BOOK REVIEW

Title:	LORE OF RUNNING				
Author:	T. Noakes				
Publishers:	Oxford University Press 1985				
	Price: £12.95	535 pages	Index. Figs. Tables	Soft cover	ISBN 0 19 570384 7

The title of this book was, at first glance, puzzling. When I first heard the title I was reminded of the books I read so enthusiastically as a boy. Books with such titles as "Woodcraft Lore" and later "Lore of the Wilderness" which took one far beyond what "Scouting for Boys" had to offer. To my surprise, on skimming through this book with the 'folksy title' and impressive publishers, I found some magnificent electron photomicrographs of human skeletal muscle accompanied by a very clear and well illustrated chapter on muscle function. Still puzzled by the title of a book which appeared to present information about muscle function, maximum oxygen uptake and its relationship to running performance in conservative tones, I decided to begin at the beginning. The Preface revealed all. Here was a man, who while completing his medical studies in South Africa, discovered running and so the love affair began. Thereafter his life both private and professional has revolved around running and his personal search to understand all that he can about those factors which contribute to successful running. His journey of discovery, as a medical scientist and more importantly as a runner, is by no means a boring plod. On the contrary, his knowledge and experience, and those of his running heroes, have been recorded in a most readable text. The author bares his soul as a runner and as a South African and the reader feels that the book is very much a sharing of knowledge between fellow runners.

Lore of Running could, in one sense, be described as a textbook in that it has much of what one would expect to see in standard textbooks on exercise physiology. However the presentation of the standard information is offered in a much more personal style than would appear in a traditional textbook. The material covered is communicated consistently from the point of view of a runner attempting to use available information to understand running performances in general and marathon and ultra-distance running in particular. The author presents his interpretation of scientific information on running in an historical perspective, analysing the achievements of great runners of the past and of the present in light of current understanding of exercise physiology. The advice of the great coaches and athletes are quoted liberally and they are so skilfully woven into the text that they seemed to have been stated exclusively for their future inclusion in Tim Noakes's book. Anyone truly interested in running will not fail to get a great deal of information and helpful advice from this book, whether as a runner or as a theoretician.

The book is organised into two main sections, the first section is presented under the heading Physiology and Training and the second section is headed Medical Aspects of Running. The photographs of the great distance runners are excellent as are the diagrams and the extensive bibliography. Once the reader, who has only a limited background in the biological sciences, has passed or has by-passed Chapter Two on the Physiology and Biochemistry of Running then he or she will feel more comfortable with the material and the style in which it is offered. The author draws much on empirical knowledge of past and present training methods in the chapters entitled "Training — the Practice" and "Training with the Modern Experts". These chapters would sit quite comfortably in any good coaching manual as would the chapter on "Racing the Marathon and Longer". This latter chapter has a section headed "Racing with Arthur Newton" who the author regards as one of the greatest of the ultra-distance runners and the person who laid the foundation for modern ultra-distance training. Tim Noakes is applaudably thorough in his examination of all the available published information on training for running. This thoroughness is also evident in his treatment of the background to great running events such as Roger Bannister's sub-four-minute-mile. The chapter containing a description and analysis of Bannister's preparation for his record breaking performance has an addendum in which alternative views to Bannister's claim to have "done it all on his own" are offered from the writings of people close to him at the time. A similar tenacity for the truth is reflected in the author's re-examination of published evidence which attempts to link, in a damning fashion, running with psychological fixations producing, for example, anorexia nervosa.

The section on Medical Aspects of Running contains a chapter on Running Injuries which is helpful and easy to understand without having to reach for an anatomy book. This chapter also contains a section on the 'psychology of injury' which is probably more helpful to the runner than a knowledge of the physiology of injuries. There is also a chapter on nutrition and even examples of the sorts of foods the runner should consume when 'carbohydrate-loading'. The final chapter deals with the female runner and the young runner and offers a mixture of useful background information and advice which is consistent with the style adopted in the preceding twelve chapters. The author's personal preference for racing marathons and longer distances is quite evident from his frequent references to the Comrades Marathon. He quotes from the many studies which have been conducted on the participants in this gruelling 55 mile race. Of the many descriptions of the onset of fatigue he offers in his book there is one which describes his own experience in the Comrades Marathon. It shares with the reader the thoughts of someone attempting to complete this double marathon and for whom experience brings not confidence but the recognition that the worst has yet to come. It reads as follows "For however easy the first four hours may have felt, the cost has been too high. Within the hour I must pay for my early excesses; I must re-enter the soul of the Comrades, that special confrontation between an exhausted body and mind, and an ailing but unbeaten will". Distance runners, of whatever standard, reading this and other such descriptions will readily recognise kindred experiences.

After reading and reflecting on the contents of the five hundred pages of this book I feel that the author has not only justified the title "The Lore of Running" but he has chosen the only title which truly reflects both his writing style and the material he offers so generously. This book is probably the best book written on distance running and deserves to become the "thinking distance runner's bible".

Clyde Williams