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Ian Torrence, (above) co-director of the Lithia Loop Trail Marathon goes for a run with trail runners Erik and Jen (far left). Southern Oregon offers plenty of trails with gorgeous views of nature.



Running Rogue

DISTANCE RUNNERS TACKLE SOUTHERN OREGON TERRAIN

words by *Valerie Coulman*

photography by *Jared Cruce*

Southern Oregon is well known for beautiful mountains, rugged terrain and an amazing variety of recreation opportunities, all of which has lately drawn distance runners to area hills. Top-notch runners can be found living throughout Southern Oregon and others are traveling from all over North America to tackle local trails.

"Southern Oregon is becoming a hotbed for distance runners," says Stan Goodell, distance runner and trainer in Grants Pass. "Our location is very unique. Trails are plentiful, bike paths are beginning to connect from Ashland to Grants Pass and parks are abundant with chip trails and smooth surfaces."

Along with road marathons, Southern Oregon's terrain is the perfect setting for trail marathons and runs. "Road marathons tend to be a bit more exciting because of the large crowds cheering you on," says Goodell, who averages three marathons per year. "Trail marathons are much more serene. The focus tends to be on the beauty of nature and the wild."

Local expert Rob Cain is the co-director of Siskiyou Out Back (SOB) Trail Runs, a local organization that offers both a 15K and a 50K run. "A trail run for the most part is on single track trails or fire roads," he explains. "People can go back and forth, but those who love trail runs tend to stick to trail runs."

What's so attractive about a trail run? "You get that sense of being up in the mountains, having the adventure," says Ian Torrence, co-director of the Rogue Valley's only marathon, the Lithia Loop Trail Marathon in Ashland. Part of the adventure is the additional challenges inherent to trail running. "Trail marathons are going to have more gain [net elevation gain/loss] and the footing is difficult," says Torrence. "Relatively speaking, it will take longer to run a trail."



Runners hit the streets and trails of Southern Oregon. Stretching before a run can prevent injuries for runners.

The dust, rocks, roots and plenty of sunshine mentioned in the SOB registration fee can all impact race results. Some runners find the environment harder on their race strategy. "It's hard to run a race in no man's land," says Torrence, meaning when runners are often separated by terrain and distance. Aid stations are farther apart and weather plays an important role, as well. During a race, "electrolytes are really important," reminds Cain. Eating is important in a race that will take hours to complete.

"The surfaces of trail running can lead to injuries from tripping over roots and stepping in holes when the eyes are focused on the surrounding areas of beauty instead of looking directly ahead," reminds Goodell.

Preparation becomes key, both on and off the course. "Serious runners in Oregon run year around but in stages of intensity, relaxation and high mileage/low mileage routines," says Goodell. "Overtraining is just as costly to a runner as not training enough. When this happens muscle strains become a common injury and the runner has no choice but to stop running and get proper rest."

"If you're sensible about things, you'll enjoy running for a long time," says Bennett, a runner since the 1970s who is currently a member of Southern Oregon Sizzlers

Running Club. "When you trail run, you have to keep your eyes on your feet. The right equipment obviously helps, and the technical aspects of running shoes have increased tremendously."

"While road shoes are designed for repetitive impact," explains Torrence, "trail shoes have a more aggressive tread, water- and dirt-resistant uppers and more protection under the ball of the foot, all of which help prevent injury on the trail."

To a distance runner, it's all relative. "A 50K is easier than a marathon, in my opinion," Cain admits, partly because the pace is slower. And the scenery and mountain air add a definite appeal. "Dirt and undulating trails are much better for the body and soul," says Torrence.

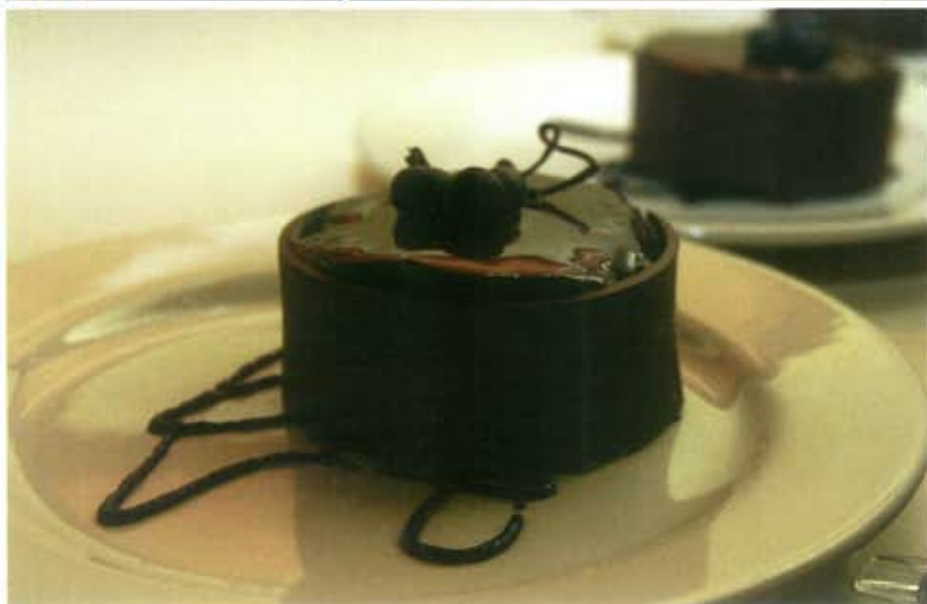
And none of trail running's challenges daunt the dedicated. "The SOB generally fills up well before the race," Cain says.

