

Race Report – 3 Days of Syllamo
Blanchard Springs, Arkansas
March 18, 19 and 20, 2005
Submitted by Rick Carr (assuming the role of ultra runner)

No doubt some will be surprised to find that there is something at which I am slower than I am when I am plodding the trails; namely completing this race report. But heck, ultra running isn't really about speed is it? I am led to believe that it is all about having fun, the camaraderie, and the beautiful places you get to run in; did I say having fun? Well 3 Days of Syllamo did not disappoint on any account, in fact race directors Steve Kirk and Roberta Orr pulled off an wonder inaugural event and the even threw in some challenging hills just to spice things up.

No matter that I had been suffering with bursitis in my right hip since January and no matter that because of this I would have to cancel some other races I had planned including Old Pueblo; next year! When I saw the 3 Days race posted I immediately knew that I had to go; first of all because I have been dreaming of doing a stage race. Secondly I knew that the hills of Arkansas are beautiful and thirdly because I knew I could get my older brother Bob to join me for a little camping and a great opportunity to tip back a few beers together; more fun! So I packed and set out for the hills Thursday morning.

3 Days of Syllamo is held on hiking and mountain bike trails in the Ozark Mountains about 2 hours north of Little Rock. The race headquarters is at Blanchard Springs a beautiful area with the Sylamore River running through the center. Upon arrival I checked in and asked Roberta Orr who was at the registration table if she had seen Bob. She said that he had arrived a few hours earlier so I took off to find out where he had decided to set up camp and found him at one of the many campsites situated next to the Sylamore River. We quickly pitched my tent, pulled up the chairs next to the already blazing fire Bob had built and poured a cold Murphy's, sat back and yakked around the campfire for several hours until I turned in. I don't get to see much of Boob so this was a special time for us and this area of Arkansas is one of his favorites for hiking and camping.



This is a picture of the check in table from the pavilion where we ate dinner.

The first day of the stage run was only 13 miles so we did not start until 10:00 AM; does it get any better than this? Sure beats 6AM! It got down to 27 degrees that night but quickly warmed up

and by the time we started running it was already nearing 50 and would warm up to mid 60s that day. In fact we had absolutely perfect weather all 3 days; sunny and mid 70s on Saturday and Sunday.

Although the first day was only 13 miles the grade of the hills was more than ample to make up for the lack of distance. Much of the trails that we ran on the first day were brand new and the park ranger who spoke to us before starting said that there would be an additional 14 or so miles of new trails by this same time next year.

Did I say steep? Those hills were steep. To get a peak at the race profiles by day you can go to the Three Days of Syllamo website located here;

<http://www.runarkansas.com/ThreeDaysSyllamo.htm>

If there is any part of this trail running stuff that I am getting good at it is probably running down hill. But that last hill on Day 1 seemed like it would never end. I believe I was running down hill for over 20 minutes.



Here is Steve Kirk addressing us before we start out on Day 1
The pavilion in the background is where Cal cooked some awesome meals

Dinner that night cooked by a guy named Cal. We had pasta with meat sauce and salad. Cal cooked the next night too; beans and rice. Both meals hit the spot. This being the first year for the race, you can imagine that volunteers were in short supply. They were but you would never know. This is because those that did volunteer did double duty. For example Cal, in addition to cooking and even running one day himself, helped out at several aid stations. Roberta also would rotate between several aid stations. These manned aid stations were well stocked with good stuff to eat and drink. In between the manned aid stations were several unmanned aid stations with water and Gatorade. This meant there was only about 4 miles between aid stations; except one stretch on Day 2.

This would be a fun event to volunteer for; come run one day and help the other two. I told Roberta I would come help next year but I don't think she believed me. She told Steve but said I probably would want to run all three days next year. She was right.



