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An Event to Celebrate Running and Walking

by Mike Childs, Race Director
Celebrate The Swan Race

Running and the environment have always been related. One of my earliest motivations to start jogging was when I read in *Field and Stream* magazine that running six miles a day would quadruple a person's chances of bagging an elk. Those were the days when smoking was more common, but harvesting an elk was not so I tried the magazine's advice.

One of the first things I discovered, the old adage that misery loves company, inspired me to train for a race, the seven mile Bonner to Missoula Bank Race. You could get a cold beer at the finish and enjoy the camaraderie of other runners for an hour or two. Competition (or the thought of it) fueled pride and vice versa and that year, 1976, I ran my first race and was hooked.

During the next twenty-five years quite a few elk found their way into my freezer and my increased stamina allowed me to also enjoy backpacking, high country fishing, mountain biking, and other out-of-doors activities I'd once considered work. For these blessings and the legion of additional benefits running provides I felt indebted.

Then in 2001, the Swan Ecosystem Center wanted a fund raising project and I wanted to give something back to the sport I loved. Thus the Celebrate the Swan Race was born!

To begin with we planned to save our race profits to buy land for a community forest, but the Montana Legacy Project and other monies took care of that idea, so we modified our plan.



Race director Mike Childs handing out cookie to runners and giving directions at last year's race.

While the race money does not totally cover the salaries of the back country rangers who do the maintenance work, it helps. Day hikers, fishermen, backpackers, horse users, outfitters, tourists—all enjoy trails and campsites free of erosion, garbage, rocks, and blown down trees.

Our hope is that the efforts of the rangers will inspire visitors to keep up the good work! For example, when campers encounter a clean camp site they will leave it in a similar condition. Or if hikers walk on a well maintained trail they will not take short cuts and cause erosion of the tread.

Initially, Robin Hamilton, race director of the Shack Race for seventeen years, helped us organize ourselves, order the race numbers, set up the course, and coordinate with the dozens of people who could make our project a success. He suggested asking Missoula area potter, Bob Eagen, to make trophy cups for us as he had for the Shack Race. Robin met with the timers and tabulators to make sure all the runners and walkers received accurate times and places.

Our first race committee consisted of Russ and Larrine Abolt, Dan Stone, Tanya Lampersberger, Diann Ericson, and myself. The evening we met, Robin lined us out and Russ, Dan, and Diann assumed the roles of solicitors of advertising. A business could place their logo on the back of our race shirts for a donation and be mentioned as well in a Pathfinder Ad. Tanya would contact community members to provide baked goods for weary racers. And all of us, but especially

Larrine, would seek additional timers, recorders, a starter, people to man water distribution tables, etc. I handled the publicity and asked for t-shirt ideas from local artists.

We chose to run up the Fall's Creek Road because of its accessibility, beauty, and challenges for the long distance runner. Astounding views of the Mission Mountains and Swan Front greet runners and walkers at many points along the way. Streams flow beside the road, a variety of tree species lines the course, including some magnificent yellow pines, and several species of wild creatures (non-competitors) dash out of sight. Yes, we've seen a few bears high tailing it too!

The 10-K climbs a couple hundred feet during the first 3.1 miles, but is almost entirely downhill or flat the rest of the way. Half of the 5-K rises too, but not nearly so much. The one mile run is flat, however the half marathon climbs as the shorter races do, drops, then climbs and drops again providing the most challenging event of the morning.

We selected the last Saturday in June for our race so as not to compete with the Missoula Marathon. It is not so warm then either and the people who train for our race will be ready for all the summer season activities ahead!

To our delight, young local runners destined to compete for Seeley Lake and Missoula sports teams have entered our race. Caitlin Stone, Lily Clark, Nathan Stone, and Mariah Childs all excelled in high school athletics and have given us an added incentive to keep providing a low key venue where aspiring athletes can compete, succeed immediately, and have fun at the same time!

Over the years (this is our eighth annual race) the Celebrate the Swan Race has involved a multitude of community volunteers who put on a quality event for the entire family. There are games for the younger kids, awards, refreshments for all, and lottery prizes too!

As yet we haven't been "discovered" so your chances of winning something are quite good. At the very least you will be exercising in clean air amidst a pristine environment while supporting a worthwhile cause. We'd love to have you and your family join us. Dogs on leashes are welcome too! The fun begins on Saturday morning, June 26, in Condon at the south end of the airstrip. The half marathon begins at 9:00 am but if you haven't pre-registered please show up early to do so. This goes

for the 10K walkers too. All other races start at 10:00 am.

Well, now you know our race's history, the motivation behind it, and the many benefits of participating here. Is it time to quadruple your chances of finding an elk or improve your enjoyment of the environment in other ways? Yes or no, walker or runner, we invite you to join us at the Celebrate the Swan Race on June 26!