

Arkansas Runner Interview – Pete Ireland
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Pete Ireland is a long time member of the Striders and has served as newsletter editor, secretary-treasurer, and race director for the Arkansas Runner 2-Mile, Arkansas 20K, and Sunset 6/12/24 Hour Race.

AR: Tell us about yourself.

PI: I was born in Arizona, but grew up in Los Angeles, graduated from Hollywood High in 1958 and UCLA in 1962, then joined the Army where I was trained as a military intelligence investigator. I was subsequently stationed in Fayetteville, NC, Atlanta, Georgia, briefly in the Panama Canal Zone, and as the resident agent in Gainesville, Georgia. After getting out of the Army, I went to work for a private firm in Atlanta for about a year doing a variety of investigative work for banks, insurance companies, and private individuals and organizations. In late 1967 I went to work for the VA Medical Center in Atlanta as a Personnel Management Specialist Trainee. Upon completion of training I transferred to the VA Medical Center in Biloxi, MS. In late 1969 I transferred to the VA Medical Center in Little Rock and remained there until I retired as Assistant Chief, Human Resources Management Service in 2002. I have lived in Benton since 1972.

AR: How long have you been running and what got you started?

PI: In the summer of 1965 I was living in Gainesville and read a condensed version of Dr. Kenneth Cooper's first book *Aerobics*, and that got me interested. I started running from where I lived, which was a basement apartment in a house at the end of a dirt road on Lake Lanier. It was about a mile round trip out to the main highway. I started running that every day. After the Army I got away from running for a while, but did a lot of walking. I started back a couple of years later and ran for about three years, though in those days rarely more than 3 miles. Then life got in the way. In May 1979, with age 40 looming on the horizon, I started back, mainly as a way to stay in shape to do other active things I enjoyed. Over time it became an end in itself. I ran my first race, the Spa 10K, in 1982.

AR: Any other family members who run?

PI: My daughter, who now lives in Oregon, runs a couple of miles a few times a week when time permits.

AR: What is a typical running week?

PI: What is typical now is a lot different than it used to be. Prior to being diagnosed with atrial fibrillation in early 2009, I usually got in one long run of 12 to 16 miles almost every week and occasionally managed two. I would normally also do a couple or three 3 mile runs during the week. I rarely did a training run longer than 20 miles and never ran more than 1300 miles in a year. Until I retired I never ran more than 1000 in a year. The A-Fib diagnosis caused me to cut back on my running because the primary triggers were allowing my heart rate to get too high, fatigue, and stress. The anti-arrhythmic medication works great but slows my heart rate and thus, along with age, really slows my running. Since the diagnosis I have completed seven 50K races and one 50 miler, but possibly have run my last ultra.

In 2012 I tore the medial meniscus in my right knee and that really put a damper on things. Now, I normally walk a couple of hilly miles several days a week, run/hike 5 or 6 miles on trails at Burns Park almost weekly, and run/hike 5 to 14 miles off pavement on the weekend two or three times a month. I average about 20 miles a week now, with the majority of it walking.

AR: Have you had any other significant injuries?

PI: Until I tore the meniscus in 2012 I had rarely been injured. Prior to that it had been 8 or 9 years. Only three or four times over 30+ years did I have to be off more than a few days because of a running related injury. I did have a chronic patellar tendon issue in one knee that bothered me for several years, but I finished many races, including several 100s despite it. It disappeared in about 2004 after I worked on changing my foot strike to a more midfoot landing. After tearing the medial meniscus in 2012, and subsequent surgery, I took a couple of months off and since then have mostly been walking, hiking, and doing a little easy trail running.

AR: How about training partners?

PI: During the week I normally work out alone, mostly walking. One day a week I often go to Burns Park in North Little Rock and do trails usually with a couple or three friends. My weekend run/hikes are normally done with friends. Prior to my knee injury I had been going to the morning fun runs at Hurricane Lake once or twice a week, but now I mostly avoid pavement except for walking.

AR: Do you do any cross training or other sports?

PI: I usually go to the gym a couple of times a week. I used to bike regularly, but since a couple of mishaps, one of which resulted in a broken collar bone and seven broken ribs, I have done very little riding other than doing intervals on an exercise bike at the gym. I used to do adventure races which involved canoeing, biking, and orienteering as well as running. I kayak occasionally for an upper body workout. I did a couple of triathlons back in the 90s but while I swim okay for a 100 meters or so, longer distances don't go too well. I don't enjoy swimming that much, so I decided that was not a sport for me.

AR: Do you have a favorite place to run?

