

On The Run

By Dink Taylor

February 7, 2013

Today I was cleaning all the cooler from this past 19th Annual Mt Mist Trail Run. While the race is over, I still have work to do to get the 2013 race completed and 2014 preparation is already underway. I was thinking about where the last 19 years went? I still find it hard to believe that this classic race has still only had one Race Director and that would be yours truly.

I first started running the Mountain Mist Trail about 26 years ago with Mark Dummer. Back then, no one around here ran the trails. Mark and I regularly met on Thursday's at Monte Sano school to do a little 10 mile tempo run. One night we decided we did not feel like it and we ventured off into the woods. It became habit forming after that first trail run. We started meeting on weekends and exploring all the trails of Monte Sano. I can remember being down on the East side of the mountain and coming up on guys riding 4 wheeler's, they would say "where did ya'll come from?" We'd say "Monte Sano State Park" and they would look at us in disbelief! And they always ask why? Ha, what fun.

I got hooked on trail running. I was already hooked on running distances beyond the marathon but I had never done a trail race. I found one, the Pine Mountain 46 mile trail run in Pine Mountain GA and made that my first one along with Jim Call. We did some serious training all Fall for that race on the Mt Mist Trail. That was Jim's first trail race as well. Jim is one of the few to now have completed all 19 Mountain Mist.

Trail running and racing became a regular routine for me. I started traveling all over the Southeast doing ultra trail races. I would run whatever I could find, it did not matter if it was a big race like Mt Masochist 50 mile Trail Run in VA (I have run that one 15 times) or a

little unofficial trail run in Sewanee TN. Jim Jones was notorious for putting together unofficial trail runs in the Sewanee area. He worked for the local "University of the South" Sewanee. He also put a little one on called "The Fiery Gizzard" a trail marathon. His runs would go something like this. He would send out a flyer in the mail. Meet at Sewanee University gym at 8am on March 19, trail run, 20-25 miles, limited aid, no entry fee, no shirt, no frills, donations welcome. Jim would tell us where to run and he would put out a few water jugs and some saltine crackers, maybe two places. We would take off and it always turned into a race. I don't remember there ever being more than 25 show up to run. Regardless of who showed up, we had fun, always.

So after a 25 mile trail run on one Saturday in Sewanee, all the guys were standing around talking. I say guys because no girls ever showed up back then. I told them that there were some trails where I lived in Huntsville at Monte Sano State Park. I told them, I could put out some water jugs and some crackers and we might could have a trail run there. What did they think? One guy, Andy Colee said, "I would come." I said really? You would drive all the way from Florida to run? He said yes. My mind took over. I was only in my 20's but I had already been running the trails of Monte Sano for several years and knew them well. This gave me an idea.

I figured if Andy would drive all the way from Florida to run, maybe some others would too. I started mapping out a route. I went out and ran several sections. I had already run several trail races and I thought to myself that I could figure out what it would take to put on a run. I could order some shirts and come up with a cool logo, something to do with skeletons would be good for the trail runners, right? I thought about where we could have some aid stations. I mapped and I planned and I thought of every detail it would take. I decided that if I was going to do this, why just have a few water jugs and crackers? Why not turn this thing into a real trail race?

I decided that if I was going to do this, I would need some help. So, I went to the HTC board meeting and made a presentation to the board to see if we could make this an official HTC event. I don't remember who all was there actually, maybe Jim Oaks and I do remember Harold Tinsley being there. The meeting was at Harold's house. I was worried they would say no. I laid out every detail. What I do remember was Harold was impressed with all my planning. He said he liked what I had prepared and that the board only had one request from me. I had planned the race for March and they ask me to move it to January since there were no races in January. I said sure, it might be a little cold but I did not think I would have to worry about snakes or folks getting dehydrated in the cold.

Here are some things I can tell you about that first Mt Mist back in January of 1995. I named it Mt Mist over Warpath Ridge Trail Run because there was an old wooden sign that said "mountain mist" on it. I also named it that because every time we went trail running on Monte Sano, we said, let's go run "Mt Mist" regardless of what trail we were running.

I remember it started and finished at the Hiker's Parking lot. It was also not a 50k. I just guessed at the distance because we just ran on time back then, no Garmins or good ways to measure a trail so rugged. There were no 50k's back then either. We just called it a 30 mile trail run. Jim Oakes decided after a couple of years that the race might get popular and we should go ahead and make it a 50k if we could add some distance. I agreed.

That first Mountain Mist was sunny and cold, 18 at the start. I had limited it to 50 runners and we actually got all 50, the last one signed up on the day before the race at the prerace dinner which was held at Mr Gattis pizza on Airport Road. I wanted to keep things simple, a black and white long sleeve cotton t-shirt. I came up with the slogan "Trail Runner's never die they just thin out" which I took from an old poster that I had as a kid of a skeleton running that said "runners never die, they just thin out." I thought it might be good to bring it

back since the poster was from the 70's.

On Friday, before the race, I ran the entire course to check the markings. I was out there all day. I knew I had runners coming from GA, FL, TN and even one guy from WA and another from South Africa. There was no way I could live with myself if someone got lost! I still worry to this day about runners getting lost but I feel like I do as best I can with trail markings and that is all I can do.

Since the race was "only" 30 miles, I was worried it might be too easy. So on race day, I sat at the top of the infamous "Waterline" and waited. Nothing made me happier than seeing that first runner coming. It was DeWayne Satterfield and boy was he struggling. He was doing what we call "the ultra shuffle" and I knew my course was legit, especially since McKay Hollow and the final 10k still awaited. DeWayne went on the win that first Mt Mist in 3:49 I believe and it would be the first of his 9 wins at Mt Mist. 36 brave souls went on to finish that first Mt Mist.

So next year will be the 20th running of the Mountain Mist. Is this really a special anniversary? Part of me thinks it may be. Part of me thinks it is just another number, like running your 75,000th mile or 1000th race. Part of me thinks I may give it to someone else to race direct. Part of me feels like no one else can do it the way I do but I know that is not true. We are thinking of letting more runners in for the 20th but that just means more work, more stuff and more organizing. I am going to do something special for the runners who have finished all 20 Mountain Mist although there won't be but just a small hand full. I am thankful to all the volunteers that have come and gone over the years, some, like Jim Oakes have volunteered at all 19 Mt Mist, to them I say thank you for making it happen. Mountain Mist is part of me and no matter what I do in the future it will always be part of me for many years to come. I will continue to be proud of The "Southeast's Premier Trail Run" I take full responsibility for the trail running madness I created in this area. For that I say you're welcome

and Long live Mountain Mist Trail Run!