

BABY, WE WERE BORN TO RUN

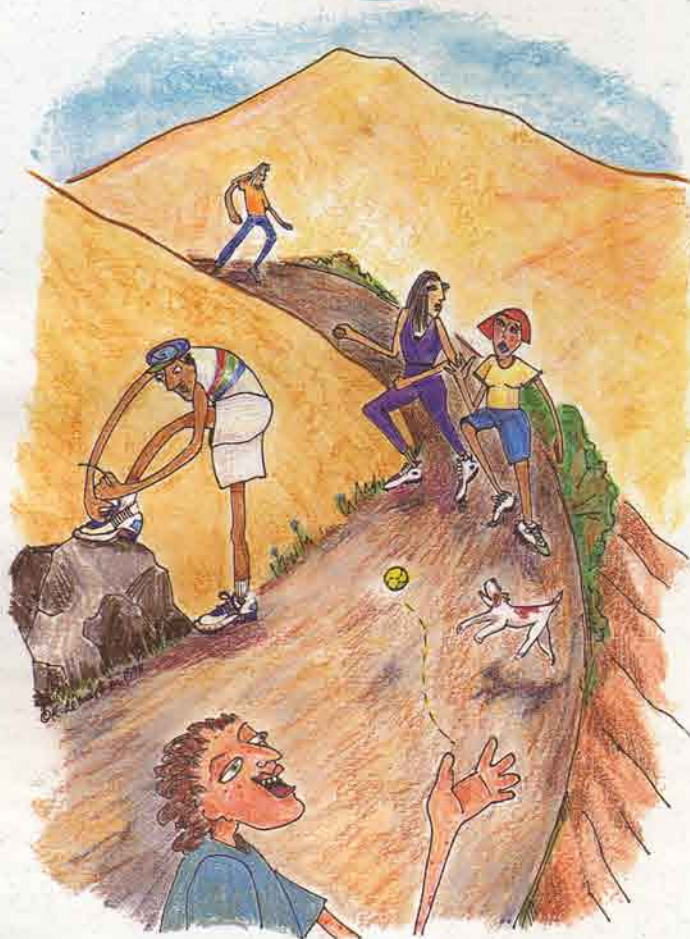
Running

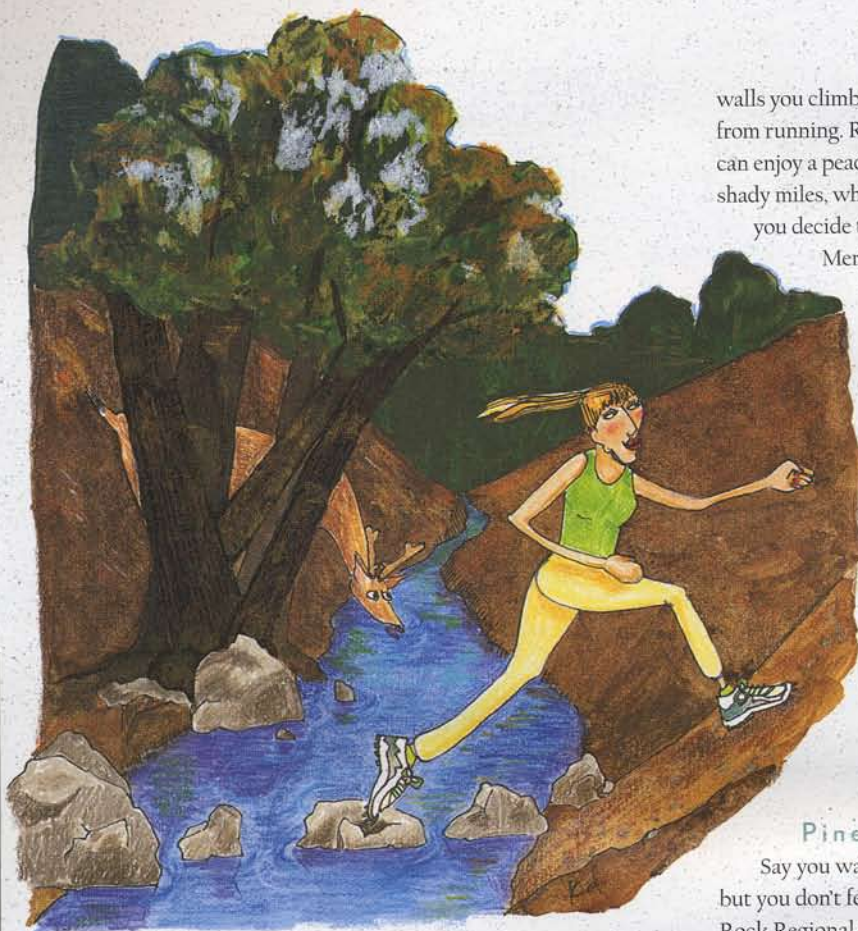
by Sarah Lavender Smith

RUNNING IS BOOMING in Contra Costa. Need proof? Look at the steady stream of runners on the Iron Horse Trail. Check out the growing number of road races held in the East Bay. Or visit Forward Motion Sports Wednesday evenings and witness some 200 people spilling into the street for a group run.

