

Life Outside

Run to the Outdoors

By Doug Humphreys

There is nothing you do outdoors that you won't do better or enjoy more when you are fit. I know this because I've tried it both ways.

As a teenager I was fit merely as a byproduct of an active lifestyle. When I wasn't playing soccer, I was climbing cliffs, paddling boats, or hiking trails. I could eat what I wanted, run without stretching, and lift without bending my knees.

In my twenties I took a more pragmatic approach to fitness, focusing on strength and speed. I spent hours in the gym lifting weights with calculated posture, and attacked cardio with exercises designed to make me faster and more explosive. Sure, vanity was buried in there somewhere, but I was fit and I liked

it. I changed my diet to mostly protein and supplements that today probably aren't allowed on the shelf. When I spent time outdoors, there was nothing I couldn't do.

Then I got married. Then I got a promotion. Then I had kids. Then I was staring down the barrel of 40, and my body was... different.

One day I realized that I wasn't enjoying the time I spent outside nearly as much. I couldn't keep my breath, my lower back and shoulder hurt, and my ankles were weak. I knew that some of the bumps and bruises acquired in my younger days were coming back to haunt me. And I knew that some of it was simply a man moving to middle age. I also

knew I was in terrible physical condition.

I decided it was time to inject fitness back into my life. I started watching my diet—not eating better, just eating less. Once I'd dropped 10 pounds, I went to a running-shoe outlet and bought a pair of shoes off the sale rack. I came home and ran three miles, after which I could barely move. My lower back was screaming.

After watching me limping and moping around for three days, my wife had her fill. She said with that "don't argue with me" smile, "Why don't you go down to Two Rivers Treads, and talk to James."

It seemed pointless. I felt old, fat, and like I'd never run again. But I also knew that resigning



Photo by Aundrea Humphreys

myself to a life with love handles and marginally enjoyable time spent outside wasn't an option either. So with my tail tucked between my legs and a badly bruised ego, I went.

James welcomed me as he always does, with a smile and a friendly, "Hey Doug." He didn't need to ask why I was there; he knows. I started in, "Hi James. I want to run again, but my lower back is killing me." It was my new running shoes.

He told me to sit down and take off my shoes. And then he talked. I suppose his delivery might have been a speech, but it was too energetic to be labeled so blandly. It was almost like getting a personal infomercial, except that it was more useful and less cheesy than the ones on TV. If it had been a movie, it would have been a soliloquy, and a darn good one.

I learned a lot in an hour with James. I learned why my back hurt. I learned that my new shoes weren't good for

much more than mowing the lawn. I learned that I needed to remember how to run like I did when I was younger—he offered a personal lesson and volumes of information to read on the subject. I learned that I hadn't really lost my athleticism. I just needed to think about it a little more than I did when I was a teenager.

I left the store with three things. One was a new pair of shoes. The second was a new understanding of running and a revitalized interest in fitness. The last, and most important, was a renewed confidence in myself.

That same evening I walked three miles, and did the same every day for two weeks. Then I ran a little, then a little more, until I was running my three miles in comfort—physical comfort and cardio-comfort. I even started sprinting again after my jogs.

I'll never again be the athlete I was at 25, and I'm okay with

that. But I will be healthy, I will do everything I can to live a long life for my wife and kids, and I will go to the outdoors with springy legs and strong lungs. I will enjoy my life more. I will enjoy exercise more. I will enjoy the outdoors more. I will like it.

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