

# ONE OF A KIND--

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TODDS ROAD STUMBLERS

by John Carroll

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Runners cannot hang around the Stumblers clubhouse long without hearing stories about the club's early days - how it was founded, how it got its name, and how it got too big for McDonald's and moved into its present quarters on T odds Road.

For most of the 2,000-plus people who have joined the Stumblers, all this is learned as hearsay; only a tiny fraction of the current membership was actually present in the early days. And even some of those who were present can no longer remember precisely how the club came to be

Here, then, for the benefit of current members, is a brief account of the Stumblers' early history based on interviews with several of the founders:

It all started in 1968 when Alex Campbell, heavier then by some 40 pounds, read a book called Aerobics by Dr. Kenneth Cooper. Inspired by Cooper's writing, Campbell began by trying to jog the length of his driveway from his house to Todds Rood and back. As the months passed, Campbell progressed until he could run a ten-mile course which took him past Pine Grove and the site of the present Stumblers' clubhouse.

In 1970 Campbell met Dyer Rodes at a basketball banquet at the First Presbyterian Church. As Campbell remembers, Rodes introduced himself by saying, "My wife says you can run ten miles "

Soon after, Rodes and Campbell began running together on Todds Road. Other early Stumblers who joined them were Bill and Doris Matlock.

In those days, nobody had digital stopwatches, \$100 shoes or Gore-Tex apparel. Campbell used an old-fashioned wrist-watch with a second hand and Rodes had a palm-held stopwatch.

Rodes recalls Campbell saying, "wouldn't it be great if we could get a group of people with all kinds of abilities so everybody would have somebody to run with."

Over the next several years, that hope would become a reality. In the early days some of the other runners were Diane Curry, Jerry Bowden, Bruce Gragg, Cathy Fox and John Fox. After running, they would go to McDonald's on Richmond Road, where Campbell claimed to have the only McDonald's charge account in the nation.

In 1977, when Ken Pike started running at T odds Rood, the crowd had grown somewhat but it was still small by today's standard. "Bock then," Pike recalls, "a big turnout would be 30."

The name "Stumblers" was coined early in 1978 when the first shirts were made for members entering the Boston Marathon. Campbell says the name was chosen "so that people who came out wouldn't feel they had to be expert runners."

One Saturday the rapid growth of the club became dramatically evident when approximately 150 runners showed up at McDonald's. Campbell says it took well over two hours for everyone to get fed, and it was agreed that a new meeting place was needed.

On days when the weather was bad, the runners had been congregating against a barn located behind the Pine Grove store. Campbell asked the owner of the property, Mr. Doug Gay, whether the runners could extend a roof from the barn to provide shelter. Mr. Gay replied that he could offer them something better: a small farmhouse nearby.

Mr. Gay recalls his conversation with Campbell as follows: "I said, 'I'll charge you a \$100 a month and refund the money.' He said, 'If you'll charge me \$200 a month and refund it, I'll take it.'"

Shortly before Christmas, 1978, the members began renovating and painting the new clubhouse. The job was finished at the end of March, 1979.

In July of 1979, the Five Hundred Mile club was started, and the first member to run 500 miles on Saturdays was Ken Pike, who was in training for a marathon. John Fox came in a close second.

It was also in July, 1979, that the first Stumblers picnic was held at Spindletop. It has been an annual event ever since.

There have been many developments in recent years, among them: The club has become a regular supporter of track and field events in Central Kentucky including the Kentucky Relays. It has sponsored midnight New Year's Eve runs. And recently it has produced its own newsletter, the MILEMARKER.

Members of the club have carried the Stumbler name far and wide. Recently Mark Nenow ran in the world track and field championships at Helsinki, and the Pan American Games at Caracas. The club has high hopes that Nenow will continue his success at the Olympics in 1984.

But for most of its members, the Todds Road Stumblers remains a club where anyone of any ability can enjoy running and making good friends. That's the way it started, and that's the way it remains today.