Torrence agrees, adding that the SOB has even expanded their November trail marathon. "We've got the okay from the forestry department to have up to 300 runners this year."

"The challenge of running 26 miles or longer is not easily explained because one has to go through it to really understand it," says Goodell. "How does one explain all the pain going through their body for 26.2 miles only to feel total jubilation and victory two steps after crossing the finish line and having that medal put around your neck by a race official? The pain goes away—you're a champion regardless of your finishing place because you just completed a task that only a few can totally understand and appreciate." ★



For Southern Oregon race information and calendars visit:
 Lithia Loop Trail Marathon:
www.roguevalleyrunners.com
 Southern Oregon Runners:
www.southernoregonsizzlersrunningclub.org
 Siskiyou Out Back Trail Runs:
www.siskiyououtback.com



Chocolate lovers unite to see (and taste) the latest unique creations at the Oregon Chocolate Festival in Ashland.



Green Chocolate?

SOUTHERN OREGON'S CHOCOLATIERS PRODUCE SUSTAINABLE DECADENCE

words by *Valerie Coulman*
 photography courtesy of *Ashland Springs Hotel*

Early each spring, historic Ashland Springs Hotel hosts a chocolate's dream. The Oregon Chocolate Festival brings everything truffles to bonbons to chocolate stout to eager eaters. But it's not all about indulgence. These chocolatiers might be heavy on decadence, but they are light on the Earth.

CHOCOLATE THAT GIVES BACK

Judith Galindo, owner of Homemade Confections (www.homemadeconfections.com) in Medford and a rising star in candy-business circles, took first place at the 2009 Chocolate Festival for Best Marriage of Chocolate and Candy.

"A lot of integrity goes into each batch," says Galindo. Her commitment to excellence goes far beyond pure ingredients and personal attention to her signature English toffee and peanut brittle. Galindo also uses local suppliers to cut shipping costs and support local business. "It's important to keep it in the valley," she says. "If I order on-line or from the East Coast, it doesn't benefit anybody here."

CHOCOLATE WITH A TWIST

Chocolatier Jeff Shepherd, owner of Lilliebelle Farms (www.lilliebelle-farms.com) in Central Point, has also been inspired by the community to go beyond his signature truffles and bonbons. "Putting blue cheese in chocolate? That was a natural—my shop is right beside the Rogue Creamery. And it's good," he adds with a laugh. His chocolate creations include chocolate-dipped bacon, cayenne caramels, ghost pepper truffles and even edible paintings. "I pay homage to traditional flavors," says Shepherd. "But I was a chef for twenty years—I have to play!"

Some of the exceptional flavors Shepherd produces are a result of his search for natural and wholesome ingredients. Lilliebelle Farms is a certified organic farm and the fruit they grow is a mainstay of Shepherd's bonbons and truffles. He expects the same standard from his chocolate suppliers. Why? "I think organic tastes better. And it gives that sense of doing the right thing." But he is careful to point out, "I don't buy it just because it's organic. It has to taste good. The star has always been the chocolate."

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Oregon chocolatiers proudly show off their delicious works of art.



CHOCOLATE AS ART

Newcomers to the candy business Kay Cutter and Jean Bakewell brought unique skills to found Recession Candy Company (www.recessioncandy.com) of Ashland. "Est. 2009 out of necessity..." is their motto, and out of that necessity they've created a unique product and presentation.

Both are artists, and their classic English toffee can appropriately be purchased in gift boxes decorated with their own art prints or one-of-a-kind reclaimed glass, cut and tumbled by Bakewell. "Recession Candy Company is a totally green company," points out Bakewell with pride. "All of our packaging is made from recycled paper, and our toffee is all natural with no preservatives."

CHOCOLATE ENRICHES LIFE

For Peter Croyle of Pete's Gourmet Confections (www.petesgourmet.com) in Central Point, an eco-kosher approach to candy-making means everyone benefits. His customers are getting fresh and delicious confections, his employees benefit and the company supports earth-friendly practices.

"It's a really neat concept," says Croyle. "Kosher is generally based on Jewish law and traditions for cleanliness and food preparation," he explains. "But kosher doesn't always provide a full circle." For Croyle that circle includes every aspect of his business. From all-natural ingredients to minimizing packaging to four-day work weeks, he says, "you take care of your employees; you take care of the Earth." The payoff? "A happier, healthy employee makes a better product." It shows in every bite.

Speaking of bites, Pete's Gourmet Confections offers some tantalizing choices including the well-known gourmet marshmallows; don't forget to have them dipped in chocolate. Want more chocolate? Try the rocky road, chocolate mints, chocolate-dipped graham crackers and peppermint sticks—or even chocolate salmon. After all, when it comes to chocolate you never know until you try it! ★



The Oregon Chocolate Festival is a chocoholic's dream come true.



Oregon Chocolate Festival
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212 East Main Street, Ashland
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