PI: I like the forest service roads out in the Lake Sylvia and Lake Winona area. I also like the trails at Burns Park and in Hot Springs, as well as a few sections of the Ouachita Trail.

AR: Do you have a favorite racing distance?

PI: The last few years I was racing the 50K was my favorite, though I enjoyed about any trail run or race.

AR: What has been your longest race distance?

PI: 100 miles. I completed 11 of 15 100 mile races. I DNFd the first and last one and was 11 for 13 in between. All four of my DNFs were injury related, though I bounced back quickly from all but one of them.

AR: What have been your favorite races?

PI: I always enjoyed the challenge of the Traveller 100, but have also enjoyed running out of state ultra races such as Lean Horse 50 mile, Kettle Moraine 100K, and Mississippi Trail 50K. Sylamore Trail 50K was an in-state ultra-distance favorite.

AR: What has been your most memorable race?

PI: It is tough to single one after 30+ years. My first Pike's Peak Marathon in 1993 comes to mind – I just took it easy and enjoyed the race and the scenery. When it was over I thought it was the easiest marathon I had ever run. I went back the next year planning to improve my time, which I did, and thought it was the hardest one I had ever run. My first Traveller 100 finish in 1995 also stands out.

AR: What are your PR's?

PI: Most of them were in the last century.

5K – 21:32 (1988 Minute Man 5K)

5K Racewalk 31:57 (1996 State Championship)

10K – 44:28 (1988 Spa 10K)

20K – 1:35:41 (1988 Arkansas 20K)

Half-Marathon – 1:53:08 (1998 Lung Run)

Marathon – 3:48:32 (1988 Dallas White Rock)

50K – 5:49:xx (1996 Midnight 50K)

50 Miles: 11:19:20 (1996 Ouachita Trail 50)

100K – 14:46:19 (2006 Kettle Moraine)

100 Miles – 27:17:38 (1995 Arkansas Traveller)

I started running off pavement (trails, Forest Service roads, etc.), including my first ultra, in 1991. Since then I have done fewer than a dozen road races, not counting several racewalk races in the mid- to late 90s. Back then, racewalking was a competitive and judged event here and was even in the Grand Prix. Since switching to mainly off pavement running I have completed more than 100 off pavement races, with well over half of them being ultramarathons.

AR: Do you have a favorite shoe?

PI: Vasque Blur has been my favorite trail shoe in recent years. In road shoes I have liked Asics, most recently the 2160.

AR: What are some of your other most memorable events, moments, or achievements in running?

PI: Getting an age group first place, and age group CR on a 90+ degree day, in the Lean Horse 50 mile race in South Dakota in 2010 was a nice way to wrap up my 20 years of ultrarunning. An age group 3rd place in Kettle Moraine 100K in 2006 was what I consider my last good ultra. Other things, such as running a couple of 50Ks through thunderstorms with the thunder and lightning being almost simultaneous bring back memories.

AR: How long have you been newsletter editor?

PI: It seems like forever. I said a few years ago I would do it for one more year. Some day that year will run out.

AR: How long have you been directing races, how did you get involved, and how many races have you directed?

PI: Too long, bad luck, and I don't know. There was a vacuum in the club years ago and I got sucked in and have not totally found my way back out. I have never kept track of how many races I directed. probably close to three dozen with the Striders plus a few fund raisers for other organizations when I could not quickly think of a good excuse to avoid it. Thank goodness for good volunteers!

AR: How about other hobbies and activities?

PI: I enjoy hiking, fishing, canoeing, kayaking, camping, and reading. Some of those things I don't get around to doing as much as I used to.

AR: Favorite non-running spectator sport?

PI: College football, particularly the Razorbacks.

AR: Favorite non-running leisure activity?

PI: Probably reading, since that is the most convenient, but most any outdoor activity is great, hiking, kayaking, fishing, etc., although I tend not to go alone as often as I

used to. That can be limiting since I tend to be lazy about finding someone to go with, or go with me.

AR: Any particular running goals for the current year and beyond?

PI: My primary goal for now is to be able to run more than a few dozen yards at a time without my being concerned that my knee will start hurting. The endurance is not what it used to be, a result of medication and age. At one time I wanted to become the oldest finisher ever in the Arkansas Traveller 100. Now that I have attained the age, that is out of reach. I have gained a better understanding why there are very few 70+ year old 100 mile finishers. My long term goal is to just keep moving.

AR: Anything you would like to say to your fellow Arkansas runners?

PI: Get involved, get out and do a variety of runs and races. Volunteer at races. Try some trail running. Enjoy the sport and the people as long as you can.

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