

MERRIMACK RIVER (NO)SNOW RACE

For the 2nd year in a row the fickle New England weather God's gave us snow (over 6") but took it away with temperatures in the 50's leading up to the race. Unlike last year, the course was left slick with icy spots and even some crusty snow on the gas line. Over 20 runners showed up to take the challenge and get a look at the latest version of the Dion snowshoes.

Times were slightly slower than last year due to the icy spots, including a treacherous crossing of the beaver dam which was coated with a thin layer of ice.

Richard Bolt took the overall victory (the day after winning the Sterling "Freezer Five" by over 3 minutes) with a strong sub 18 effort on the 3.3 mile mostly out and back course. 4th Place finisher Wesley Lassen ran in shorts and singlet!

Laurel Shortell won the women's race and continues her streak of consecutive WMAC races. Cathy Dunham picked up course markers as she ran and was the third finisher for the victorious CMS team.

CMS narrowly won the team competition beating the Merrimack Valley Striders and the Western MA Athletic Club by two and seven points respectively.

Thank you to the helpers at the race without whom I could not have held the race, Cathy Dunham, Dan Verrington, Alan Beebe and James Pawlicki. And everyone else who pitched in!

Dave Dunham

MERRIMACK RIVER 3.3 MILES Andover, MA January 02, 2005

PL	Name	Age	Time	Points
01	Richard Bolt	34	17:53	50.00
02	Mark Wimmer	33	18:32	47.62
03	Bob Kearns	34	19:44	45.24
04	Wesley Lassen	26	19:56	42.86
05	Paul Kirsch	38	21:27	40.48
06	Glen Swanbon	40	22:09	38.10
07	Jim Wilkinson	35	22:14	35.71
08	Bob Dion	49	22:24	33.33
09	Bill Morse	53	23:44	30.95
10	Rob Smith	37	23:13	28.57
11	Dave Geary	39	23:52	26.19
12	Gerry Caruso	45	24:00	23.81
13	Norm Sheppard	47	24:33	21.43
14	Ed Alibozek	42	25:33	19.05
15	Alan Beebe	55	26:35	16.67
16	John Loring	57	27:06	14.29
17	Richard Busa	75	32:00	11.90
18	Laurel Shortell	38	35:32	9.52
19	K. Karolczuk	52	38:50	7.14
20	Jack Kelleher	60	40:33	4.76
21	Cathy Dunham	39	46:37	2.38

A NEW KIND OF HURT

Getting tired of dodging black ice on the roads every winter? Have you memorized every pothole on the State Office loop yet? Then take your running off-road this winter and try the fastest growing winter sport: Snowshoeing! Although the mode of travel dates back 6,000 years or more, it wasn't recognized as a sport until 1998. Since then the sport has grown exponentially, capturing the devotion of runners looking for a way to hit the trail. Canadians, in particular, have taken to the sport at a frenzied pace. So much that they are lobbying to make the Snowshoe race an exhibition event at the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Last winter I tried snowshoeing for the first time, in search of a way to break up the monotony. I soon found out that the snowshoeing community was alive and well in the Western Massachusetts Athletic Club. The United States Snowshoe Association itself calls Corinth, NY home. So why haven't you tried it yet?

Probably because your clunky old pair aren't fit for recreational use. Snowshoes made for running are constructed quite differently from the traditional "tennis racket-style" you're likely familiar with. Racing snowshoes are made of aluminum alloy tubes, joined with a nylon/polyurethane decking, and attached by bindings that allow for greater flexibility. They are usually about 25" in length and weigh between 2 - 5 lbs. Manufacturers run the gamut of price and flashy options like titanium talons and sporty colors. Local favorite, Dion Snowshoes, can be borrowed at most local snowshoe events for free and feature one of the narrowest decks available, which promotes a more natural gait.

So how does running in snowshoes differ from the roads? They are surprisingly similar and I made the transition with little or no trouble. The most noticeable difference is the extra weight your hip flexors are forced to lift and the wider foot plant you must learn to adjust to. You learn the hard way to plant your feet further apart. After your first few sessions, you'll likely find dime-sized scabs appear on the insides of your ankles, or as I call them "stingers." Stingers are the result of the aluminum tube accidentally scapping your ankle. It stings. Thus the name I gave them. Besides the occasional stinger, I found it immediately gratifying to hit the trails of the Pine Bush amidst fresh powder or packed ski trail.

This may not be the best advertisement for snowshoeing, but I'll say it anyway. The hurt one feels from running is intensified on snowshoes. I have never felt a hurt like the hurt of a snowshoe workout. I feel it's a great way to give your knees a break during the winter months and cross train your leg muscles. It is also an absolute joy to witness the wonder of the wilderness in winter.

This February, the Albany area will get its first taste of snowshoe racing with the Brave The Blizzard 5k hosted by the Albany Running Exchange. Bob Dion will have free trial snowshoes available for use during the race. The course will enter the Pine Bush Preserve from Guilderland Elementary School's field and traverse mostly flat terrain for beginners. What more reason do you need? Okay, every first-time snowshoer will receive a complimentary goodie and chili and hot beverages will be available to everyone inside the gym after the race. Come and experience it for yourself. Take to the woods this winter on snowshoes!

Andrew Rickert