

Emerald Necklace Stage Race Covers Entire 80-Mile Greenway

A fitting memorial to Chad Denning

Brian Reynolds, for the Beacon

The Sunapee-Ragged-Kearsarge Greenway is a network of trails familiar to many of us. It started to take shape in the 1980s and attracts hikers from all over. Scheduled hikes are published in the *Beacon*, and many hikers make a point of finishing the entire loop.

In the past few years, New London resident Chad Denning had an idea for a race around the Greenway. Chad was an accomplished adventure racer, runner, and race director. He envisioned a "stage race" where racers would run roughly a third of the trail each day for three days and finish where they started on the third day, after having covered 80 miles.

On August 22, 2014, Chad's dream was realized in the first running of the Emerald Necklace Stage Race. The race started on a rainy Friday morning with 42 athletes starting in Potter Place on a 24-mile trip over Ragged and Kearsarge, finishing at the Kearsarge Middle School. The competitors set up camp in the gym to avoid the rain and shared dinner and stories of the day.

The next day was bright and sunny, and the race continued on the Greenway over King Hill, into Newbury, and over Mount Sunapee, and finished after 26 beautiful miles at the Sunapee Middle High School. On Sunday the race continued along the Greenway through Springfield, New London, Wilmot, over Bog Mountain, and then back to Potter Place to finish the final 30 miles and the whole Greenway in three days.



August 22, 2014 – A rainy morning in Potter Place, ready to start the first-ever Emerald Necklace Stage Race: once around the 80-mile Sunapee-Ragged-Kearsarge Greenway. The second running of the Emerald Necklace Stage Race was held this year on August 21. Photo: Tom Flummerfelt

For many, it was a life-changing experience. Athletes spent the days running and hiking together, sharing stories of training, other events, and everything else, including keeping on the trail itself. The evenings were spent sharing stories of the day, eating together, and getting ready for the next day.

The race went very smoothly thanks to the efforts of Chad, Tom Flummerfelt, Mike Sarnowski, and many others. After the race was over, while Chad, Tom, and Mike were cleaning up, they were talking about how cool it would be to set the Fastest Known Time (FKT) on the trail. It had been set in 2005 by Nathan Richer of Newbury, who also served as a volunteer on the Emerald Necklace race.

About two weeks after the Emerald Necklace, Chad passed away suddenly while running Mount Moosilauke.

Tom remembers, "The last thing I recall discussing with Chad in-person after we had just finished packing up after the Emerald Necklace was the idea of jointly running the entire 75-mile Greenway loop in a single shot ...

in an attempt to set the FKT. "Although I had been involved in planning the race, I wasn't yet intimately familiar with the course. I had done it in its entirety over three days in a scouting trip the year before and finished that trip thinking that the course would eat me up. It was definitely not suited to my strengths as a runner – too technical, too difficult to navigate, too overgrown, with trails too ill-defined."

As Tom stepped into the race director's role, he was inspired to follow through on that conversation he'd had with Chad. "Chad has inspired so many ... not just athletes, but folks from all walks of life, young and old. I was running up Kearsarge three weeks after his death on a trip up to his memorial. A random runner coming up the trail casually said, 'Remember Chad' as I passed.

"A month or two later, when running Stage 3 [Sunapee to Potter Place], an un-athletic 50+ year-old woman said to me as I passed her on the trail, "You must be one of Chad's friends."

After months of planning and training, on August 1 of this year Tom set out from Newbury Harbor to set the FKT on the Sunapee-Ragged-Kearsarge Greenway. It was a perfect day; it had been cool overnight and not too hot during the day, and there was even a brief shower as Tom summited Kearsarge in the afternoon. With the help of some running partners on various parts of the course and family and friends providing food and drink at aid stations along the way, Tom finished with a new FKT of 17 hours and 44 minutes. Tom and all his supporters along the way were inspired by Chad.

On August 21 of this year, Tom was the race director for the second edition of the Emerald Necklace. Many of the people who supported Tom on his record attempt ran the race. The race was a memorial and celebration of Chad Denning and everything he did for the running and trail-running communities in New England and beyond.



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For each event: CONTACT leader for meeting Time & Place

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Sept 13 (Sun): Hike over Bog Mountain in Wilmot. 4.5 miles of beautiful SRKG Trail 7. Moderate 4.4 miles. **Contact:** Lisa Correa 518-281-1494 or: c.lisa7716@gmail.com

Sept 19 (Sat): Learn trail construction skills from Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) instructors: build rock steps and waterbars and move large rocks safely. In Newbury near Chalk Pond. **Contact:** Gerry Gold 526-2857 or geecubed@yahoo.com

Oct 4 (Sun): Easy hike in Springfield on SRKG Trail 4 from Baptist Pond to NH 114 via Star Lake Farm. 4.1 miles on paved and abandoned roads. **Contact:** Lee Carvalho 7355719 or leecarvalho6@gmail.com

Oct 10 (Sat): Hike SRKG Trail 2 from Old Province Rd in Goshen to Sunapee Town Offices via Webb Forest, Red Water Creek Preserve and Sunapee Riverwalk. Moderate 7.3 miles **Contact:** Nathan Richer 763-2127 or nricher@ruger.com

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