Here is a picture of the first uphill on Day 1



Looking down onto the Sylamore River from a Bluff we passed every day



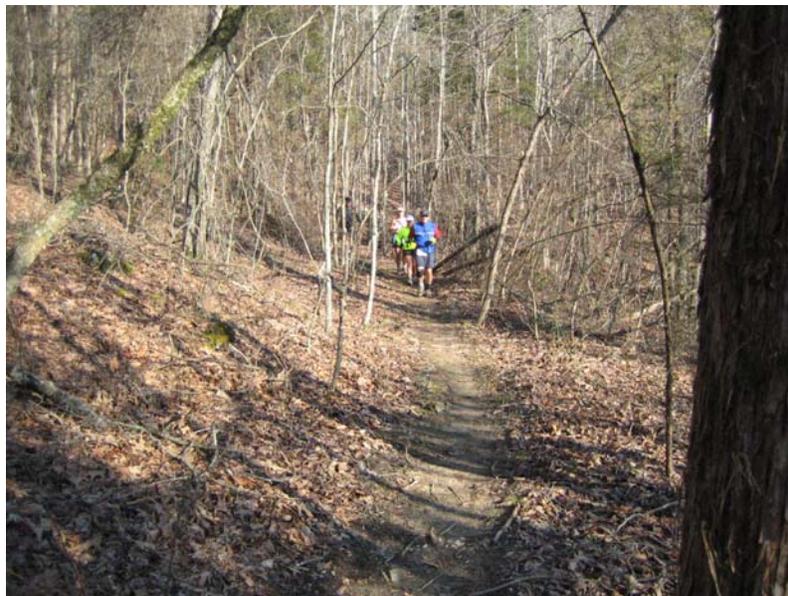
Here I am with Frances Griffin a friend from Waco
We ran together most of Day 2

On Day 2 we woke up to temperatures much warmer about 47 degrees. This is because the sky was overcast on Friday night. In fact it actually rained very early Saturday morning for about 30 minutes at near midnight. The second day was 36 miles and started at 6.30 AM. Now I was a bit worried about Day 2 because the hills we climbed on Day 1 were not easy and I knew from looking at the race profiles that now I had to face more hills over a longer distance; three times a longer than Day 1. It only dawned on me as I was running up the first big hill of the day that the hills, even though longer were not as steep as they appeared on the race profiles. That is because in order to plot 36 miles in the same paper space as plotting 13 miles, the hills will naturally look steeper; three times steeper; did I say slow?! So when I realized I was climbing the first big hill it was a pleasant surprise that it was not going to be as steep as it appeared on the race profile. The only problem was that it continued to be a pleasant surprise for a long, long, long time.

On the second day we ran along the Sylamore River for about 4 miles before turning into the hills and climbing. Somewhere before the first aid station I caught up and began running with a group of 4 people from Tennessee. It is always good to meet and make new friends at these events. That is clearly one of the best parts about this past time; camaraderie.



Here are 2 of my new friends from Tennessee
Roberta Orr is in the background with the white cap on



Here are my new friends from Tennessee
I eventually left them and caught up with another new friend from Waco
My Tennessee friends caught up to us just before we finished

After aid station 1 I took off ahead of the group from Tennessee. It was not my intention to leave them behind; I just thought that I would take the lead for awhile. But it became clear to me that they wanted an easier pace than I and I was feeling good so off I went. This part of the trail was fun with lots of winding back and forth up and down mountain sides. In a little while I caught up to another new friend, Frances Griffin, a runner from Waco, Texas. Frances and I stayed together the rest of the day. On Day 2 we would encounter 4 water crossings. Only one actually required us to get our feet wet and it was only about 4 inches deep. The others were possible to cross on rocks protruding from the water.

I mentioned to you that the aid stations were only about 4 to 5 miles apart if you counted the non manned ones in between the manned aid stations. That is, all except the second to last manned aid station on Day 2, which I believe must have been about 6 miles, not a terribly long distance unless you run out of water about a mile or so before getting there. By the time we were supposed to arrive at this aid station it was about 3PM and sunny and the temperature had climbed up to about 73 degrees or so. Both Frances and I had run out of water. It was good to be running with Frances because she had lots of stories to tell and I don't mind being talked to while running as long as I don't have to answer; since I am usually trying to breathe. Frances did not mind that I was not answering and she helped us keep our minds off the fact that we were both out of water. We were on a part of the trail we had run the day before only we were going in the opposite direction. In optimistic fashion I informed Frances the aid station was just around the corner. Was that ever a l o o o ng corner. Another thing that helped was some dried apricot that I had picked up from my brother, whom we ran into at one of the bluffs overlooking the Sylamore River. He had hiked up there for the view. Finally we arrived at the coveted aid station and I sat down to eat and drink while Frances sought out her drop bag for goodies.

