

Capon Springs WV 50K Trip Report May 8-12, 2009

I went, I did, I conquered.

You might remember that last year I'd met these delightfully lovely runners who convinced me to try this 50K, but they couldn't get me over the finish line in 2008. With their continued encouragement, I went again, and with their help, I finished this 50K (31 miles) technical trail run over hill and dale, through mud and pastures, a few miscues and added mileage, super high mountains, over dozens of stream crossings, in the heat and humidity, and finished in 8:38. I was thrilled. See the morning picture?



Conditions weren't much better than last year (see picture of last year's group, most returnees this year), there having been a lot of rain and thus swollen rivers. Thus the organizers gave us more than the 8 hour cut off time. Yet still, of 200 who entered, 126 of us finished. I didn't mind being at the back of the pack and was just grateful to finish.

Would I do it again?

For the first 7 or so hours of the run, I was certain that I had to return no matter whether I finished or not. It was that gorgeous. The stream crossings at times were upwards to the knees but I'd taken trekking poles and felt more secure and didn't have to wait for someone to hold my hand to cross the waters. But at the last 1 ½ hours, I was doubtful of finishing let alone wanting to return. Still, here I am now, looking forward to next year! Is this something like childbirth that you forget the discomfort? Before I left Capon Valley Farms, I reserved for next year, and followed up with asking the organizers if they were okay with me returning knowing that an 8 hour cut off probably wasn't in the cards.

Disclaimer: 2nd Liberty Lady Maricar did not go to this 50K and she's very firm that there's no mud and no hills and no 8 hour runs in her future! Yet she is learning to enjoy hiking in our practice sessions for our next goal of climbing Half Dome in Yosemite this July (in honor of her 35th and my 64th.) But next thing you know, she'll be doing a 50K in 7 hours

Plenty of tourist sites

I have to wonder why I'd ever leave Capon Valley Farms **(1)** with all the hiking trails, good food, restful atmosphere, but wonders abound in the area. Last year I stayed a few days in Winchester **(7)** and that's a possibility for 2010 again. This year I toured through Hagerstown, MD both before and after, plus picturesque Shepherdstown near to Harpers Ferry on the way home. One goes through Pennsylvania, Maryland, West Virginia, Virginia, then back into West Virginia to get to Capon. Capon Springs is about 45 minutes east of Winchester, the closest town of any size. It's in the middle of no where as evidenced by the lack of cell coverage. It encompasses 4700 acres and has been in the same family for four generations with the fourth generation now working there. It is out of the way, restful, clean and healthy and I met a family that had been coming for 39 years and counted over 150 stays. (See **(2)** and **(5)** and www.caponsprings.net.)

Compatriots



The friends who'd gotten me there in 2008 were returnees. Jim Mellody, Monica Nop, Alison and Keith, Stephanie and Debbie, all from DC area. I'd met first Monica and Jim at Myrtle Beach Marathon in February 2008, then Monica, Janice and Keith at Virginia Beach Marathon in March. They'd convinced me to try my first 50K. See the picture of our 'dirtygirlgaiters' which were a gift from Stephanie.



New friends include Lou Jones who got Monica into her first 100 miler and had just completed Umstead 100 miler himself and was my guiding light through most of this 50K, Jack Kilislian from Knoxville who hiked with us the day after and who I hope to see again in January, Seth Elsheimer who is a friend of a marathon friend and whose path I've crossed countless times but only met after the 50K, and lovely Faye who was seen using trekking poles in 2008 and encouraged me to try by using them again this year and who I'm most grateful for her kind words and advice.

The event itself

See www.runcapon50k.com for more pictures. This was the 11th annual, my friends had been there at least five times, and Lou had only missed one year. Entries were limited to 200 and only 126 finished. Some might think finishing for the free BBQ chicken dinner would be worth it. (See course and facilities description at (3).) I now realize that there were NO women in my age bracket and only a couple of men. My husband would say that the senior women were just smart enough to stay home.

