

## Running in One R.I.

By John Farrow

Years ago when E.F. Schumacher wrote *Small is Beautiful*, he wasn't specifically referring to Rhode Island, but he could have had it in the back of his mind. Prior to landing at the airport, you glide over peaceful forests of green trees which give way to picturesque bays and inlets along the coast.

The capitol city of Providence is dotted with architectural masterpieces and historic buildings, including the Friend's Meeting House, built in 1723, and the First Baptist Church, THE First Baptist Church, founded by Roger Williams in 1638.

Rhode Island is the epitome of "small." How small is it? Let's just say that I actually had to share the hotel elevator with someone from Santa Fe. It's also very easy to turn a corner in Providence and be greeted by a "Welcome to Massachusetts" sign.

Having grown up in our big neighbor to the east, I will admit that Texas is a state not much noted for modesty where size is concerned, with one exception. It is downright rude to ask a rancher the size of his ranch. You'll be lucky if you're met with only silence and perhaps a stream of tobacco juice splattering around your feet.

On the other hand, among serious cattlemen, ranches are informally measured in "Rhode Islands," with one Rhode Island (R.I.) equal to the size of that state, 1,214 square miles or 776,960 acres. By way of illustration, the present-day King Ranch in South Texas weighs in at 1.61 R.I., while the legendary XIT Ranch in the panhandle measured 3.86 R.I. at its peak.

Against this background, I was therefore intrigued to finally be visiting Rhode Island and to also find a race in Providence at a time when I would be there on my way back from Cape Cod, the 1998 Harvard Healthcare Pilgrim 5k (Note: there is no truth to the rumor that a 5k is the longest race they can have in the state).

Picking up my race packet, I was pleased to find a list of 16 local bands that would be playing along the route, including Hitler Stole My Potato and Screaming Under Stars. Nothing

like a little blues or rock and roll for a Sunday-morning run through the former haunts of Roger Williams.

But I think he would understand and approve. While Rhode Island was founded on religious tolerance, it exhibits a fair amount of musical tolerance, as well. More than 25 years ago, Roomful of Blues came smoking out of Providence clubs, and later, Sugar Ray and the Bluetones did the same with its more driving, urgent style of blues. Along the way, the state has also been home to one of rock's earliest but least known pioneers, Sleepy LaBeef, whose early performances featured guest stints by Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis, and whose original Sun recordings are now collector's items.

Although Sugar Ray has left the Bluetones for Roomful of Blues and guitarist Kid Bangham left to spell Jimmy Vaughan (Stevie Ray's brother) with the Fabulous Thunderbirds, the music scene is still vibrant and well in Rhode Island. Who should I run into in the airport men's room but Louisiana Zydeco legend BooZoo Chavez ("BooZoo, tha's who"), in town for a show.

Race day dawned bright and sunny. At the start, the depth of the elite field was staggering. Kahlid Khannouchi and Philemon Hanneck, Libbie Hickman and Amy Rudolph. From Albuquerque, James Bungei, Peter Koech, Charles Mulinga and Jane Omoro. The first American would finish far down the list.

I had hoped for some help from the sea-level elevation, but that was countermanded by a week of indulging in *beaucoup* shrimp and chowder and quahogs and fish and crab cakes and cranberry chutney and . . . No matter. Hitler Stole My Potato was very good, and I finally got to experience 1.0 R.I.

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