

RUNNING AWAY

by Mark R. Johnson

A musket ball whizzes past my head and crushes with a thwip into a nearby tree. Running faster, I feel the ground quiver as a cannon thunders. Snare drums erupt through the woods. I enter a farmer's field and dash alongside a thigh-high stonewall, heading for cover—until the sight of a lady piloting a baby jogger jolts me back to my senses.

It's understandable if your imagination outpaces your legs in Concord, MA: running through skirmish sites of the American Revolution seems to have that effect. Concord—if your high school history lessons don't come flooding back—was where the war for independence officially ignited in 1775. And it's really just one chapter of this rural hamlet's history; the town is also renowned for its role in the return-to-nature transcendentalist movement and as a place where many literary legends have hung their hats.

Located just 20 miles west of Boston, Concord is quintessential New England: tidy village green, soaring church steeples, colonial-era homes. Its landscape is a patchwork of orchards, pastures and woods, stitched together with dry stonewalls. I grew up here, running the back roads and byways, and now that I live in Oregon, the following are some of the runs that I like to go "home" to.

You can sample many of Concord's key sights on a short run from downtown. From the center's cluster of boutiques and bookstores—where you can peruse the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Nathaniel Hawthorne—head past the Colonial Inn on Monument St. to the Old Manse, where both writers once lived. Then, hang a left down the wide pathway, passing through a corridor of trees to the Old North Bridge, the site of an infamous clash between British Redcoats and local militia. Cross the Concord River, run past the Minuteman Statue (made from a melted-down Revolutionary War cannon), and grind up the hill. Go right at the top, turn right down

Liberty St. until you hit Monument again, and return to town.

Visiting a graveyard may not be on your must-do list, but sprawling Sleepy Hollow is actually quite inviting. Add a tour onto either end of the previous run, accessing it from Bedford St. Follow the main road as it meanders through the trees, then head over to the north side, to "Author's Ridge," and pay tribute to the likes of Emerson, Hawthorne and Henry David Thoreau.

Speaking of Thoreau, you can follow in his solitude-seeking footsteps at Walden Pond—but go in the early morning hours to experience the tranquility that H.D. embraced. On a two-mile, waterside loop, check out the site of the cabin where he wrote *Walden*. Several other trails radiate outward and offer added mileage. Find it on Route 126, just minutes from town.

Perhaps nowhere is local history more

Corner on Lexington Rd. (and just up the way from Louisa May Alcott's former home).

For a little more distance, hop on the 11 mile Minuteman Commuter Bikeway, a rails-to-trails project that extends from Concord to Cambridge. Well, officially it begins in Bedford, but I discovered this excellent extension originating closer to home, even if it is a bit overgrown. Head for Great Meadows Wildlife Refuge (take Bedford St. 1.5 miles to Monsen Rd.), look on the right for a trail that heads east through the woods. This earthen trail soon morphs to paved pathway, where you'll join the ranks of runners, walkers and cyclists as you head down this smooth-as-board route, eventually arriving at Alewife Station. Back at Great Meadows, there's a great short loop. Here, natural history takes the spotlight, and

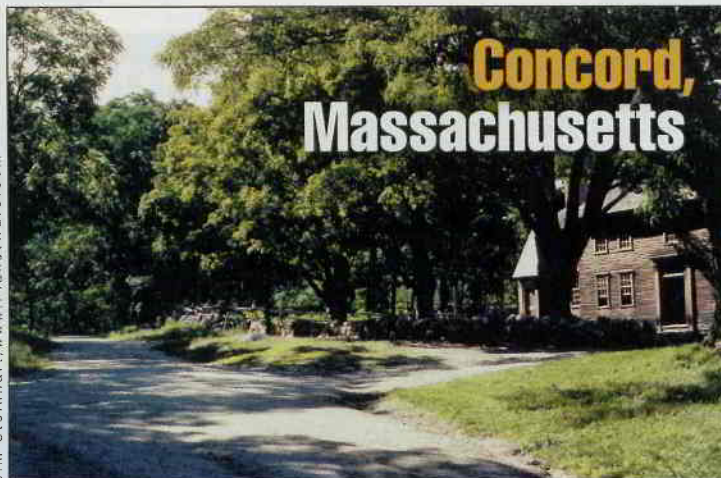
you can run 2.5 miles of gravelly trails around the watery habitat while spying all kinds of bird life. The terrain is flat, the trails are wide, and at the end there's an observation tower.

In neighboring Carlisle, Great Brook Farm State Park—part farm, part forest—offers nearly 20 miles or trails, looping around ponds and linking countless meadows; there's a map board at the entrance showing all the options. It's a perfect place

to unwind for an afternoon. Great Brook is located on Lowell Rd., just down from the Carlisle center roundabout.

If you feel like competing, there's the Battle Road Run 10K (May), the Genesis Battlegreen Run 10K in nearby Lexington (November), and every Fourth of July, the 5M Minuteman Classic. Check with Carr's Concord Sports (69 Main St., (978) 369-4087) for race info and running gear. **f**

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latent than on the Battle Road Trail, a stonewall pathway extending 5.5 miles from Concord to Lexington. This is where the imaginary musket balls really begin to fly; it was here that Minutemen chased British troops all the way to Boston, and so began the Revolution. Weaving through fields, wetlands and woods, the Battle Road features a collection of restored colonial homes and old foundations. You may even run past some folks (park rangers, usually) dressed in period clothing. Along the way, interpretive signs replay the battle, and there are visitor centers at both ends to enjoy while stretching. Start at Meriam's