

A person wearing a blue t-shirt and black shorts is running away from the camera on a dirt path in a wooded area. The path is surrounded by trees and foliage, with sunlight filtering through the leaves. The overall scene is bright and natural.

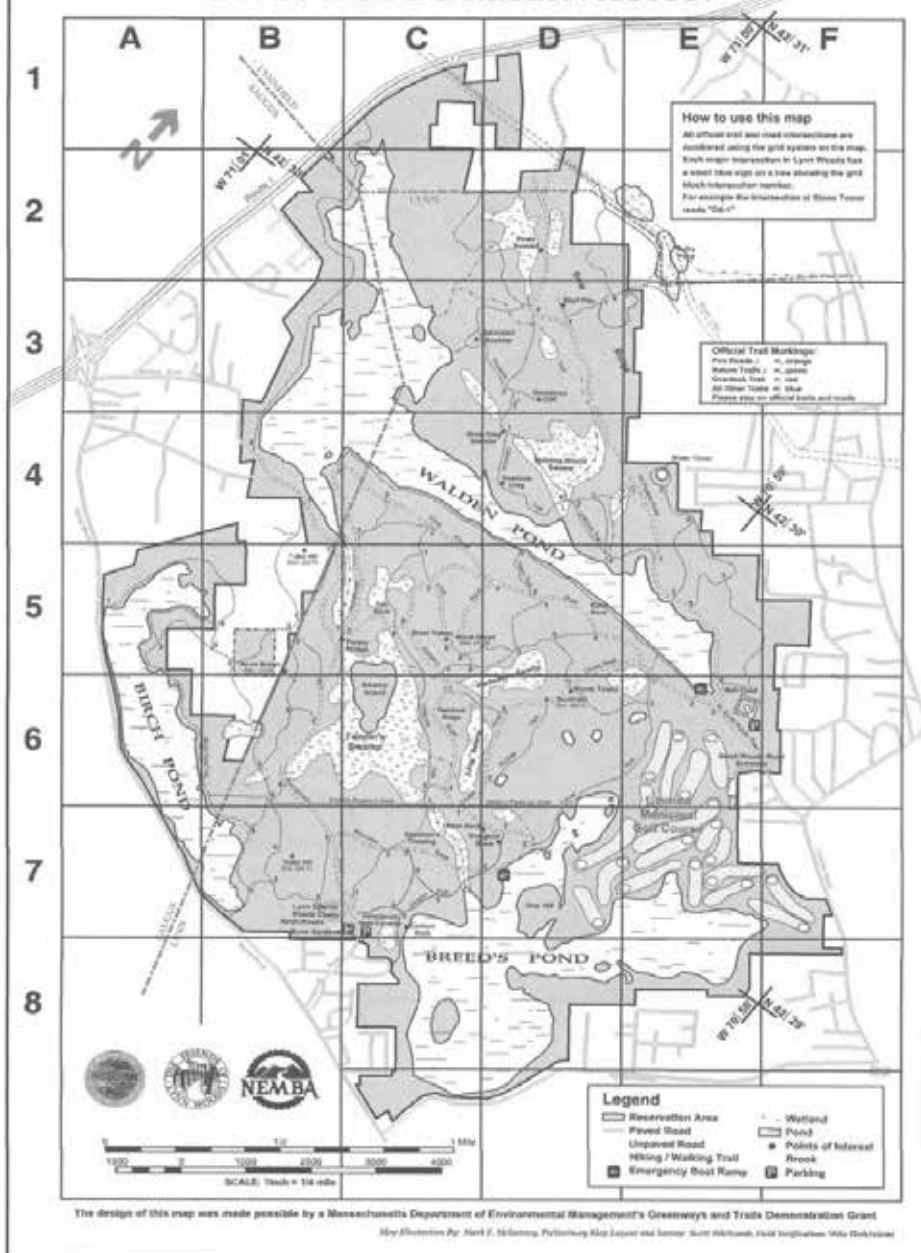
# Running In The Woods

*by*

*Paul J. Arrington*

**Running In The Woods**

# LYNN WOODS RESERVATION



**Running**  
**In**  
**The Woods**



**The Lynn Woods**  
**Cross-Country Running Story**

*by*

***Paul J. Arrington***

#386

*In February of 2018, John Robertson, Sr. ran his last race. John was such a prominent figure in Lynn Woods Running and the local running community in general, it seems fitting to dedicate this story to his memory. Although it is my lament to have never met Mr. Robertson, there is certainly enough evidence to know that, while he would be humbled and awed, such an honour would certainly be deserved.*

*For Mr. Robertson, and all my running friends.*

*To Camaraderie and Athleticism.*

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## CHAPTER ONE

# COLONIAL DAYS

**S**TEP ONTO A TRAIL in our beloved Lynn Woods and you can easily conjure an image of the Pawtucket Indians running the same trail almost four hundred years ago, hunting for food. To say that these woods have history is just the beginning; these woods *are* history.

When Europeans first came to Lynn in 1629, they shared the beauty and bounty of this land with the Pawtucket, using water and timber to sustain the settlement of their “new world.” In 1686, the settlers bought the woods and surrounding land from the natives for \$75.00, less than the entry fee for some prominent races today.

For most of the next two centuries, Lynn Woods was “held in common” for the townspeople. In the early 1700’s, parts of the Woods were divided into lots for certain landowners, a practice that was reversed decades later when those parcels were re-acquired by the town. In 1851, Hiram Marble began a thirty year quest to find treasure thought to be buried at Dungeon Rock, so named because a 1658 earthquake had entombed pirate Thomas Veal and his supposed booty there. To this day, Dungeon Rock carries the mystique and intrigue of possible buried treasure.



*Dungeon Rock*

Also in the early 1850's, Lynn naturalist and poet Cyrus Tracy (Tracy Trail) and three friends formed the Exploring Circle and devoted their efforts to investigating and describing the natural wonders of Lynn Woods, encouraging others to experience the area's beauty.

Some ten years later, in an Exploring Circle journal, Tracy called the Woods “...*a map ready drawn – a picture of sylvan beauty sketched in the freest and aptest strokes of nature's pencil. It is an asylum of inexhaustible pleasures.*”

Another early developmental leader was Phillip Chase, Tracy's successor and a tireless Woods advocate, who headed the Lynn Park Commission on its inception in 1889 and was the first President of the Lynn Historical Society. Chase's vision led him to write the venerable Frederick Law Olmstead, landscape architect of hundreds of renowned public spaces including Boston's Emerald Necklace and New York's Central Park. Olmstead, in his response to Chase's letter, stated that the Lynn Woods was better than a public park or garden; it was “a real forest” and to ensure that it would “supply a place of refreshing and restful relief” should remain unspoiled.