You might wonder how I can feel good about my finish time of 8:38. Well, it's better than not finishing. And I wasn't at the very back, just close. And in view of friends who typically complete a marathon in 4 and 5 hours but who complete this event in 7 ½ hours, I can think my walking and hiking legs did pretty good not to mention my being the oldest woman by far. The woman winner came in around 5 ½.

It's interesting that the creators and organizers of the event are not runners at all. One is an accomplished artist, one is in a wheelchair, one rides a horse to check and mark the trail, and all are the most wonderfully kind and helpful people (all women I think) you can imagine.

Also nice to see are all the private property signs that we are allowed to run through and make ruts and create mud holes. We run across some lawns where I'm sure major repairs were required thereafter. We ran for miles along fast running streams, as evidenced by the 24 stream crossings that increased with rainfall to many more.

At Capon Farms life is slow and easy



Music starts an hour before the dinner bells followed by eating wholesome food with a group on picnic tables. They are known for their local grown fresh produce. They used to raise their own hogs and sell homemade scrapple but I learn the government's regulations made that difficult. (Now the hogs are just brought in for the children's



entertainment in the summer.) We are provided a great number of lovely trails in the surrounding hills. There's a natural springs pool, tennis courts, a fishing lake where you bring your catch to the chef who prepares it for your breakfast. There are no locks on the doors. People come from far and wide to partake of the natural spring waters and the spa. I bought the huge book about the historical significance of the resort.

Some people will try anything

The young gal in the dining hall picture had completed a half marathon, was searching for a full marathon and found this 50K and decided, well, why not? Youth doesn't conquer everything – she opted out at about the 4th aid station. Yet I suspect she'll be back.



Scenes from Capon and surrounding area



Here's a picture of Jim at the main house in last year's 50K shirt. He was the main impetus to get me to try in 2008 as he'd tried 3 times and the last time they were looking at sending out a helicopter to find Jim and Monica after 11 hours with darkness approaching. This year he was resting his newly repaired heart and was at half of the aid stations. Clearly he has a BIG heart! Between Jim and Debbie, I felt very taken-care-of and protected and I'm sure that went far to get me through the event. Jim stayed on a couple days and we hiked the adjoining mountains. Next is a picture of me on the red trail that starts at the springs and gives about three hours of hiking with only one stream crossing, followed by one up on the Big Schloss of George Washington National Forest about 20 miles out of Capon, then me at Eagle Rock.

The End - sunset over Capon's golf course. Until next year.

Upcoming?

See attached list if you're curious and/or want to join me. Especially on the hikes to Yosemite and the Canadian Rocky Mountains. I'm open to new ideas too. Please help me fill up my calendar!



(1) **Capon Springs** is an unincorporated hamlet in Hampshire County, West Virginia, USA. According to the 2000 census, the Capon Springs community has a population of 95. It is located on Capon Springs Road (West Virginia Secondary Route 16) along Capon Springs Run. Originally known as Frye's Springs after its discoverer Henry Frye, and later established as the Town of Watson on December 12, 1787, the town was renamed for its medicinal spring. The springs were believed to carry such healing power that half an acre sold for \$900 in gold in the late 18th century. After West Virginia seceded from Virginia in 1863, it had to pay Virginia for the loss of the springs during Reconstruction. The historic Capon Springs & Farms resort is located here and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

(2) **Capon Springs & Farms** - Since the 1840s, guests have journeyed to Capon Springs seeking rest, relaxation and rejuvenation. Nature's gifts of woodlands, water and food provide the perfect setting to experience the bounty of resources here. When Lou and Virginia Austin acquired the property in 1932 with the sole intention of distributing the water, little did they know they would slowly resurrect the resort, with the help of over one hundred loyal co-workers. Their dedication and commitment continue through the generations to provide a safe comfortable haven for visiting families and friends. A sign hangs on the outside wall of our Main Building. It was made by long time Capon guest Merv Regener of York, PA. Here at Capon Springs we strive to make you feel at home during your stay with us. The use and trust of the honor system, coupled with the family atmosphere and tranquil serenity of Capon itself, makes Capon Springs one of the most special places on earth. As our grandfather Lou Austin used to say, "Once you've made your first trip to Capon, you're considered an old friend."