Most of these runners don't care about their 10K times; they're just out to have fun and improve their fitness. If you're among them, or you'd like to give running a try,

consider yourself lucky to live here. Good weather and a vast network of trails make the East Bay an ideal place to run. Several specialty stores and sociable running clubs give runners all the support they need. Read on for a comprehensive guide to these trails, stores, clubs, and more. Then lace up your Sauconys, stretch your quads, and enjoy a great run.





WHERE TO RUN

You can run almost anywhere, which is one reason the sport is so appealing, and a good route waits outside the door of just about any home in the Diablo and San Ramon valleys. But why limit yourself to jogging the same four miles on neighborhood sidewalks? This area has a spectacular number of trails that reveal some of Northern California's best scenery, and chances are they'll inspire you to run farther. Consider what follows to be a sampling of the East Bay's great running routes—one that attempts to be geographically diverse and to offer something for all ability levels.

Mitchell Canyon

The drive to the Mitchell Canyon trailhead will make you appreciate this Mount Diablo trek before you even start. One minute you're cursing sprawl development as you follow brake lights along Ygnacio Valley Road to Clayton, then two turns later you're by a meadow at the mouth of a pristine canyon seemingly untouched by the surrounding suburbs. The Mitchell Canyon Road loop on Mount Diablo is the most challenging—and most rewarding—run listed here. Challenging because the 8.6-mile route rises 1,800 feet, and you'll probably walk and struggle for breath on some of the switchbacks leading to Deer Flat Creek. Rewarding because as you run along Meridian Ridge, looking ahead to panoramic views of northern Contra Costa, the Delta, and beyond; and looking behind at the towering canyon

walls you climbed, you'll feel that celebrated high that comes only from running. Runners who aren't ready to try the strenuous loop can enjoy a peaceful out-and-back run on the fire road's first two shady miles, which follow an easy incline along Mitchell Creek. If

you decide to attempt the loop, follow the trail to Deer Flat, run

Meridian Ridge Road past Murchio Gap, and then start a

steep descent by following signs to Donner Canyon Road. You can take Donner Canyon Road all the way down, but to get a better feel for the mountain's diverse habitat, I recommend making a left just before Meridian Point and heading back on the single-track Back Creek Trail. Once you're on flat terrain again, make a left onto the Bruce Lee Trail or any of the several trails that cut across the meadow and return to the ranger station.

From Walnut Creek, take Ygnacio Valley Road east to the town of Clayton. Go right on Clayton Road and right on Mitchell Canyon Road, which ends at the ranger station. Parking costs \$2.

No dogs are allowed here or on any of the Mount Diablo State Park trails. Dirt surface; water and restrooms available.

Pine Canyon

Say you want to run through the wilderness of Mount Diablo, but you don't feel up to tackling its rugged hills. Go to the Castle Rock Regional Park and explore Pine Canyon. This is a fairly easy run through meadows and oak groves, and you'll feel like a kid playing hopscotch as you try to skip across Pine Creek's many crossings without getting your feet wet. The grassy hillsides give way to a shady, craggy canyon where massive rock formations appear underfoot and at your side. I usually run here with the Diablo Road Runners, and we start at the rear of the Orchard Staging Area for a seven-mile out-and-back along Castle Rock Trail and Stage Road. You also can park at the Castle Rock Recreation Area and find the trailhead near the park's entrance. For an entirely different—and much more difficult—approach to Pine Canyon, start at the Macedo Ranch Staging Area in Alamo. Macedo Ranch is a hot and dusty destination during the summer, but its ridgetop is one of the best places around to watch the sunset. Carry a map—there are several alternative routes that traverse Pine Ridge and drop into Pine Canyon and I once got lost and chased by a cow while crisscrossing a summit here at twilight. Runners face a daunting uphill out of the staging area on Wall Point Road. For a hilly 8.5-mile loop, follow Wall Point Road to Summit Trail and return via Barbeque Terrace Road.