Following the Lynn Fire of 1869, the Woods took on some of its current configuration of ponds and roads. Three ponds, Breed, Birch and Walden, had their shapes defined between the time of the fire and 1905, and remain that way today. The 1869 fire destroyed a major section of the factory district of Lynn and made clear the need for a protected water supply. As beautiful as Walden Pond is today, its creation produced devastating effects on the tranquility of the natural environment. Groves of hemlocks and willows were flooded, and Penny Brook Glen, considered the most beautiful area in all the Woods, was eliminated.



*Walden Pond*

The remaining years of the nineteenth century were a golden period for the Woods. Trails were widened into roads, a railroad station was built at Great Woods Road and wooden observation towers were built on Burrill Hill and Mount Gilead, the highest points in the city and the sites of today's Stone Tower and Steel Tower.



*Stone Tower - Winter Solstice 2012*

As the twentieth century dawned, an off and on gypsy moth infestation defoliated many trees foreshadowing a loss of both public funding and overall interest in Lynn Woods. During this seemingly dark period, however, a number of major projects were conceived and realized. A nature trail and toboggan chute were built (neither has survived), Happy Valley Golf Course, (now Gannon Memorial), the Steel and Stone Towers, the rose garden and amphitheater were all added to the Woods and are in use today. In 1954, one-thousand people gathered for the first concert at the amphitheater given by the Saugus DeMolay Band. Attendees young and old expressed amaze-

ment that “such a beauty spot” had been overlooked by the general public in the thirteen years since it was constructed. The concert was a benefit for Camp Sea Haven, the summer home of Essex County’s polio victims. Thirteen hundred dollars in donations was garnered from concertgoers, the equivalent of \$11,500 in 2016 dollars. Despite these improvements, the Woods declined through the middle decades of the 1900’s, losing its attraction and charm to the ravages of nature and the disrespect of its natural wonder. In 1954, the park was closed for the first time from the effects of a 1953 hurricane.



*The Amphitheatre*



*The Rose Garden*



*Gannon Golf Course Across Birch Pond*

In the 1960's, a plan was floated to run Interstate 95 right through the woodlands, thinking this a better use than allowing further deterioration. Through dogged efforts by the Connector Objector Committee and the Pine Hill Civic Association, that proposal was abandoned in 1970. The group was headed by Stanley Cooke, and for his determination and leadership, Cooke Road is named for him. In the latter part of the 1970's, total disregard for the Woods' beauty and value by a bad element using it for torching cars and other illicit activities forced city officials to again close it in 1978.



*Cooke Road*

## CHAPTER TWO

# REVIVING INTEREST

**F**OLLOWING THE GROUPS MENTIONED above as overseers of the forest, The Friends of Lynn Woods was formed in 1990. Founding member and inaugural president of the group, Steve Babbitt, was as passionate an advocate for the preservation of the Woods as anyone who preceded or succeeded him. He served as president for ten years and was recognized in 1992 by the Massachusetts Audubon Society with its highest honor, the Audubon A Award, presented for “outstanding and exemplary contributions to environmental protection in Massachusetts.” The Friends of Lynn Woods supports the City of Lynn’s efforts to improve and maintain the Woods through its commitment to insuring the perpetual existence of the Lynn Woods Reservation.

The original 1881 intent for this magnificent place, set down by the Trustees of the Free Public Forest, was to ensure that Lynn Woods would remain a public space in perpetuity. This idea has guided those who followed to preserve, improve and defend its use for hiking, horseback riding, cross country skiing, golf, bicycling and, of course, running.



*Tomlin's Swamp*

The magic of Lynn Woods may never have been better captured than in this description of Tomlin's Swamp, (named for the Tomlin family, one of the original land holders of the 1600's), the largest wetlands area in the Woods to this day.

*"The dictionary men describe a swamp as a low land filled with water. Tomlin's Swamp is rather a gigantic vase whose sloping walls are precious stones of dark porphyry and gray sienite down which innumerable little rivulets of sparkling water leap to vivify the garden of the glades. Then, uniting, the little streamlets become Penny Brook and glide over its mossy bed till they hide themselves in the placed bosom of Walden Pond. Our vase is filled with wondrous results of the Alchemy of the elements. The charms of this region come almost wholly from the fact that the hand of man has had so little to do in fashioning them."* The Lynn Transcript. 1891



*Three-Way Intersection*





*Penny Brook Bridge*



*Jackson Path to Dungeon Rock*

## CHAPTER THREE

# TRAINING GROUNDS

**I**N THE LATE 1960'S, Saint Mary's High School of Lynn had a cross-country coach named Joe Abelon. Joe had run at Northeastern University and brought many of the techniques taught there to his teams at Saint Mary's. In Joe's first year, St. Mary's ran all of its meets on their opponent's grounds. Prior to Joe's second year he and team runner Patrick Burke (now a Lynn attorney) rode to Lynn Woods in search of the perfect two and a half miles to call their own. Pat Burke picks up the narrative without hesitation. "Joe took a couple of us in his black Volkswagen Beetle and set out to measure a 2.5 mile course in the Woods.<sup>1</sup> I remember driving up the main road (Great Woods Road), through the gate while Joe watched the odometer. We went left at the three way intersection and headed up. When we came to the top and Joe turned right, we were on what we all know now as the Goat Path, and driving **DOWN THE PATH** in Joe's car! Joe was on a mission: measure out our course, and if that meant negotiating the Goat Path, so be it!" Joe remembers running over several "thin trees" in creating the first formal cross-country course in Lynn Woods.

<sup>1</sup> Motorized vehicle traffic was not completely banished from the Woods until 1981.

