

OUTDOORS

Full Moon Running

Members of Fort Collins club hit the trail with the sun down and the mercury below freezing

BY FELIX WONG
For Fort Collins Now

The sun had already dipped below the foothills on the Winter Solstice as I frantically shot off an email to the Fort Collins Trailrunners Yahoo! Group.

"So this is happening for sure?" I asked, referring to a nighttime run under a full moon that a couple group members were thinking about doing at Horsetooth Mountain Park later that evening.

I had my doubts. Outside temperatures were already less than 15 degrees and supposed to continue plummeting before reaching a low of 5 degrees. Snow was blanketing most of the trails in the foothills.

I imagined that many people were doing anything besides running around the woods. Turns out I shouldn't have worried that anyone was going to show up after all.

Let me tell you something about the Fort Collins Trailrunners. They are, in short, a group of super-friendly folks who do many Needlessly Insane Things In Their Spare Time. Most of them, for example, have completed at least three or four (and for some, 10 or 20) marathons, sometimes as "training runs"

for, say, a 50-miler. A popular weekend "diversion" might be running to the top of Pikes Peak and back down, or participating in a 24-hour race.

As it turned out, seven intrepid Trailrunners came out to Horsetooth Mountain Park on the night of the Winter Solstice, although Pete and Heather opted to hike instead of run, because Heather wanted to and Pete had already run 29 miles in the morning.

In contrast, we ran "only" eight miles. "We" included Alex, Dan, John, Mackenzie and Steve. Alex and Dan raced in the 5-day, 105-mile TransRockies Run a couple of months ago; John had recently placed 2nd in his age group in the Christmas Classic 4-miler; Steve has had top-10 or top-5 overall finishes in many races; and Mackenzie has qualified for the Boston Marathon a bunch of times and is one of strongest hill runners of the fairer sex I've run with.

It soon became apparent that my 5-miles-a-week, run-when-I-want-to training since mid-October was not exactly ideal preparation for keeping up with this group of over-achievers. I never got dropped, but got close to the limit of cardiac arrest a few times early on since the hills at

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Horsetooth are both steep and sustained.

I also had to be careful with my footing since the trails were slick with snow and ice. Fortunately, visibility was not a big issue as moon rays filtered through the trees and reflected off the snow, augmented by light emitted from our headlamps.

We all avoided doing a face plant, although some of us occasionally uttered an "ooooohh" as a toe inadvertently grazed a root or a shoe unexpectedly slid a few inches after striking the ground.

Apart from the sketchy footing, however, there were



Photo by Dan Turk

Full moon lit the way for the Fort Collins Trailrunners at Horsetooth Mountain Park.

several benefits to running on such a frigid night.

There were absolutely no crowds to contend with. Darkness obscures how steep the upcoming hills are, helping to prevent a runner from prematurely psyching himself out. What you can't see won't hurt you, or so the thinking goes.

On the other hand, what we did see was often nothing short of spectacular. Coming back down from 6,000 feet in elevation along Tower Road, Herrington Trail, Spring Creek Trail, and Soderberg Trail, we admired the brilliant city lights from Fort

Collins in the distance and wispy clouds speeding past the full moon like witches on broomsticks.

After an hour and 40 minutes, we were back in the parking lot feeling warm enough to strip off our gloves and reflect upon what it was like to run under a full moon on the shortest day of the year.

"Don't they say crazy people come out on the Winter Solstice?" asked Steve.

"Yes, us," I immediately replied.

Here's to the days getting longer and lunatic runners everywhere. ❦