

RUNNING SHORTS

State park a super place for running

By Ken Johnson

It is amazing that there are so many people in and around Huntsville who never visit the Huntsville State Park.

The park was established in 1938 and consists of 2,083 acres, including 210-acre Lake Raven. It is nine miles south of Huntsville on Interstate 45.

While Huntsville State Park offers a variety of recreational opportunities, such as fishing, camping, swimming, canoeing and picnicking, there are 19 miles of trails for running and hiking. These trails have been recently measured and marked and maps are available at the trailheads.

Also, the Seven Hills Running Club measured and mapped eight courses, ranging from 3.5 miles to 12.4 miles. These are on the club web site at www.7hills.us, under "Course Maps."

For trail running and hiking, Huntsville State Park is the place to be.

Many runners who have not run trails express concern about safety. While you have to be careful not to trip on a root, the trails are a relatively safe.

Many members of the Seven Hills Running Club have been running trails at the park for many years. None report being attacked by any wild animals – except for a horsefly or two during the summer months.

The park is peaceful and quiet and you do not have to worry about dodging traffic. You can enjoy nature, get lost in your thoughts and get some exercise at the same time. Even if walking is more to your liking, try the trails.

The cross-country team at Sam Houston State trains on the trails at the park on a regular basis and, especially on the weekends, you will find many runners from the Houston area on the trails. The Seven Hills Running Club has a group that runs trails at least twice a week. Even if you are not a member of the club, you are welcome to join this group. If you are interested, call me at 295-4291.

Here are some tips for safe and enjoyable trail running: Run with a partner; protect yourself with insect repellent; always carry a bottle of water, but never litter the trail with empty bottles; take in the scenery, but keep an eye on the ground for trip hazards; expect to run slower than you do on the road; and, pace yourself and walk up the steeper hills if you need to.

Trail runner shoes are available, but they are primarily for rocky trails. Regular road running shoes will do at Huntsville State Park.

The park hosts several trail races each year. In fact, the granddaddy of all trail races in the U.S. is the Sunmart Texas Trail Endurance Run at Huntsville State Park each December. About 1,000 runners from all over the U.S. and many foreign countries participate in this 50K (31 miles) and 50-mile event. Other races at the park include the Rocky Raccoon 25K and 50K race in November, the Rocky Raccoon 50-mile and 100-mile race in February and the Hogs Hunt 25K and 50K race in March.

While these are all long distance races, the Seven Hills Running Club has a 3.5-mile non-competitive run/walk at the park each March.

The park entry fee is \$4 per adult. An option is to purchase an annual pass for \$60. The annual pass covers everyone in the vehicle (up to 15 people) and is good for all Texas state parks.

While not on the trails, the next race in Huntsville is the Fall Fun Run, 5K and 1-Mile run or walk, at 8 a.m. on Saturday, September 29. The race starts and finishes at the southwest corner of the West Hill Mall parking lot. The course is out and back on the sidewalk along Veterans Memorial Parkway. The entry fee is \$1. Register at the starting point before the race.

Recent Race Results:

Bearkat Bash 5K (3.1 miles), Klein, Sept. 8

Robert Duncan 19:22 (2nd in age group)

John Slate 22:07 (3rd in age group)

Ken Johnson 34:48 (3rd in age group)

Spring Fever 5K, Bellaire, Sept. 15

John Slate 21:43

Burnet TRI-HARD Challenge Triathlon, Sept. 16

Marvin Dittfurth 2:01:47 (3rd in age group)