*Goat Path*

The inaugural home meet for St. Mary's started at the main gate, went up the middle road, turned right and went down the Goat Path, right on Great Woods Road and back to the finish. "At some point in the next few years, we decided to reverse the loop and run straight on Great Woods Road, turn left up the Goat Path, left down to the middle road and back to the finish, still 2.5 miles," said Joe. This course was used by all the Lynn schools for many years. "The coaches would get into my Volkswagen. We would start the race with a verbal command from the pace car. The VW would ride ahead of the runners and stop several times. We would then rush back so we could time the finishers. The course was easy to follow, but, as was common practice when new opponents arrived, we and the visiting teams would jog the course as a warm up. In one particular meet with Greater Lawrence Voc-Tech a few members of the visiting team had not returned. It was an hour after the rest had finished when I spotted those members running on Great Woods Road in

the direction of Lynnfield Street. Their lack of attention to course instructions had taken them on tour to the Pennybrook entrance at the far end of the Woods.” More recently, Classical, English, Tech and St. Mary’s have used trails at the Pennybrook end of the Woods for their high school meets. Joe continues, “After the Woods was closed to vehicles, we got permission to drive buses into the Woods. We would park them in the picnic area across from the Goat Path where we would run on any of four loops (A, B, C, D). I painted the directions on strategic trees. These were tough 2.8 mile courses with the Goat Path up used TWICE, with one loop continuing up to the Steel Tower.”

Pat Burke’s memory of those early years under Coach Ableon had the St. Mary’s X-C team 0-9 in 1966 and undefeated in 1967.

Joe Abelon was the first coach to organize a summer practice regimen for his high school teams. This gave his St. Mary’s squad such a “leg up” on their 1969 competition that they made a third place showing not only in the state meet, but in the New England’s as well.



*Captain of the Woods*

## CHAPTER FOUR

### WEDNESDAYS

**A**FTER A COUPLE OF YEARS of Woods cross-country meets, Joe was set to begin coaching at Lynn Tech (known then as Lynn Trade), and thought his team might benefit from more summer competition. The very first summer cross-country race at the Woods, run on a Tuesday (no one with knowledge of those early years can seem to recall when the day was changed to Wednesday; possibly due to another local running series taking place at that time on Tuesdays), started at the Great Woods Road main gate, went to the right of Walden Pond, out two miles and back. Mile markers were painted on the rocks. As Joe recalls the story, “That was the only time that course was run. I believe people complained that it was too rough. The rest of that summer we used the standard 2.5 mile left on Goat Path course.”

*Ox Pasture Road*

The winner of the first summer series race, a three-miler held on June 16, 1970, was South Boston native Bruce Lehane. In the mid 1960's, Bruce set records at Boston State College in the 880 and the mile. He went on to coach track at Boston University for many years. Also among those who made a showing in that first year of the series was Bob Sevene, a 1964 All-American at Alfred College in New York. Sevene served as an Army Captain in Vietnam, earning two Purple Hearts and the Silver Star. He was selected to the U.S. Army track team and represented that team when running in Lynn Woods. He later coached at four colleges as well as helming the United States World Cross-Country teams in 1986 and 1988. Bob may be best remembered for coaching one Joan Benoit (now Joan Benoit Samuelson), winner of the first women's Olympic Marathon in 1984 and a former world record holder in the marathon and half-marathon.

An elite member of the "First Race Club," Paul Smith, who along with thirty others braved the much maligned Ox Pasture run, recalls another "weekly meeting" of the time, a workout program organized by Joe Abelon at Lynn Common. One night, when Joe was late in arriving, one of his St. Mary's runners, Joe Crowley, asked his dad about Coach Abelon's whereabouts. Mr. Crowley left and returned a short time later. He loaded young Joe and five of his friends into his

car and drove to where Joe Abelon's trusty VW pace car and team transport needed help escaping a swamp trail Joe had been measuring for future use!

In the early days of the summer series the fields were quite small. Barney Bloom, director of Lynn Parks and Recreation offered ribbons, hoping to draw more participants, and the recreation department actually took over the program for a number of years. Working for the park department at that time was Roger Perham, who, through no fault of his own, had been designated "Lynn Woods Tour Guide." Acting as sort of a park instructor for the Woods he would take kids on nature hikes and recreational walks, organize games and other activities using the Woods as their playground. It seemed natural to Roger, himself a runner and still a Wednesday night regular, to incorporate the fledgling Wednesday cross-country races into the recreation department's list of things to do. (Roger and friends organized another race which has become one of the North Shore's longest-running events, The Great Stew Chase. Begun in 1975, it is currently the third oldest 15K race in the country). Others, including Swampscott cross-country coach Fred Doyle, Glenn Charbonneau, Joe Monaco and Lynn schools athletic director Elmo Benedetto helped to organize a junior high running program at Fraser Field and the Woods. Word spread of the competition being held every Wednesday in the summer, and soon local high school coaches were encouraging their teams to run the Woods. Fred Doyle knew the Woods would prepare his teams for the fall season. "No fear of hilly courses after running at the Woods," he said. Through the years, members of cross-country programs from the surrounding towns of Swampscott, Winthrop, Saugus, Nahant, Beverly, Peabody, Salem and some as far as Waltham, Marlborough and Cape Ann participated. In the mid 1970's, the 10-mile relay would routinely feature teams from all of the above, Bishop Fenwick, Malden Catholic, St. John's Prep and all four of the Lynn high schools. Many of Lynn's neighborhood playgrounds fielded teams as did Salem State College.



*No Better Place (Courtesy Mike Fitzgerald)*

During the formative years of the 1970's, John Robertson, a Lynn native and accomplished runner who ran into his 70's, helped administer the Wednesday night program. John's sons, Bill, Jack, Tom and Paul, were all runners, some with noteworthy accomplishments. In 1970, six-year-old Paul Robertson ran a mile at Stoneham High School's track in 7:31.2, four seconds better than the previous record of 7:35.2. Through 1972 and 1973, Paul Robertson moved up steadily in the Woods results to a win on August 1, 1973 (1.2 miles), followed by six members of Nahant's McDonough family and four of his own sisters, Cathy, Jean, Marie and Tricia. There were a total of twelve in the race! (Paul supplied copious records of the summer series for this story from his father's collection of keepsakes from fifty years of running). In 1972, four-year-old Jeannie (now Jean Getraer), had her photo in the Lynn Item crossing the finish line in a 1.2 mile race at the Woods. Jean recalls her brothers, cousins and neighborhood friends looking forward to Wednesdays at the Woods, followed by her father's treat at Dairy Queen, then home to watch *Eight is Enough* or *The Bionic Woman*. The Robertson family has their names in the record of many a Lynn Woods run as well as countless other races near and far. Jack won the city X-C meet while at St. Mary's and he



