

A Turkey Mountain Adventure
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Tulsa, OK
By Gary Britt

It seemed like a good morning to go out for an easy 5 miler. You know, the 9 minute pace, 45 minutes and done for the day run. After all, I have been nursing sore quads for weeks in preparation for my first marathon in almost 30 years. It's Thursday morning, 6:30 AM, the weather channel shows 78° and 79% humidity. Perfect! As I complete the double knot routine on each shoe, I grab the soft cooler with the Gatorade and water and head out the back door so as not to wake Sleeping Beauty. I am headed to the Arkansas River at 71st & Lewis. The watch strikes 7AM as I finish stretching. The game plan is to begin at the 6 mile marker then head west across the 71st street bridge to Elwood and north to the Turkey Mountain parking lot. That round trip would give me three miles. However, I want to run the trails for two miles before returning to civilization. As I glance at my watch, I figure with the hills, ten minutes per mile. So ten minutes in, ten minutes out.

Turkey Mountain is really just a hill, but Tulsa needs a mountain. I have no experience with this mountain. As I enter, it immediately changes four shades darker. The oak trees are thick with green foliage in late August. The dust, rocks, roots, washed out trails, etc. make for a concentrated focus for each foot plant. Breathing heavier and heavier on the ascent, the trail splits. I choose the left because it's an election year. Fifty yards later it splits again. I catch on quickly. There are blue, yellow, green, red and pink spots painted on trees to keep someone informed. I can't watch the paint on the trees and roots at the same time. Twenty minutes later I decide to turn around. This is great. Now there are four different trails. No one around. I am alone, all by myself.

A ray of sunshine guides me east toward the river. I stumble onto the yellow trail. Wow! One can actually look up from this two-foot wide highway. The river is on my left. Excellent. I am headed south.

Ten minutes later I cross a grass pasture and sense the parking lot is to my right a couple of hundred yards. The yellow trail is leading me home. Just a few more minutes now. As I get caught up in this morning's run, I realize another 20 minutes has past. I may be slow (in several departments), but it doesn't take 20 minutes for two or three hundred yards. I catch a glimpse of sparkling shimmering water. This is wonderful. It's the Arkansas river. WAIT!!! It's on my right. This cannot be. I never made a U Turn. Now I am moving north. I am alone. Is this possible? Surely, there is another Turkey Mountain trekker somewhere in these woods. Normally they would be coming out of the woodwork. Oh, well – I am enjoying having the mountain to myself. I query my internal GPS and figure if I keep heading due north and keep the river to my right, I'll eventually run into Interstate 44. Excellent idea. Now, execute the new plan.

Let's see, it's now 8:30 AM. I took off at 7AM. Running north on the wide yellow brick trail is fun. Whoops! The trail begins to narrow, then I see trees painted red. Red means danger to me. I am correct in this assessment. Jumping over boulders, moving tree limbs out of my face, I find there is no trail left. Where in the hell do all these bikers go on this red trail?

All that's left is ravines, deep ravines. Now I am crawling under large fallen trees, crushing rotted limbs as I step over. I particularly enjoy straddling the poison oak. Suddenly out of nowhere is an 1800's model Indian ladder constructed from oak saplings that leads deep into a crevice where pumas live and no man has been before. Never fear, I have captured a glimpse of the I-44 bridge through a whisper of space, in the oaks, maybe one mile away.

As I stumble to the bottom I see a creek ahead. It appears to be running either east and west or north and south. My voices that speak to me softly say "go right".

This is breathtaking! Such a quiet, hazy, picturesque canopy of trees, a babbling brook in a shaded tunnel. WAIT A MINUTE!!! REALITY CHECK! I'M LOST!!!

I now accept my destiny. Bullfrogs jump from stumps into the water. Overhead a giant screech owl takes off. I know it's a screech owl by how loud I screamed. My life is starting to pass before my eyes. What if I fall and break a leg? What if I can't get out of this creek? I won't be found for years. No one knows where I am. I left no farewell messages. This is possibly the end. I never got to say goodbye. Then I remembered Cher's line in MOONSTRUCK, "snap out of it!" I can't hear any signs of civilization as I know it. No cars, no cell phones. God...how can this be?

The bank along the creek is too narrow. I have to walk in the water. It's full of silt. My shoes are full of "stuff", wet soggy "stuff". Trying to grasp tree roots on the sides of the bank I see dark spaces in between the roots. I sense a huge black anaconda coming at me. I think this is a little fear and hallucination.

Barely one quarter mile later, exhausted, no energy remaining, something bites me. I crawl up this embankment to find a fence. What an ad this would have made, maybe for the movie, "Deliverance". Cresting the top, I see thirty Pepsi trucks in a parking lot.

I begin running again. I hug the fence, going one direction, then another. I know this property has been surveyed, and there is front somewhere. I find it. I see -I44! I smell carbon emissions. Thank God, I am free at last!

I now have a spring in my step and a slosh in my shoes. I run to the bridge; I find the trail on the west side of the river. GLORY! The river is on my left again. Rounding a corner I come upon a lone man completing his morning walk. The sloshing of my shoes as I approach gives this poor soul an out of body experience. He allows me a wide berth as his heart returns to normal.

I am gleeful. I have been set free. Now I know I only have 5 more miles to get back to where I started. The legs are acting up. Some lack of cooperation on their part. They have been mistreated. Promised one thing and made to do another.

But wait, my will is stronger. I press toward the mark. I know not what the mark is any longer. Survival is necessary.

I return to the parking lot at Turkey Mountain. But not before I have to climb two monstrous hills. I know I must look like the old lady in the commercials that keeps repeating "where's the beef?" I am spent, my goose is cooked. I am reduced to baby steps. I would cry, but I would embarrass myself. Where's the kid with the lemonade stand when you need him?

Now I am headed east across the river, going down the hill, going fast. Maybe 3MPH. WAIT!!! I see a dime in the traffic across the divider on the highway. I am tired, but this dime can go in my collection. I climb over the divider. These people think I am trying to commit suicide. NO!! I just want that dime. GOT IT!!!

Finishing was anti-climatic to say the least. But looking back, I think how many other folks in Tulsa get to experience what I did. None!!! This is a memory reserved only for a runner. The opportunity to go for an easy 45-minute run, and stretch it into a 2 ½ hour nightmare, and living to tell about it. Thank God I 'm a runner!