



## XTERRA Trail Run Nationals: A Runner's Trail Tale



Andi prepares to run the Day Lily Dash last summer.

*Photo by Donna Segelken.*

I knew during my first trail race that I had found my racing niche. My favorite runs had always been on trails, but I had never raced on trails. Having spent a barefoot childhood in the forests of my family's farm stubbing toes and ripping toenails, I seemed to have developed a sixth sense about foot placement over rough terrain, adjusting my stride naturally, avoiding the roots, rocks, sticks, and uneven surfaces without thought. Even though I now always wore shoes when running (well, almost always anyway), my comfort on the trails had stayed with me decades later, and trail running instilled a sense of pleasure and peace that I had never found road running.

Even though most of my runs for the past year had been on trails, I signed up for that first trail race, the "XTERRA Heritage Park 10K Trail Run", not knowing what to expect. I knew I loved running trails, but I was apprehensive as I drove to the race, taking place near Farmington, Georgia, on November 4, 2007. Around 100 people showed up to run the 10K, and most of them appeared to me to be experienced trail runners. The course was almost entirely in the forest and tough: hills, rocks, hills, roots, hills, creek crossings, hills, switchbacks, hills, and FUN! (Did I mention hills?) Fall was well underway, and leaves sprinkled the trails. Late in the race, my legs were so tired that I

walked up a few of the steepest hills, but I had never had so much fun in a race. Runs, yes, races, no. In addition to the fun, I received a first place master's trophy by finishing as the third overall female. I guessed that my comfort on the trails gave me an advantage over the other runners in the race. This race had me hooked on trail racing.

A half marathon was taking place on the same trails three weeks later, but I had not planned to run it. I had never run 13.1 miles and didn't think I could finish a race that long. In fact, beginning in my twenties and up until about six months earlier, I had not been able to run more than three or four miles without worrisome pain in my knees. By adding mountain biking to my regular training, I was able to gradually add miles to my runs and had built up to long runs of around nine miles. After having so much fun in the 10K, I immedi-

ately signed up for the upcoming half marathon. The "XTERRA Heritage Park USMC Toys for Tots Half Marathon", on November 27, 2007, covered the same course as the 10K, twice. Same rocks, same hills, same creeks, same switchbacks, same fun, times two! Around 150 people were joining in on the fun for this race in the misting rain. By now, fall had stripped the trees of almost all of their leaves, many of them now wet and slippery on the trail. My strategy for being able to finish this distance was to run slowly, and I managed to start nice and slow (which is usually impossible for me in a race), and ran the first lap feeling comfortable and having fun. Great motivation came from lots of polite young marines cheering us on at the trail intersections. On the second lap, my legs were mostly exhausted, so again I walked up the steepest hills, still enjoying the race. Around mile 9, I began experiencing the first exercise induced cramps of my life, and I was no longer able to claim that I was having fun. I did manage to continue on, and finished in 2:08:45 as the sixth overall female with another first place master's trophy. Even though the cramps made the last few miles painful, the overall experience was fun, and I was excited to have successfully completed my first half marathon. Now I was hopelessly hooked on trail racing, so I started looking for more trail races of any length.

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## Running Club News:

With the weather so cool and crisp, it's hard to stay indoors. All of a sudden, I feel like a runner again! While the weather has gotten cooler, as the end of the year approaches the competition has gotten hotter in the Macon Tracks Piedmont Sports Medicine Race Series. Both of the top two contenders (the only ones who have run every race of the series), Monika Bubacz and Tom Weitzel, have signed up to do the Bartram Forest 50K on November 29th. We wish them luck in their quest. It's hard to believe Monika just started running a little over a year ago, and here she is getting ready to do an ultra!

A board & officers meeting was held on November 2nd. Click the link on the bottom right at [www.macontracks.org](http://www.macontracks.org) to read the minutes from the meeting. We spent a lot of time discussing the Labor Day Race. Between sponsorships and race registrations, the race took in \$45,203. It's an expensive race to put on, however, with chip timing, lots of police officers needed to close off intersections on the point-to-point course, wicking shirts, and nearly 250 awards to give away. Still, thanks to donations and keeping a careful eye on the books, the total expenses were \$29,893, meaning that we had proceeds of \$15,340. Half of this money will go to local organizations such as the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail, the Georgia Industrial Children's Home, the American Red Cross, and others. Our running club is a 501(c)(3) organization as well, and the remaining proceeds will be used to fulfill the club's mission to promote and encourage running in Middle Georgia.