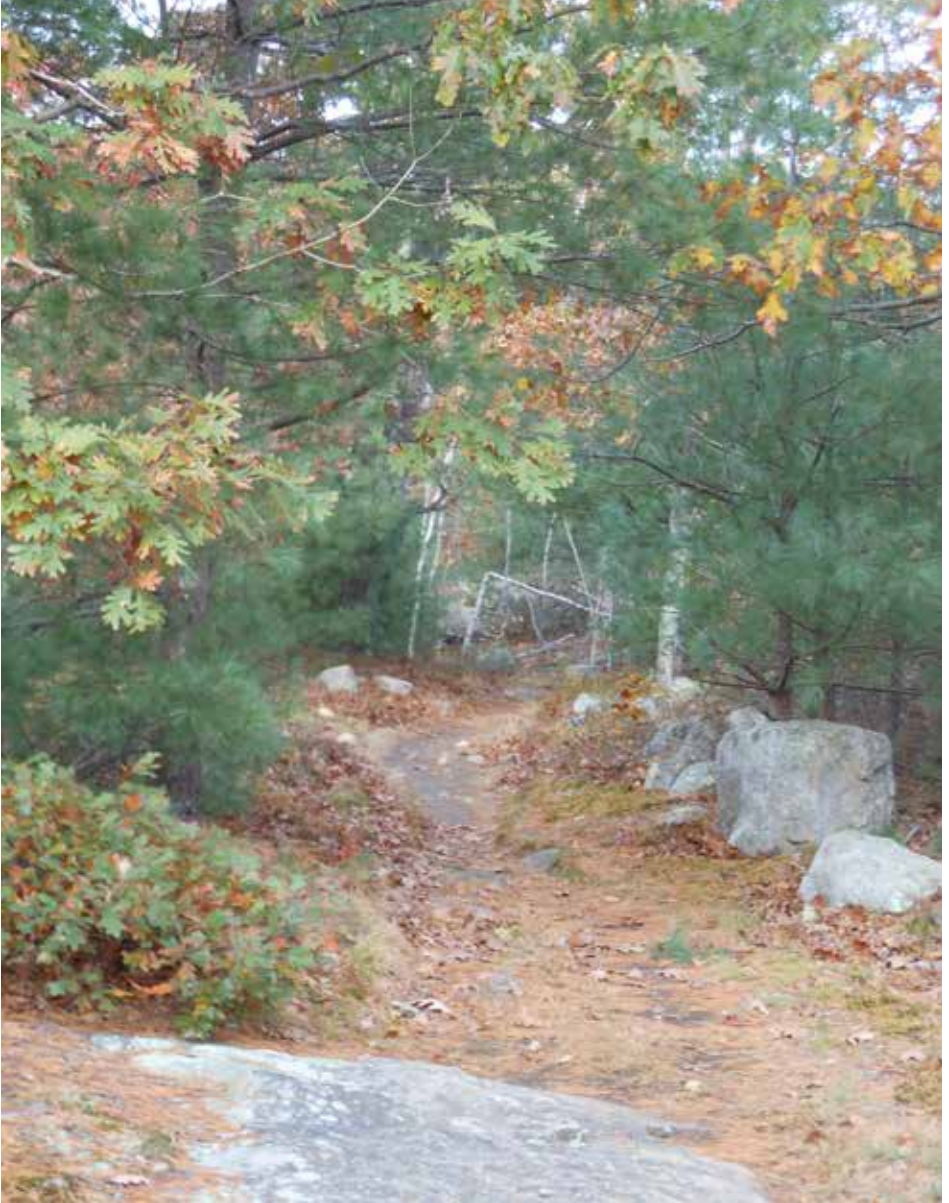
and Bill both ran at Holy Cross. Jeannie went on to become a three sport Captain at Bishop Fenwick, a Junior Olympian and a Boston Globe All-Star. The most dedicated of all may be Bill, who, according to his brother Paul, has not missed a daily run in some FORTY years, logging over 100,000 miles! In fact, research revealed that Bill Robertson, now of Ashland, MA, is listed in eleventh place by the United States Running Streak Association having run for just under FIFTEEN THOUSAND consecutive days! His streak, which is active as of this writing, began in February, 1977. The legacy of the Robertson family and its mark on the Lynn Woods Summer running program is unmatched. John Robertson, Sr. had more to do with making the series what it is, almost fifty years later, than he could have imagined. His handwritten records of the early days of the series show a veritable who's who of local running talent. Regular participants who were prominent on the New England running scene then were Stu Rice of Danvers, Sumner Sears and Cal Perham of the Lynn Athletic Club, Dick Bennett and Earl McGillivray of the North Medford Club, W.F. Newhall of Swampscott, a descendant of one of the original families to settle in the area, Jim and Joe Capezzuto of the BAA, Kyle Snowden of St. John's Prep, and many others.



*Waycross Road*

Here, for posterity, as provided by the Lynn Item on June 16, 1970 and preserved these forty-seven years, are the results of the inaugural Lynn Woods 3-mile Cross-Country Race.

1. Bruce Lehane, South Boston 17:00
2. Ken Dawson, Dorchester 17:04
3. Everett Haywood, Brockton 17:11
4. Chris Mitchell, Unattached
5. Stu Rice, Unattached
6. Glenn Charbonneau, Lynn AC
7. Phil Kron, Brockton
8. John McKinnon, Unattached
9. Bob Donahue, Brockton
10. Paul Williams, Unattached
11. Steve Watson, Unattached
12. Paul Smith, Unattached 18:17
13. Steve Hamilton, Unattached
14. Tim Levangia, Unattached
15. Steve Bagley, Unattached
16. Jim McCarthy, Unattached
17. Bob Feeney, Unattached
18. John Letizia, Unattached
19. Bob Cataldo, Unattached
20. Dan Moschella, Unattached
21. Bob Chouinard, Unattached
22. Tom Churches, Unattached
23. Tom Fennel, Unattached
24. Rick Cooper, Unattached
25. Carl Schultz, Unattached
26. Sumner Sears, Lynn AC
27. Dan Martin, Unattached
28. Dave Larsen, Unattached
29. Charles Hale, Unattached
30. Jim DeCourey, Unattached
31. Doug Symington, Unattached



*Boulder Path*

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **10-MILE RELAY**

**T**HE LYNN WOODS RELAY, first run in 1970, has become legendary on the local running scene. Four team members each run a 2.5 mile loop, including the Goat Path, of course, with very exciting competition and camaraderie. Some impressive times have been turned in over the forty plus years of the relay. In 1980, The Greater Boston Track Club set a relay record of 51:25 for ten miles. Paul McGovern (12:45), Fred Doyle (12:46), Wayne Spinney (12:51) and Mike LaVallee (12:53) are still the only relay team to have all four runners break 13:00. The current record holders, Team Sully's Ice Cream; John Doherty, Terrence White, Mike Chambers and Dave Dunham, had three runners under thirteen minutes per leg, with the fourth at just 13:02. All of these runners were mature adults, not teenaged phenoms. Dave Dunham's 12:05 anchor in that 1991 relay, an amazing 4:50 pace including the Goat Path, has not been touched in over twenty-five years.