To reach the Castle Rock Regional Park from downtown Walnut Creek, take Ygnacio Valley Road east, right on either Walnut Avenue or Oak Grove Road, then right again on Castle Rock Road. Continue south to the staging area or park. For Macedo Ranch, take I-680 south and exit at Stone Valley Road. Follow Stone Valley Road to its intersection with Green Valley Road, turn left and park at the end of the street. Parking costs \$2 at Macedo Ranch. Dirt surface; water and restrooms available.



Shell Ridge

A cluster of foothills on Mount Diablo's west side makes up the 1,400-acre Shell Ridge Recreation Area, named for the fossilized shells found in the area's rocks. You can run for miles in this open-space area and have a 360-degree view of hills covered by oaks and wind-flattened grasses. You're just a couple of miles from downtown Walnut Creek, but you'll feel like you're an hour's drive from the nearest minimart. This is another place where it's wise to carry a map, given the array of dirt roads and single-track trails that crisscross the ridge and lead to Mount Diablo State Park. Did I mention the hills? That's right, this is a fairly difficult place to run, but many of the ups and downs are followed by relatively flat portions that spell relief. I enjoy a route of just over five miles that starts at the end of Marshall Drive, takes the Hammill Trail to the Upper Buck Trail to the Costanoan Trail, runs past the windmill and weathered barns of Borges Ranch, and returns on the Briones-Mount Diablo Trail. Finish by making a left onto the single-track Indian Creek Trail to find yourself following a curvy creek bed through a microcanyon almost entirely shaded by bushes and oaks that huddle on the banks.

From downtown Walnut Creek, take Ygnacio Valley Road east and turn right on Homestead Avenue. Turn left on Marshall Drive and park at the end of the street. Dirt surface; water (at Old Borges Ranch) and restrooms available.

The Brickyard

Running hills is an excellent way to build strength and endurance, but many of the East Bay's hilly trails simply make a single lung-busting ascent, followed by a knee-pounding descent. That's why I like the rolling, varied hills of the Brickyard course between Martinez and Crockett. The challenging out-and-back run on Carquinez Scenic Drive is set against the bluffs of Franklin Ridge and showcases the beauty of Carquinez Strait. Even the Shell refinery's smokestacks look postcard-pretty from here, set against the water and Benicia Bridge. The road is paved but has been left to erode in several spots ever since a landslide closed it to through traffic in 1982. I run the eight miles that make up the Brickyard race, which is held each April. Start at Rankin Park and go left on Talbart Street and left onto Carquinez Scenic Drive. Run four miles to the Pacific Custom Materials plant, where bricks used to be manufactured, and turn around by the portable offices near the plant's entrance gate. You may wish you were dead on the return when you run a final steep hill past a cemetery, but hang on—you're only a quarter-mile or so away from the finish at the park.

From Highway 4 West, take the Alhambra Avenue exit in Martinez, go left on Marina Vista, right on Talbart Street, and left on Buckley to Rankin Park. Paved surface; water and restrooms available.

Pleasanton Ridge

The Pleasanton Ridge Regional Park looks down on two of the East Bay's most congested freeway spots—the 580-680 interchange

FOUR STANDBYS

No Contra Costa running guide would be complete without highlighting these four trails, but I'll be brief because they're familiar to anyone who lives on the east side of the Caldecott Tunnel. These trails are paved, easy to access, and with the exception of the Lafayette Reservoir, mostly flat. They also can get a little boring. But when you want a predictable, paved place to run that has plenty of water and restrooms and is away from traffic, they're ideal.

The Iron Horse Regional Trail

The Southern Pacific Railroad tracks that used to run through the Diablo and San Ramon valleys were removed in 1979, and the paved path created in its place now stretches some 23 miles from Walnut Creek to San Ramon. No more pausing for a light at Ygnacio Valley Road—a \$2.1 million pedestrian bridge opened last May lets trail users run above the six lanes of traffic.

From southbound I-680, take the Diablo Road exit right, then left onto Hartz Avenue. Park anywhere in downtown Danville and head one block west to pick up the trail.

Lafayette-Moraga Regional Trail

During the winter and spring, when many of the area's dirt trails are too muddy to run, I love to head to the Lafayette-Moraga trail to see the white buildings of St. Mary's College against the rolling green hills. The 7.6-mile stretch has a few easy slopes and a little hill by the college. You can begin at the Olympic Boulevard Staging Area off Pleasant Hill Road, but I recommend picking up the trail at Moraga Commons Park since restrooms and drinking fountains are available there.

From Mt. Diablo Boulevard in Lafayette, take Moraga Way to the town of Moraga. Turn left on Moraga Road; Moraga Commons Park is on the left.

Lafayette Reservoir

This scenic 2.7-mile loop is hilly enough to make you question whether you really want to run around it twice or quit after the first go-around. Those who subscribe to the no-pain-no-gain school of running might want to try the reservoir's extremely difficult rim loop, a dirt trail of about five miles that can be accessed from several points along the shorter paved trail.

