

Banff-Jasper Relay Race revival honours memory of Garth Huck

Garth Huck was two hours away from succumbing to a brain tumour last May when a friend told him he would dedicate the first Banff-Jasper Relay Race to him.

"Hospital staff told us he was unconscious," Blair Shunk said Tuesday.

"But his eyebrows went up and a little grin stole over his face.

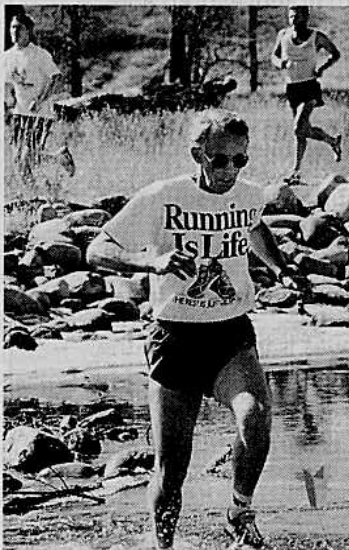
"He loved that race and ran it many times. Whenever there have been hurdles in getting a race going again, I've thought of him."

Shunk and other Calgary Roadrunners plan to stage the first annual Banff-Jasper Relay Race on June 4. Feedback from all quarters has been positive.

The Jasper-Banff Relay Race ended after 21 years in 2000 when Edmonton's University of Alberta-based Chasquis Running Club cited volunteer fatigue and the cost of an environmental impact assessment requested by Parks Canada.

"Parks Canada dedicated an environmental consultant to work with us until the completion of the race," says Hugh Magill, another organizer.

"We have met several times



Garth Huck's battle with a brain tumour led his friends to dedicate the first Banff-Jasper Relay Race in his honour.

Nick Lees



with Parks representatives and while the study hasn't been finalized, we have policy approval. They have been most helpful."

But before you grab your runners and head for what was an overnight race, major changes should be noted.

While the relay will still cover 288 kilometres in 17 stages on the Icefields Parkway, it will be run in reverse.

And it will be run in two sections.

Runners on the first eight legs will begin in Banff at 8:35 a.m. and finish at Saskatchewan River Crossing.

Those covering the last nine legs will begin at Saskatchewan River Crossing at 7 a.m. They will have one-minute wave starts, with all 125 teams running by 7:12 a.m.

"Running in daylight will mean there will be no nocturnal meetings with bears at the Bow Summit and at the Lake Louise-Trans Canada Highway interchange," says Shunk.

"Encounters with bears at these points was always a concern. Running in daylight will also help traffic safety issues."

The resurrection of a race through some of Alberta's most scenic country was greeted with delight in Jasper.

Edmonton's John Day, owner of Mountain Park Lodges, has entered a team and said his hotels would pick up the cost of a finish-line supper at the Jasper Activity Centre.

"It's a great event to help celebrate Alberta's centennial year," said Helen Kelleher, Jasper Chamber of Commerce acting-general manager.

Connie Sikkes, a member of the Friends of Jasper National Park, said her group plans to help at an aid station.

"We expect as many as 3,000 runners, friends and family members in town at the end of the race," she said.

"It's still really the shoulder season here and with many people staying overnight, eating and gassing up, it will help the community financially."

Running Room president and founder John Stanton, who ran in the former race 14 times, said he would "love to go back and take part in the race again.

"Many runners have fond memories of the Jasper-Banff race and will want to run out of nostalgia."

Eve Campbell, the workhorse behind the Jasper-Banff race that attracted teams from Japan, Switzerland, Peru and from throughout the United States and Canada, said she wishes organizers of this race the best of luck.

"It's a totally different race," she said. "It's not overnight, but it's still difficult and will require a tremendous amount of planning."

Registration has only been open for one week (www.bjr.ca) and eight teams have so far signed up. Sponsors and volunteers are being sought.

Huck, 58 when he passed through the Pearly Gates looking good, ran for the Old Dogs Masters' team in the final J-B race, clocking Stage 16 at a 6:57/mile.

"Our team was so enthusiastic about the race that when Garth once went back up to his office to get his kit we left without him," says Magill.

"We drove from Calgary and were at the pasta supper in Jasper before we missed him. He caught a ride up and chuckled along with us. He led in such a way that we didn't even know he was leading us. We'll be thinking of him."

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