Dave Dunham is another Lynn Woods notable. His list of running accolades is impressive at any level. Among them are three wins at the Mount Washington Race (7.6 miles UPHILL), multiple wins in the Mountain Running World Championships, second American in the 1989 Boston Marathon, twice a qualifier at the Olympic Marathon Trials and 2000 USATF Mountain Runner of the Year.



*Don't Get Lost (Courtesy Mike Fitzgerald)*



*Relay Start (Courtesy Mike Fitzgerald)*

## CHAPTER SIX

### **THE SERIES MATURES**

**T**HE 1970'S SAW RUNNING become very popular beyond its core devotees. The national recognition of such "celebrities" as Bill Rogers, Steve Prefontaine and Frank Shorter, who won Olympic Gold in the 1972 marathon, brought more and more people to organized races and running in general. The weekly Woods cross-country series was regularly covered in the Lynn Item with many local harriers getting their names "in the paper" week after week. Fred Doyle believes that the Lynn series became popular with a younger crowd due to its shorter distances and runs designed for kids. He remembers that there were always summer road races that were five miles, 10K and upward of ten miles, but Lynn Woods offered the challenge of the trails at distances that high-schoolers and younger runners could handle. "Lynn Woods filled a void and continues to do so today", says Fred.

In 1978, Lynn Woods hosted an All-Star meet between the North-eastern Conference and the Greater Boston League. In total, the two conferences had sixteen high schools. The top fifteen boys and girls from each league faced off on a 2.8 mile Woods course. Fred Doyle recalls Freddy Braz of Peabody outkicking Swampscott's Mark Ernst in the boy's race after they had run shoulder to shoulder the entire way.

Many a cross-country dual meet was held on the Woods 2.5 mile left on Goat Path loop. Joe Abelon recalls one particular meet in which five of his St. Mary's high schoolers ran the following times:

Joe Crowley (Senior) 12:52

John McKinnon (Senior) 12:58

Jim Neary (Senior) 13:15

John Robertson (Sophomore) 13:22

Bob Kaczenas (Sophomore) 13:28

The Lynn cross-country season always wrapped up with the city championships at the Woods on Columbus Day.

It is interesting to note that the Wednesday series starting line has been changed three times since 1970. Originally, step-off was at the outer stone gates. To avoid some of the golf course traffic, the start was moved to the iron gate at the rocks. Finally, it was placed in its current position at the ball field. Long-time runner Tom Lubas, a winner many times in his prime, remembers the finish line for the relay being at the outer stone gates, making for exciting finishing kicks and battles down some two hundred yards of pavement.



*Original Starting Line*



*Before The Bell (Courtesy Mike Fitzgerald)*



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### **BY THE NUMBERS**

**B**EFORE PARTICIPANTS WERE given bib numbers, the tried and true Popsicle stick method of tracking finishers was used. Younger runners, who grew up with timing chips on everything from ankle bracelets to shoelace clips to bib numbers might laugh at being handed a stick with a place on it to record their finish. (A nod to the weekly D5K in Danvers which uses Popsicle stick places to transfer results to a tablet!) Since runners now keep their assigned number from week to week and year to year, some consider their bib a badge of honor. Notable bib holders are regular participants Moira and Bill Hussey, (#26 & #28), Jim Noonan (#25), Dave Jefska (#21), Mike Doyle (#13), Bill Morse (#11), Chris Smith (#4) and Carl Spencer (#2). When asked who had #1, Bill Mullen said it had been in the hands of more than one runner over the years, but has not been seen for some time. At last count, the newest bib numbers are in the 3100 range! Joe Abelon, who had left the Wednesday night program for a number of years, returned in 2007 with his now familiar electronic timing service, AB-MAC Finish Systems, giving us an in depth archive of the Woods races for posterity. Bill Mullen maintains these records at [www.lwrun.org](http://www.lwrun.org). Older results posted there from as far back as 1972 have all been taken from hand-recorded results. Think



*Joe Abelon (Sign in, please)*

of how painstaking the process was before the advent of electronic timing. Bill Mullen, who had been a regular participant (one record uncovered showed Bill finishing second at 29:51 for a 5-mile long race), and member of the prominent North Medford Club<sup>2</sup>, brought his considerable expertise to the organization and evolution of the summer series beginning in the early 1980's. He recalls that, when the park department sponsored the races, there were two standard short courses and two standard long courses. Short was either 2.5 or 3.1 miles, and long was either five or six miles. During that period, all were run as out and back loops. Bill and Roger Perham followed the original concept of incorporating kid's races into the program with age divisions for those as young as three years old. The kid's race is still held every week, now run on a 1.59 mile out and back course designed by Bill and Joe. Over the past few years, the weekly "kid's" race has seen more runners of all ages, including more than one three-year old. Credit should be given to Joe, Bill, Roger, John Robertson and others who have always actively encouraged kids to start running at an early age.

<sup>2</sup> Many runners were and still are recognized by their club affiliation; still others as 'unattached.'



*Beth and Bill Mullen (Courtesy Mike Fitzgerald)*



*Course Instructions (Courtesy Roger Perham)*



*Rain? What Rain? (Courtesy Mike Fitzgerald)*

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# DUATHLON

**A**ROUND 1995, BILL MULLEN and fellow enthusiasts added another facet to the summer series; the Duathlon. By definition, a Duathlon is a run-bike-run athletic event, which, while never achieving Olympic status, has gained popularity worldwide at various levels. The *Powerman Zofingen* in Switzerland consists of a 10 kilometer trail run, a 150K road bike leg, and a finishing 30K trail run. Lynn Woods version was our own 2.5 mile Goat Path loop, 5.5 miles out and back on the bike and a second Goat Path run to wrap it up. All this took place while the regular long and short runs were underway. During its ten-year stretch, the Lynn Woods Duathlon was first dominated by runners. Paul McGovern had the early record due to his running prowess. Eventually, Kurt Perham, an intrepid runner, but even better on the mountain bike, was able to wrest the record away from McGovern. The Duathlon was removed from the Woods lineup in the early 2000's when the transition between its events and the interaction between Duathlon and running-only participants became difficult to manage.

