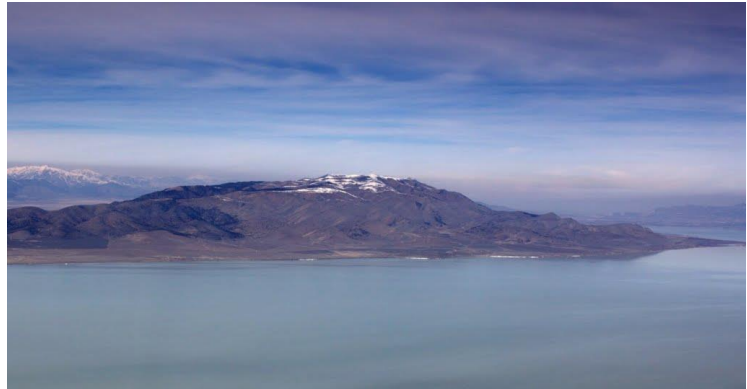


Training Playground



noisy traffic on a pavement shoulder. They do this morning after morning oblivious to the wonderful peaceful trails nearby.

As a child in the 1960s, I recall sitting in my grandparent's living room, up on the Provo foothills, looking across Utah Lake to west and seeing the mountain on the other side. I couldn't see any homes over there. Little did I know that I would run thousands of miles there starting 40 years later.



In 1999, I moved to Saratoga Springs, Utah and my gaze immediately looked up to that mountain towering more than 3,000 feet above my house. Lake Mountain is about twelve miles long, north to south, and five miles across, east to west. In 1999, on the west side of Utah Lake, there were only a few hundred people settled on the Lake Mountain foothills. The pioneers still lived there, including Reid and Ursula Wayman who for years struggled with an orchard. They welcomed the newcomers who came out to settle in the shadow of Lake Mountain. Those of us who came from the cities, seeking the peace and quiet and amazing lake views, affectionately referred to those who were already there as “field people.” Most of those existing settlers lived on expansive farms growing various crops or raising mink. In the years to come, many of those pioneer settlers would pass on or sell their now valuable property to developers. Mike Dortch purchased and developed the historic Saratoga Springs resort which paved the way for thousands to discover the beauty and peace of living near Utah Lake.

Several years before I became a runner, in 1999 I started to explore the foothills of Lake Mountain. There are various small canyons on the north end that I hiked into, hoping to find routes that climbed to the top. But all the trails I tried ended. I discovered that the main activities on the mountain foothills seemed to be target shooting, ATV riding, and deer hunting. I came across remains of a water slide from the former Saratoga Springs resort and a giant tire dump hidden up in a side canyon. Eventually I found Lott Canyon which went in a more than a mile deep but stopped at a low pass giving views to the west. It would still take another couple years for me to venture further south to Israel Canyon which led to the top.

Lake Mountain rises to an altitude of 7690 feet. As you gaze up to its top, you notice the numerous towers that contain various antennas for radio and TV stations, Ham radio repeaters, and an important Loran

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station to help guide aircraft to the Salt Lake airport. Every night you can see high flying planes flying right over the mountain on their journey north.



One of the several summits on Lake Mountain

In 2002, I started to get into better shape and began to hike regularly. During September of that year I hiked up to the summit for the first time using the Israel Canyon road. Back then, there were no houses in the area and the dirt road for Israel Canyon extended all the way down to Redwood Road, the starting point. Reid Wayman's home could be seen to the south along with a cluster of new homes being built below. When I made it to the top I was very impressed by the views and I knew that I would again make the climb. I did hike up again a few months later in the snow during January, discovering that this was a great climb year round.

In those earlier years, my meager efforts to run involved running a mile stretch on a paved road back and forth in front of my house. Boredom resulted and I didn't keep it up for very long. There weren't many interesting paved roads to venture further and it never dawned on me to run the trails until 2004 when I started to seriously train. I then discovered the joy of running in the foothills of Lake Mountain and it became my primary area to run. I wouldn't see any other runners or even foot prints on those trails and roads until many years later. It became my private training ground and an opportunity for solitude.



A beautiful winter view from the top of Lake Mountain



In Lott Canyon, a week after the big fire

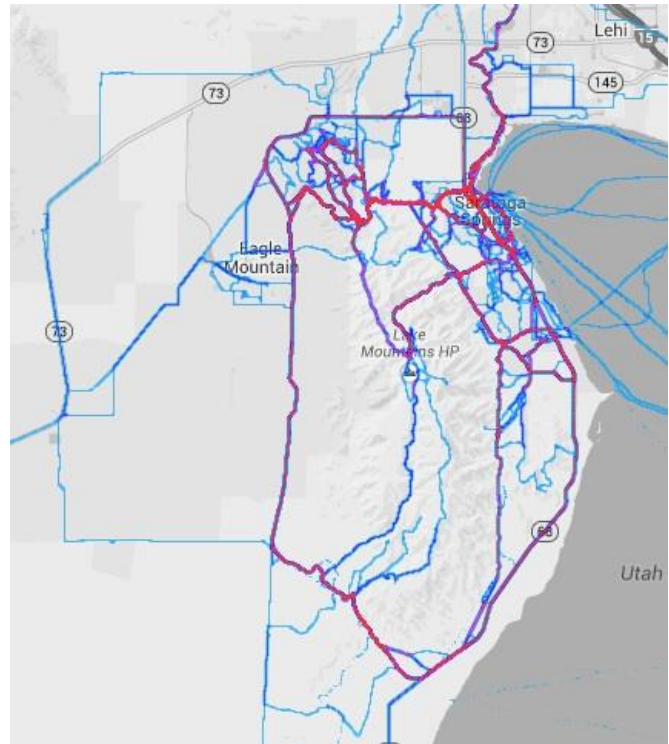
During 2004, I ran up and down nearby Lott Canyon many times and it became a fairly regular route early in the morning before work. I loved that Canyon. From my home my fastest round trip was 1:08, a very fast time for the seven-mile round trip and 1,500 feet climbing that included blasting down in only 26 minutes. Sadly I can no longer run that favorite canyon. In 2012 the Saratoga Springs Dump fire caused by thoughtless shooters destroyed the canyon. Eventually the area was closed for revegetation. I tried to make my way up it again in 2014, but it was overgrown with high weeds, the road

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very faint, and it could no longer even be hiked. My PR and fastest known time will likely stand for years.

