

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.

Phil's Trail, Bend, OR

Bend, Oregon is probably one of the most active communities in Oregon. They ski, snowboard, kayak, river raft, hike, mountain bike, run – you name it, they do it. There are trails all over the area, and they are all popular. In this case I visited Phil's Trail just east of Bend, and ran a section that ended up being about four miles out and back (although I could have run much farther).

The first thing to know about Phil's Trail is that it is a real trail. By real trail I mean, it's not a paved bike path like those rails to trails projects such as Springwater Corridor in Portland, or the Vernonia/Banks Trail. It's also not smooth, wide and made of bark dust like the Amazon Trail or Pre's Trail in Eugene. No, this is a real, honest to goodness single track, watch your feet for roots and rocks trail, which is not my preferred surface. It's not especially difficult or technical like parts of the Pacific Crest Trail near Mount Hood, but it's enough where I'm worrying about turning an ankle, and you have to run single file.

So starting my run, I'm a little anxious about the state of my ankles and if I'll finish the run with all the skin intact on my hands and knees. For those of you who run frequently on trails, this one was probably a cake-walk, and I have to admit, if I was going to run on trails on a regular basis, this was a nice one. There were not a lot of rocks or roots, with most of the trail

being simply dirt (or dust in this case since it hadn't rained in over a month). The most I really had to worry about was how dirty my shoes would be at the end. Yes, I did catch my feet a couple of times, but I didn't go down, so in those terms, I'd call the run a major success.

There were also no major hills, or even inclines on the trail. It was primarily flat, with no drop-offs or edges, or even a lot of switchbacks. So it was a fairly easy run on a nice soft surface. This would be a great place for new trail runners to try and get the experience before tackling more difficult trails.

If you go, however, you need to be aware of all the other users on the trail. There were a lot of mountain bikers using the trail system, and why wouldn't they? Phil's trail is part of a group of trails that stretch from Bend all the way to Mount Bachelor. On one mountain bike website the "trail details" for Phil's Trail lists the distance as, "as far as you can ride." There are also lots of dogs accompanying their owners, most of them off-leash, but usually well under control. There is no animosity between runners and cyclist, just a very peaceful co-existence. While technically there is no specific "right of way," the people I ran with said they usually yield to the bikes since it is simply easier for pedestrians to step off the trail versus making cyclists stop or go off the trail. As such, we kept a constant eye out for the multitude of cyclists on the morning we went, and ended up stopping fairly frequently. The cyclists were all very appreciative, and I didn't mind, but after an hour I was wishfully thinking of a wider path where I wouldn't have to be so aware of who else was on the trail.

I have to mention the highlight of this particular run, but first a

The Lowdown

Directions: Phil's Trail is just east of Bend. Start at the roundabout on the corner of 14th and Galveston, where you can see the "flaming chicken." There is a Fleet Feet sporting goods store on the corner in case you need shoes or clothes or a water belt, or directions. Head East on Galveston, and it turns into Skyliners Road. Go about 2 ½ miles out Skyliners and there will be paved road on the left. There is no name on the road, but there is a "fire risk" sign and a small bike sign on the right indicating this is where to turn. Go about a 1/3 of a mile down the paved road and you will find the trailhead for several trails, including Phil's Trail.

Bathroom. There is a bathroom at the trailhead, so no worries there. A note on the trail though; while you might think "I'm in a forest so I can go anywhere," the trees are very skinny, and there aren't a lot of bushes, just some scrub, so it's actually pretty difficult to find a secluded spot.

Parking: There is ample parking at the trailhead.

Surface: Single track trail, fairly dusty, but not too technical.

Traffic: None. The trail is closed to traffic.

Popularity: Very popular, but more so with cyclists than runners or walkers. So be prepared to give right of way. It's not that crowded, but probably more noticeable on a busy weekend.

Plusses: Soft surface, pleasant scenery, easy to get to, no traffic.