While on the subject of coupling running with other activities in one event, another local tradition which has survived more than 35 years is the Nahant Triathlon. Bob Levine, retired from General Electric and a life-long Lynn resident has organized a Thursday event which, while it does not draw the numbers of the Woods program, has been a summer tradition for many triathlon devotees. Begun in 1980, participants swim a quarter mile near the Tides Restaurant, bike 4.75 miles through town and run a 3.75 mile loop to Red Rock Park and back. Bob Levine has run his share of Lynn Woods races over the years and volunteers at another Lynn race, the GEEAA Red Broderick 5K, itself now over thirty years old. Roger Perham tells of Bob's involvement at the Woods. "Bob Levine contributed greatly to youngsters being welcomed into the running community. For years, he had them run loops behind the ball field fence and gave the kids prizes he had purchased himself."



*Kid's Race Turnaround*



*The Future of Running (Courtesy Mike Fitzgerald)*



*Winner & Still Champion (Courtesy Mike Fitzgerald)*

## CHAPTER NINE

# THE LONG AND SHORT OF IT

**B**ILL MULLEN CAN BE CREDITED with adding many of the Woods courses run today. In the late 1990's, he came up with creations such as the Twin Towers (4 miles), Triple Towers (5 miles), Horse Stables and Picnic Loop. Runners will recognize long-used names for other regular routes: Tour de Lynn Woods (Parts I, II, III, IV and.....??), Gate to Gate, Undercliff Trail and I Hate the Dam(n) Run. The longest course currently in rotation is "The Very Long One", over ten miles of trail for those who dare. For most, the 7.7 mile Boulder Path is a reasonable challenge. Bill is quick to pass the credit, or blame as he tells it, for the brutal Stone Tower Challenge Race course to our own Wednesday night tune master, D5K founder and all around good guy, William (Liam) Brady, who made his debut in the Woods as a very young cousin of the Robertson's. Entry fees from the last eight years of Stone Tower Challenge races have provided some \$30,000 dollars to the preservation of the tower and its legacy in the Woods.

Even the varied trail layouts have been altered from time to time. Tracy Trail has been used to shake up the usual early stretch of main road and provide more views of Walden Pond. Bill Mullen recalls that the regular Wednesday night run once went off as planned with a live fire on the Goat Path! “Poor judgement,” he says of that venture. This may have influenced a makeshift course creation out to the right of Walden Pond on the always challenging Ox Pasture Road the next time fire had closed the normal routes. The Ox Pasture loop has occasionally been brought back for the long run. It has apparently become less threatening than it was at that first race. In recent years, more courses have been added to challenge both short and long runners. The title of “Honorary Trail Master” has been bestowed on creators such as Jeff Hixon, Greg Esbitt and Jeff Laine, who have given runners different looks and challenging single-tracks over some parts of the Woods previously unseen in the Wednesday races.



*Wednesday Friends (Courtesy Mike Fitzgerald)*





*Boulder Path (Courtesy Mike Fitzgerald)*

## CHAPTER TEN

# THE HANDICAP

POPULAR IN THE TRACK WORLD in the 1960's and 1970's, handicap races became a favourite diversion to the repetitive weekly cross-country runs. Using time as a handicap, slower runners start first, and faster runners later. The slower you are, the more of a head start you are given. The theory is that the difference in starting times varies, so that all runners should cross the finish line at the same time. Those who put in the most effort have the best chance of winning. Let's say you are a regular short race runner and you do 2.5 miles in 22:30, a 9:00 pace. Using the accepted handicapping formula [  $T_2 = T_1(D_2/D_1)^{1.06}$  for you algebraics! ], you should run the handicapped race, normally 5.5 miles, in approximately 52:30, or 9:35 per mile. You would start the race about seventeen minutes before those runners considered 'scratch', or those not awarded an earlier starting time, in hopes that at the finish line, runners of all abilities would compete down the stretch with the same chance to win. As Joe Abelon tells it, the first handicap race was simple to stage since everyone had 2.5 mile times on which to base the "head starts." Bill Mullen, who has done most of the handicapping over two plus decades, has calculated, analyzed and fine-tuned his methods, making him quite adept at firing off a handicap without using the formula above, creating a competitive atmosphere seen only on handicap night and at the relay.



*On The Trail (Courtesy Mike Fitzgerald)*



*The Hard Stuff*

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### WHO WAS THAT?

**T**HE FIELD HAS FEATURED many accomplished runners through the years. Alberto Salazar, one-time world record holder in both the 5000 and 10,000 meters ran a Lynn Woods Relay in 1974 when he was a sophomore at Wayland High School. Peabody native Lesley (Welch) Lehane, 1982 NCAA Cross-Country Champion and winner of the 1991 San Francisco Marathon ran the Woods, as did the aforementioned Fernando (Freddy) Braz, a two-time Olympic Marathon Trials qualifier and Boston College and Peabody High School Hall of Famer. Another Olympic Marathon qualifier, Lynn's own Paul McGovern, still runs in the Woods races. In addition to being part of that first relay record team, Paul's accomplishments include finishing in 22<sup>nd</sup> place at the 1986 Boston Marathon and in 16<sup>th</sup> at the 1992 Olympic Marathon Trials with a 2:19 time. Jericho, Vermont native Erin Sullivan, two-time Foot Locker National High School Cross Country Champion who set the U.S. high school 5K record in 1997, ran the Woods. More recently, one Wednesday night featured Jordan Williamz, who ran a sub four-minute mile as a Villanova sophomore in 2014.

Local elite runner Lou Ristaino, a winner of many a road and trail race in his day, credited his great times and overall stamina to his training in Lynn Woods. After a ten-miler in Worcester, a city built on seven hills, he said, “As I ran up the big hill in Worcester, I thought about how many times I had run up the big hill in Lynn Woods - the one with the Stone Tower - and I found I wasn’t as tired as I thought. I passed many runners in the latter half of the race. It must have been Lynn Woods!” Lou Ristaino is also the holder of the fastest times at no less than FIVE of the thirteen recorded distances in the Woods series.