The annual meeting has been scheduled for Monday, January 19th (Martin Luther King Day), at 6:30 p.m. and this year it will be held at the Piedmont Sports Medicine facility, which is near the intersection of Riverside Dr. and I-75 behind Butler Toyota. Awards for the Macon Tracks Piedmont Sports Medicine Race Series will be given away and new officers will be elected. On the slate so far are Sam Martinez for president, Monika Bubacz for vice-president, Amy Tarpley for treasurer, and Kerry Oedel for secretary. Of course, there are many, many ways to get involved in helping with club activities, so don't hesitate to step forward if you've got some time and energy to share!

We're looking ahead and starting to make plans for the Al Toll Memorial 5K/15K, to be held February 21st. This will be the 25th anniversary of the race so we'll be celebrating even more than usual. We're thankful that we already have two sponsors for the race, **Run Fit Sports** and **Gateway Fitness**. Stay tuned for more details.

Hope you have a wonderful Thanksgiving. See you on the road!

Kerry ☺



Photo by Sam Martinez

Tanner Johnston (above) lost a shoe halfway through the junior varsity cross country state meet, but kept on running! Sam Martinez (right) broke the 3-hr. mark at the Chickamauga Battlefield Marathon, finishing in 2:59.



Photo by Peachsports.com

David Tinkey (top) finished his first marathon at the Chickamauga Battlefield in 3:59.



Photo by Peachsports.com

## Run for the Health of It

by Eric Thomas

Let me start by saying that I loved this race. The weather was perfect running weather. The wellness staff along with Jeff Galloway made this a great event. I loved the clinic that Mr. Galloway put on after the race. I was able to learn a lot of valuable information from him. It's always good to hear other runners voice their thoughts, troubles and opinions about running. I loved the last leg of the 5K when it entered the football stadium because it kind of pumped me up a little and I was able to finish strong. I met a very inspiring person named Andrew Mathis and was able to trade a few stories and learn quite a bit from this running veteran native of Fort Valley, Georgia. I got to see my friend Brenda Gail from Leesburg. She's a great runner and also an inspiration. There were some good runners I could mention that won 1st, 2nd and 3rd with some great times but, to me, all runners are awesome whether

they finish first or last because they had the courage to get out there. My son Austin and I both improved our times and left happy saying, "We will go back there next year."

My name is Eric Thomas and I'm from Americus, Georgia. My son Austin and I recently joined the Macon Tracks Running Club. I'm a 5th year Marketing student at Georgia Southwestern State University. I will be graduating soon and I hope to live more in the middle region of Georgia. After graduation and settlement I hope that Austin and I will be able to utilize the full benefits of the club.

I started running in 2004 and did a few races in 2005. I remember my first race ever was The Tybee 5K. I couldn't believe all the people. You had to take small strides to keep from kicking someone. In 2006 I took on two jobs plus attending school and soon there was not much time for running. In July of 2008, overweight and remembering how happy and confident I was when I was running, I hit the road and on Sept 7th I did my first triathlon and have done a road race every weekend since. Running is a gift of freedom from God and I don't want to miss a day of it. It's not always about who the fastest runner is, sometimes it's about simply being there and being a part of something great. My son, Austin, is 12 years old and just started running. He lives in Moultrie, Georgia and comes to stay with me every weekend. I hope running will allow him to set and reach goals and become more confident in all aspects of life.



Eric Thomas (left) and fellow age group winners at the Run for the Health of It race in Hawkinsville on October 11th.

### Upcoming Macon Tracks Piedmont Sports Medicine Series Races:

Will Robinson Memorial 5K, Nov. 22nd

Bartram Forest Marathon & 50K, Nov. 29th

Reindeer Run 5K, Dec. 6th

Christmas Lane Dash 5K, Dec. 13th

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The “XTERRA Trail Race Running the Rocks 10K” at the Olympic Horse Park near Conyers on February 2, 2008 was next. Having successfully run two trail races, I wasn’t particularly apprehensive about this race. Once I arrived at the park, however, my apprehension grew, because over 250 people had shown up for this one. Once again, the course was fun, but with fewer rocks, roots, and twists, it was not as technically challenging as the Heritage Park trail. This time I ran up all of the hills, and finished in 51:31, only about 1 minute over my 10K road race PR. I was the seventh overall female and first female over 40. About now I realized that these XTERRA races were part of a Georgia series in which points were awarded for age group placement. Since I had won my age group in the first three races of the series, I was the point leader in my age group, and the incentive to continue running in these trail races increased.

