

## Rob Rose Column 7/26/07

Pine Grove, Pa. - It's 5:45 a.m. on a weekday morning in late June and I'm in my hotel room sizing up my running options. I'm here in this remote east central Pennsylvania town on a work assignment and I'm contemplating how to get in 30- 40 minutes of road work. The Hampton Inn where I am quartered is bounded by US 81 on two sides and Rte 443, a state road where the 55 on the speed limit sign seems to only indicate the floor. The location is a hotelier's dream but a runner's nightmare: no safe area to run. However, even situations that on the surface look hopeless, may, after a little exploration, yield unexpected rewards.

I walk out the door and consider whether to risk running on the potentially perilous Rte 443 or restrict my running to endless circumferences of the hotel parking lot. I'm sure many of you have faced that situation. Risk getting hit by a car or endure a monotonous and interminable workout. I can recall running in a hotel parking lot in Woburn many years ago and taking some turns at a West Virginia Quality Inn. More recently, I amused the sales staff at the Toyota dealership in Hamburg, Pa. as I made circuit after circuit around their lot on a raw, rainy October night three years ago.

I elect to take the chance and somnambulate onto Rte 443 that morning and head west with not a little trepidation. The traffic is light at that hour but the shoulder is narrow. When any car approaches, I move onto the grass and give the vehicle, usually hurtling about 70 mph, a wide berth. I gain some confidence and actually begin to enjoy it as it's a beautiful area with mountains peering down on both sides. It's a change in running routes and to be truthful, my training routine has become ..... routine. I'm here because of work but it's become a running vacation. I confine my run to a short thirty minute out and back.

Two days later I again venture out on 443 but I go a little further. Twenty minutes out just as I'm about to turn around I see a sign, 'Swatara State Park'. That gets the juices flowing because in my dictionary the words, 'state park' means 'secluded trails'. I finish up the run with a side trip up a nasty little hill that tops out at a road called Moonshine Lane.

That was my last run on my initial trip. When I returned home, I did some research on the area and Swatara State Park. The map on their website revealed a long swath of park land that extended several miles to the west. But the most intriguing part was an area of green that flowed east to the area right below the Hampton Inn. Within the patch of green was a dotted line indicating a trail. Interesting.

I returned in early July with a mission to find the trail. As the first order of business, I go out to survey the back of the

hotel and see a dirt path on the adjoining property. I quiz the hotel staff but no one knows anything about it. One individual, however dismisses the idea. Puffing on his cigarette, he states flatly that it doesn't go anywhere. I didn't need any more motivation to succeed.

I elect to play it safe and avoid any trespassing issues, so I decide to look for the trail further up. The next morning, I'm on Rte 443 looking for the ROAD CLOSED sign I saw on my earlier treks. Twelve minutes out I veer off the road, slip down an overgrown path and in a moment I'm on it. It's a rail-trail, an old railroad line that's been abandoned and reconditioned for pedestrian use. It's ten feet wide with compacted black gravel. It's flat, straight and ensconced in beautiful woodland. I hit the mother load. I take it out to Swatara State Park and enter it where there are myriad trail options. I don't have enough time to see if it connects to the hotel so I retrace my route and wait for the next time.

A couple of days later, I hit the ROAD CLOSED sign, trundle down to the trail, turn east and take it back to the hotel. Yes, the trail goes all the way through without treading on someone's property. Mission accomplished.

The object lesson here is that one needs to look around a little and survey your surroundings. The internet reveals all. In rural areas, state parks are a good resource. In urban and suburban regions, running clubs know all the good running routes. It could make the difference between running in a safe environment or one that is not.

And the skeptical cigarette puffing hotel clerk? On my last night I sauntered past the front desk and triumphantly announced that the trail was a continuous path from the hotel to the state park. His crestfallen expression told all. Sometimes the satisfaction isn't confined to just the running.

Footnotes - Earlier this month, the Wampanog Road Runners took their second consecutive Marshfield Road Runners Marathon Relay title; 26 Wamps each ran a mile and the club came out besting four other club teams; there was some confusion over the final .2, where some statistically challenged team members interpreted that distance as 200 yards rather than 352 yards; the club recovered in enough time to nip the Marshfield 'A' team by 23 seconds ... Plainville's Ron Farkash completed last Saturday's Vermont 100 Mile Endurance Race, finishing 45th in 22:53:07:80 ... the Wampanoags bid farewell to Ben Coyle last week; the former Mansfield and Cumberland resident has moved to California; Coyle has been a podium finisher at many area races over the years, most recently winning the Attleboro Y 5K .....