

2015 Tussey mOUntaiNBACK Previews: Profiles in Hillage

Team: itseemedlikeagoodideaatthetime

What's unusual about a neuroscientist and an IT specialist spending a Sunday in the outdoors?

It might not seem so unique, until you know that the two are mother and step-daughter and will be running 50 miles as a two-person relay team in the Tussey mOUntaiNBACK 50 Mile Relay and Ultramarathon in Rothrock State Forest on Oct. 25.

A graduate of Penn State (BS 2007 in biomedical engineering), Natasha Tirko currently lives in New York City where she is pursuing a doctoral degree in neuroscience at NYU. Her mother, Sherry, works for Penn State's Information Technology Services' Identity Services group as an IT manager.

Relay teams running the mOUntaiNBACK are allowed up to eight runners, so it's worth noting that a relay team of two has an extra challenge: they must take turns, exchanging their baton 12 times over the 12 sections of the 50-mile course. The 12 segments are all different in distance as well as difficulty, so one will end up logging 22.3 miles and the other 27.7 miles.

A team name can be a source of motivation or humor, or both. The Tirkos chose this name for their team:
itseemedlikeagoodideaatthetime.

What's their motivation for doing this?

"It's a great race," says Natasha Tirko. "I love Tussey in the fall."

"It's my favorite race," echoes Sherry Tirko. "If I only do one race a year, this one is it!"

This year will be Natasha's third time in the race, but first time doing a two-person team—aptly called a "Supra" in the event's nomenclature. "I think this is the 11th year in a row that I've run," says Sherry, who's run previously on relay teams of 3 to 8 people. She also ran the race in 2001, the second year of the event.

Facing down this challenge, what will be the duo's goal for the day? On this they are in unison: "To finish!"

On race day, the Tirkos will use a support vehicle to get around the course, which takes in several noteworthy outdoor venues, such as Whipple Dam State Park, Colyer Lake, and Bear Meadows Natural Area. So they will be alternately running and resting, each running six separate times.

How does one train for such a race?

"Long weekend runs," says Natasha, "sometimes divided into 5-6 mile sessions to mimic alternating legs on race day—nothing fancy."

"I do a long run each weekend, and several shorter runs during the week," says Sherry. "In the past, I have never done more than one run in a day. This year, I'm trying two short runs on the same day every other weekend. I like to do my longer runs in Rothrock for proper hill training. Leg 4 (a 5-miles-plus section that includes three hills) works well!"

