

Moving

A decade. That is the length of days my running repeatedly in a sliver of a local suburban town park finally led to my running to my standards. Just this year, before we purchased an eight-year old home in an established neighborhood on the other side of the river, I learned the park path's real purpose, which is, to make me run faster.

In the winter, running the park's asphalt path at any time of the daylight hours, I demand a dry day with no wind, not even a hint of a breeze. I can manage the wet asphalt on the park's path from a rain preceding my run, but the path cannot be too slick, or my run's purpose is defeated. In the other months, I require the same conditions of no wind and damp asphalt, and, since I cannot control the air temperature or the dew point, I run as the sun rises because I can control the heat and dew point index.

Six tenths of a mile is the out and back length of the balloon-shaped path, the string of the path being both the initial and last portions of the two-tenths of a mile segments. The balloon portion of the path is the middle portion. You bet that running this path as a distance runner requires repeated laps of the same loop, over and over. But that's a small price to pay for getting in the speed workout. Keep your eye on the prize, not the monotony.

A tenth of a mile, a fifteenth of a mile, a fifth of a mile, a quarter mile. Each of those distances, repeated over and over in the workout, are ideally suited to being performed on this path. Well, there is a smart watch capable of adjusting the algorithm for these repeats assumed away in this process. Inclusive of that is the manhole cover.

Twice in the last 10 years, the pocket-sized park has been closed for repair: once for relaying the relatively young but torn up asphalt path, and the other, to prepare the sewer flow for the immensely large subdivision that is going in across the main drag. Some 500 homes on postage stamp-sized lots to be sold at astronomical prices relative to their size and location. Not my problem.

Because city workers are shoved from worksite to worksite at the whim of the City's powerbrokers, this little park's project are always moved to a dark corner bottom

shelf, only to be released to resume the upgrade on the path when time allows. I know that the park's projects are important, but I take any delay personally because the park's usage is all about me.

But I digress. The manhole cover was purposefully placed at the 0/20-mark of the loop. Exactly one-third of the full distance of the path, just happening to be the opening portion of the path and the last one-third of the path's distance, just happening to be the closing portion of the path. Both outgoing and incoming, that manhole cover is the landmark of the path. It's true measure of import is when I pass any concluding mile of a workout over than manhole cover. Glancing at my watch in crossing over the manhole cover gives me an overall time for the workout at a set mile, from which, with the aid of simple division in my head, I can determine my per mile pace.

These rotating workouts are quick in pace. The warmup consists of two loops, the overall pace for those two loops being within a minute of the workout paces. The same goes for the cooldown pace of the same two loops. Hint: make certain you wear your most trusted magic running shoes. the workout segments are 5km-pace or faster. The short recovery distance is easy pace at its fastest, but still run at its fastest.

The goals of this weekly workout are two-fold: to run the short segments fast, and, to run a quick pace for the workout overall. Consider the workout to be an extreme version of a lactate-threshold workout. For me, as long as I run the fast segments at an average pace below 5km pace and maintain the overall workout pace within a minute of the workout-repeat pace, all is good.

The warmup is two loops. The workout is five loops on the path, equaling three miles, the cooldown is two loops. In between loops, I'll jog over to my car to both wipe my brow and guzzle down water. That's 10 seconds, at most. I more frequently run these workouts in the summer, when the air is sopping wet, the heat high, and the combination making for a miserable weather moment. No matter, the repeating of this varied workout has its benefits.

Week one I run one tenth of a mile with a 0.05 of a mile jog.

Week two I run .15 of a mile with a 0.05 mile jog.

Week three is two-tenths of a mile fast segment with a one-tenth of a mile recovery. Week four is a quarter mile with a 0.05-mile recovery job.

Each of those weeks, no matter the segment distance or recovery distance, gets me back to the start, with me regrouping in seconds before commencing the next loop. Six months ago, I started this regimen, weekly, on Monday mornings at 6:15 a.m. I have been diligent and disciplined to get these workouts done each week. My workout-segment pace has dropped by almost one minute.

I run these workouts solo. No running companions are interested in meeting up for this weekly event. In fact, the only signs of life I see include an older fellow my age who is of immense girth who walks diligently while carrying 2.5-lb weights in his hands and a few animals who want no part of my existence. I also witness the rising sun each Monday morning from late winter into mid-summer now, the sun's warmth not yet reaching being oppressive. The park's path is directly alongside a copse of trees protecting a small stream, simultaneously giving me a wee bit of morning shade. Even with my running fast, my effort at the time of the dawning morning is tranquil.

Now that we've moved across the river, that park is pragmatically inaccessible. The alternative will work for the short term, but I know I'll find a different location. That new permanent location will take time, probably the same passage of time that I need to grow accustomed to our new abode in a different location.

The morning sun rises in a different, but better location into our new home. The supposedly temporary workout path begins under an arch adjacent to the high school student parking lot, heading away from the school until it begins its gentle curve back to the left, coming alongside the athletic fields, before the path takes a sharp left curve into the beginning of a long climb upwards. My kilometer progression stops just as the incline steepens.

There is no straight portion for any noticeable length. There is no shade. There is no shelter from even the smallest breezes. There are pedestrians endeavoring to power walk their way into the early morning; friends walking together in no particular hurry, barely moving aside for others on the path; dog walkers focused on what their dogs discover; other runners with their own agendas. This path is not busy; it just isn't mine alone.

I've now run this portion of the greater greenway for the third consecutive week. I'm learning the subtle rises and falls along the asphalt path. I am putting to memory the tree or the crack in the asphalt that becomes the end point for these short repeat distances, be they 0.10 of a mile or greater to 0.25 of the mile. I am also relearning my focus.

My running these Monday early morning repeats to begin my week is only one aspect in maintaining my self-discipline. The focusing on the speed needed in succeeding in reaching my running day's goal is equal to getting out the door. Repeatedly running over the same portion of path leads to focusing on the pace, which leads to running relaxed, leading to the mental strength in accomplishing the task. I've been doing these kinds of workouts for over 40 decades. I sorta know the drill.

I lean into these runs, one segment at a time. I find my groove as quickly and in as easy a manner as possible, the immediacy of pace quickly replaced by the focus on shortening the arm swing, the gentle lifting of the ankles over the ground, the relaxing of the breathing and the shoulders. All the while I gently push the pace in completing the segment. All of that is how I break down the effort, but none of those are consciously drilled down. Each movement from beginning through the middle pull to the ending glide is a transitory thought, fleeting in time, forgotten just as quickly as each show up on my head.

Six tenths of a mile on the out and back length of the long, slow curved path, the last portions of the two-tenths of a mile segments. The balloon portion of the path being the most challenging. Repeated laps of the same loop, over and over. That's the weekly speed workout. A tenth of a mile, a fifteenth of a mile, a fifth of a mile, a quarter mile, repeated over and over again, performed on this replacement path.

There is no manhole cover, but there are black metal benches and black metal trash cans affixed to the ground, just off the path, on both sides of the path along the arch to the hill section of the greenway. There are small shade trees, separated from their closest friends. It ain't the park I knew so well, but it ain't all that bad. I can't stop at the car on the end of the loop, but I can suck it up, get the workout done, and enjoy the cooldown to the car. First-world problems are not really problems.