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ANNOTATION

AN OPEN-AIR RUNNING AND CIRCUIT EXERCISING TRACK IN FRANCE

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Over the last year or two I have been visiting a part of South West France which has developed an unusual and interesting recreation and sports facility. It has provided a lot of fun, exercise, and competition, for members of my family and friends of all ages and of all degrees of fitness and unfitness. I have been unable to find anything similar in this country, and thought it was a good enough idea to deserve a short description in your journal.

The whole Bay of Archachon area is well wooded, and the Commune de Lege-Cap Ferret, in association with the Office National des Forêts, has taken a small "forest" behind the village of Petit Piquet some 40 km west of Bordeaux, just off the main Bordeaux-Cap Ferret Road (D 106), and turned it into a "Parcours Sportif".

With a minimum of interference with the natural forest, they have made a "track" which winds in and out of the trees, and follows the natural contours of the land up and down hill. The track is not surfaced artificially but is typical forest floor of earth, leaves, sand, etc., now well trodden, which is delightfully soft and springy to run on.

The defined path is wide enough for two people to walk or run side by side, and from start to finish is about 3,000 metres. It follows a roughly circular route so that the starting and finishing points are sited side by side emerging onto a small parking ground at the roadside.

At irregular intervals of 100 to 150 metres along the track 20 exercise stations are placed in natural clearings, each one assigned to a particular exercise which is described by a short text and diagram signs on a convenient tree, with suggested number of repeats for trained and untrained participants. The first few exercises are straightforward stretching and warming up routines, but they get progressively more demanding involving jumping, stepping, vaulting, swinging from rings, a "monkey climb", and a balance beam.

Where apparatus is required, this is made of logs and forest timbers which blend into the background, and is of strong, crudely simple design, requiring little maintenance.

The whole complex is "user friendly" with symbols and signs on the trees to keep you going in the right direction, indicating when to walk, run, or jog, and describing the exercises, and suggesting numbers of repeats.

The "Parcours Sportif" is open all day and every day and there is no admission fee.

There are no changing rooms or other "social amenities" but there are lots of friendly bars and bistros nearby for post-exercise refreshment.

It makes use of natural facilities without in any way spoiling them for the non-sporting public, who can still use the Parc for a gentle stroll with the kids on a sunny afternoon, (though in my experience those who start off in this way are usually tempted to return in track suit and running shoes for a more strenuous attack on the course).

For the not too serious keep-fit enthusiast it provides a pleasant jogging environment, easy on the eyes and on the feet, with constantly changing visual interest, and a chance to vary the monotony of jogging with the exercise routines built into the course.

For the serious athlete it provides a form of "circuit training" in a much more stimulating atmosphere than a gym, and can be turned into a gruelling competitive event with a minimum of organisation.

In practise, it is not unusual to see all these different types of users on the course at the same time, all going at their own pace, and not interfering with each others' enjoyment.

Plan of the open air "circuit" at the Parcours Sportif in the National Park near the Bay of Arachon, West of Bordeaux, France.

The advantages of such an exercise park in encouraging people at all levels of fitness to take part in enjoyable outdoor activity at little or no cost, seems obvious.

Any community with a piece of suitable land, not necessarily wooded, and a few handy do-it-yourself volunteers could do the same as Lege-Cap Ferret.

Perhaps the French weather is more conducive to this sort of venture, and the French vandals less destructive.

I would be interested to hear what other BASM members feel about the viability of a Parours Sportif in this country, or of any experience of similar exercise parks.

Exercises specified in the twenty exercise stations

Station

1. Arm swinging, one at a time.
2. Touching toes, knees straight.
3. Both arms swinging forwards, knees and hips flexed.

4. Both arms circling together, trunk flexed laterally.
5. Trunk sideways flexed, fingers to touch toes, alternate sides.
6. *Squat jumps over logs.
7. Astride jumping with arms swinging.
8. *Chinning a bar.
9. *Vaulting over and ducking under a log "horse".
10. *Hip swinging while suspended by hands from rings.
11. *Sit-ups, feet fixed under a log.
12. *Stepping on and off tree stumps.
13. *Body twisting with a log "weight bar" on shoulders.
14. Jumping from side to side over a horizontal log.
15. Over and under a beam (similar apparatus to 9).
16. Squats with log shoulder weights.
17. Press-ups with feet raised on a log.
18. Arm and leg swinging.
19. *"Monkey climb", swinging hand to hand on an overhead ladder.
20. *Zig-zag balance beam.

* = Exercises illustrated by photographs.

BOOK REVIEW

Title: SPORT AND MEDICINE
Author: Peter N. Sperry
Publishers: Butterworths, London, 1983
Price: £14.95 **Hard cover** **271 pages** **123 figs.** **ISBN 0-407-00270-7**

I was curious to read this book — and it is a curious and interesting book to read. It gives neither bibliography nor guide for further reading (shades of O'Donoghue!) so it must automatically be excluded from consideration as a possible recommended first source for newcomers to the subject. The preface suggests that the book is directed to a variety of different types of people with different backgrounds and basic knowledge in respect of training, injury and health generally. To some extent this seems reflected in the varying academic level of the material in the book, though perhaps this is more a reflection of the author's particular interests and experience in sports medicine.

The chapter on "Running Injuries" is way ahead of anything else available in the literature.

In many ways "Sport and Medicine" thus becomes more a personal testament to one man's ideas of how sport and medicine interact than a text book as such.

The book is not without its blemishes. There is the occasional non-sequitur (e.g. cancer finding its place between antibiotics and skin), omission (e.g. no reference to rotatory instability in the knee joint) and actual error of fact (e.g. that surgery is used when all else has failed in the treatment of tenosynovitis in the forearm extensor muscles in canoeists. In fact it is the treatment of first choice rather than the last!)

Nevertheless despite the odd reservations, this is a book of real character, full of lots of good things and well worth its place on any bookshelf devoted to Sports Medicine. I am happy to recommend it as companion reading to everyone interested in the field.

J. G. P. Williams