

Moe, Larry, and Curly Go To Trail Running Camp

By Marla Brucker (Originally appeared in the Onteora Runners Newsletter)

Last weekend Karen Spinozzi, Linda Schrader, and I packed our bags and favorite beverages and headed up the highway to the tunes of Lucinda Williams and ZZ Top. Our destination was the Dippikill Wilderness Retreat in the Adirondack Mountains. Oh what a fun filled trip it was!

With the aid of a Garmin GPS and the precise directions provided by Josh Merlis, camp director (aka President of Albany Running Exchange Event Productions) we arrived late afternoon Thursday. We were warmly greeted by Josh and the camp staff. Sue Wong, a staff person, kindly helped us schlep our tremendous amount of stuff to our bunk room. The three of us shared a small room which contained a bed for each of us complete with drawers underneath. Thanks for the drawers. Without them there might not have been space to stand up in our room (because we brought soooooo much stuff!). On each bed was a sheet of paper with our individual names, a small stuffed frog which had the name of person we didn't know on it, a handbook, other info, as well as a very cute moisture wicking shirt with an AREEP logo.

Our first mission was to be ready for a run at 5:30. While driving there we had noticed that we were going up a very, very steep road with small cones on the side. Each cone had mile marker info. (.5M, 1.5M, up to 2.5M). Those who run down have to turn around and run back up.... It was reminiscent of the Viking Run course, but the hill was way more intense. We assembled at the main lodge and Josh took roll call. He explained that we were going to run on the dirt road and told everyone to feel free to run as far or as little as we liked. Dinner would be served at 7:30. Off we went, everyone trotting along at their own pace. No pressure. There wasn't any pressure all weekend, until the race on the very last day of camp: The Froggy Five Mile. We were advised to bring our frogs to dinner. Our next mission was to find the owner of the frog that was on each of our beds.

Luckily the person who had Linda's frog found Linda. Linda and her frog became very close friends and were almost inseparable, especially at night. She squeezed him while she slept (I think her frog was a boy????). For the rest of us, the frogs were a good vehicle to get to know one another. I tried my hardest to remember people's names, but of course needed constant reminders.

Josh Merlis is a genius at remembering every single person's name he meets. He made us all feel comfortable and welcomed. Josh was always making sure people were taken care of and that things were running smoothly. Karen remarked several times during the weekend that he will one day be famous. Josh is a down to earth type of person with tons of charisma. He is smart and charming and did everything he could to make the weekend the best it could be.

I could run through a blow by blow, minute by minute description of our 4 day, 3 night experience, but I have other stuff to do this afternoon. I mostly want to tell you that AREEP Trail Running Camp is an amazing vacation experience. For approximately \$350 (or less depending on the accommodations you choose) you most certainly get your dollars' worth. The price included 3 meals a day, discussions/lectures on different aspects of trail running, training sessions, hiking, yoga, core strengthening, zumba class, swing dance lessons, swimming, kayaking, a talent show, and entry into a race. All this a the opportunity to hang out with great folks and make new friends.

Personally, the activities I enjoyed the most were running solo on more technical trails than I am used to at my own pace, participating in 2 yoga classes in one day, core strengthening, swing dancing, zumba.... Ok. I guess I enjoyed it all "the most."

The swing dancing class was taught by Josh and Sarah. They have both extensively studied swing dancing and were one of my favorite acts in the talent show. Let me tell you, swing dancing is a work out! I persuaded a young man (whose mother is my age, and also btw: it was his frog on my bed when we

arrived) with 2 left feet to dance with me. When I tired out I handed him over to Linda. She wore out and gave him to Karen. Just kidding and exaggerating, but it was something like that.

Late Saturday afternoon, after a 3 mile hike, some of us went to Zumba class taught by Lisa Glick. I always knew Lisa was a great Zumba teacher. I had previously taken 2 or 3 Zumba classes and wasn't impressed, but when I have heard Lisa talk about how she conducts her classes it was obvious to me that her approach is not the same. Lisa did an outstanding job as an instructor. She had everyone swaying their hips to a Latin beat and sweating profusely (but I AM the sweating queen). Lisa is a teacher by trade and was able to make it easy for anyone to learn and enjoy Zumba. I love her!

The talent show on Saturday night was an entertainment experience not to be missed. Several folks brought instruments to camp. We were all hypnotized by the performances. Josh and his family secured our close attention with a magic act. Dick Vincent (who also functioned as a staff person and btw: an entertaining and informative instructor/coach on hill running techniques) lured the audience into participating in his amusing folk singing act. He was a lot of fun. An acappella group did an enticing rendition of the song "Da Doo Run Run". (I don't know if that is really the name of the song but it goes like this: "I met him on a Monday and my heart stood still. Da doo run run, da doo run run..." I guess you know what I'm talking about.) One woman did an Irish drinking/celebration song that we were mandated to participate in. Josh and Sarah did a swing dance number that looked like it was being performed on a Broadway stage. I volunteered to get on stage and show folks my talent of wiggling my ears without touching them, but decided not to make that much of a fool out of myself. Next year, however, I will participate in the talent show as one of the Glickettes in the soon to be famous singing group Lisa Glick and the Glickettes. I think we will likely be the comedy act.

The other part of trail running camp which was outstanding was the race on Sunday, the Froggy Five Mile. We were directed to bring out frogs to the starting line. Before the gun went off (there was no gun really) we all threw our frogs into the air. Racers were not allowed to cross the finish line until they found their frogs at the end of the race. The frogs were then lined up in order of when people crossed the finish line. When the race was over we were given our frogs with our finish times written on them. How cool is that????

One more neat thing. Throughout our camping activities we were videotaped and photographed. During meals we had opportunities to watch the videos. On Saturday night Josh presented each and every camper with a framed action photo of themselves in action complete with the AREEP logo on it. What a fun souvenir!

Well the clock is ticking and I have other pursuits to pursue today. I hope I have successfully explained to you the fun we had at AREEP Trail Running Camp. Moe, Larry and I would like to get together a group of ORC runners to go there next year. Registration for next year's camp will open in mid-fall. For more information check out <http://www.albanyrunningexchange.org/camp/>

And if you want to see the video on youtube, you can find it here.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d9QXVYbhxyk&fmt=18>