FACTS:

- Capacity: 200 adults, 50-75 children
- Property size: Approx. 4700 scenic acres
- Dress: Strictly casual; no neckties please!

Open from about the beginning of May to the end of October.

There are 10 guest lodges ranging from 2-20 rooms each plus two private lodging facilities for couples, a Honeymoon Cottage and restored Log Cabin. Every building is different, all rooms have their own entrance, with common hallways and/or stairways to the rooms. Except for the Main building, all rooms have their own private bath, each with its own charm.

Peaceful! There's a curfew of 11:00 pm, no cell coverage, no TVs except in a room of the meeting hall, no radios, etc. Though one can privately have alcohol in their room there's no alcohol served. There's areas for Ping Pong, Croquet, Shuffleboard, Soccer, Tennis racquets and balls, bamboo fishing poles (they'll cook your fish for you), volley ball, badminton racquets as well golf clubs and golf balls are available for your use at no charge. They have a huge library off the fireplace room.

Honor system – they don't ask for a credit card guarantee, there's no cancel fee, the honor system prevails to the extreme that the country store has a cash box to pay on your own and make your own change.

Meals at Capon are probably one of the highlights for most Capon guests. Made from scratch recipes passed down through the generations create mouth watering huge meals and desserts. Fresh baked breads, rolls, cookies and pies pour out of the coal fired brick oven. Service is family-style and one sits with other guests.

(3) **Course Description** - The course is situated on wonderful woodland trails filled with natural beauty. There is breathtaking scenery and quiet country atmosphere. The course is hilly, and the footing would generally be very runnable. There are always a number of stream crossings but this year there were counted to be 42, plus a few rocky areas. Almost the entire course is on lovely dirt paths in the woods. Everyone kept asking me if I'd gotten through the power line section? Yes!!!! It is a remote course yet

well marked with pink surveyor's tape hanging from tree branches so you've got to quit looking at your feet long enough to look up and find the signs to turn. Lots of folks got off course.

Ruritan to Aid #1 – 3.6 miles

When you leave the Ruritan, you will run on some pavement, crossing a few back yards, and then you will cross the river on a cement bridge. You will then run onto wooded dirt trails with several creek crossings. There are 2 steep but relatively short hills, and then you will run on a remote rolling gravel road with no traffic through the woods to Aid #1.

Aid #1 to Aid #2 – 7.2 miles

You will leave Aid #1 on wooded dirt paths and run back onto the remote gravel road with no traffic. The course leaves the road and enters wooded paths, and you will run up and down some good (but not long) hills. There are a few short stints on the gravel road, and you will run all the way down hill to the Cacapon River. After the river (drinking water is available) you will run on wooded paths up and down several significant hills. You will run along a power line where there is a significant down hill. After you leave the power line, you will run on a wooded path up a long hill to a gravel driveway, where you will run downhill to Aid #2.

Aid #2 to Aid #3 – 3.9 miles

You will leave Aid #2 on a beautiful 2 track dirt path (an old railroad bed) along a lovely creek, and there will be several creek crossings. You will leave the railroad bed and climb a good hill to a retired grass air strip. You will turn right on a paved road, running down hill for a very short time into Aid #3.

Aid #3 to Aid #4 – 4.3 miles

You will leave Aid #3 on a wooded dirt path, with a bit of mud and a few creek crossings. You will cross a wonderful field with spectacular views onto another wooded path (with a creek crossing), and after you pass a hunter's cabin on a very old road, you will begin the most significant climb of the day, climbing almost to the top of North Mountain. Once you reach the top, you will slowly begin downhill on wonderful old wooded dirt roads to Aid #4. This is probably the most difficult section of the course.

