



This team of Iraq war veterans ran in last year's American Odyssey Relay. The relay will return this year, April 23-24. The 200-mile relay course uses back roads from Gettysburg, Pa., through Washington County and heads to Washington along the C&O Canal Towpath. Team registrations are still being accepted.

American Odyssey Relay scheduled

The American Odyssey Relay offers an interesting way to tour the back roads surrounding Frederick County this spring. The relay race is April 23 and 24.

Think of it as three 10K races, interspersed by a few naps and a meal. Your first run will probably be in daylight; your second run will almost definitely be in darkness; and your third run will again be in daylight.

You may be a little sleep deprived, and you may need a shower. But the relay provides an opportunity for you to get in touch with your inner runner, along with the inner runners of 11 teammates.

Teams of 12 run 200 miles from Gettysburg, Pa., to Washington, along meandering back roads and some easy trails. The course traverses through four states and the District of Columbia.

Last year was the first for the relay, which had 108 teams of mostly 12 people, maybe a few less. This year, nearly 100 teams have already signed up. Race director Bob Fleshner said interest has been excellent.

Fleshner, a runner who lives in Bethesda, will be speaking at If the Shoe Fits in Frederick on Feb. 6 from noon to 1:30 p.m. He will also be offering a discount to teams that sign up for the race at the store.

Registration fee is \$1,260 per team, but those who sign up after Fleshner's talk will get the early bird rate of \$1,140. Race fees cover race shirts, race support and aid stations along the way. Runners will be provided with snacks and drinks at aid stations.

What it doesn't provide is a van to transport the runners, meals and additional food.

Teams are advised to rent two vans, enough to hold six runners. Teams divide in two, with half the runners on duty while the other half rest. The six runners in the first van will run the first six legs, and meet the second van at a designated transition point. That van will then follow the second six runners on their legs, until meeting up with the first van after the 12th leg.

Relay exchange stops may be remote, but transition stops will have parking and an aid station for runners.

Runners will begin based on predicted pace anywhere from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. April 23 in Gettysburg. Slower teams start first. The fastest teams will likely overtake the slowest teams about midway through the race, with finish times expected to be about six hours apart in Washington.

It's important for teams to be honest about pace, Fleshner

GOING THE DISTANCE

By **KAREN GARDNER**

■ For suggestions or to include your event in the list of upcoming events, e-mail kgardner@newspost.com, or call 301-662-1177 ext. 268.

said. He advises that teams estimate each person's pace to be slightly slower than 10K per mile pace. Teams that considerably underestimate their pace throw the race support off balance, Fleshner said.

"It's one thing if you say 10 minutes and you run a 9:30," he said. "That's OK. It's another if you say 10 minutes and you run a 7:30."

Teams can be all men, all women or mixed. A team of seven men and five women is considered all male, for example. "You need six women to be a mixed team," Fleshner said.

Many teams design team T-shirts, and decorate their vans. Fleshner recalled on one of his relay adventures riding in a van decorated with a poster of John Belushi, that was called, appropriately, "Animal House."

One group of women last year dubbed their team the "Wolf Pack" with the slogan "Running for the howl of it."

The legs vary from 3 miles to nearly 9 miles. A chart on the course maps included on the website indicate distance and difficulty. The legs are rated easy, medium, hard and very hard. The toughest courses are usually the hilliest.

Teams do not have to have a full contingent of 12, if some members don't mind running four relay legs. Twelve runners spreads out not only the price but the difficulty.

Fleshner said some teams field as few as six people, with each person running six legs. Those are usually people training for ultramarathons.

Fleshner advises following the maps closely. If runners get lost, the rules do not permit them to accept a ride from their teammates. So getting lost just adds that many more miles to a leg.

The race starts in the tran-

quil countryside around Gettysburg, and winds through two covered bridges. Then the ferocious hills start. Runners get a break on the Frederick County section, which goes along the flat C&O Canal Towpath before finishing in Washington.

One change to last year's course involves a middle-of-the-night run near Keedysville. This 8.5-mile stretch, on some curvy, narrow roads, was too long and too desolate, Fleshner said. Former Keedysville Town Administrator Amy Simmons arranged for the runners to transition at her sister's farm outside the village. This will be known as the Sister to Sister transition.

Runners will then head toward Shepherdstown, W.Va., where a local organization hopes to put on a pancake breakfast for charity. This will be in the wee hours of the morning.

Runners will wear headlamps and flashing vests, and be accompanied by a pacer during these dark stretches. Team vans will likely be nearby. Fleshner is getting permits for the entire course, so local authorities will be aware of the race.

For the half of the team not on the road at night, Fleshner said runners can crash at the central transition area at Boonsboro High School, or in local motels. There will be showers at the Boonsboro gym.

The finish will be at the Southwest Waterfront Park in Washington. Runners will be greeted with food, drinks and music.

Like last year, there will be a few running celebrities. Veteran marathoner and ultra runner Dane Rauschenberg will be running the relay, except he plans to do it solo.

Mayor Adrian Fenty, also a runner, will again participate on a team, as he did last year.

A portion of the race proceeds will go to the Wellness Community DC, a cancer support services charity.

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If the Shoe Fits is located at 1507 W. Patrick St. in Frederick. For details on the relay, check the website, www.american-odysseyrelay.com.