From Hwy. 24 westbound, take the Central Lafayette exit to Mt. Diablo Boulevard. Turn right; the reservoir entrance is ahead on the left. Bring quarters for the parking meters.

The Canal Trails

The canal trails snake through downtown Walnut Creek and around Pleasant Hill and Concord. I've done several short runs from different starting points along the canal, and the variations on possible runs—long and short—are endless.

From downtown Walnut Creek, go east on Ygnacio Valley Road and turn left on North San Carlos Drive.



and the Sunol Grade on I-680. That's one reason the trails on these 3,200 acres of open space reward runners with a sense of escape from the daily grind. When your chest is pounding and your leg muscles radiate heat from an after-work run up the ridge, you can look down and feel relieved to be utterly removed from the line of traffic inching toward the Central Valley. Cars aside, the ridge run provides a glorious view of the Livermore Valley to the east and, to the west, the wilderness of Sunol Ridge. You could loop around the park's well-maintained dirt fire roads to run a full-marathon here; or, if you're like me, you'll be so winded from the initial climb that you'll want to walk after about 45 minutes. Wear a hat and sunscreen because the oak grove stands, though lovely, do little to shade the trails. I enjoy a moderately difficult route roughly five miles long on the park's southern end, near where the Thermal Fruit Company used to cultivate apricot and cherry trees in the early part of the century. From the Oak Tree Staging Area, head up the Oak Tree Trail's switchbacks and pick up the Olive Grove Trail. Keep going uphill, through a fragrant, turn-of-the-century olive grove, and meet the Ridgeline Trail. Head south on Ridgeline and drop into a scenic pocket of Killcare Canyon. The trail reunites with the Oak Tree Trail for a calf-burning uphill past an abandoned ranch house. You'll return to the hilltop and begin a blissful descent to the parking lot, during which you might whoop like a yahoo in spite of yourself.

From I-680 southbound, take the Castlewood Drive exit west.

Turn left on Foothill Road and drive almost two miles to the Oak Tree Staging Area on your right. Dirt surface; water and restrooms available.

Redwood Regional Park

Mike McManus, the Dipsea Race course record holder and a Moraga resident, probably was exaggerating when he told me that Redwood Regional Park is "the best place in the world," but it's easy to lapse into hyperbole when describing the park and its 100-foot-tall trees. The babble of Redwood Creek and the damp canopy of redwood branches create an environment so hushed and tranquil that I feel relaxed even when my pulse is racing from a run up the French Trail. Some runners enter the park at Skyline Gate and complete a very hilly and difficult 9.5-mile loop along the French Trail. My personal favorite, however, is a more manageable (though still quite difficult) loop of approximately seven miles that begins at Redwood Gate. Run along the creek by taking the Bridle Trail to the Stream Trail, then turn left onto the Star Flower Trail (careful—it's easy to get confused and wind up on Tres Sendas). Star Flower makes a rigorous ascent to the French Trail. Run the roller-coaster curves and hills of the single-track French Trail all the way back to the Orchard Trail, which drops down to the Bridle Trail near Redwood Gate.

Take the Redwood Road exit from southbound Hwy. 13 and head east. Redwood Gate is on the left side of Redwood Road about two miles after the intersection with Skyline Boulevard. Parking costs \$3. Dirt surface; water and restrooms available.

The Nimitz Trail at Inspiration Point

When the temperature reaches 101 in Concord by 11 a.m., you can drive to Inspiration Point in Tilden Regional Park for an eight-mile run (or shorter, if you turn around sooner) that's almost guaranteed to be breezy and at least ten degrees cooler. Don't go on a foggy day.

however, because the Nimitz Trail has arguably the best views of any East Bay run. Where else can you see San Francisco and Mount Tam and, to the east, San Pablo Reservoir, Briones Regional Park, and Mount Diablo? For runners, the Nimitz Trail is similar to the Brickyard run: four miles of paved surface over moderate hills (save some energy for a tough rise at mile 3.5). It's an excellent place to train for a 10K road race. The pavement ends but a hilly trail continues at the four-mile mark, so keep going if you're so inclined, but be warned: the dirt portion to and from the turnaround point is brutal.

From Hwy. 24 westbound, take the Orinda exit and go right onto Camino Pablo. Turn left at the Wildcat Canyon Road/Bear Creek Road intersection. Take Wildcat Canyon Road up about two miles; Inspiration Point is on your right. Paved and dirt surface; restrooms are available, but no water.

