

Always Time for a Run

By Statesboro Pacer, Toby Davis, 9/16/06

Several high school cross country teams had gathered on a beautiful mid September morning at Magnolia Springs State Park. The park is located on highway 25 just north of Millen, GA. It is a perfect place for a cross country run and the teams were there on that day for the Ray Miller Invitational. The exact date was September 16, 2006, a Saturday. Serving as the assistant coach for Southeast Bulloch High's Cross Country team, I had made prior arrangements to meet them there. The head coach had ridden the school bus up with the Southeast Bulloch group of runners. I would need to leave immediately after the meet and avoid that slow trip home on the yellow bus. I had a honey do list of things to do around the house awaiting me.

The meet began at 9:00a.m. with the boy's teams competing first. Then the girl's teams ran the course through the winding trails found in the park. Several great high school performances were turned in, and afterwards the awards for the winning teams were handed out. The meet was now finished, and the young men and women began boarding their busses for their journey's back home. I knew at this point, I needed to get back also in order to conquer that list and help my sweet wife with all those man chores.

As a runner who enjoys running on trails, and knowing this park had one of the best tree lined and shaded trails for miles around, I felt the calling. It was a great day for a run. I knew at that instant that my jobs at home would have to wait. After all I had driven 45 miles, and after going that far, I couldn't pass up a run on the trail. It just so happened that I had my running shorts on under my pants, and my favorite running shoes were on my feet. You would think that when I left the house that morning, that I had planned to run. My intentions were good; besides, I would make this a quick run and still return home in time to take care of the tasks.

After adjusting my running attire I began to stretch at the beginning of the trail. About that time along came Ray Miller, the man for whom the earlier meet was named for. Ray has been a runner for many years, and also a great promoter of running in Southeast Georgia. He along with other fine folks such as Jim & Joyce Hite promote running in many ways, including their running club known as the Millen Milers. Ray has coached high school track and been involved at many levels of school administration. Of all his years of being involved with physical fitness, he has encouraged many young people to get involved in the sport of running. Ray always supports area runs such as 5 & 10k's as well as half and whole marathons. He has run in numerous races as his resume' indicates. (You can find out more about Ray on this web site: www.millenmilers.com . He usually always comes to Brooklet, GA and runs in a 5k race that I direct each August. Sometimes he even slows his pace down enough to run with kids that are wearing flip flops. (You can find that story on the above web site, just click on the link: "Ramblin' with Ray").

As I was finishing up my stretching Ray briefly spoke, as he took off running on the trail. I stretched for about another 2 or 3 minutes, knowing I would be able to easily catch up to him. I lit out on the gravel and dirt pathway. The day was now heating up as it usually does that time of year in South Georgia. The trees provided some relief as they shade much of the byway. I finally caught up with Ray and passed him. The trail wanders throughout the park and there are a couple of split off trails. I must have made a turn on one of these split off trails. My run seemed to go on longer than I had anticipated which made me realize that I had made a wrong turn. Of course I didn't mind as I love to run through the woods. Eventually, I made it to the end of the trail, near where the high school teams had finished their race earlier. There stood Ray. He had already finished his run, so then I knew for a fact that I had made a wrong turn, because I was ahead of him at one time. I slowed just enough to tell him that I had gotten lost, and that surely was the reason he finished ahead of me. He said that was part of having the home field advantage and I totally agreed with him. I am certain that Ray knows every inch of the trails through the park. He only lives a few miles away, and uses the park and its trails on a regular basis for training. I only get the opportunity to go up and run on the trail maybe 2 times a year.

As I trotted past Ray at the end of my run, I noticed that he was busy taking down all the signs and marking tape from the cross country meet that had been held earlier that day. Wait a minute! I thought to myself. The meet was named for Ray Miller, but here he was unselfishly working and making sure the park was cleaned up before he went home. Surely, with this race honoring his name, I would have thought that others would have been there to do all the work. I knew I should have stopped to see if Ray needed some help, however, I knew my wife would be furious if I didn't get home soon to help her. Sorry Ray; I didn't have time to stop and help you, because I had chores of my own to do.

I realized two things that day. First, there is always time for a run. Secondly, from seeing Ray working to complete the task at hand on a project named in his honor, we can't rest on our laurels. For those of us who run, running is not work, but there is always work to be done.