

The goal of this column is to describe a route/location, and let you know in my opinion if it's all it's cracked up to be. So if you have a favorite running route, let me know by contacting ORRC at orrc@orrc.net and I'll give it a try.

Pre's Trail, Eugene, OR



There probably isn't a more famous runner in Oregon than Steve Prefontaine. The legendary athlete who died too young inspires both young and old alike, and in Eugene, he has a special place in everyone's hearts. There is a world-class track meet named after him, the exact place he passed away is a shrine where people go to remember him and leave mementos in his honor, and for those of us lucky enough to run on it, there is Pre's Trail.

Located along the North side of the Willamette River near the University of Oregon's Autzen Stadium, the bark dust trail named after Pre, consists of a series of loops that you can combine for any number of miles. It also connects with the Ruth Bascom River Trail and meanders through Alton Baker Park, so you could go for a truly long run (up to 20 miles) and park nearly anywhere you want.

I started my run at the Autzen footbridge just across from the University of Oregon. There is a map there detailing where you can go, and there are other maps scattered along the trail, which is good because maps can be helpful to newbies who might get turned around on the loops. In addition, portions of the trail have fitness stations, so for those of you who like to add chin-ups, pushups, etc to your run, have at it. The trail has some sections within the trees (such as where I started my run), but most of it is more open grassland with streams and ponds meandering throughout with the football stadium located just to the North overlooking everything. With the big "O" on the stadium, you definitely don't forget where you are, or where Steve Prefontaine started his collegiate career and became world famous.

The trail forms a kind of figure eight, and if you run the full loop it's a little over 4 miles around, although you can add an out and back portion near the I-5 overpass that extends it to almost 6 miles. And what I like most is that it's all a nice soft surface (bark dust/chipped wood) so even though it's a trail, it's the kind of trail I like (not technical at all and wide enough to run side-by-side), and I could run on it forever. However, if dirt trails aren't your cup of tea, there are sections of the trail that parallel bike paths so you have your choice of surface for some portions. The only thing you have to worry about if you run on the trails is getting your shoes cleaned up afterward.

Is it a safe place to run? I ran this trail on a weekend morning, and there were so many people that I felt very comfortable in terms of safety. However, if I was running in the evening, or early morning, I'd probably feel more comfortable running with a friend, simply because it can feel a little isolated in some areas (particularly near the I-5 overpass).

But bottom line, if you're in Eugene, you really need to ensure you run on Pre's trail. It's beautiful, quiet (no traffic or even the flapping of your shoes on the trail because of its surface), and with runners all around, you feel that Pre is just waiting around the corner to welcome you to his trail.



PHOTOS: JULIA REISINGER AT PRE'S TRAIL

Pre's Trail, Eugene, OR - The Lowdown

Directions

Probably the easiest access point to the trail is either at Autzen stadium or Alton Baker Park, both just north, across the river from the University of Oregon. Autzen Stadium is located at 2727 Leo Harris Prwy, Eugene, OR 97401 while Alton Baker is at 501 Day Island Rd., Eugene, OR 97401. Or you could access the trail via the Autzen footbridge after parking near the University of Oregon.

Bathroom

There are no bathrooms along the route, although there are some at Alton Baker Park, so depending on where you park, go before you go.

Parking

Depending on where you start the loop there is ample parking at Alton Baker Park, or Autzen stadium.

Surface

Bark dust/chipped wood trail the entire way. Easy to run on, not technical at all. I loved it, but if you want, there are some

bike paths that parallel the trail in some sections.

Traffic

None. The trail is closed to traffic, both vehicular and cyclists.

Popularity

Very popular on the weekends, and in the morning and after work. There were more runners on the trail near Autzen and Alton Baker park, a little less as you get closer to the I-5 overpass.

Plusses

No traffic, best surface to run on and beautiful scenery.

Minuses The scarcity of bathrooms on the far end.

Rating

5 out of 5. You cannot not love this trail and the history behind it.



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