

Running Routes in Oregon

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.

Duniway Track / Terwilliger, Portland, OR

One of the first big races I ever ran in, before my freshman year in high school, was the Cascade Runoff in the summer of 1980. This was my first experience seeing and meeting famous runners, running in a crowd, and above all, my first experience running up Terwilliger Blvd. Throughout the years I ran it again in Cascade Runoffs, Shamrock Runs, and simply when training for hills. But I never forgot my first experience, and thinking not only "there are a LOT of people in this race" but also... "where the heck is the top of this hill?!"

Many people consider the top of Terwilliger to be at the Chart House Restaurant, but that would be misleading depending on how far you are running and where you are going on the route. Yes, the Chart House is at one of the crests of Terwilliger, but to be honest, there is another hill if you run past it all the way to the A-Boy parking lot on Barbur Blvd.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. If you are not running a race such as Shamrock, where you start downtown, head up Terwilliger and back down Barbur, you have to figure out where to start. The easiest place would be to start at the Duniway Track between Barbur and 6th Ave. at Sheridan, just south of downtown Portland.

The Track is part of Duniway Park, named after Abigail Duniway, writer, newspaper publisher and advocate for women's rights. The track is popular for groups in the evening, and track meets for local schools. It is made out of 200,000 recycled running shoes, which make up its surface. There are lights for running at night, and a small parking lot and a bathroom. So aside from being a great place to workout, it's also a good place to start a run up Terwilliger.

After a quick lap warm-up, a path leads up to 6th Ave (the start of the uphill grade). You take a left on 6th, following Duniway Park along the Lilac Garden, and then take a left to start up Terwilliger Blvd.



JULIA REISINGER ON TERWILLIGER BLVD

The Lowdown

Directions: Duniway Park is located just south of downtown Portland at the intersection of 6th Ave, Sheridan and Barbur Blvd. Terwilliger is located alongside the park, just south of Duniway Track alongside Duniway Lilac Garden.

Bathroom: There is a bathroom at Duniway track, and another one about a mile up Terwilliger Blvd.

Parking: Duniway Track has nine parking spots, but if it's full, exit the parking lot and go south on Barbur to the first intersection at Hooker, where there is more street parking.

Surface: Duniway Track is "Granulated" rubber made out of recycled running shoes, and Terwilliger is all side-walk until you reach capital highway. Then there is paved bike path. There can be some bumpiness as tree roots cause some ruts in the path, but nothing too serious.

Traffic: Terwilliger is open to traffic, but there is not too much, and there are also no intersections to cross until you hit Capital Highway, so you don't have to worry too much about what little traffic there is.

Popularity: Pretty popular on a Saturday morning. Not crowded by any means, and bicycles stay on the road, so you don't have to compete with them for right of way.

Plusses: Beautiful view, with trees lining the entire route. You don't have to think about traffic, and there are bathrooms and water along the way.

Minuses: The hills. If you are not prepared for it, this can be a hard run. But if you are prepared, mentally and physically, it's not too bad.

Rating: 4.5 of 5 (I just can't ignore the hills....)

One of the nice things about this run is, aside from one main intersection at the top of the hill, there are no major intersections. You remain on Terwilliger the entire time, and while there are some side streets, you don't have to worry about stop signs or traffic signals for most of the run. It's open to traffic, but you really don't have to think about it too much. Also, if you run early enough on a weekend, there isn't too much traffic noise, so unlike Eastside Esplanade downtown, it's fairly quiet.


Another nice thing about this run is the greenery, and the view. I last ran this route in early November, and the leaves were all changing colors, and dropping to the ground around me. With not a lot of traffic, and fall colors, along with a few viewpoints overlooking downtown and the Willamette River, this is definitely a route to recommend to visitors, as long as you warn them about the hills beforehand.

And then, there are the hills. And there is no getting around it...this is a hilly course. Not a "gently rolling" or "undulating" course...it's downright hilly. Basically, depending on where you start and finish, it's basically uphill one way, with a rewarding downhill on the way back. Starting at Duniway Park, you might not think it's that bad, until you make the left onto Terwilliger...and the uphill starts. The first "crest" comes around one mile, but don't be fooled. You get a slight, short reprieve, which is also where you'll find a bathroom and a water fountain, but then you start uphill again for approximately another mile up to the Chart House restaurant. Here is another water fountain and another viewpoint, and your first opportunity to turn around. Of course you could always turn around before getting here, but where's the challenge in that? From Duniway to the Chart House is approximately 2.3 miles (using the odometer on my car...I don't have a GPS system). So if you simply ran from Duniway to the Chart House and back, you'd get in about 4 ½ miles. If you ran a lap or two warm-up first, that would make a good solid 5 mile run.

However, you don't have to stop at the Chart House. You can continue along Terwilliger about a quarter mile, and hit the intersection at Capital Highway. Continue across Capital, and you have another ¾ mile run along pleasant bike trail and neighborhoods before hitting Barbur Blvd and the parking lot at A-Boy. This is not a shameless plug, but a place where many people decide to start and finish their run instead of at Duniway. Basically it's the other end of the route, with parking in the neighborhoods or the A-Boy parking lot (preferably not when they are open for business). Running from Duniway to Barbur Blvd at A-Boy and back is about 3 ½ miles each way, so a good 7-mile run.

However, to warn you, if you continue from the Chart House on to Barbur, there is another hill in your path. Yes, it's a pretty run, but your quads are going to protest the next morning if you aren't prepared for it.

Where to start and finish? I preferred starting at Duniway because that makes me work the hills first, and then I get rewarded by the down-hills in the second half. Starting at Barbur you get more down-hills starting out (easier for a warm-up) but you're working more on the up-hills toward the end. But then again, there is limited parking at Duniway, so it might be easier to start at Barbur if you are meeting a larger group.

There were quite a few people running the route the day I went, and of course, since it's an out and back, you'll probably see people twice. Duniway track is lit at night, and so is Terwilliger, but I don't know how comfortable I'd feel running it at night by myself. Probably, as a single female I'd recommend running it with a friend at night, but on a weekend morning, I felt perfectly fine. If you're not running the Shamrock Run 15K you won't have the experience of a bagpiper at the top, or people offering you beer on the way down... but as a really pretty run, taking in the views of downtown Portland, it's definitely a route to recommend to anyone visiting from out of town. It's easy to reach from downtown, and not a lot of traffic or intersections to worry about. Yes, it's not Forest Park, but it's easier to get to, and just as pretty and has all the amenities without needing to carry water or worry about bathrooms. 



AUTUMN LEAVES RACE DIRECTOR BRET HENRY WITH BOB HEARN, 50K SECOND PLACE WINNER. PHOTO BY GAIL HENRY