

Chattanooga: Trail Running 101

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By:

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With some of the world's best — and most accessible — running trails in Chattanooga, it's no surprise the city's trail running community is taking off.

"I think people are starting to get out and say, 'This is really great stuff,'" said Randy Whorton, president of Chattanooga's Wilderness Trail Running Association.

This year, Rock/Creek Outfitters and the Wilderness Trail Running Association are sponsoring more local trail races than ever.

Four new races were added, including a 50k event billed as "the most difficult trail race anywhere in the country."

For more information

Wilderness Trail Running Association membership by donation (any amount), 822-1840, runintheboonies.org.

"It is beyond challenging," Mr. Whorton said. "It's in the middle of nowhere on a section of the Cumberland Trail that hardly gets any traffic, with hard climbs, plenty of roots and rocks and stream crossings."

Nationally, trail races and long-distance "ultra running" races are the fastest-growing activities among runners, said Mr. Whorton, a 47-year-old vice president of Chattanooga-based Earthscapes.

Today, "the Boonies," as the local Wilderness Trail Running Association is known, has about 65 members. Ninety-eight people subscribe to its message board.

The Scenic City's advantage, and its challenge, is a wide range of trails literally out many residents' back doors.

"Within 30 minutes of downtown there are something like 11 trailheads and about 300 miles of trail. I would challenge any city to come close to that," Mr. Whorton said.

Trail Running 101

Trail runners say they enjoy the sport because it builds strength, reduces problems from chronic injuries, and allows them to relax in nature.

"Being submerged in the wilderness and away from the normal sounds of the city is very freeing," said Cathi Cannon, a 33-year-old graphic designer who has been running on trails for about 5 years.

Many are intimidated by the trails supposed terrors, from snakes, ticks and poison ivy to injuries.

Simple practice is the best training to build up your ability in trail running, said Les Hegwood, 30, a teacher and cross-country coach at the new Signal Mountain Middle High School.

"It doesn't take much. Just start running a little bit and do a little better every day," Mr. Hegwood said.

Running on the Boonies regular Wednesday night and Saturday practice runs can help avoid many dangers. Check the Boonies message boards to find partners on other days and times.

Good shoes are critical, experts say.

The process of selecting the right pair can take time, money and experience, runners advised.

"Find what works for you. You'll have to spend a little bit of money, but it's worth it," said Kris Whorton, 42, a lecturer in English at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and co-founder with her husband of "The Boonies."

Strength and balance exercises, especially yoga, will aid runners in managing the ups and downs of rugged trails.

Don't be afraid to walk.

"We always do. You go to some beautiful and amazing places. You have to be able to soak it in," Ms. Cannon said.