Aid #4 to Aid #5 – 5.7 miles

You will leave Aid #4 running down hill on a dirt path into the George Washington National Forest, and you will follow this path (with one road crossing, and a few creek crossings) until you reach the Tuscarora Trail (Big Blue Trail). At the Tuscarora Trail you will turn right on the trail, which is maintained by the PATC, and is marked with blue paint. The trail is downhill most of the way into Aid #5. There are a few short uphills, but it is mostly downhill.

Aid #5 to Aid #6 – 3.2 miles

You will continue on the Tuscarora Trail with some serious up and down hills for about 2.5 miles. Shortly after you cross the power line, you will leave the blue marked trail, going left on a short winding trail which takes you into a landowner's barn, which is Aid #6.

Aid #6 to Finish – 3.1 miles

You will return on the same trail that you ran from the Start to Aid #6, except for one short diversion to eliminate a difficult hill on the way back.

Facilities: Toilets with running water are available at the Ruritan Park. No others. Outside hot showers are available at the Ruritan Park. There were plenty of snacks and drinks for the runners at 7 AID STATIONS (approximately every 5 miles) and at the finish.

(5) Article by LANA M. LOMBARDI of the Capon Valley Chronicle, June issue

A Touch of Nostalgia

Change is everywhere. We can't get away from it. The young are hungry for more, better and faster while the more mature are just plain exhausted. Is there anywhere on this planet that allows an individual to slow the pace down enough so we can re-evaluate the direction life is taking us? The answer is yes and it's called Capon Springs and Farms in Capon Springs, West Virginia.

The resort is purposely designed as a haven in which one can escape year after year and find little to no change taking place. The environment is safe, clean, healthy and peaceful. The rooms have no televisions or phones – that's deliberate. The meal times are scheduled and all the food is home cooked – from scratch – with the menu rarely changing. Each day of the week you know what is going to be waiting for you in the dining room. You don't have to rush to the dining hall in order to get a table because your table – the one you were escorted to the very first day - is the table at which you will sit for all your meals every day you are at the resort.

The entire property is designed to create quiet spaces that most of us rarely find in today's fast moving lifestyle. There are fountains and other sources of fresh water running throughout the resort. You hear birds chirping, maybe for the first time since your last get-a-way. There is even a curfew. At 11PM residents can begin to move back toward their rooms or mini-lodges to either turn in for the night or take a quiet evening stroll. But whatever their choice, all guests know that the property is going to be peaceful until breakfast.

Doesn't it sound too good to be true? It is a place where all your basic needs are taken care of and you don't have to be involved except to show up.

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Capon Springs resort offers you the rare opportunity to slip back into a time when the world just didn't turn quite so fast. The rooms, clean and comfortable, are designed with rest and relaxation in mind. Although the resort has no control over cell towers, even cell phone reception is poor in this section of the county. Everything about the resort and how it is set up is designed to remove as many distractions as possible. It's a way to halt life just long enough to smell the roses once again.

What does one do for fun at Capon Springs? Do people get bored? Jonathan Bellingham, grandson of Lou and Virginia Austin, laughs, "You sleep well and soundly, read, sit in the sun, swim in the pool fed by natural spring water, get a massage, soak in warm baths that are kept at 102 degrees, play golf, ping pong, go for nature walks, join watercolor classes and even wellness classes. There is even a campfire sing-a-long in the evening where everyone can enjoy a great hot dog on the most spectacular homemade bun this side of heaven. I might add, you don't come here to lose weight", he laughs.

"My grandfather was very wise and understood how important it is to get off of life's treadmill to re-evaluate or at the very least, get some well-deserved rest. He wanted our guests to have at least one place on the planet where safety dictated that children can wander anywhere on the property and be safe, where respect for one another is encouraged by positive peer pressure that moves everyone who stays here to do the right thing every day, all day while at the resort." Jonathan continues, "There is no preferential treatment at the resort.

