



Published: Jan 17, 2007 07:06 AM
Modified: Jan 17, 2007 07:06 AM

Little River event breathtaking
RECREATION

BY RANDY YOUNG

Piece by piece, runners help fun area trails

The irony was inescapable.

An event guaranteed to deepen the breath and quicken the pulses was staged upon idyllic hillsides and quiet riverbanks of northern Orange County, a rural area once devoted to tobacco farming, about as far away as possible from hustle and bustle.

Fittingly, the elements, community spirit and vitality on display at the second annual Little River Trail Run events this past Saturday were, in a word, breathtaking.

Coordinated by the local Trailheads running club, proceeds from the 5K and 9-mile trail runs benefit the Little River Park, located off Guess Road in northern Orange County, a virtually pristine natural area boasting miles of hiking and mountain biking trails, picnic areas and a playground.

Unwittingly running in others' footsteps over the course of their races, runners traversed single-track trails through the same forests as ancient Native American trade routes and galloped through the structures once relegated to farming.

"All of the structures at the park were originally here when this was a tobacco farm," race director John Strange said. "All of the buildings were refurbished -- taken apart, piece by piece, and put back together again. Before that, there were trails here for trading purposes (among Native Americans). There's a long history of use of this land."

Nine-mile race winner Brent Ferrell aptly smoked the competition with a new course record of 56:21 on the old tobacco trails.

"I liked it. It was good," Ferrell said of the course. "It was pretty technical in a lot of places -- pretty slow. But it was well-marked and well-maintained. ... You're still going up and down a lot, so it's a little hard to get into a groove."

Caroline Blatti was first woman across the nine-mile finish line.

"It's a little tricky when there are a number of successive uphill," she said, "but I had two men right in front of me, and that sort of helped me a little bit (with pacing). I haven't run trails a lot, and I didn't know the course, so I wanted to work with other people."

In the 5K, 15-year old Taylor Gilland, North Carolina's prep cross-country champion, crossed the line first (21:26), with Chris Tommerdahl leading all women to the finish (27:13).



CHHS standout Taylor Gilland leads runners through a refurbished tobacco barn just after the 5K race's start. The state high school champion in cross country went on to win in 21:26.
Photo by Randy Young

[MORE PHOTOS](#)

Story Tools

Printer Friendly Email to a Friend
 Enlarge Font Decrease Font

More Sports

- Little River event breathtaking
- Not the end of the world
- Highlander scores at USA tryouts
- Latta's clutch play gets Heels past Connecticut
- Names & Notes
- Upcoming

Ad Links [Buy a link](#) »

Mountain Biking Apparel
Free Shipping & 100% Gear Guarantee on Backcountry.com!
www.Backcountry.com

Airfare and Hotel Bargains at SideStep
Find great Airfare, Hotel, or Car Rental Deals. Try SideStep, the Award-Winning Travel Search...
SideStep.com

Refinance
\$170,000 loan for \$561/month. Apply online today!
www.Low.com

Advertisements

[Scan My System](#)

GETTING A PERFORMANCE BOOST REALLY IS THAT SIMPLE

crucial
TECHNOLOGY
A Division of Micron

[Print Ads](#) [View all ads from past 7 days](#) »

Ads from Today's **The Chapel Hill News**

- 1/17 WORSHIP DIRECTORY
- AMETEK
- ANGEL NAILS
- ASHLEY FURNITURE
- AUDIO VIDEO ONE
- BA DA WINGS
- BELK A/P V# 6513085
- BINKLEY BAPTIST
- BUTTERBALL TURKEYS LLC
- CALIFORNIA CLOSETS
- CAPTAIN STACY FISHING CENTER
- CAROLINA FITNESS
- CHAPEL HILL
- CHAPEL HILL CHRISTIAN
- CHAPEL HILL FRIENDS MEETING
- CHAPEL OF THE CROSS
- CHRIST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
- CITI TRENDS, INC.
- COOPER HAND TOOLS
- COOPER HAND TOOLS
- CULINARY ENTERTAINMENT GROUP
- D H H S/ DIVISION OF FACILITY SERVICES
- DILLARD'S INC
- DR. ROSENQUIST
- DRY CLEAN WAREHOUSE
- DURHAM ACADEMY NIGHTS
- EDWARD JONES
- EDWARD JONES CHAPEL HILL

Trailheads' delight

The Little River Park is one of the Triangle's newest parks, having opened just over two years ago with assistance from the Triangle Land Conservancy and the Eno River Association, as well as the N.C. Clean Water Management Trust Fund, N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund and the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The park is managed by Orange County, offering nearly 400 acres of natural area, including eight miles of hiking trails and more than seven miles of mountain biking trails. There is also a 15-acre meadow with picnic areas and children's playground.

