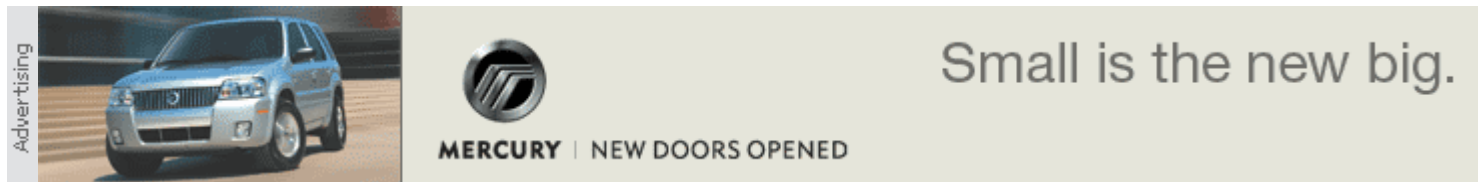


White Rock Marathon



Dallas, Texas
Friday December 10, 2004 8:44 a.m. CST

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Solemates: Barefoot marathoners see shoes as arch enemy

02:40 AM CST on Friday, December 10, 2004

By **DEBBIE FETTERMAN** / Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News

Rick Roeber of Lee's Summit, Mo., will run his fourth Dallas White Rock Marathon on Sunday. This one will be unlike his first three.

Roeber plans to run the entire 26.2-mile course barefoot. Becoming a barefoot marathoner renewed Roeber's passion for

COURSE MAP (.pdf)



Debbie Fetterman writes about running for *The Dallas Morning News*.

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running. He said he now runs without chronic knee pain. He posted a personal best within two months of taking up barefoot running.

"It added a whole new dimension," said Roeber, 48, who attended Arlington Sam Houston and still has family in the area. "I've always loved running, but something was missing. I'm having a blast now."

He struggled to express in words exactly why.

"It's a zen thing," he said. "It's great feeling the earth underneath you or the asphalt or the grass. It's the same thing as working with gloves. You feel clumsy, and you can't feel what you're doing. Our appendages were made to feel."

Dallas physical therapist and barefoot runner Lisa Ann McCall said our bodies have receptors in the feet and ankles that pick up information on how to move – when not encumbered by shoes. She said she uses barefoot running as a preventative and rehabilitation tool for her runners.

Others question whether the potential benefits of barefoot running could outweigh the risks. There are the obvious dangers of puncture wounds caused from foreign objects lodging in one's foot.

Dallas-area podiatrist Roy Ashton said the technology in running shoes provides shock absorption missing from bare feet. Ashton said people come down with five to six times their body weight on their feet. He said he wouldn't recommend barefoot marathon running to anyone.

"Obviously, people do amazing things," he said. "There are the polar bear club members that swim in freezing water. There are



BarefootRunner.org
Through his Web site, Ken Saxton (left) helped turn on Rick Roeber to the joys of running barefoot.

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people who ski barefoot. I'd put this in that category."

McCall said that she has research showing that the intrinsic muscles of the foot are designed to absorb the vertical force that comes from the ground up through the body.

"When we wear shoes, the intrinsic muscles do not get a chance to work as they were designed," she said. "The bone and connective tissue of the foot absorb the force, which results oftentimes in stress fractures and plantar fasciitis," an inflammation of the bottom of the foot.

Roeber said shoeless runners have posted world-class marks over the years. Ethiopia's Abebe Bikila, considered one of the greatest Olympic marathoners, won the 1960 gold medal in a world record two hours, 15 minutes, 17 seconds running barefoot in Rome. He never meant to run that race barefoot, said Dr. Robert Vaughan, exercise physiologist at the Baylor Tom Landry Center. His shoes had not shown up. In 1964, he won the Olympic gold in Tokyo with another world record (2:12:11.2) while wearing shoes.

Zola Budd, another famous barefoot runner, set a track world record in the 5,000 meters (15:01.83) in January 1984.

Roeber hadn't considered running barefoot until March 2003. Surfing the Internet, he found a reference from a woman about a "Jesus lookalike" running barefoot past her at the Long Beach Marathon. Roeber's curiosity was piqued.

He learned the runner was Ken Saxton, a longtime barefoot marathoner. He corresponded with Saxton and read everything he could on Saxton's Web site, www.runningbarefoot.org.

Initially, Roeber considered all the money he would save not buying \$80 shoes every few months. Then he recalled how much he enjoyed running barefoot as a kid. Saxton's Web site also noted that running barefoot reduced Saxton's knee and leg pain.

For Roeber, who has run five marathons barefoot, the story is

much the same. His chronic knee pain disappeared. He said he thinks his shock-absorbing shoes masked symptoms.

"The feet act like a regulator," said Roeber, who has a Web site of his own – BarefootRunner .org. "I get instant sensory feedback. The shoe companies make shoes too good. You don't get that feedback."

Further, barefoot running helps people land on the middle of their feet, preventing them from having heel strikes, McCall said. This is more biomechanically correct, she said.

McCall said the skin of the foot toughens up over time. Vaughan says that barefoot running, adopted slowly and on safe surfaces, can strengthen the feet.

"We didn't creep out of the primordial ooze onto concrete," Vaughan said. "It was a softer surface."

DALLAS WHITE ROCK MARATHON

What: 35th Dallas White Rock Marathon, Michelob Ultra "Run the Rock" Half Marathon, and Bank of America Five-Person Relays, all presented by the Dallas Police Association.

When: 8 a .m. Sunday

Where: Start and finish at Victory Plaza, American Airlines Center, Dallas

Costs: Marathon \$80 today, \$100 Saturday. Half marathon \$55 today, \$75 Saturday. Five-person relay \$160 today, \$180 Saturday. No race-day registration.

Field: Approximately 10,000 anticipated.

Information: 214-372-2068 or www.runtherock.com

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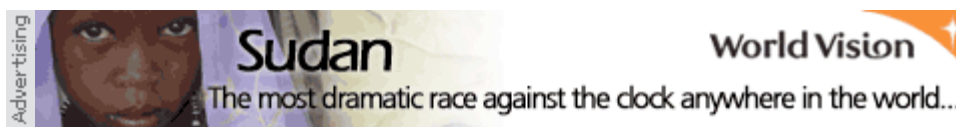


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