

Trail Factor Run Report 11/02/2008

Wilson River/Kings Mountain/Elk Creek Trail 12.1 mile loop

Well, it was another great Trail Factor running adventure. Today was our third organized Trail Factor run and it included a solid crew of 7 runners. Those attending the run today were Shawn, Jessi, Ruben, Mallory, Ben, Robert, and Paul.

The route was already laid out and was to take us to Tillamook State Forest. Our goal was to tackle the Wilson River, Kings Mountain, and Elk Creek 12.1 mile loop. This trail is very easy to access. All you do is drive west on Hwy 26 out of Portland and then exit Hwy 6 to Tillamook. The campground and trail access is just past MP (mile post) #28 and is called the Elk Creek Campground.

This is a challenging loop the runs you through the Tillamook State Forest, which happens to be one of the nation's largest reforestation projects. This is a project that was initiated due to severe fires that struck the Tillamook State Forest and burned over 350,000 acres of beautiful Oregon coastal range land. The project was very successful and now there is lush forest throughout and many FS roads in the area, which serve as excellent fire breaks in case of future fires.

As we pulled into the Elk Creek Campground, we all anticipated some great running. Overcast skies, temps in the low 50's and drizzly conditions made for a spectacular Oregon day. It would certainly make the trail slick and the running could be pretty cold once we hit some of the higher elevation trail.

As with many of our runs, this run starts uphill. It's steep, but only last for about .1 miles. This is called the Wilson River Trail. Basically, the Wilson River trail winds you through the Tillamook State Forest and parallels Hwy 6 for over 20 miles. We used the first 3.6 miles of the Wilson River Trail. We started off nice and easy by running this first 3.6 mile section in just under 30 minutes. We were using it to prep ourselves for the first major climb of the day.

All the boys and Mallory stayed together for this first 3.6 mile section just before the turn off onto Kings Mountain trail. This is the first major climb of the day, with a massive 2.5 mile climb that gains 2,500 ft of elevation. It summits Kings Mountain at over 3,200 ft.

We all chatted for a second before tackling the hill. It was imperative that we all knew where to go, since the group was sure to be separated while summiting the hill. As expected, Ruben and Ben sped away toward the summit. Rob and Mallory were next, with Paul not far behind. Myself and Jessi left shortly after to bring up the rear.

Everyone settled into the climb and heavy breathing was inevitable. There are sections on this climb that are nearly impossible to run. Ruben and Ben ran most of it, while I ran about $\frac{3}{4}$'s of the climb and the others ran about $\frac{1}{2}$. It varies from a mild 10% grade and pitches up to as much as 25-30% sustained in some sections. It really burns the old soleus muscle and glutes.

Ben and Ruben reached the summit first and sped on to complete the rest of the run. Robert was next to summit and I summited shortly after. Mallory was next in line.

Since the next section of trail was rather technical, I expressed my desire for Robert and Mallory to run the next portion together and continue ahead. This would allow them to keep each other company for safety purposes. The trail snakes along the edge of a ridgeline and includes some very steep descents and in wet conditions is better run with a partner.

Mallory and Rob pushed on and I stayed behind to wait for Paul and Jessi to complete their climb. This would allow us to run the next trail together.

The climb was finished and the summit was windy and cold. There would be no views today.

We pushed on through the next technical section. It would skirt a ridgeline for about 1.3 miles and actually require us to do a fair bit of scrambling in some sections. This is precisely why I felt it was important that everyone have a partner to run with in this section.

Once we completed the technical ridgeline, the trail finally starts to descend and dumps you onto a bit of old jeep road. It runs along this jeep road until you reach a sign that directs you to either Elk Creek trail or the Elk Mountain summit. To complete the 12.1 mile loop, one would choose the Elk Creek Trail. If you are into a bit more climbing, you can choose the Elk Mountain Summit trail. It goes up some more, but then descends a grueling 1,900 ft in just 1.5 miles. Very steep and tough on the knees, but it also shortens the loop by 1.3 miles.

We chose to descend off the mountain by running down the Elk Creek multiuse trail. This trail descends for about 4.8 miles and is much more gradual and runner friendly.

By the time we started our descent, the rain had really begun to pour. It was hailing, raining, hailing and raining. The legs were cold, body was cold and the trail was slick. This was perfect. I personally love it when it rains, but you do risk going hypothermic if you don't keep moving and if you don't carry enough fuel. We were only 4.8 miles from the campground finish, so we hauled butt down the trail.

Ben, Ruben, Robert and Mallory were already on their way down. Paul was behind them and Jessi and I were sweeping up the back.

We all made it down intact. We had no Trail Factor falls today. The sun gods may not have been shining down on us, but the trail gods certainly were.

In the end, Ruben and Ben finished the run in just under 2 hours. Robert and Mallory finished in about 2:30. I finished in 2:37, Paul in about 2:42 and Jessi in 2:50. As you can see, these slower times are very indicative of technical terrain and a very steep climb. It's a trail factor favorite, but not a regular trail on the Trail Factor Diet. We'll be back and may even run a Christmas Day run out there. It can get very snowy and is gorgeous when covered in white.

If this adventure sounds like fun and you'd like to join us, please visit:

<http://www.jessimoroney.com/trailfactor/index.html>

Be well and happy trail running.