

# [ MILES and MINUTES ]

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PHOTOS BY ANNIE TOBEY/ACTIVE WOMAN TRAVELER

Six Runners in the Wind, (l-r, back row) Travis Walker, Elizabeth Martin, Loretta Cataldi, Brian Kelleher, (l-r, front) Carena Chin, Annie Tobey savor their accomplishment.

# The Colonial 200 Relay – *a whole lot of road*

by Annie Tobey

Road races are typically solo pursuits, though the footfalls of other runners surround you. In the 2013 Colonial 200 Relay, runners ran alone, surrounded by woodlands, pastures and open sky. But after passing on the baton – in this case, the slap bracelet – it became clear that the race was a team effort: You stopped, took a few recovery breaths, and connected with fellow runners.

This year's Charlottesville-to-Williamsburg relay was on Sept. 20-21 under blue skies by day and a full moon at night. It featured 23 teams each made up of 12 runners and three six-runner teams, the latter called "ultra" teams. Runners took turns tackling stretches of the course, the "legs."

Richmond-based Six Runners to the Wind began their quest at 9 a.m. Friday at Beaver Creek Lake Park in Charlottesville, sending off runner one, Brian Kelleher. Our other five team members – Travis Walker, Loretta Cataldi, Elizabeth Martin, Carena Chin and me –

began the ritual that would become habitual over the next 31 hours and 31 minutes. We hopped into our van, leapfrogged our runner (sending a few attaboys his way as we passed), and stopped at the next exchange point to wait for the handoff.

The Colonial Relay, named by Active.com as one of the eight most scenic races in the U.S., captures Virginia from the mountains to Tidewater. The route is unlike any GPS-mandated journey. Instead, it followed back roads and byways. We ran past fields, forests, farmlands, rural homes and mountain views. Small country churches hosted many of the exchange points. Slopes both gentle and challenging dominated the early legs, gradually giving way to foothills and flatlands.

By the time we each had completed two legs, twilight set in, and out came the mandatory reflective vests, lamps and flashing taillights. For me, the expansive feeling

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of running by day morphed to the focus that darkness brings. My illumination provided a tunnel of subdued light. Besides the occasional passing car or distant dog, I was accompanied only by crickets, katydids and my own rhythmic footfalls. Patches of fog set in as the night progressed, drifting across the road like spirits protecting my way – or questioning the sanity of my midnight run.

Not all legs were quite so uneventful: Runners faced two aggressive dogs, a self-alleged jokester startling runners from behind a tree, and drivers oblivious to foot traffic. Such challenges can be expected during any run, but they took back seat to the inescapable physical challenges of the relay: running your part of the 200 miles, up hills and down, on unknown roads, with little-to-no sleep and on a sporadic fueling program.

“There are risks anytime you run,” Carena Chin commented as we drove home after the race. “It’s part of the mental challenge and toughness. You have to be



**Marathon Training Team photographer Mark Buckland shines as he approaches an exchange point during his night leg of the run.**

prepared – for the terrain, the route, the difficulties. You have to work with yourself to overcome it.”

Connections extend past team boundaries for Richmond runners. At several exchange zones, Richmond teams mingled with familiar faces from training teams and the Richmond Road Runners Club. When friends and family came to support us, they could drop in for an extended chat, not merely provide a passing cheer.

Any race provides an individual challenge – achieving a P.R. or simply going the distance – but a relay like the Colonial 200 adds the gratification of connecting with fellow runners. ■

*Annie Tobey, a Richmond-based freelance writer and RRRC member, is director of active woman traveler.*



**At the exchange point at the end of the first leg, Brian Kelleher finishes his run while Travis Walker (left) and a race official (right) wait.**