Next up was the “XTERRA Trail Race Thrill in the Hills” on March 1, at Fort Yargo State Park near Winder. I had hiked/run some of the trails at this park and knew that there were some incredibly steep hills here. This was another half marathon, and I had an important team race coming up the next weekend, so once again I planned to run slowly. About 300 people showed up to race, many of them incredibly fit looking women. Fortunately for my legs (and my teammates the next weekend), the race course did not include the steepest of the hills, and although fun, the race was not technically difficult. The female competition was tougher here, and the edge given by my trail running experience didn’t apply much. I finished as the seventeenth overall female, again the first in my age group.

Not part of the XTERRA series, the most challenging trail race of all came next – the Sweet H2O Half Marathon on April 26, 2008, at Sweetwater Creek State Park near Lithia Springs/Six Flags. Over 200 runners started the race together, with around 60 branching off later to complete the 50K course. The half marathon course was incredibly tough: monster hills, wide water crossings, rock fields, and many sections impossible for me to run. The freshness of spring was evident in the green of the trees and the rush of the river, but not in my pace which was significantly slower than my previous half marathon trail race. The course was technical and demanding, and my trail running experience definitely helped this time. Once again, around mile 9, pain started creeping into the fun, but I finished as the ninth overall female and first in my age group. The most difficult race I had ever run, this race was also the most fun.

The final XTERRA Georgia Series race was the “XTERRA Deep South 15K Trail Run” at Dauset Trails on May 31, 2008. Although I had already wrapped up an age group win in the series, I wanted to see if I could obtain a perfect age group record for the series, so the pressure was on. Having enjoyed these trails several times on my mountain bike, I knew the race could include some tough technical

sections. Summer was making its imminent presence known, but the cool streams and deep shade of the trails offered welcome relief to more than 200 runners. Somewhat disappointed that the race course didn’t cover the most technical parts of the trail, I pushed to run harder than I would have on more technical trails. I finished in 1:19:09 as the tenth overall female and first in my age group with a perfect age group record for the series.

The awards for winning the XTERRA Georgia age group series were a nice medal and free entry into the XTERRA Trail Running National Championship, a half marathon in Bend, Oregon, on September 27. Initially I did not consider participating in this race, especially since the series award only covered the small entry fee, not travel expenses. But for a few years my husband and I had been discussing a trip to the west coast to visit friends and relatives, and this race turned into the incentive to finally make that trip. I had done so well in the Georgia series that I believed I could be competitive in my age group in the National Championship half marathon if I trained hard, so I made travel reservations and a rigorous four month training schedule. The schedule involved increasing my training time/distance by ten percent each week, with one rest day each week, and a “light” week every fourth week. I had followed a similar schedule the previous summer and again over the winter with good results.

Late September came quickly. After a long flight and even longer drive, I arrived in Bend late at night with two full days to acclimate before the race. While pre-running part of the race’s course the next afternoon, I realized that unless the remainder of the course was much different, once again my trail running experience would not give me an advantage. Absent were the rocks, roots, hills, and switchbacks that I had grown to love. Present were elite runners from all over the country ready to compete for the \$5000 purse to be divided among the top five male and female finishers. Among the female competition were the 2008 World Mountain Running Champion, the 2008 USATF 50 Mile Trail Champion, and the two-time USATF Masters Mountain Runner of the Year, as well as other nationally ranked women. I was in the presence of some amazing athletes. (The race results show how amazing these athletes are: the first, second, third, and fifth top female finishers were over forty, the first place winner finishing in 1:23:07, and second place nineteen seconds later. The first male finished in 1:08:01, second about a minute later.)