EXPERT PICKS

Some of the country's elite road racers and ultrarunners call the East Bay home. We asked a handful of them to name their favorite runs in this area and to share some expert advice.

Mike McManus, Moraga, *Dipsea Race course record holder and first California finisher at 1998 Bay to Breakers*

Favorite run: Redwood Regional Park and the Pinehurst Road-Huckleberry Preserve area between Moraga and Redwood Park
Tip: "Variation is the key to keep everything enjoyable. Don't run the same pace every day; vary your distance, pace, and setting."

Ann Trason, Kensington, *world record holder in the 50- and 100-mile; 10-time winner of Western States 100-mile Endurance Run*

Favorite run: The French Trail in Redwood Regional Park
Tip: "Take a map with you before heading out into any previously unexplored areas; run by time, not by miles; and if need be, take walking breaks, especially on the uphill."

Brad Hawthorne, Danville, *six-time winner and course record holder of the Big Sur Marathon*

Favorite run: Crow Canyon Road and other streets that loop around downtown Danville and Blackhawk
Tip: "Make sure you have some good running shoes. Go to a specialty store and let them get you in a good pair. And you need to have a goal—maybe a 5K or 10K or the Bay to Breakers race. If you have an event coming up, it makes it a lot easier to step out the door and train."

Wendy "Wingnut" Ingraham, Walnut Creek, *fourth-place finisher in 1997 and '96 Hawaii Ironman World Championships; winner, 1998 Austrian Trimania Ironman triathlon*

Favorite Run: Shell Ridge and the Iron Horse Trail
Tip: "You have to have a good shoe that fits. The biggest problem

beginners have is they'll say, 'I wanna run a marathon,' and they'll slap on an old pair of Nikes and within a week be injured. People also need to be aware of not running too much on pavement when starting out. I do a mixture of running on trails and pavement."

Chris Schille, Lafayette, *Ranked seventh in the U.S. for the 10K in 1989 and 1998 winner of the Houlihan's to Houlihan's 12K*

Favorite run: Briones Regional Park reservoir loop and the Lafayette-Moraga Trail

Tip: "Have patience. Start slowly, get an established routine, and look for progress over a long period of time."

RUNNING CLUBS

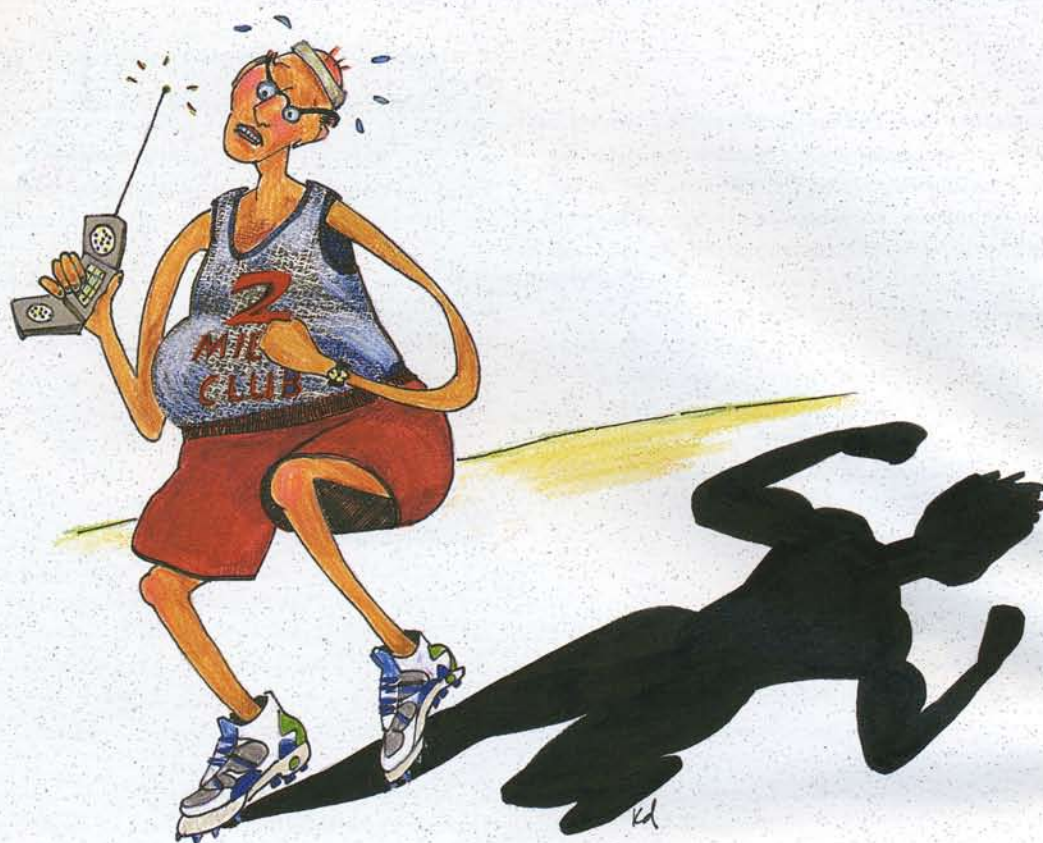
People sometimes complain that running is boring and lacks the camaraderie of team sports. My response: Try running with a club. You'll enjoy yourself more, and you'll likely run farther and faster in the company of others. All of the groups listed here are open to new members; call their hotlines or visit their websites for details on where to meet.