It doesn't make any difference who you are or what you do outside this property – all are treated equally here. Where in this world can you just be yourself with no expectations except to be honest and neighborly? That's why people come back here two or three times a year and others spend every vacation here year after year."

When Lou and Virginia Austin, Jonathon's grandparents, purchased the property in 1932 where the spring was located, their purpose was to maintain the water bottling business. Purchasing the spring's water source just happened to include remains of the once thriving resort and the nearly 5000 acres surrounding it. Initially they tried to support the property and themselves by selling bottles of the legendary healing waters that flow throughout the Capon Springs property. While running the bottling company, friends and family kept coming up to stay with them because the property was so beautiful and peaceful. The Austins had not intended to re-build the resort, but by the late 30's they began to put money back into the property and the resort just kind of evolved from there.

During these early years, Lou was going through a spiritual transformation. He began to recognize that God desires to work through us and be a spiritual partner in all we do. He knew that Capon Springs was a gift that he had been entrusted with and he wanted to show his gratitude to God for being his personal spiritual partner. He wanted all his business dealings to be operated according to God's standards – not the standards of the world.

These personal revelations left a permanent imprint on this third generation of family owners. Lou's philosophy of life became the foundational inspiration for the newest family members when they wrote the following Mission Statement for the Resort - "To sustain Capon as a business and as a home, we share our heritage with guests, primarily through a summer resort. We expect the best of ourselves and look for the best in others." This Mission Statement is Lou's grandchildren's way of building on his legacy.

Jonathan says, "Everything here at the resort is based on the honor system. If a guest comes into the snack shop and doesn't have the right change or has left his wallet in his/her room, they can take the soda or snack and just record their purchase on the wall. They can pay for it later or when they check out at the end of their stay."

He continues, "When a guest comes here they enter an environment where everyone, guests and staff, operate from the best part of who we all are. I know that sounds impossible, but it's been going on here since the early 1900's."

He adds, "Recently one of our guests stated to me that "I wish I could be this way in the outside world." What a testimony to the character of the family and staff who run the resort year after year.

According to Jonathan, "The families who come here year after year also do not like things to change at the resort. They get a little bent out of shape if the menu is tweaked or we add too many amenities. We, the younger family owners, had to learn what grandfather already knew. People like the resort just the way it is."

"People even got upset when we replaced the old metal shower stalls that didn't allow you to bathe without banging your elbows with the larger, more modern stalls. We have learned to make only the changes that are necessary to keep the resort well functioning. Our guests do not come here to experience what other resorts provide. They come here for the Capon experience."

One of the long time guests, Pat Roushakes, arrived just as Jonathan and I were completing our time together. She had brought her water color class out from Washington DC that day to introduce them to the resort. Pat regularly escapes her busy city life by coming to Capon Springs. She has been coming here for her family respites for over 30 years.

When asked why she comes back so frequently, she laughs "Oh, I come back to see Jonathan. Seriously, coming here is like coming home to visit family. It's like having a very large extended family when you become a repeat guest like me. All the children know each other and actually grow up with one another on these vacations. My children are all grown now, but they still look forward to coming back here at least once a year."

Why does she come so often? She smiles and says, “I just need the Capon experience in my life. It’s hard to explain to someone who has never come here. Even packing is simple. I throw in some jeans, t-shirts and a hat and I’m ready to go. The moment I come over that mountain, I think my blood pressure drops 20 points.” she laughs. “When I leave here I am absolutely rested.”

“What makes the Capon experience so unique are the people. This is a place where you can put the world behind you the moment you drive onto the property. You are safe and free to drop all pretenses. If you bring your children and take your eye off a child for a moment, there’s no need to panic. Someone else is watching the child – someone who cares. The people who come here really care about each other.”

I keep hearing the phrase “Capon experience”. What exactly does that mean? Pat smiles and says, “I can’t really describe it. It truly is something you have to experience for yourself.”

