

# features

## Autumn Walk designed for fun and fund raising

By Elise Henshaw

Editors note: Elise Henshaw walked in the fourth annual Autumn Walk Oct. 16. She was just one of the many people who turned out to help raise money for the new walking-jogging trail.

Did you know there's an 8:00 a.m. on Saturday's too? Eight boy scouts, three scoutmasters, a dachshund, several serious runners, my daughter Lisa, and I made this discovery together last Saturday at the fourth annual UNCA Autumn Walk.

By the time the walk ended at 5 p.m., our ranks had swelled to nearly 400 and 60% of us had run, walked, strolled or staggered 12.4 miles to the top of Elk Mountain and back to the UNCA gym. The other not-quite-so-hardy souls had covered 10 km or 6.2 miles.

The sun was shining, the skies were blue, the air was crisp. Dr. Russ Reynolds, assistant professor of Spanish and coordinator of the event, must be on excellent terms with whoever arranges autumn weekends in the mountains.

I was confident of my ability to complete the 12.4 mile walk as I had accomplished ten miles in a walk last fall. I had however failed to comprehend the full significance of "Elk Mountain." The word mountain obviously suggests ascent and descent, and in this case there was a great deal of both.

Before starting out from the gym, I talked with Jay Thomas, scout master of Troop 53 from Lyman, N.C., his two assistants and eight scouts. They held the record for traveling the greatest distance to participate in the walk, 357 miles. With hikes of 25 miles under their belts, this walk would be a cinch.

"Anyone who can't make this will be back in Cubs," said Thomas. Being flatlanders, they also hadn't thought much about all that ascent and descent. They did make it to the top and agreed the route was very challenging. They also agreed on some rather unpleasant possibilities for whoever thought it up.



Three Autumn walkers are shown enjoying the fall weather while helping raise money for a walking-jogging trail. Staff photo by David Pickett

Further evidence that word of the walk reaches far beyond the campus came from two sisters-in-law from Spruce Pine. Carolyn and Linda Medford, attired in grey warm-up suits, said they read about the event in the *Asheville Citizen*. Being walkers, they decided to come. "Five miles is about as far as we usually walk," said Carolyn. They walked a lot farther Saturday.

Gunther, the dachshund, who will be seven in November, was on his second Autumn Walk. He was accompanied by his owner Emily Sloop of Asheville, who also walked with him two years ago. Last year Emily walked with a golden retriever. Emily is a registered nurse who works in blood services at the Red Cross. She said she walks three miles a day.

A walk of this length could hardly be uneventful. We rounded one curve to find two police cars with

blue lights flashing and a car that had gone over the side resting against a tree. No one appeared to be injured and since the police seemed to have the situation under control, we proceeded up the mountain.

We also encountered a friendly dog, a walker with his "box" going full blast, numerous squirrels and one wooly worm who seemed to be making dire predictions about the approaching winter. At least that's the way many mountain folks would view his red and black body.

As we approached the top, we received assurances from all who passed us on their way down that "we were nearly there, not much farther, just around the corner," etc. When we started back, we found ourselves giving the same assurances to the eager, hopeful or desperate faces that looked to us for encouragement.

After one final steep climb, we reached the promised land. On this particular Saturday, it consisted of an olive drab truck containing a supply of cool water brought by National Guardsman Ronnie Metcalf.

Metcalf, a member of the 109th M.P. Battalion, said they had supported Reynolds and the walk every year, carrying water to the half way checkpoint and to the top. He also picked up anyone who couldn't make the walk. At 10:25, our arrival time, Metcalf said 63 peo-

ple had reached the top.

Don't put a whole lot of stock in the generally accepted idea that the uphill part is the worst and once you start downhill, it's a piece of cake. My experience is that one simply

uses a different set of muscles coming down than going up and they all can be equally painful. Going up the hills, the calves hurt. Coming down the hills the aches were in the ankles, knees and at times the thighs.

At various places on our descent, we encountered members of the group comprising nearly half of the walkers. These were ROTC cadets from several high schools. The largest group of approximately 100 came from Pisgah Academy in Canton.

Also represented was Reynolds High School. As an avid Erwin High fan and coming off of a 28-26 football loss at the hands of Reynolds the night before, this was hard to take. The problem was compounded by the fact that I was proudly sporting my Erwin Band Booster jacket which left me wide-open to numerous uncomplimentary comments.

Jimmy Biddix, a sophomore and a member of the Naval Junior ROTC from Marion, explained that they were walking for sponsors. Their earnings would go half to the United Way and half to support their ROTC trips. Biddix said the first ten of his group to come in would receive special notice at their annual inspection and receive a free dinner. Biddix finished sixth despite many aches and pains.

I finally came upon a couple of UNCA students participating in the event, proceeds from which go toward a walking-jogging path on the campus. Annette Brown and David Plunkett were walking for the second year. "We're in better shape this year so it should be easier," said Annette. They started up the mountain, David with his camera and Annette with their lunch in her backpack. "Easier, maybe; easy, no."

At 12:30 Lisa and I handed our cards over to Dr. Reynolds and received our medals with a feeling of pride and accomplishment. Mine will be displayed prominently on my chest [one of the few areas of my body that is ache-free]. Actually the walk was great fun and I shall probably do it again next year.

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