Diablo Road Runners

I have the Diablo Road Runners to thank for introducing me to many of Contra Costa's trails. The DRRs meet Wednesdays at 6:45 p.m. and Saturdays at 8:30 a.m. for runs of five to eight miles in length. This is truly a group for all ability levels—some guys lead the pack at a sub-6-minute pace, and others bring up the rear jogging or walking slower than 10 minutes per mile. A small group also meets Tuesdays at 6:30 p.m. for track workouts. No one can recall exactly when the Diablo Road Runners formed, but their best guess is 1976. The club now counts about 160 members, and a typical run draws 30 to 45, most of whom go out to eat together after the scheduled run.

906-8880; www.diablorunners.com





East Bay Frontrunners & Walkers

This is the local chapter of the worldwide Frontrunners group for gay and lesbian runners and walkers. Founded in 1984, the East Bay club meets Saturdays at 9 a.m. for group runs and walks three to six miles in length, followed by breakfast at a local diner. Lake Merritt, Redwood Regional Park, Strawberry Canyon, and the Lafayette Reservoir are some of their common destinations. The chapter has about 60 members total, and 10 to 15 people show up each weekend for Saturday workouts. Says club president Michael Campbell, "It's a really fun group—more like a family-type thing than some of the clubs that are really huge."

(510) 465-3089

East Bay Striders

I once showed up for an 8-mile run with the Striders and discovered what it's like to finish last. The other runners were exceedingly friendly and encouraged me to join them again—after all, EBS is open to runners of all abilities—but I could tell this is a club geared toward serious runners who train hard and pay close attention to their split times. "The club is open to people of all talent levels who are interested in becoming faster," is the way club treasurer John Monteverdi describes it. Founded in 1983, EBS has about 100 members—many of whom race competitively—and the club participates in the USA Track & Field Pacific Association's Grand Prix series of road races. The club meets Sundays at 8:30 a.m. for runs 7 to 13 miles long, and Thursdays at 5:30 p.m. for track workouts.

(510) 428-1200; tornado.sfsu.edu

Forward Motion Sports

Forward Motion's Wednesday-night run is more of a scene than a club. At 6:30 p.m. in downtown Danville, heart rate monitors and stopwatches start beeping and Hartz Avenue becomes overrun (literally) with 150 to 200 runners taking off. They usually run an out-and-back of 2 to 10 miles on the Iron Horse Trail or a 6-mile loop on El Pintado, and some runners choose to run trails at Las Trampas Regional Park. Store owner Marty Breen says it's the largest continually run group workout in the country. This is a club for all types and ages, but the majority look like young, fit professionals. Ability levels run the gamut—Ironmen triathletes and ultrarunners mix easily with those who still haven't run off their beer bellies. Forward Motion also organizes a track workout Tuesdays at 6:30 p.m.

820-9966; www.forwardmotion.com

Huffers & Puffers

Pleasanton chiropractor and middle-of-the-pack runner Wayne Coleman started this club in the fall of 1996, and the group's first few members chose the name to emphasize their noncompetitive, laid-back attitude. The H&Ps meet Saturdays at 9 a.m. and Wednesdays at 6:30 p.m. for runs around Pleasanton's residential streets and creekside paths. Coleman says anywhere from 4 to 30 people—"a lot of 40ish types"—show up for the club's runs, which range from 3 to 10 miles. The club recently started holding track workouts Tuesdays at 7 p.m. "We exist mainly just so people can have other people to run with," says Coleman. "We always encourage beginners to come out; we have runners of all different levels, and everybody is welcome."

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Orinda RoadRunners

Six days a week, up before the sun—that's the Orinda RoadRunners regimen. Next year this slightly graying group with some 100 members will celebrate 25 years of running around the Lamorinda area while most people are in bed pushing their snooze buttons. ORR is headed by Jerry Wendt of Lafayette, who has crossed the finish line of 37 marathons, and he says the club is open to all ages and strives to meet the needs of serious and casual runners alike. Members meet at 5:30 or 5:45 a.m. weekdays for runs of four to six miles around residential streets, and at 7 or 7:30 a.m. on weekends for runs of five to ten miles on trails. After the run, it's time to trade one-liners over coffee at a local coffee shop.