Prior to the races' debuts last winter, the natural area came to the attention of the Trailheads (www.trailheads.org), who celebrate area preservation through a common love of trail-running, mountain-biking, ultra-running, triathlons and other adventure sports. The group's members have also worked closely with other conservation groups.

Last year, the Trailheads presented a \$3,000 check to Orange County parks in the wake of the first Little River Event.

Orange County recreation and parks management director Lori Taft praised everyone involved in this year's reprise.

"It was great," she said. "Everyone is professional -- everyone."

Trailhead member Steve Hoge said this year's event owes much to suggestions made by runners in last year's races.

"We specifically addressed every single criticism that we received on last year's post-race questionnaire," he explained. "There was a Port-a-John at the race start area. There was more music, and the atmosphere was more festive. There were more fluids at the aid stations and at the end of the race, there was a little more food, and we handed out souvenir socks instead of T-shirts."

"Runners last year said they wanted more mile markers and more cups," Strange added.

Strange noted the contributions of material by Bobby Biles' Fleet Feet Sports and the logistical help of Cardinal Track Club in timing and guide chutes at the finish. Strange said his biggest challenge was toting all the donated race equipment up to the park.

"It was mostly just a matter of lugging this stuff all over the place and getting it out here," he said.

All were quick to credit the volunteers and sponsors with much of the success of the race, including Nantahala Outdoor Center, Sport Kilt, Fuel Belt, Montrail, Trailrunner Magazine, Tyler's Restaurant and Tap Room, Clif Bar, TiPS, the Balance Movement Studio and runDiabetes.

"We had at least 45 volunteers out here today too," Strange said.

As it happened, that ratio figured to be about one volunteer for every 10 participants, which came in handy with race registration up to nearly 450 runners, nearly 33 percent more than last year.

Hoge also noted that unseasonably mild and dry temperatures likely sped race times up a bit.

"It's drier, there are more people, there was more 'trail love' all the way around, and overall aura was awesome," Hoge said.

Good times

In fact, the top three finishers in the nine-mile men's field all broke last year's course record. Just behind Ferrell was Chapel Hill's Geoff King (56:42), with Jonathon Williams (58:57) rounding out the top three places.

"Geoff did a great job of pushing me the whole time," Ferrell said. "It really wasn't until after the eighth mile that we sort of separated."

Andrew Herring took the men's 20-and-under category (1:05:37); Curtis Swisher bested the 21-39 males (1:00:16); and Paul Potorti scored gold in the masters over-40 bracket (1:02:07).

Behind Blatti among the women was Fleet Feet teammate Sarah Hallenbeck (1:08:22). Allison Peters took third place honors (1:11:00).

"I think the course was very challenging, but not overwhelmingly challenging, Blatti said.

Finishing only 20 seconds off the leader, Hallenbeck said she never knew how close she was to Blatti.

"I never saw her at all," Hallenbeck said. "I thought she had finished way ahead. Visibility just isn't that good (through the forest)."

Other women's age group winners were Breanna Gawrys among 20-and-under (1:19:16); Jin Yi Kwon among the 21-39 women (1:11:01); and Emily Hass in the over-40 masters bracket 1:11:06).

On the men's 5K medal stand (though the race measured closer to four miles) alongside Gilland was Nicholas Ludlow (23:19), with Louis Pelsang in third place (23:54).

Gilland bested his own course record in the shorter race.

"The course was a little drier this year," said Gilland, who will switch soon from cross-country to track for the spring season at Chapel Hill High.

