

Winter Series 3 – A Historical Trail Race

By Jack Anthony

As we prepare to enjoy Winter Series Race #3, I thought it might make the wind and cold we often face as we run our course more endurable if we knew some tidbits of history about the trail we run upon (yea, right Jack....nice try on coaching mind games ☺) Most of our route is on the railbed of the Santa Fe Railroad built in 1887. The last train traveled the now absent rails in the early 1970's.

OK, at the starting area we are essentially in the long gone village of Pring Station. This village was named for John W. Pring. In 1876 John Pring purchased 240 acres of Colorado land sight unseen. He and his bride Mary plus 5 children came to Colorado and found his land investment a barren wasteland. Pring stated he felt not even a rabbit could survive on his land. He questioned his purchase, but was determined to settle here and raise cattle and farming a try. He developed an irrigation system which transported water via a 4 inch iron pipe from the mountains west of here. John Pring's efforts in improving the land, raising cattle, dairying, and farming soon earn him accolades for having one of the best farms in the fast growing El Paso County. In 1887, the Santa Fe Railroad built the Pring railroad station in the area south of here where most of us park our cars. You can still see some evidence of Pring's cattle loading area about 300 yards to the southeast of the parking area. Much of the railroad bed material and a few wood structures still remain as fingerprints of Pring's past. Back during the thriving Pring dairy business, they would ship milk and 35 pounds of butter weekly to the Antlers Hotel in Colorado Springs.

As we run north, you'll notice a slight up hill grade...ops, sorry to mention that, there's also a wind usually out of the north, dang, I shouldn't have mentioned that either! Before locomotives were large and heavy and powerful, the lightweight engines often had great difficulty making it up this grade when the rails would freeze over from rain, snow and cold. Many times citizens of Monument would see a train roll back as far as Pring and then make a go of it by building up a head of steam and speed to make it to the level ground of Monument. Sometimes they just sat and waited for day and the warmth of the sun. Some locomotives had a really clever device that would drop sand ahead of the front wheels and try to afford the engine some degree of traction. So, as you run north, just keep saying "I think I can, I think I can, I think I can"...it worked for the trains, but don't roll back to the starting line and try, try again...just keep going and enjoy the community of runners you are with...who are huffing and puffing, just like you!

Just before entering Monument for the 5 milers turn around, we cross over an unassuming creek called Dirty Woman Creek. What a curious name for a creek! Originally named Dirty Woman Gulch in 1861, this branch of Monument Creek gained the name "Dirty Woman Creek" thanks to a lady who lived in a shack along the creek. Many stories exist about this lady who had a lot in common with Charles Schultz Peanut's character Pig Pen. The Dirty Woman received her name from soldiers who traveled back and forth though the region in the 1860's. The 'Dirty Woman' didn't

exactly keep herself, her property and children very clean; thus, the name ‘Dirty Woman’ stuck. She tended goats, chickens, cats, dogs, and other animals on her ranch and in her house! The ‘Dirty Woman’ also made butter by trampling the cream with her bare feet! Perhaps ‘Dirty Woman’ brand butter was wee bit gritty I bet.

As stage coaches of the 1860’s and 70’s traveled north to Denver they would stop near the Dirty Woman’s place, the stagecoach drivers even called it the ‘Dirty Woman’ stop. As you run our fun filled race, imagine this gritty gal and her kids cheering you on as you trod by.

From the Dirty Woman Creek, we are also running across a significant earth and rock “trestle” just before we enter town and find the 5 miler turn around. In the early days of the Santa Fe Railroad, this was an elaborate timber framed trestle structure. It was 300 feet long and 49 feet high at the deepest part of the ‘Dirty Woman Creek’ channel. On July 17, 1895, at about 11:00 am a terrible train/construction accident occurred at this location. The trestle was undergoing repairs when a southbound train consisting of an engine and 25 cars, of which 9 were loaded, and a caboose started to cross the trestle. The repair crew had removed some bracings and this jeopardized the structural integrity of the trestle. The engine, tender and first few cars came crashing down. Four people were killed two on the repair crew and two train crew members. Here’s a photo of the accident.



The great Santa Fe train wreck July 17, 1895. Photo Courtesy of The Vaile Museum