

Top Running Routes in Dallas

By Warwick Ford

Big “D”, Dallas, seems much more a place for automobiles than for pedestrians. If you asked the average person here what was the most important thing he did with his feet, he would say hitting the accelerator and the brake. Nevertheless, Dallas does have a thriving subculture of on-foot enthusiasts. There is a keen running community and a few really good trails convenient to downtown. The DART bus and light rail system can help you get to and from these trails, making it possible to plan exercise outings without using a vehicle at all. The weather is excellent for running in October through April, with good temperatures and only a small risk of precipitation ruining your outing. In the other months, average maximum temperatures move into the 80s and 90s, meaning you might want to go to extra pains to fit your outdoor exercise in early in the day. In this short article, we shall look briefly at the very best of those local on-foot routes.

For a training or recreational route to be motivating and enjoyable, the *Fun on Foot* model says it needs to have four attributes: **Comfort** from both the safety and underfoot perspective; **Attractions** to make it interesting; **Convenience** to city center and public transit; and a worthy **Destination** to help motivate you to finish the route. Applying this model to Dallas, we came up with the following three winning routes.

Katy Trail (5.0 miles)

The 3.5-mile Katy Trail was built over the bed of the former Missouri-Kansas-Texas (MKT or *Katy*) Railroad. It is one of the finest examples of rail trail development in the country. It is wide, well surfaced, beautifully landscaped, and entirely absent the unwanted railroad track scenery, such as industrial back doors, junkyards, and undesirable dwellings, that plague so many other urban rail trails. To build a complete on-foot outing around the Katy Trail, we suggest a start in downtown Dallas, easily reachable via the DART network. We nominally start at Dealey Plaza, the most famous spot in the city, where President Kennedy was assassinated in 1963. Head north on Houston Street a little under a mile, past the American Airlines Center, to the ramp onto the start of the Katy Trail. Follow the trail to its end at Airline Road, running, walking, or inline skating, as you prefer. At Airline Road, if you follow sidewalks north and east of here, it is about a half-mile to the intersection of Mockingbird Lane and Central Expressway. Here there is a DART light rail station, allowing you to get quickly back downtown. There are also shops, restaurants, and an excellent Irish Pub, should you feel like a wind-down break. The Southern Methodist University campus is nearby.

Turtle Creek Trail (5.2 miles)

If you want to weave some more variety into your Katy Trail outing, there is an older, more sedate parkland trail along Turtle Creek, paralleling the Katy Trail for roughly the first half of its length. Advantages of the Turtle Creek Trail are more pleasant creek-side scenery, more wildlife, plus you escape the cyclist traffic of the Katy Trail. You have various options as to how you might use the Turtle Creek Trail. For our nominal route described here, we simply repeat the Katy Trail outing described above, but divert onto the Turtle Creek Trail for part of the distance. Another option would be to do an out-and-back loop, using the Turtle Creek Trail in one direction and the Katy Trail in the other.

Suppose we start out as in our previous route and get onto the start of the Katy Trail. At Reverchon Park, after crossing McKinnon Street, you can conveniently switch to the Turtle Creek Trail via the park. (Improvements here are scheduled for completion early 2007.) Follow the main trail north and then, after Avondale Avenue, bear right away from the creek and into the classy suburb of Highland Park. The mansions you will pass here are typical of Dallas' glorious best. Follow St. John's Street north, then Armstrong Street east, back to the railroad easement and a ramp onto the Katy Trail.

White Rock Lake (9.0-to-10.0 miles)

White Rock Lake is the most popular running, jogging, walking place in Dallas. It is an attractive lake, originally a reservoir, surrounded largely by parklands. There is a nine-mile trail around it, accommodating pedestrians and cyclists. It is a popular venue for racing events for both pedestrians and cyclists. You can drive and park in various parking lots, and run the loop. Alternatively, if you prefer, you can take the DART light rail to White Rock Station, and travel on-foot down a pleasant half-mile trail to the lake's northern tip. If you want to end up in a top class eating and drinking area, especially for weekend brunch, you can leave the lake near its southwest corner and head west along the residential streets to Greenville Avenue. You have many choices of food and beverage establishments here, and end up not far from Mockingbird Station on-foot or via bus.

© Warwick Ford, 2007

[Warwick Ford is author of "Fun on Foot in America's Cities," the book that describes and maps the best on-foot routes in 14 major U.S. cities. Check out the www.funonfoot.com site for more information and to purchase the book or maps.]