- EDWARD JONES-CHAPEL HILL
- EPISCOPAL CHURCH
- FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
- FIRST CHURCH OF SCIENCE
- FURNITURE FACTORY WAREHOUSE
- HALIFAX REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER
- HICKORY GROVE BAPTIST MISSIONA
- HOLY TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH
- HOMEWORKS CUSTOM BUILDERS
- HOPE CREEK CHURCH
- JULIANS COLLEGE SHOP
- LOOK OUT CASUAL CLOTHES/
- MAUS PIANO
- MAYFLOWER SEAFOOD RESTAURANT
- MILLER-MOTTE TECHNICAL COLLEGE
- NC 2X2 NETWORK
- NC 2X2 NETWORK
- NC 2X2 NETWORK
- NC 2X2 NETWORK
- NC 2X2 NETWORK
- NATIONAL ART INTERIORS
- NEW HOPE CHURCH
- OMAX CORPORATION
- PLATINUM DUNES LLC
- PLAYMAKERS THEATRE
- PRAXIS
- R. DANIEL BRADY
- SATURN OF CHAPEL HILL-DURHAM
- SIMPLIMATIC AUTOMATION
- SOUTHSIDE COMMUNITY SERVICES BOARD
- ST PAUL AFRICAN METHODIST CH
- ST. AUGUSTINE BEACH
- STEPHEN M. HIMMELBERG
- STEVE RICHARDS
- SUNCOM WIRELESS
- THE LAURELS OF CHATHAM
- THE ROGERS TEAM, LLC
- TOM ENGLUND CLOCKSMITH
- TRAVEL INFO WEBSITE
- TRI-ARC FOOD SYSTEMS, INC.
- TRINITY MANUFACTURING INCORPORATED
- US FOODSERVICE
- UNC-ACKLAND MUSEUM
- UNC-LINEBERGER
- UNIVERSITY BAPTIST CHURCH
- WACHOVIA SECURITIES
- WAKE TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

findit Search all Triangle Network Ads

Search for: **go**

- View All » Top Jobs
- Accounting Assistant
- NC Justice Center
- Plumber Helpers & Laborers
- Wake Plumbing & Piping, Inc.
- Software Support
- Smd Software, Inc.
- Sales Consultants

"We'll start in March," Gilland said. "I think our first track meet is the Athens Drive Invitational."

Jacob Hoerger scored a victory among the 20-and-under men (24:12); Tom Moore won the 21-39 bracket (25:13), and James Pelsang took the masters' over 40 field (24:42).

Finishing behind Tommerdahl in the women's 5K overall standings were Molly Grabow (28:03) and Mackenzie Robinson (28:04).

Scoring an impressive win in the 20-and-under women's field was 9-year-old Allie "Seabiscuit" Parker (33:17). Lauren Clark won the 21-39 bracket (28:14), while Donna Parker took the women's masters' over 40 field (33:23).

Wounded knees

While winning is certainly to be envied, the battle scars are Red Badges of Courage among trail-runners at this event.

Trailhead runner Abby Zeveloff, last year's winner of the "Trail Love" award, handed out to the most war-weary competitor by virtue of her bloodied knee, lamented her unblemished finish in this year's race.

"I was a little disappointed ... because it's my favorite award of all that I've ever won at races," she said.

Zeveloff said the race symbolized what the Trailheads were all about.

"I think Little River is an exemplary race," she said, "because it really links together new runners in the Carrboro and Chapel Hill area. It's not an intimidating race, with two distances of a 5K and nine-mile distances. It also indicates how the Trailheads are encouraging trail-running not just for themselves for but everybody."

Taft said the Trailheads' work was invaluable to the Little River natural area. More than 28,000 people used the park in the preceding 12 months.

"We're always looking to increase that," Taft said. "We'd love to continue with events like this."

Plans for Little River include a campground, an amphitheater and horse trails, those being contingent upon neighbors.

In the meantime, many of the Trailheads will be focused on the Uwharrie Mountain Trail Run on Feb. 3. Dozens of locals will once again leave their footprints where others have left their own for centuries, and with proper preservation for centuries to come.

Contact Randy Young at chnsports@nando.com or 932-8743

Peak Fitness
 Electrical/controls Engineer
 Simplimatic Automation

Quick Job Search

Enter Keyword(s):

City: State:

Select a Category:

[Advanced Job Search »](#)

powered by **careerbuilder.com**