*Jim Noonan & Carl Spencer (Courtesy Mike Fitzgerald)*



*The Start (Courtesy Bill Mullen)*



*Ready To Go (Courtesy Mike Fitzgerald)*

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### UP TO DATE

**M**OST REGULAR WOODS PARTICIPANTS are content to be consistent from week to week, run with friends, improve times as the season progresses and do what they like best: run. Some, however, answer the starting bell with a different goal: to win. Over the past ten years, the most consistent top ten finishers in the long race have been Dierdre Lowe, Matt Viega, Chris Smith, Chris Stank, Greg Esbitt, Jeff Hixson and Jim Pawlicki. In the short race, Brit-tani Atkinson, Tiana Foglietta, Douglas Wilson and Marty Kennedy have placed their names at the top as consistently as anyone. Doug Wilson's parents, Doug and Pam, credit their son with getting them involved in the running thing after young Doug had a health scare in his teens. On his bucket list was "keeping his parents healthy", which led to their commitment to the Wednesday night program.

It is difficult to call out multiple winners of the kid's race since rapid 'graduation' to the longer races usually takes place. There have been as many as 56 participants in the kid's race of late, including many siblings and parents running together. All five members of the Ferguson family from Winthrop, April, Bailey, Colton, Denise and Eric compete regularly on Wednesday nights. The entire Hackett family from Peabody, John, Winn, Lai-Sahn and Lai-Ping, runs each week.

The general camaraderie of running spurs many other local clubs to participate whether for fun or competition under their 'banner.' Gil's Athletic Club (GAC), Merrimack Valley Striders (MVS), Mystic Runners, North Shore Striders, Central Mass Striders, Team Gloucester, Wicked Running Club, Winners Circle Running Club (WCRC) and more informal groups such as Goat Hill Athletic Club and the Flux Capacitors regularly send participants throughout the summer. Kathy Matthews, a Flux member has been a runner for just the past six years, but has a special connection to the series: Joe Ableon was her Algebra teacher at Lynn Classical High School.

Another name that frequently appears as a winner in the annals of the Woods races and can still be seen in the results of an occasional Woods run is Tom Derderian, marathon and Olympic trials veteran, holder of a personal best 2:19.04 at the 1975 Boston Marathon (18<sup>th</sup> place), and a senior writer at *New England Runner*. In 2017, Tom published an update of his *Boston Marathon*, 800 pages of *Year by Year Stories of the World's Premier Running Event*, first written in 1994.

The distinction of "most experienced" regular participant from week to week may well go to Dan Coffey of Beverly and The North Medford Club, who listed his age as 83 in 2016. Jim Green of Marblehead, who finished ninth in the Boston Marathon in 1960 and is also 83, still runs the Woods on occasion.





*The Final Turn*

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### **ACCOLADES**

**T**HE STORY OF THIS TRIBUTE to local runners and organizers of this venture, which enters its forty-eighth year at this writing, cannot be told without speaking of the many volunteers who have given their time and camaraderie over the years and carry the torch of putting on the show every Wednesday in the summer. At the beginning, there was Joe Abelon. His commitment to running, coaching, organizing and perpetuating Lynn Woods Cross-Country and running in general is amazing. As more and more people came forward to offer memories of the program, no name was mentioned more than Joe's. Paul Robertson wrote that, "Joe may not realize the influence he has had on hundreds of runners who have passed through his coaching ranks over the years."

Fred Brown, founder in 1933 of the North Medford Club, the second oldest running club in America, was the driving force behind building the NMC into the preeminent New England running club of its time. NMC set the stage for clubs such as the Central Mass Striders and the Greater Boston Track Club and gave the older (1887) Boston Athletic Association a 'run' for its lofty perch atop running's hill, organizing thousands of road races and leaving a lasting legacy in local running circles.

Fred Doyle, who coached Swampscott Cross-Country and worked for Lynn Parks and Recreation, took the program to heart and encouraged his teams to run as preparation for fall meets. Fred made some waves himself in the mid-1970's when the New England Cross Country Championships were held at the Woods. He describes a very tough tract which incorporated some of the Gannon Golf Course terrain and covered 5.75 miles. Fred recalls finishing ninth in 1975 and fifth in 1976, and says his ability to best some elite runners whom had all beaten him before was due to his familiarity with the Lynn Woods trails. "If you think the Woods trails are tough in summer, an inch or two of snow fell the day before the 1976 championships. That was a real test for all," said Fred.

Paul Smith, a local coach and running enthusiast who ran in the first race, tells of another "commitment" to the Wednesday night program. "Occasionally, there would be a 'lost runner,' usually a back-of-the-pack who took a wrong turn. Warm-downs would become search parties. The recovered runner would be named the winner of the 'Swamp Run' or the 'Red Barn Race' or whatever geographical reference point the search party happened to see." Many reading this are likely nodding their heads remembering a similar experience! (The "Red Barn Race" is indeed chronicled in one of John Robertson's many weekly results sheets!)

The enthusiastic participation of the entire Robertson family deserves a second mention. When Joe Abelon and Bill Mullen were asked for the names of other volunteers who were instrumental in the development of the series into what it is today, John Robertson, Sr. was the first mentioned. As the Robertsons told their portions of

the story, the influence that guided them toward running came from their father. Some years after John Sr. was no longer able to run, his kids brought him to the Woods for a Wednesday night visit. He was moved to tears by all the people who shook his hand, asked about his welfare and offered him a hug. “How do they all know me?” he kept asking. The experience was true testimony to his friendship, influence and love for running and to those lives he touched without even realizing it.



*John Robertson, Sr. (Courtesy Bill Mullen)*



*Paul & John Robertson and Friends July 26, 2017  
(Courtesy Roger Perham)*

Paul Smith, who coached at St. Mary's, Fred Doyle of Swampscott High, Wayne Spinney, who became 'race director' for a year before Bill Mullen took over and others who were involved at the school or recreation department level all had a hand in the formative years. Barney Bloom saw something in the beginning that deserved the attention of the City of Lynn. Roger Perham, who may or may not turn seventy soon and who is a regular just about every Wednesday as this is written, was a guiding light in fostering what we now see at the Woods. In recent years, Doug and Pam Wilson play a huge part in organizing the program. Pam is the keeper of the numbers, official timekeeper, chief overseer of the finish line and den mother to those who need it! Al Peterson, a long time runner who can be seen just about *everywhere* on Wednesday evenings, has rarely missed a night in thirty years, setting up the finish line, marking the course and saving a parking spot for "the truck." 'Pete' is a long time member of the North Medford Club and The Lynn Athletic Club, a veteran of some eighteen marathons and a friend to anyone who has ever been a Woods participant.



