

A 200-mile experience that won't be forgotten

Libby Jones, Heels and Hills co-race director, was among many D-FW area participants in the 200-mile Texas Independence Relay on March 7-8 that went from Gonzales to the San Jacinto Monument in Houston. Here's Libby's reflection of the event from the Team Heels and Hills perspective:

By Libby Jones



It truly was an experience of a lifetime. Over a 30-40 hour period, it was a lot of work handling all the logistics, van driving, navigating, and then adding running 17 miles to that (my 3 relay legs)!

I can say that organizing a trip like this is like race directing but you feel more like a mother than just a coordinator. Making sure everyone got at least the minimum amount of sleep, potty stops, food breaks, etc. But it was a lot of fun and people know the history Paula Robertson and I (pictured with Libby on the left and Paula on the right) have organizing and coordinating

events and clubs, so they trusted us to get them from point A to point B. I am already looking forward to next year.

Also, the team pulled together to watch out for each other, even though we were mostly strangers and, once or twice, it brought tears to my eyes. I really pushed the girls to carry water bottles and cell phones.

Saturday was average weather, but 20 mph winds. But then Sunday was 80 degrees with no clouds! Teresa Williams is a team member who qualified for Boston recently, so we designed her relay legs to act as her "long run." She had two back-to-back legs mid-Sunday morning when it was starting to get SO hot. She called about 11 miles into the 13 ½ leg and said that she was starting to feel dehydrated, not feeling good at all. We were waiting at the end of her leg when that phone call came. We immediately all jumped back in the van and someone grabbed a map and we drove back on the course to find a spot to connect with her quickly, and another person grabbed a cold water bottle from the cooler. No discussion occurred; we all just moved into action!

And two minutes after she had called, we'd driven a couple miles and were all standing there with a water bottle in hand and cheering when she turned the corner. It was just so touching how we all wanted to look out for one another considering we'd all just met for the first time a day and a half ago!

The runs themselves were an adventure. I crossed three cattle guards in my first relay leg and was chased by a dog (a rather fierce rat terrier!). You'd be running down a country highway, and the Saturday runs had 21 mph winds, and then an 18-wheeler would go right by you and WHOOSH - it was like all the breath in your lungs was gone!

The nighttime runs were the most interesting. Hundreds of runners with reflective vests, reflective belts, headlamps, blinky lights, glow sticks -- all in the middle of nowhere in total pitch black. One runner, Amanda Witty, had a woman actually pull to the side of the road, step out of her car, and yell "What do you think you are doing running on the side of a highway?!?"

Another runner jumped a mile when encountering road-kill in the dark; running along, your headlamp doesn't catch it in the light until you are right on top of it.

A long narrow bridge over water at Leg 18 was an eerie sight for new night runner and teammate Sarah Hendrickson. All runners on this leg had police assistance to stop traffic on both sides of the bridge so that participants could safely cross.

Teammate Jennifer Meuse was scared in the middle of the night when a car veered onto the rumble strips on the side of the highway close to her and then back on the road; at that moment, she truly thought she was about to be hit by a car.

These were all encounters we knew we were signing on for; the race website warns you. And both the race and the teams did everything they could to keep their runners very, very safe. And it all made for an experience that is just not easily repeatable!

We're ready to start putting together teams for next year!