The morning of the race was cold, somewhere in the thirties, and my warm-up jog before the race did little to warm me up. The race began with most of the runners appearing comfortable, confident that the air would warm quickly here in Oregon’s high desert. For the first mile or so, the course followed the Deschutes River out of downtown Bend on a wide, relative flat jogging path, and then turned up a gradual incline for about two miles on a paved path. I was struggling these first three miles, even walking some, feeling awkward, uncomfortable, and cold. Somewhere in

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that fourth mile, after hitting single-track trail and completing most of the course's 1000 foot elevation gain, my running rhythm finally joined the race, and I started enjoying the run. Over six miles of sandy trails through sage brush, along a spectacular section of the Deschutes River, highlighting vistas a full 360 degrees, tossing in almost a mile of rocky climbs and switchbacks, supported *Outside Magazine* editors' description of Bend as "America's Best Trail Running Town". Around the nine mile marker, the race course returned to the paved path, and my now familiar nine mile marker leg cramps began. I continued on, trying to hold the cramps at bay with a shortened stride for the rest of the race. It helped that the remainder of the course was down the long hill we had run up the first part of the race. I finished a disappointing, but not unexpected, ninth in my age group in 2:01:33. Why disappointing? I had the potential to do better. Why not unexpected? I didn't train enough. Although I had a good training plan and followed my schedule throughout June and July, sometime around mid-August I lost my motivation and quit training. I still ran some here and there, but not enough to even maintain my moderate race times. Was my motivation hiding in the heat of summer, was it buried beneath a mountain of training, did it fold under pressure, where did it go? Motivation is mysterious; mine comes and goes, and it stayed gone through September. I went to Bend knowing that I would not be competitive in the race, but expecting that I would meet my more important goal: enjoy the journey. I met that goal many times over on this trip. Bend's restaurants and trails are spectacular, and I had an extraordinary run in the rain forest later in Canon Beach, Oregon, but that's another story...

To add to the fun, the morning after the National Championship race, I ran in Bend's local Pilot Butte Challenge, a one-mile run from the base of a cone volcano to the top. XTERRA was giving a special award to the man and woman with the fastest combined times in the National Championship race and the Pilot Butte Challenge. Another cold morning met me before the race. The race volunteers hauled our coats to the top for us, adding to the reasons I was finding on this trip to like Oregonians. Between my sore calves and the 493 foot elevation gain, this was the most difficult mile I've ever attempted, and I finished in 11:37. I have run a slower mile, but not while putting out as much effort. As it turned out, it didn't matter how fast (or slow) I ran this one, as I was the only woman who ran both races and therefore won the XTERRA/Pilot Butte Challenge Double and a nice REI jacket. Just goes to show that oftentimes, the most important part of winning is just showing up, especially when one wins merely by staying reasonably fit and enjoying the journey.

The next XTERRA Georgia series has already started, but it's not too late to join the fun. I missed the first race because I was still playing out in Oregon and Washington. Check out <http://www.xterraplanet.com/trailrun/> for more information about the races.

## Running for a Cause

by Janice Williams



Janice Williams finishes her first marathon and raises money for a cause.

Good morning running group,

I wanted to let you all know that I finished the Marine Core Marathon on Sunday. My official time was 5:56:45 (cut-off time for the race was 7 hours). Not bad for a first timer, right! It was very hard (the course was full of steep hills and down-grades). I started out with a sponsored

pacer group with an estimated time of a 6 hour finish. We ran 2 minutes and walked 1. They were great! It was about 10 of us in the group and they were very motivating. I think they were actually running a faster pace because they finished way before me. I actually lost track of the group on the 16th mile because I had to use the restroom (there was a long wait). I could never catch up with the group and had to run the rest by myself. At mile 17, I started to cry because I was starting to feel leg cramps. But then I drank Gatorade and popped some energy beans :). Mile 20 I was nauseas, but by mile 21 I decided to suck it up and finish. By then I was mostly walking but I still maintained a light jog (even across the finish line). I am so proud of myself and it was for a good cause (Fisher House Foundation). It was amazing to see all the people running for family members (Marines) who died this year. there was a young lady probably in her 40's, who wore a sign on her back "Proud Marine Widow". She kept to herself and was focused on completing the marathon and she did! It was very moving. I plan on running it again. Thanks for your support!

*Editor's note: Janice raised \$555 as a Team Fisher House member. Because members of the military and their families are stationed worldwide and must often travel great distances for specialized medical care, the Fisher House Foundation donates "comfort homes," built on the grounds of major military and VA medical centers. These homes enable family members to be close to a loved one at the most stressful times - during the hospitalization for an unexpected illness, disease, or injury.*

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Over 125 runners participated in the 2nd annual Peacemakers 5K on Nov. 8th. The race was held at the Ocmulgee National Monument on scenic trails that wound through the woods over bridges, around the ancient Indian burial mounds, and across a swamp. We remembered longtime club member Chuck Place who passed away this month, and were thankful to be running with friends on such a beautiful fall morning.