283-2045

Team in Training

Tens of thousands of people have trained to run a marathon through this national program that raises money for the Leukemia Society of America. Each participant raises money and runs on behalf of a leukemia patient. But how does an average Joe manage to run 26.2 miles? The program's teams are led by coaches who get even the most out-of-shape beginners to the finish line through a comprehensive six-day-a-week training schedule.

1-800-78-TRAIN

Transition Sports Triathlon Club

This Orinda store has a twice-weekly workout for those who want to take on the multisport challenge. Transition Sports owner and triathlete Krag Rasmussen says runners and cyclists of all levels are welcome to join the group Tuesdays at 6:15 p.m. for a run and Thursdays at the same time for a bike ride. The group has an optional run following the Thursday ride and occasional weekend workouts, including some scheduled swims, too—call for details. Rasmussen started the club workouts in January and says "it's not a big group, but just right."

253-8399

WHERE TO SHOP

Running is a blissfully uncomplicated sport. A runner can be fully equipped for under \$150—something a cyclist, skier, or golfer can only dream about.

Since the sport is so affordable, it's foolish to buy a middling pair of running shoes just to save 30 bucks. Purchasing a proper pair of shoes—and replacing them every 400 to 500 miles—is essential if you want to stay injury-free.

Unlike the big sporting-good chains, these specialty shops are staffed by runners who will study your footstrike and consider your training goals in order to find the best shoe for you. "Big 5 and Copeland's will just hand you a shoe. They're not going to evaluate your biomechanics," says Laurey Davis, owner of Fleet Feet Sports in Pleasanton and a competitive 5K racer.

She and the owners of other businesses listed here are a great source of information about training, trail runs, upcoming races,

RESOURCES

Maps and Other Publications:

Maps for trails on **East Bay Regional Park District** land are available for free at many of the trailheads or can be picked up at the district's headquarters, 2950 Peralta Oaks Court, Oakland, (510) 635-0135. A map pack with guides to the district's 50 parks and 20 regional trails costs \$5.

Maps for the **Shell Ridge Recreation Area** and the canal trails are available for \$1.50 at Walnut Creek City Hall, 1666 N. Main St., 943-5800.

A topographical trail map of **Mount Diablo**, published by the Mount Diablo Interpretive Association, is available for \$4.50 at local bike and outdoors stores, at the Mount Diablo ranger stations, or through the MDIA, 837-2525 or 828-3733.

The East Bay Out, by Malcolm Margolin (Heyday Books, \$12), is available at local bookstores. It's a beautifully written guide to the East Bay Regional Park District's trails.

The Runner's Schedule used to be a low-budget calendar of road races throughout California but has matured into a slick magazine that includes useful articles written for runners, by runners. Pick it up at a running specialty store for \$1.95 or subscribe by calling (415) 472-7223.

Websites:

East Bay Regional Park District: www.ebparks.org

The park district's site is brimming with information about area trails, plus ideas on things to do and places to go.

Trails of the Diablo Valley: members.xoom.com/OutPost

Produced by an anonymous person whose e-mail moniker is "The Trailrunner," this site gives detailed descriptions of trails on Mount Diablo, East Bay Regional Park District land, Walnut Creek open space districts, and elsewhere.

Mount Diablo Interpretive Association: www.mdia.org

Visit this site to learn interesting facts that will enhance your appreciation of Mount Diablo, and take a virtual hike to check out the mountain's trails.

East Bay Striders: tornado.sfsu.edu

This site is a great source for trail maps and links to other running-related sites.

The Schedule: www.theschedule.com

This is the online version of the *Runner's Schedule* magazine and has a calendar of road races, race results, and more.

Runner's World: www.runnersworld.com

The online version of *Runner's World* magazine has sections devoted to beginning runners, injury prevention, nutrition, training tips, shoe reviews, and more, plus a daily news update.

and organized group runs. These stores also stock that intangible, often elusive element that's key to successful running: motivation. When you see the piles of Powerbars and packets of Gu, the stacks of 10K race forms, and racks of Lycra and CoolMax clothes, you'll find yourself vowing to rise an hour earlier each morning to squeeze in a five-miler before your commute.

