

2019 Relay Team Profile: Legs of Steele

No, there's no typographical error here.

Every relay team taking part in the Tussey mOUntaiNBACK 50 Mile Relay and Ultramarathon has a name. This one may cause some readers to consult a dictionary for guidance.

The team name "Legs of Steele" is likely to conjure the familiar phrase "legs of steel" referring to strong lower limbs, but here "steele" refers to the central core of the stem and root of a vascular plant, consisting of the vascular tissue and associated supporting tissue.

Many relay teams return again and again to this event. One of these is a team from the Department of Plant Science at Penn State. Marvin Hall, professor of forage management, is usually near the center of this extracurricular affair.

"I have been putting department teams together for about 10 years, with a few missed years during that time," said Hall.

Hall says the event is great fun, but it also brings significant perks back to the office.

"It benefits the department by showing graduate students that professors are not all crazy focused lab rats, we like to have fun too," said Hall. "It also lets them know that some faculty in our department are interested in the whole student, both their physical and mental health, and not just their research skills.

"It also builds comradery and friendships as we keep checking in with each other about how training is going. We have had pre-race dinners and post-race parties over the years depending on the chemistry of the team members."

Team members' training typically occurs according to runners' varying schedules. "We train individually or in small groups, except for training runs on Saturday morning and/or Tuesday afternoon/evening. We tried to follow our Saturday morning group runs with breakfast or coffee at a local eating establishment. The time around the table allowed everyone to get to know each other better and become friends. This year has been different because I got lazy and decided to just join the Saturday morning Discovery runs rather than organize group runs for our teams. However, we still stop for coffee or breakfast after those runs."

The Tussey mOUntaiNBACK race puts on a Discovery Training Series that covers all of the course's 50 miles over eight Saturdays. But Hall is quick to note the presence of discovery in a different way.

"The one consistent thing I hear from new team members is that they never knew such a beautiful place (Rothrock State Forest) was so close to State College."

Proceeds of this year's event will support Centre Volunteers in Medicine, a free medical and dental clinic that provides access to primary and preventive care for qualifying individuals living or working in Centre County who live in surrounding counties that do not have a free clinic or programs to meet their needs. For more information about Centre Volunteers in Medicine, visit <https://cvim.net/>.

Photo: Marvin Hall has some fun on the ice at Colyer Lake after the Colyer 'Sno Big Deal 10K, one of the Tussey Teasers Series runs.

