

TRAIL FACTOR RUN REPORT #5 11/23/2008

Saltzman/Wildwood/Lief Erikson 14.5 mile loop

I love chilly mornings. It makes waking up much harder, but once you're outside breathing the cool crisp air, you realize how brilliant it is to be alive. It invigorates you and makes you want to move, which is exactly what we were about to do for the next couple of hours.

Temps hovered in the high 30's, but we had a solid crew that was ripping and ready to go. Today's crew consisted of 10 runners. Jessi, Kylie, Mallory, Andrew, Chris, Richard, Rick, Joe, Shawn and Danny (Kylie's super cool dog). This was Richard, Andrew, Kylie and Joes first time out to a TRAIL FACTOR run and let me just tell you how pleasurable it was to have all of you out there. It's really wonderful catching up with friends and meeting new people. Also, I can't think of a better place to spend quality time with great people than a trail surrounded by nature.

The trail that we were tackling this morning was a home course trail for TRAIL FACTOR. It lies within the heart of FOREST PARK, which is one of the most amazing urban parks around. It's an incredible park that offers immense opportunities for trail running, hiking and mountain biking. The park itself is 5,000 acres strong and is actually older than the city of Portland. For more info on the park and a map of all the trail running opportunities within it, visit the Forest Park Conservancy home page.

www.forestparkconservancy.org

The start of this run is super easy to access. All you do is head west on Hwy 30 and hang a left on Saltzman Rd. You know you're there once you come to the barricade in the road. We would be running a combination of trails and fire lanes this morning. I had originally mapped out four options for people to try out, but most seemed stoked to run the longer loop. The 14.5 mile loop includes Saltzman Rd, Maple Trail (my favorite), Wildwood Trail (30 miles long), fire lane #5, Trillium Trail, fire lane #7, and Lief Erikson.

It skirts up and down the side of Portland's west hills and the trails are beyond splendid to run on. This is due to the tremendous efforts of the Forest Park Conservancy to retain high quality trails for people to utilize. Most of the trails are single track, with the exception of the fire lanes and Lief Erikson.

Our run today started at a nice casual pace. We were all running together up Saltzman Rd in a nice TRAIL FACTOR pack. The boys were planning on running the trail clockwise and the ladies counterclockwise. Andrew and I were discussing which direction is considered the correct direction or the classic direction. Since Andrew and I both have a background of running track, we both agreed that since you run on a track counterclockwise, we were running the loop backwards and the ladies were running it the correct way. I like being different.

Maple trail is only about a half mile up Saltzman road and basically crosses the road. Once we hit the trail the ladies turned right and the boys turned left. This portion of the trail is by far my favorite. It starts off nice and easy, which gives you a chance to warm-up the legs before climbing to the top of forest park. It's also less traveled and literally makes you feel like you've stepped back in time.

Maple trail would be taking us to Wildwood trail, which is the main trail that runs through Forest Park. If you were to run Wildwood end to end, you would have accumulated over 30 miles of running.

We were chatting and running along nicely. We hit our first major artery, Lief Erikson. This is a great place to do higher speed runs. It offers 11 + miles of jeep road and is marked every ¼ mile with a post and the mileage traveled.

We crossed the road and reconnected to maple trail. This is kind of where maple trail starts to climb up Forest Park. It's not a huge climb, but is enough to accelerate your breathing. We jammed up the hill and marveled at the beauty of the trail.

While running up maple, we got to talking, which is one cool thing about running with a group. I got to know Joe and Richard a bit more. Richard moved out here from the East coast and he and his wife moved for much of the same reason me and my girlfriend moved. Joe grew up in France and works for a non-profit here in town. Things I would have never come to know had I not had a chance to run with them on the trail.

We hit Wildwood trail and hung a right. Now we were back on some flat terrain that winds in and out of the hillside. It's also a very well marked trail and one of the more traveled portions of Forest Park. It has quarter mile markers, so you always know how far you've gone.