As I increased my miles, I discovered more Lake Mountain foothill trails and ran many miles on the north side on the ridges and hidden valleys, still all to myself. I discovered a network of motorcycle trails constructed on the east slopes and north slopes above the homes starting to be built nearby. There was one particular route that I loved, running along the ridge that extends to Ranches. I loved a crazy motorcycle decent on the north end. One day I took reflective ribbons and hung them on the descent trail so I could blast down fast in the dark weaving around the cedars with my bright green light. Ten years later you still might find one or two of those faded ribbons. I affectionately call that ridge, "Tickville Ridge" in honor of the original name for the area below, Tickville.

I finally got the crazy idea of running all the way around Lake Mountain which would be about 32 miles. My first attempt was aborted because of dusk at about 3/4ths around, but I succeeded in May 2004. I knew that I was the first person to ever do that because it was such a crazy idea and I was the only very long distance runner in the area. I would repeat the circumference run many times in the years to come. Later in 2004, I ran with Jim Skaggs for the first time on my second trip around the mountain. On that trip for the first time I reached the 1,000 mile running mark for a calendar year. I thought that was so far. Little did I know that I would soon be exceeding 3,000 miles each year. In 2009 I ran with Craig Lloyd around the mountain as he ventured for the first time into ultramarathon territory. I've lost track how many times I've run around Lake Mountain. By 2014, it is probably was approaching 15 times.



Map recording many of my runs on and around Lake Mountain

My runs up to the top of Lake Mountain continued. I lost track of how many times I have run up it but by 2014 I had probably run to the top about 40 times. One year in the mornings before work, I would start at the present-day trailhead above the houses and run until the hour mark up the road and then run down in time to go to work. I did this over and over again, progressing higher each time up the mountain.

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The year 2012 was a very difficult year for Lake Mountain. For years target shooters have trashed the mountain and with the increased popularity of explosive targets each year the mountain would catch on fire. Early in the dry season of 2012 about a dozen human caused fires were started, most by target shooters. Saratoga Springs incompetent mayor, Mia Love, at the time refused to do anything to protect the mountain or the city below from this danger. "I will oppose all efforts to restrict our gun rights." When the big one came, the Dump fire which was started just 1.5 miles from my home, it resulted in the evacuation of about 9,000 people from their homes for several days.



The devastating fire burned about a third of the mountain and destroyed most of Israel Canyon, including the power lines that head to the top which all needed to be replaced.



Fire destruction even on the high ridges

A week after the fire, I ran up onto my mountain and was greatly saddened by what I found. My training playground would never be the same. The culprits were were shooters from Washington state who went and bought explosive targets, shooting at them only a half mile from homes. They only received a fine of \$10,000 and no jail for starting the fire that took \$2.1 million to put out.

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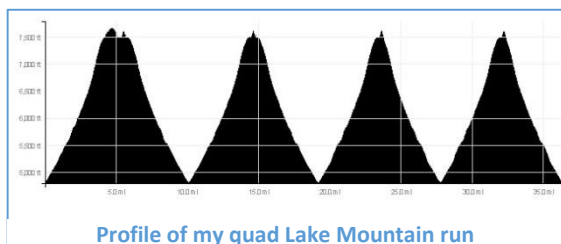
Later after the fire was put out, government leaders went to investigate the shooting problem and as they visited, they actually witnessed another fire being started. Finally the BLM stepped in and issued shooting bans on the east slopes of the mountain. Still shooters tried to continue and finally the BLM has resorted to fences and gates.



This wasn't the end of the tragedy on the mountain. City leaders were very slow to act regarding potential mud slide threats from the thousands of acres of ash. Nothing happened until the rain came a few months later. Mud and ash flowed down the mountain into neighborhood filling basements.

Acting too late the local government finally took erosion control action, and closed a significant portion of the foothills I used to run in. The efforts chewed up all existing trails in the closed area to help with runoff.

By 2012, the Lake Mountain secret was out and other ultrarunners came to meet its challenge. In 2014, I participated in what probably has been the largest group run up and down the mountain. It was very nostalgic for me, thinking back on the former years when I was the only up going up. It made me proud and happy to see so many runners enjoying that morning.



A group run up Lake Mountain. Me on far left.

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Also in 2014, I did a first. Several runners had accomplished doubles, so I decided one morning to accomplish a quad – four times in a row running up and down my mountain. It was great fun.

I continued to find new ways to enjoy the mountain. In 2013, I ran the entire spine of the mountain north to south, beginning at the homes on the north side of the mountain. That was a spectacular and challenging run. [View a video of this run](#). Many of my favorite foothill trails have now long disappeared as homes have crept higher and higher on the mountain foothills. But even in 2014, I discovered a series of fun single-track motorcycle trails to the south, past the further developments. This is now a favorite morning area to run.

Finding your own training playground is essential to help you get out often for interesting runs on easily accessible trails. Go find it.

