

July 8, 2005

Note: This article first appeared in the Kansas City Star on June 22, 2005. Thanks to Ed Eveld, a fairly comprehensive article was finally written about local trail-running.

The article went nationwide & even worldwide over the course of the next 6-months, with some minor editing changes (for local consumption). (Must've been some slow news days).

We got so much notoriety and so many e-mails, that we decided to launch the Yahoo Group trail-running website. The photo was taken at Clinton Lake, Lawrence, KS, on the North Shore trails. Kyle Amos is in red, I'm in Blue. Just 1-hour after the photo session, it rained and stormed like heck, with 70 MPH winds knocking over trees and such. I was a fun day!

Trail mix

Runners put a little excitement in their workouts by swapping the pavement for sticks, rocks, ticks and mud.

By Edward M. Eveld
Knight Ridder Newspapers

When most people get home from jogging, their shoes aren't covered in mud. Their socks aren't soggy. No one's checking for ticks.

These people are not trail runners.

Trail runners jog, run, scramble, walk, even wade through their workouts and return exhilarated not only by the exercise but also by their connection with nature.

Trail running is big in places like California and Colorado. Photos of the sport in running magazines always feature a mountain or an ocean for a backdrop.

Runners use hiking, mountain-biking and equestrian trails for outings that can last 30 minutes or literally hours on end. They see wild turkeys and bobcats, and sometimes have to call out to deer blocking the trail ahead.

Mark Jacquez, 26, of Overland Park, Kan., was a regular road warrior until a buddy last year suggested the two hit the trails for something different. Now he's hooked.

Full of surprises

"At first, you get kind of dizzy, because you're looking at the ground, trying to avoid rocks," Jacquez said. "I took some spills. But your legs start to get used to it."



Zoom

Pleasant change: Runners such as Kyle Amos and Ben Holmes prefer the rough terrain of trails near Lawrence, Kan., to pavement. Holmes, a marathoner, says trails are kinder to his body than roads. -- Susan Pfannmuller / Knight Ridder/Tribune

There are other things to get used to. Once, a squirrel fell out of a tree and almost landed on Jacquez's head. He has stepped on more than one snake. And ticks seem to be worse in dry weather. His highest tick count for one trail outing: 22.

Trail runners say there's plenty to recommend the sport. The nature aspect might have drawbacks, they say, but the positives of off-road running far outweigh them. Jacquez knew it on that first run as he jogged past deer rather than parked cars. "There's something new every time you run," he said. "It's exciting."

Trail runners might crave a little fear factor -- the potential risks in nature -- but they also say a big reason to run trails is to help reduce the kinds of chronic injuries endemic to pavement running.

Ben Holmes is a trail advocate for that reason, among many others. He doesn't exactly have a marathoner's build at 6 feet and 200 pounds, but he's run 38 marathons. Now he does almost all his running off pavement.

"I used to get injuries, the knee pain, the chronic foot problems that runners have," he said.

Trails, he said, require a variety of body movements to make your way along curvy paths. "You're using different muscle groups, changing your pace. You're tired at the end, but not sore or injured."

Risks add to the fun

Holmes, too, gets a kick from the notion that mild danger might lie ahead.

"We just use gravity to zoom down hills like nobody's business," he said. "I'm a 48-year-old grandpa, so I don't get too many thrills. I'm thinking, 'Hey, I could get hurt here!'"

Holmes likes to remind novices that trails are supposed to be shared. That means being courteous and yielding when necessary, especially to horses. It's good safety advice.

Holmes also suggests applying duct tape to the skin and peeling it off -- *rrriiipp* -- to remove tiny seed ticks. Ouch!

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT TRAIL RUNNING

- **Go with a running partner.** It's good to have a buddy along in case of a twisted ankle or other mishap.
- **Bring water.** Carry bottles (get ones with handles) or wear a waist pack that has bottle attachments.
- **Get a trail map** from the park department to help provide orientation on the trail. A compass is helpful if you get lost.
- **Wear sun block and insect repellent.**
- **Use Bodyglide or other skin lubricant** to guard against friction and blisters on your feet, underarms, etc.

- **Stop periodically to check for ticks.**
- **Wear socks (not cotton) that wick moisture.**
- **Scrub your legs** after your run with soap or a product such as Tecnu if you brushed against poison ivy. Remember that poison ivy oil clings to shoes and socks, too.
- **In icy conditions, screw short sheet-metal screws into the bottom of your shoes.**
- **Enjoy the ambiance** while focusing on each footfall. (It takes practice.)