We were in a TRAIL FACTOR pace line and kept a nice brisk pace, occasionally having to dodge fellow trail runners and several unleashed doggies (I love dogs, but unleashed dogs can be a hazard). We made it to one of the trails that connected back to Wildwood and Richard's turnoff to head back. He was battling an injury and was on the road to recovery. It's better to head back while you're still on top of the injury rather than constantly beating yourself down and not allowing yourself to heal. We parted ways with Richard and kept moving along.

We finally hit Saltzman Rd again, hung a left and started the second climb of the day to the top of Forest Park. Saltzman isn't steep, but we were moving at a nice little pace up the hill.

I don't consider myself a strong runner on the hills, so anytime the gradient rises; I question running hard or just tucking in. I prefer the later of the two options, but when you're running with a fast miler (Andrew) and a really strong ultra runner (Joe) sometimes my stubbornness makes the decision.

The funny thing is that they probably weren't running that hard up the hill, but it was certainly a strain for me. Sweat was dripping off my face, but I had one pleasant thought in my head. I knew how long the hill was and how long I would have to suffer before getting a break on the cruise back down the hill.

Saltzman ends and just beyond the gate is fire lane #5. We took a right on fire lane #5 and started cruising down the hill. Andrew was hacking up a lung. He said that he had sucked in a bug. I hate it when that happens. I then told Joe about this one run that I did in the Gorge in which I sucked in a humungous moth. It was a mouthful, but I quickly spit it out and the moth survived. Andrew got that bug out and rejoined in the downhill fun.

We really moved down fire lane #5 and reconnected with Wildwood trail. Andrew's early plan was to run about 8-9 miles, so we sent him all the way down fire lane #5 so he could complete the scheduled mileage. We had gotten separated from the others, so we made an arrow out of branches on the ground pointing in the direction we were heading. Rick certainly didn't need them, but I was concerned that Chris may not have known all of the turns. If you want to get the skinny on Forest Park Trails; ask Rick, he is the master.

Joe and I took a left onto Wildwood, kept jamming and chatted about food and nutrition. After about a mile of running we ran into Kylie and Danny (her coolio leashed dog). Kylie has some IT issues that were flaring up. I mentioned to her that she could cut the loop short and head down fire lane #5. That's the nice thing about Forest Park. There are so many trails, so it allows you to really augment your runs according to the way you feel.

Mallory and Jessi were not far behind. They had climbed up a different trail and were on the return from their side trip. They had missed Trillium trail, but managed to get back on track and finish the rest of their loop. We exchanged brief words as we crossed paths. I couldn't understand what they said, but it sounded something like, "We're swoooooosh doing greeeeaaat, swoooooosh." It's really funny trying to talk to someone as they are running by in the opposite direction.

Joe and I continued on and found Trillium trail off of Wildwood. It's unmarked, but it has a couple of wooden beams supporting the dirt at the trail head. This is how we knew to turn left on Trillium trail.

The trail climbs up to fire lane #7. We turned right on fire lane #7 and then connected to Ridge trail. We descended down Ridge trail, crossed Wildwood and connected back to Lief Erikson. I almost had a spectacular TRAIL FACTOR spill at the bottom of Ridge. It was super muddy, planted with my right foot and proceeded slip and slide. My silly modified Newton shoes provide no traction, but I was lucky to have Joe there to partially catch me. He said later that it could have been a highly rated TRAIL FACTOR fall had I also been able to take him out in the process. I'll try harder next time.

We turned right on Lief Erikson and then connected to Maple once again. We took a left on maple trail for the last single track section of the day. This side of maple is also great. We ran it smoothly and connected once more to Saltzman and descended back down to the cars.

The ladies were already there. They had cut the loop a bit short, but it was really nice to see their smiling faces at the end.

Joe and I had finished the 14.5 mile loop in just over 1:50 and Chris and Rick were not far behind in just over 2 hours. The ladies had done 1:30 hrs of solid running and Andrew looked great after his longest run in a while since battling back from a torn plantar fascia.

What a spectacular day of running. New faces and a great home course route. It was time for food.

Visit www.trailfactor.com if you are interested joining TRAIL FACTOR or if you'd like to view a map of the route.