*Al Peterson & John Robertson July 26, 2017  
(Courtesy Roger Perham)*

Paul Croft, who usually runs, is one of the first to step up when someone is needed on the organizational side. The first time Paul's name appears in the Woods records is as a member of the St. Mary's High School team in the 1975 city cross-country championship meet. Mike Fitzgerald, another long time regular runner, has taken more pictures than anyone in history! Thank goodness for digital cameras! Mike's photos capture the very spirit of summer Wednesdays at the Woods. In recent years, Liam Brady has set up his music system for the enjoyment of those at the starting line, and then taken off in one of the races.

Missing a night only when dire emergency (or the occasional concert that simply *must* be attended!) calls, Bill Mullen is first at the starting line, marking the course, 'running' things and is the last one out. He is the heart of this thing along with Joe Abelon's soul. Last year, Bill was honored by USA Track and Field of New England with the *Marja Baker Award* as *Volunteer of the Year*. Pam Wilson captures the essence of Bill's stature on Wednesday nights. "Bill Mullen runs the show and is so respected by all the runners for the time and enthusiasm he puts into these weekly runs. If he wasn't there smiling, shrugging off all the complaints, the show would not go on.

His personality makes everyone come back.” Fred Doyle sums up the team: “If it wasn’t for Joe and Bill, this would be a short story.”



*Liam Brady & Paul Croft (Courtesy Mike Fitzgerald)*



*Bruce Lee and Mike Fitzgerald*



*Joe and Bill (Courtesy Mike Fitzgerald)*



*Roger Perham At His Best (Courtesy Mike Fitzgerald)*





*The Wilson Family (Courtesy Mike Fitzgerald)*



*Wrap-up (Courtesy Mike Fitzgerald)*

## AUTHOR'S NOTES

WHEN I FIRST STARTED COMING on Wednesday nights, it was because of my good friend Dan Curtis who, during one of our regular Tuesday morning Breakfast Club runs said, “You know, there is a relay race coming up in Lynn Woods; cross-country trails..... could be a fun time.” Turns out Dan is another disciple of the Joe Abelson culture, having thrown the discus and javelin and maybe run a bit with Pat Burke, Tom Cunningham and others who still, almost fifty years later, lace ‘em up and run the Woods. We ran that relay and a couple more races that season, and I was hooked. I too, have been a runner for the better part of 50 years. My first organized race was the Salem Heritage Days 10K in 1968 when the bib numbers were cardboard, there were no race shirts and Gatorade had just been invented. I have run in hundreds of races since then, one involving Heartbreak Hill (a WBCN sponsored 5-miler, not the Marathon), many in other states; some with thousands of participants and one, in New Hampshire, with twenty-nine runners. All of us who love running will agree that the camaraderie among those who run is unmatched by any other sport, but summer Wednesdays in Lynn Woods are something special.

When I asked Bill Mullen in 2015 if anyone had ever written the history of this thing, he said, “Well, we’ve been covered by the Lynn Item, and maybe had a blurb or two in a couple of the running magazines, but, no, not really.” I said I’d like to do it, knowing it might take some time to put it all together, but never losing focus that this little Wednesday evening get together needed to be chronicled. It

needed a record, not only for everyone who has participated or has supported those who have, but for those who have organized it, kept the torch lit and made it their own. There is a special place on the results sheet for Bill Mullen, Joe Abelon, Pam and Doug Wilson, Al Peterson, Roger Perham, John Robertson and countless others who have stepped in when someone was needed to mark a course, call out numbers at the finish line, man the corners at the relay or simply give their time and effort to make the Lynn Woods Running experience what it is.

As long as they'll have me on Wednesday evenings in the summer, my routine will be to drop my donation in the 1970's era Coca-Cola box on the table, check my name off the list taped to the side of the truck, warm up, and when I hear, "Short race, line up behind me please," take my place at the starting line and await the commands....."Runners set?" followed by the cowbell.

<b>Paul J. Arrington</b>	<b>#386</b>	<b>Written in 2016 &amp; 2017</b>
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*The Woods were put there years ago,  
Though no one then would ever know  
The treasures to be found there now.  
Never been? Then you should go!  
Take a hike; I'll show you how.  
Some sweat may trickle off your brow.  
We'll not get lost for there's a sign,  
And giving up is not allowed.  
Guided by the master's line,  
Following on trails defined.  
Splashed in sunlight's lazy beams,  
The majesty of fir and pine.  
For in the wood, to me, it seems,  
We lie protected from extremes.  
And every day that sunshine gleams  
We'll run the Woods, the trails of dreams.*

*Paul J. Arrington, 2016*

## Lynn Woods

*I walk along the narrow paths;  
While the wind wisps through my hair.  
The trees sway as if waving to me;  
As their leaves fall softly to the ground.  
I stop and listen very hard;  
I hear the animals playing in the distance.  
The air smells of a wonderful pine;  
And the rocks stand as tall as towers.  
The soft chirping of a bird  
Makes me feel welcome, while on my hike.  
The vines from the trees are very strong;  
Strong enough to swing on.  
This place is very wonderful.  
As wonderful as it sounds.  
So just come on and visit it,  
As long as it's around.*

*Helene McInerney  
12 years old*

# CONTRIBUTORS

Bill Mullen

Joe Abelon

Roger Perham

Patrick Burke

Al Peterson

Dan Curtis

Tom Lubas

Mike Fitzgerald

Paul Smith

Fred Doyle

Paul Robertson

Pam Wilson

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Historic Landscape Report – Lynn Woods

Keith N. Morgan, Boston University    1986

Prepared for the Ohlmstead Historic Landscape Preservation  
Program

In 1970, a group of runners set off on a three mile trail race in Lynn Woods. On every summer Wednesday for the next forty-six years (and counting), runners of all ages and talents have come to The Woods to race with friends, meet new ones and enjoy the camaraderie and athleticism that is running.

This is the story of how the Lynn Woods Summer Cross-Country Series has grown from a field of 31 in that first race to hundreds of participants who stare down the rocks, roots, and paths that criss-cross the 2200-acres that is the **Lynn Woods Reservation**.

With a golf course, a long-lost pirate's treasure lair, and thirty miles of roads and trails, Lynn Woods invites you to hike, mountain bike, take your dog for a walk, or test the limits of your endurance by

**Running In The Woods.....**

