

RUNNER'S WORLD

Training :Trail Running



Why I Love Trail Running

Ten runners tell how they got hooked on trails, and what keeps them coming back for more.

By Nancy Hobbs

Because of my long involvement in trail running and racing on the national level, people often tell me about their trail adventures. So when Runner's World asked me to do this story, I was ready. You want testimonials from happy trail runners? You got 'em.

Following are 10 of my favorites, gleaned from recent correspondence. Clearly these people love trails as much as I do.

If you haven't tried trail running, you owe it to yourself to get out there. And you don't have to live near a mountain trail at 10,000 feet in the Rockies. A quiet city park with an unpaved path or a nearby rail-trail will do just fine.

Tom Borschel, 43
Idaho falls, Idaho

How I got hooked: "I fell in love with trail running when I took a land-surveying course my freshman year of college. Four of us had to survey and map an entire 1,500-foot-high mountain above the University of Utah. To speed up the project, I ran up and down the mountain carrying survey equipment. My group finished in record time. I've forgotten everything about surveying, but I still love trail running."

Peak trail moment: "When I was doing my best running in the late '80s, I ran the Squaw Peak Challenge in Squaw Valley, Calif. It's a 3.6-mile ascent, including an elevation gain of 2,300 feet. What I'll always remember from that race is the helpless look on one guy's face -- he was actually a 2:12 marathoner -- as I pulled away from him on the uphill."

Why I love it: "It's all great -- the sounds and sights, the goose bumps I get in a chilly breeze, my rasping breath at altitude, the whiteness that surrounds me when I'm running in a cloud."

Jordan Woods, 20
Davis, Calif.

How I got hooked: "During high school I lived in the Bay Area of California, and did my best running in the San Mateo Hills. I ran there every day of the summer before my sophomore year of cross-country."

Peak trail moment: "One of my training buddies and I would always run a trail that had a 1-mile downhill section at

the end. It was narrow, and had lots of curves, cliffs, and wooded sections. We'd race it like two Indy cars, complete with race commentary. One slip in a number of spots would've been the end of our running, but it was so exhilarating we couldn't stop ourselves."

Why I love it: "I still do it for the excitement and adventure. And I always feel re-energized afterward."

Erin Renken, 23
Boise, Idaho

How I got hooked: "I'd run track and cross-country for years, but discovered trail running on my own when I was at the University of Wyoming. I'd head out from Laramie, always looking for new trails to run."

Peak trail moment: "It happened on the Cactus Canyon Trail near Laramie. There were 3 inches of new snow, and I was the first one on the trail. The snow crunched under my feet, and everything looked perfect and still. At the top of a big hill, I saw the sun come up. I had to stop and watch."

Why I love it: "It's as simple as this: Trail running is my passion, stress relief, and exercise all in one. Every trail run brings something new."

Meghan Arbogast, 39
Corvallis, Oreg.

How I got hooked: "I grew up on a farm surrounded by woods, so it was natural for me to hike and run everywhere. Years later, I was introduced to trail running by my coach here in Corvallis. I loved it immediately, because it reminded me of my childhood romps on our farm."

Peak trail moment: "I experience lots of peak moments in the McDonald Forest near Corvallis. My favorite trail includes a 3,000-foot climb followed immediately by a 1,000-foot descent. Near the end I'm running on a soft bed of pine needles in a quiet stand of tall Douglas firs."

Why I love it: "Trail running is my fountain of youth. When I'm on the trail, I feel like a child again, completely relaxed and at peace. No matter how tired or stressed I am going into the run, I'm always refreshed at the end of it."

Christine Baldoni, 38
Poitiers, France

How I got hooked: "I live in the countryside of France now, but I fell in love with trail running in Boulder, Colo., 2 years ago when I visited for 3 months. I'd meet up with a group in town on Sunday mornings, and we'd drive to a trail about 3,000 feet above Boulder for long runs."

Peak trail moment: "I was on an escarpment trail overlooking Hamilton, Ontario. I saw a man walking toward me with what looked like a very large dog beside him. As I drew closer, I slowed down and realized it was a fawn. The man had been walking in the woods, and the deer had just started following him. Since I was heading back where he'd come from, I figured I'd try to persuade the deer to follow me. I started running, looked over, and saw the deer running beside me."

Why I love it: "I enjoy the trails in France, and run them often. But what I really love is the wildlife and maple trees on the wilderness trails in North America. I can't wait to return."

Brian Manley, 36
Aurora, Colo.

How I got hooked: "After my first 10-K many years ago, I committed myself to get faster and run farther, and trails seemed like the best place to do that."

Peak trail moment: "I was at mile 68 of the Leadville Trail 100-Mile race a few years ago. I'd just shuffled away from an aid station into complete darkness. I looked up, and I'd never seen a sky so filled with stars. The Milky Way literally went from one end of the horizon to the other; the entire sky seemed alive with pulsing lights."

Why I love it: "I've run countless road 10-Ks, half-marathons, and marathons -- including Boston twice -- but those occasions have never given me the high I feel cruising along a soft dirt trail through a grove of aspen trees, or around a high mountain lake surrounded by 14,000-foot peaks."

Kevin Rassier, 41
Maple Grove, Minn.

How I got hooked: "I live next to a large nature preserve near Minneapolis and began running on the grass trails to reduce the pounding on my legs. Soon it became much more than that."

Peak trail moment: "One morning I almost ran into a huge buck. All of a sudden I was eye-to-eye with this awesome animal. I was scared he might charge. He gave a big snort, then turned and ran down the hill ahead of me."

Why I love it: "I see so many animals from the trail, including trumpeter swans, beavers, woodchucks, foxes, deer, skunks, raccoons, and other smaller mammals and birds. At the same time, trail running is an incredible workout. I believe I could replace my speedwork with more trail running, and I'd be more fit."

Edward Dowling, Jr., 37
Allenhurst, N.J.

How I got hooked: "I started running trails by accident. One day I decided to run in New Jersey's Hartshorn Woods Park, from where you can view the Raritan River and Bay, the mouth of the Hudson, the Atlantic Ocean, and the New York City skyline all during one run. I immediately fell in love with the challenge, the hills, and the scenery."

Peak trail moment: "The best time was when I got lost in Hartshorn, even though I was carrying a map. I circled around aimlessly for probably 15 miles and loved every minute. The views were spectacular."

Why I love it: "Trails give me the time and space to think -- simple as that."

Christa Lloyd, 18
Green Mountain Galls, Colo.

How I got hooked: "I ran cross-country all through high school, but I didn't really like trails until my dad started training with the Incline Club in Manitou Springs, Colo. He kept inviting me out with him on Thursdays and Sundays, and finally I went. It ended up being a lot of fun."

Peak trail moment: "I love when I find a hilly trail with lots of rocks to jump over and mud to run through."

Why I love it: "It's more interesting than running on roads, and I feel so engaged and aware on the trails. You have to stay alert at all times."

Bernie Boettcher, 38
Silt, Colo.

How I got hooked: "As a kid I always loved to explore, to go trekking through the woods. When I started running again 2 years ago (I hadn't run since high school), I realized that trail running allowed me to do this again."

Peak trail moment: "At the 2000 World Sky Games Half-Marathon, I climbed for 7 gray, foggy miles up the Matterhorn from Zermatt, Switzerland, to Cervinia, Italy. After struggling up the final glacial ridge, I popped out of the fog. A line of photographers all shouted, "Americano! Americano!" A helicopter was whirring directly overhead in the intense sunshine. It was visual ecstasy."

Why I love it: "I love to explore wilderness areas on foot. Trail running in remote locales is how I keep in touch with primitive nature."