Forward Motion Sports

Runner Marty Breen and brother Gary, an Ironman triathlete, did more than open a new store for runners and triathletes in 1991. They also established the area's most popular gathering point for runners of all ability levels. Some 150 runners stop traffic on Hartz Avenue every Wednesday night when they take off on Forward Motion's group run, which bills itself as the largest continually run group workout in the country. The store is staffed by runners—two of whom are high school track and cross-country coaches—and sells several dozen types of running shoes and just about every running accessory on the market. Triathletes will find a full line of specialized swim gear here, too. The store will move into a new and larger building next door to its current location in March, and Marty Breen says he'll use the extra square footage to offer even more types of running shoes.

412 Hartz Ave., Danville, 820-9966

Fleet Feet Sports, Pleasanton

Recognizing that the tri-valley area has a growing number of runners and running events, runner and swimmer Laurey Davis opened a Fleet Feet franchise in Pleasanton last April. "I like motivating other people to start running and to keep it up," says Davis, who can be seen running with the Diablo Road Runners and finishing near or at the top of many local races. "I believe in selling what I know, and I swim and I run." To that end, the store stocks a complete line of running gear, including some 50 different types of shoes, and swim gear, too. The store also organizes a women's-only group run Thursday nights at 7 p.m., and the Huffers & Puffers group meets there Saturdays at 9 a.m.

310 Main St., Suite C, Pleasanton, 426-5576

Fleet Feet Sports, Walnut Creek

When Berkeley resident Valerie Doyle opened Fleet Feet Walnut Creek in 1983, she drew on her experience as a top triathlete, ultrarunner (racing 50 miles or farther), and marathoner to develop a haven for runners. (How many marathons has she run? "I stopped counting at 60.") Doyle ran competitively until her 50th birthday in 1992 and now uses running to stay in shape for a variety of sports, including back-country skiing and mountain-bike racing. Her sales staff is made up of avid runners, and she says the store's success is due to her staff's ability to find the best shoe for individual runners and walkers. The store is dedicated to runners and walkers, period, so you won't find other types of athletic shoes or swim gear there—just three dozen or so models of high-end running shoes, along with clothes and accessories for running and walking in all seasons.

1528 Bonanza St., Walnut Creek, 943-6453

Transition Sports Inc.

Krag Rasmussen, a 30-year-old triathlete, bought Transition Sports a year ago with his buddy Steve Banducci. The two Walnut Creek natives saw demand for a store that caters to the needs of the area's growing number of triathletes. A runner will find a good inventory of quality running shoes and running accessories here, along with swim gear, cycling clothes, and other goodies for Ironmen-in-training. The store welcomes runners and cyclists of all ability levels to join its triathlon training group, which meets Tuesdays at 6:15 p.m. for a run and Thursdays at the same time for a bike ride.

270 Village Square, Orinda, 253-8399

GET READY, GET SET...

You don't have to go far to find a road race. Here's a calendar of races held annually in Contra Costa and Alameda counties. These events are subject to change or cancellation; call for a registration form and for additional information.

1998

- Oct. 4: Mountain Challenge 10.8M, Danville, 935-0472
- Oct. 11: Primo's Run for Education 5K/10K/Half Marathon, San Ramon, 279-6670
- Oct. 25: Lafayette Reservoir Run 5K/10K/2M, Lafayette, 284-7404
- Nov. 7: Get Dirty Trail Adventures 5M/Half-Marathon, Walnut Creek, 820-9966
- Nov. 22: Pleasant Hill Turkey Trot 8.1M, Briones Regional Park, 682-0896
- Dec. 5: Chevron Bah Humbug 5K, San Ramon, 275-2300
- Dec. 12: Holiday Run & Walk for Health 1M/3M/10K, Antioch, 757-2379

1999

- March 14: Nicky's Rainbow Run 10K/3M, Berkeley, (510) 704-2813
- March 20: Greek Independence Day 5K/10K, Oakland, (510) 521-3310
- April 18: Livermore Fitness Days 5K/10K, Livermore, 447-8426
- April 18: The Brickyard 4M/8M, Martinez, 906-8880
- May 2: Devil Mountain Run 5K/10K, Danville, (415) 564-0532
- May 16: Tilden Tough Ten 10M, Tilden Regional Park, (510) 339-2430
- May 30: Wind Breaker 5K, San Ramon, (510) 275-2300
- June 6: Spirit Run 5K/10K, Pleasanton, 462-3557
- June 13: Danville 5000 (5K), Danville, 820-9966
- Aug. 1: Skyline 50K Endurance Run, Castro Valley, (510) 430-1591
- Aug. 29: Livermore Valley Vine to Wine 5K/10K, Livermore, (415) 759-2690
- Sept. 12: Walnut Festival 5K/10K, Walnut Creek, 746-7175
- Sept. 18: Back to School Scholarship 5K/10K, Pleasanton, (209) 795-7832