Capon Springs and Farms just celebrated 75 years as a resort the first week of May. Jonathan muses, “It was interesting to hear the same theme in all the comments from the guests who had been here at least 75 times. The people who were asked to share their experiences at the resort were from every walk of life imaginable, yet all were emotional in their comments about this place. They may have used different ways to express their fondness, but the bottom line somehow ended up the same. They really love it here.”

There is a tremendous amount of historical information on this very special resort, but after spending time with Jonathan, guests and running into previous staff members of the resort, it seemed more appropriate to communicate the heart of Capon Springs and Farms. Facts are easy to obtain, but the heart attitude that built the resort and maintains the character of the resort isn’t recorded in any history book. One has to either know some of the people who bring heart to the organization or one has to actually go experience it personally.

The name Capon Springs and Farms should really have the word family in it somewhere. That is how everyone refers to each other – whether guests, staff or owners – everyone considers themselves a family member. Harry B. Thayer once said, “As are families, so is society. If well ordered, well instructed, and well governed, they are the springs from which go forth the streams of national greatness and prosperity - of civil order and public happiness.”

For all readers who have worked at or been guests of Capon Springs and Farms, the above quote will be meaningful. If you have not yet had the “Capon experience”, consider experiencing a visit to the resort. Once you do, you will then understand the above remarks about family.

(7) What do tourists do in Winchester area?

Old Town: Winchester is a lovely small city with an historic center. The Old Town streets are lined with brick sidewalks, beautiful homes, historic buildings, and different styles of architecture, so just strolling around is enjoyable in itself. In quaint Old Town you’ll find many specialty shops, small galleries, a variety of restaurants (both casual and upscale), outdoor cafes, and nightlife.

Dining: Winchester has an excellent variety of local restaurants to fit all tastes and budgets, and many of our very best are within walking of the inn. There are many chain restaurants here as well. Ethnic choices include Italian, Mexican, Chinese, Brazilian, Thai, Japanese, and Indian.

Theatre and concerts include • Winchester Little Theatre; • Shenandoah University concerts and Summer Theatre shows; • Wayside Theatre in nearby Middletown.

Historic Interest in Winchester and nearby: • Glen Burnie historic home and garden tours (home of Winchester’s Founder James Wood); • Abram’s Delight museum, George Washington’s Office and other

historic buildings; • Civil war battlefield sites and reenactments; • Belle Grove Plantation; • Historic Long Branch

Museums: • Patsy Cline Museum opening Spring 2007 (it has not yet opened); • Museum of the Shenandoah Valley

Annual Events: • Apple Blossom Festival each May; • Historic garden tours in April; • (Nearby) Mountain Heritage Arts and Crafts Festival (25 minutes away) every June and September; • Apple Harvest Festival each September; • Hot Air Balloon and Wine Festival in October; • First Night each New Year's Eve

Shopping: Old Town has unique shops and small galleries selling gifts, pottery, books, original art and framed prints, furniture, antiques, gourmet items, wine and specialty beer, home décor, fine linens, candles, jewelry, clothing and more. Winchester also has an upscale complex that includes Jos. A. Banks, Talbots, Ann Taylor Loft, Chicos, Terra Cotta Kitchen and many other specialty shops. In addition, there's the Apple Blossom Mall, Pier 1 Imports, Borders, Target, TJMaxx, Ross, Kohls, Books-a-Million, Linens-n-Things and more.

Antiques: Winchester has several antique shops that carry a wide range of quality antiques, used furniture, and flea market items. In addition its known for antiquing with 2 large multi-dealer antique warehouses (in Strasburg, VA and in Bunker Hill, W.Va.) and 10 minutes away is Red Schoolhouse Antiques in Millwood.

Outdoor and sports in Winchester and the area: • 5 public golf courses, miniature golf a few miles north of town; • Hiking nearby (15 minutes to Sky Meadows State Park, 30 minutes to the start of the Skyline Drive and Blue Ridge hiking); • Fishing in the Shenandoah River;

Wineries: Winchester is a good base to visit many VA wineries and scenic drives.