After refueling and resting we continued on only to be passed by the folks from Tennessee about a mile from the finish line. It was a great day of running; 36 hilly miles. I did suffer from a little dehydration but I can't blame it entirely on running out of water. I think the beers I had with my brother the night before might have contributed.



My very own Thomas Kinkaid picture
This was taken in the morning of Day 2



Somewhere on the trail Day 2



Around the Long Corner Looking for Water

It was nice having the Sylamore River go right through Blanchard Springs Campground and many runners took advantage of the cool waters to soak in after a long day of running. I was pretty stiff and sore after running 36 miles and I was feeling somewhat dehydrated when I got back to camp. It was too late for me to take in the river therapy so I showered in the nice heated showers at the campground. I told Bob that I would wait until the morning to decide whether or not I was going to run Day 3. I turned in early after eating Cal's rice and beans.

Sunday morning I awoke to about 40 degrees. I did not feel as stiff as I expected and was not feeling dehydrated anymore. Since the race did not start until 7:00AM this morning I had an extra 30 minutes to consider what I was going to do. I had missed Old Pueblo to do this and had already completed the first 2 days. I knew there was no way I would be able to live with myself if I didn't at least start. If my hip gave out and I had to stop then I would but I figured if I took it slow I would surely be able to complete this final day within the 9 hour time limit. So off to the pavilion I went.

I did not take my camera on Sunday which was a big mistake because the route that Steve had laid out for us that day had a 4 mile loop around a mountain that had some nice bluffs overlooking the White River Valley. It was awesome; some of the best views of the entire race! The pictures of Day 3 that I have included are not mine but borrowed with the permission of another new friend that I met on the trail, Marshall King. Marshall is a walker and boy can he walk! He walks faster than I run! Marshall is from Richardson, Texas. You can see his race report at the site below:

http://www.geocities.com/marshall/blog/syllamo2005_3.htm

Day 3 took us back out the same direction as Day 2. Not everyone ran all three days. Some people came to run only one day. Sunday was a beautiful day again. The sun was grand and the cool air made this a most enjoyable finish to the 3 days. This day we would run up to Green Mountain Road aid station the we would actually run down Green Mountain Road for about 2 miles before cutting back into the woods and some trails we had not run on before.

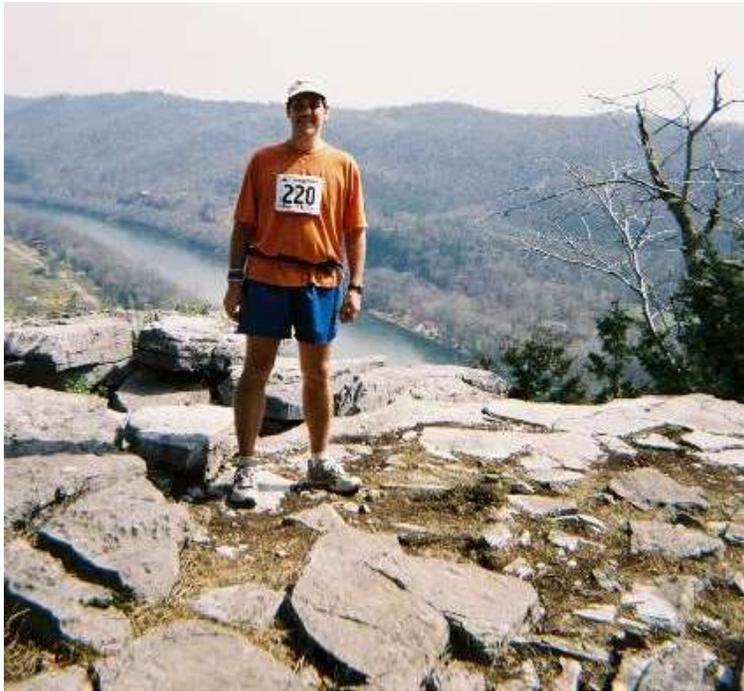
I am glad to say my hip held out and I completed the third day in 7:43:28 which is not bad after having put in the two previous days and a bad hip. My dream of running a stage run has been fulfilled in grand style. This was one of the most fun races I have participated in yet, in my short ultra running career. I am looking to making this a regular on my running calendar.



Green Mountain Road
The only non trail section we ran - about 2 miles



Some more beautiful trail from Day 3



Marshall King on bluff overlooking White River