

NTRC Trails

An urban run crew wanders off into the forest and discovers the trails

By Tania Haas

Studies have shown that time spent immersed in a natural setting reduces the stress hormone cortisol, boosts immunity and leaves you with an overall feeling

NIGHT TERRORS RUN CREW TRAILS TORONTO, ONTARIO



Club Stats

| | |
|---------|---|
| MEMBERS | 40 |
| FEES | Free |
| WEBSITE | instagram.com/ntrctrails |

of serenity. In Japan, they call it “forest bathing.” In Canada’s largest urban jungle, where runners can get addicted to barren asphalt if they aren’t careful, a group of runners called NTRC Trails make a conscious effort to escape the city.

An off-shoot of Night Terrors Run Crew, NTRC Trails asks runners to commit a few hours, usually on a weekend, to join them

on a road trip with a guaranteed reward: to escape the grind and explore.

Crew leaders have nurtured its organic growth by focusing on well-organized outings that welcome all levels and interests. As of early 2016, active participants hovered around 40 with social media interest suggesting a steady rise.

“NTRC Trails introduces urban runners to trail running,” says Heather Grieve, one of the two run leaders. “It’s an entry-level activity to get people more familiar and more comfortable with the trail running experience around Toronto and southern Ontario.”

While NTRC racks up impressive urban mileage with four runs a week, the trail faction invites the urban runner, via ride-share, to a scoped out locale, to unplug and tune into nature’s sights, sounds, smells and seasons. Crew and run leaders ensure participants are aware of challenging and changing surfaces, and techniques to avoid injury.

Like surfers at a popular break, there are recommended behaviours when runners tackle trails en masse. The crew and run leaders discuss those codes before runs.

“Running trails forces me to be aware,” says William Chaupiz, crew co-leader. “When you’re running a trail, you’re not running marathon pace, you get to enjoy the scenery but also be highly attuned to your surroundings. It’s an amazing challenge where I definitely find peace.”

Like its urban originator, this crew prioritizes fun, safety and inclusion. Run leaders Grieve and Jason DeLuce lead the packs.

“No one’s left behind and no one runs

alone,” says Sula Larochelle, crew co-leader. “We always run together regardless of speed, ability or expertise.”

Since November 2014, the crew has organized five out-of-city runs. Webster’s Falls in Dundas, Harrison Park near Owen Sound, Forks of the Credit Provincial Park near Caledon, and the Niagara Escarpment near Milton. During the week leading up to run day, participants are asked on Facebook to indicate which route they plan to run (short, long or hike). Larochelle says all routes have included at least one impressive vista or sight, which is proudly shared on Instagram post-race.

Trail running enthusiasts from outside the city are always welcome, yet the crew is mostly Toronto-based. There are also members who use the trails as ultramarathon training and other extreme goals.

“Paul and Eric Chan will be representing NTRC trails in their year-long running journey of completing eight ultra desert marathons – a Guinness World record attempt,” says Chaupiz, an ultramarathoner himself.

While the Chan brothers and other extreme runners exist among NTRC Trails, they are outliers who inspire rather than intimidate. For everyone, the overarching purpose is to appreciate Mother Nature.

“The reward is not running gear, beer or a big brunch,” says Larochelle. “It’s a badass route and wicked destination. A view, a waterfall, that’s what we drink in and savour.” 

Tania Haas is a Toronto-based runner and writer. She is currently on assignment running trails in New Zealand.