Minuses: I'm not partial to trail running, so I get tired of looking at my feet, and worrying about cyclists got a little old by the end of the run.


Rating: 3.5 out of 5 (probably a 4.5 or 5 if you like trails).

Julia Reisinger



JULIA AND THE FLAMING CHICKEN ON PHIL'S RUN

little background on Bend. Bend is a city that utilizes roundabouts instead of intersections. A roundabout is a circle where cars enter, and wind around until exiting. Cars entering the roundabout yield to cars already in it, and they use their turn signals to indicate when they are planning to exit. Bend often uses these roundabouts instead of 4-way stop signs or red-lights. As part of a beautification project, in many of these roundabouts there are sculptures and artwork. At the intersection of Galveston and 14th Ave, there is a particular roundabout with a colorful sculpture entitled "Phoenix Rising." This is a red sculpture that is meant to depict the mythical phoenix rising from the flames. However, everyone I know in Bend affectionately call it the "flaming chicken." I give this background because as you run along Phil's Trail, about two miles in, you get to an intersection of various trails. There are signs detailing how far you've gone, and which trails are which. But several years ago, someone decided to "beautify" the trail in imitation of the City of Bend, and you guessed it...there is a roundabout at the intersection, with a duplicate of the "flaming chicken" smack in the middle. I cracked up when I first saw it, and when we ran to this section of the trail, I saw several people taking pictures (as did I). It's just a quirky aspect that made the trail fun.

Would I recommend this trail to other runners? Absolutely, especially if you like trails over roads and bike paths. Like I said, I don't usually prefer trails, but done in moderation, this one would be a nice change. 

The other race he was involved in was the Greater Portland Half Marathon, which didn't fare as well as the Keg to Barrel Relay. The name, itself, is a bit of a misnomer, as the Portland Marathon now has a half marathon distance, and this sounds like the event is claiming to be greater. Plus, Forest Grove isn't exactly Greater Portland. Mark tried to explain this to the owner of the event, the Reinke Sports Group, but they were set on a national half marathon series, trying to make money by creating as many half marathons as they could, and wanted to be connected to Portland without having to go through the trouble and expense of actually having their race in Portland. Mark reluctantly agreed to head up their event, but it wasn't pretty, and he declined the offer to direct it again the following year.

Mark has been the RRCA State Representative since 2010. He says what it's about, mainly, is being a resource, such as helping to start clubs, providing insurance, and certifying races. He is not only the RRCA Rep for Oregon, he is the Oregon Rep for the RRCA, so a lot of it is just being recognized for what we are, which is leading the nation. For example, the RRCA just declared Portland a Runner Friendly Community. Obviously, everyone in the Northwest already knew Portland was runner friendly, but the national recognition is a step in the right direction. Other cities and towns in Oregon may be recognized as Runner Friendly in the future, such as Salem, Eugene, and Bend.

Also, Mark established the Vernonia Marathon and Vernonia Half Marathon as RRCA State Championship races, so we now have that in our backyard. In July, RRCA hosted a certified coaching class here in Oregon, which is something that Mark wants to bring back every year. In the next year or two, the RRCA will put together a race director program. It is still in development, but they are aiming to make an online class available, which will offer certification. And in the future, if there is enough interest, Mark will look at building an RRCA race series among Oregon's RRCA club members.

Mark's mantra is to lead by example. The ORRC leads the rest of Oregon, Oregon leads the nation, and Mark is leading via the RRCA, and by making things happen. One of the ways he leads by example in his personal life is by recycling. Around Forest Grove he is known as "that guy who picks up cans," because he runs with a plastic bag and picks up cans. He typically makes \$250 a year. Another way Mark leads by example is by giving blood.

"Everybody who is healthy should do it, but runners in particular," he says.

Mark is a big fan of apheresis donations, where you can donate every two weeks, instead of only once every eight weeks when donating whole blood. He has donated blood his whole life, and keeps track of how much blood he has donated so far, which is around 32 gallons.

"I believe in recycling everything," he says. 