

# Trail-blazing runner goes end-to-end on the Bruce

## CEO fights shin splints, pain to conquer 850-km historic Ontario route in 15 days

By OMAR EL AKKAD, *Globe and Mail*, Tuesday, October 4, 2005

If Clayton Smith's running shoes could talk, they'd scream.

As the 38-year-old CEO of an investment firm and father of four jogged the last few kilometres of an exceptional journey last month, his beat up trainers bore the only hints he'd just finished running Ontario's 850-kilometre-long Bruce Trail in 15 days.

To put Mr. Smith's achievement in context, the Bruce Trail Association's staff can't recall anyone running the rocky, isolated route faster since the trail officially opened almost 40 years ago. Of the association's 8,000 members, only 1,500 have earned their "end-to-end" badges, usually by covering the distance -- from the tip of the Bruce Peninsula along Georgian Bay to Queenston Heights near Niagara Falls -- over the course of months or years. And prospective end-to-enders usually walk the trail rather than run.

But Mr. Smith's tour of the picturesque trail was somewhat more condensed -- for two weeks; he covered more than 50 kilometres a day.

At 5 feet 10 and 158 pounds, Mr. Smith has a runner's body -- virtually devoid of fat. It's the result of years of long-distance running dating back to his days at the Royal Military College. He credits the five years he spent with the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry after college for giving him the "stick-to-it-ness" he needs to cover such vast distances on foot.

In addition to training daily, Mr. Smith often runs ultramarathons -- intense races that can stretch 160 kilometres (100 miles) or more.

Mr. Smith and his running partner, Marc Hamel, were driven by more than training: both were running to raise money for the Bruce Trail Association, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada and the Canadian Mental Health Association

While Mr. Smith blazed through the trail, the injury bug brought disappointment to aspirations Mr. Hamel had cemented during a year of intensive training that included running and cross-training for as long as six hours a day, seven days a week. He was forced to abandon the run after the third day when he suffered a calf and hip injury as he ran the treacherous northern end of the trail. Still, he was not about to quit, and rejoined Mr. Smith a week later.

The runners raised \$20,000, half of which will go to the Bruce Trail Association, which is trying to buy all the private property that parts of the trail run through.

The Bruce Trail is the longest and oldest continuous footpath in Canada. The trail runs along the Niagara Escarpment, one of the most popular outdoor attractions in Ontario. The escarpment contains everything from



Marc Hamel, left, who missed some of the run due to injury, and Clayton Smith are joined by members of the Niagara Bruce Trail Club Sept. 24, seven kilometres from their destination at Queenston Heights

forests to farmland, rolling hills to 1,600-foot cliffs. A series of waterfalls run down these cliffs, the most famous of which is Niagara Falls. The escarpment is also home to about 530 species of animals.

Emboldened by the success of their run, Mr. Smith and Mr. Hamel hope to turn it into an annual event to raise money for the preservation of the Bruce Trail.

Reflecting on the success of the run, Mr. Smith talked of rising at 3 in the morning to begin training in order to minimize the impact on his work and family life and the gratitude he feels for his wife's patience and support. His family, specifically his four children, he said, and children everywhere also served as motivation for running the trail.

"There are so many overweight children out there, and there are all these diets. What I'm saying is all you have to do is find something you love and involves physical activity," he said. "You should see the kids when we go out hiking; it's like a transformation for them."

Minutes after completing the run on Sept. 24, Mr. Smith saw evidence he had achieved his goal of inspiring his children. Midway through describing his gruelling training regimen, he was interrupted by one of his three sons, who presented him with a "World's Greatest Dad and Role Model" medal.

He might also have earned a medal for his courage for enduring the full 850 kilometres of the run.

"I started getting shin splints on day six, which I've never had before," Mr. Smith said. "Days nine through 13, it was a struggle just to get out of bed. I was running with extreme pain."

Mr. Smith often got up at 5 o'clock in order to make it to the trail and start running by 6:30. Some days he'd run for 11 hours, slowing to a snail's pace over sharp rocks and loose shale, and finding strength in the inspiration he encountered along the way, including a 61-year-old running the trail end-to-end in the opposite direction.

For physical strength during the run, Mr. Smith relied on a 400-calorie meal replacement shake. He drank one every hour, as well as electrolyte replacement powder. The runner's only solid meal was dinner.

Surprisingly, his weight didn't change over the two weeks.

"When my wife saw me, she said, 'You lost a lot of weight.' But I was exactly the same," he said. "I think all the fat just turned to muscle, because you're running at a speed where you're in constant fat-burning mode."

Mr. Smith averaged about seven or eight kilometres an hour, including stops.

But what may be even more impressive than his speedy completion of the trail run is what he intends to do next. Always looking for a challenge, he plans to run in the aptly scary-sounding Badwater Ultramarathon.

The 217-kilometre run starts in Death Valley, Calif., the lowest point in the United States, where temperatures often flirt with 50 degrees. It ends at Mount Whitney, one of the highest points in the country. By some measures, it's the toughest race in the world, and it's exactly what Mr. Smith is looking for.

"You just have to find something you love doing," he said, "and keep doing it."

### **Fitness profile**

**Clayton Smith:** age 38.

**Currently:** The first runner to complete the entire 850-kilometre Bruce Trail from end to end in 15 days.

**Previously:** CEO of Crystal Wealth Management.

**The goal:** To build on the fundraising success of this year's run by turning it into an annual event, and prepare for the gruelling, 217-kilometer Badwater Ultramarathon in Death Valley, California.

