

Craze for 50-Mile Hikes Started By President's Fitness Challenge

By Jerry Doolittle Staff Reporter
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By Vic Casamento, Staff Photographer

Taking their lead from the President's physical fitness program, the Warren Dahlstrom family, of Rolling Ridge, Vienna, Va., yesterday took a hike part way up the C & O

Canal towpath from Great Falls, Md. From left are, Mrs. Dahlstrom; Dahlstrom; Warren Jr., 6; Jane, 4; Susan, 10, and Sharon, 9.

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Things have reached the point where all the President has to do is drop a hint and the whole country is off and walking.

College students, postmasters, Boy Scouts, Marines, airmen and even sports editors are tumbling over each other in their willingness to accept President Kennedy's recent fitness challenge. And the most publicized, if not the fastest, marches are being staged here.

The fad got its innocent beginnings in 1908, when President Theodore Roosevelt issued an executive order pointing out that Marine officers should be able to march 50 miles in 20 hours. There is no record that the order caused much of a stir outside the Corps.

In 1963, though, Marine Commandant Gen. David Shoup dug out the order and sent a copy to President Kennedy. The President suggested that the Marines see if they still measured up, and an official test was set for Tuesday in Camp Lejeune, N. C.

But dozens of physical fitness enthusiasts couldn't wait. By now, reports are coming in from all over the country of people who have difficulty passing by a flung gauntlet without picking it up.

Reporter Makes Distance

In Amarillo, an Air Force psychologist walked and jogged his 50 miles in 10½ hours, although it was on the flat and hence possibly not a world's record.

A Lincoln, Neb., reporter trudged off into the distance Saturday, and said at the finish, "The Country is in sad shape if its people can't hike 50 miles." The reporter was presumably in good shape. She is blonde, 26, five feet tall and the mother of three.

In California, Kentucky, South Carolina and elsewhere, teams of Marines and Air Force men took the Presidential dare over the weekend. One of the South Carolina group did the last seven miles clutching a four-foot tree limb, to symbolize the big stick that Theodore Roosevelt carried while speaking softly.

On Saturday, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, probably the world's most vigorous attorney general, outlasted four companions in a 50-

mile march up the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal to a point near Camp David, the Presidential retreat in Maryland.

The C&O Canal towpath is Washington's most customary course for this sort of thing. It has echoed in the past to the plod of Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, Sen. Paul H. Douglas (D-Ill.), former Florida Gov. Leroy Collins and Interior Secretary Stewart L. Udall—among many others.

The towpath was at its worst yesterday—a long ribbon of gray puddles and muck. Here and there, tracks were still visible in a jeep that operated as relief

Picture on Page A2.

Hiking bug attacks President and First Lady.
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vehicle for the Attorney General's Saturday march.

Off to the side, a family group was settling down at a picnic table. Could it be for a time-out in a 50-mile marathon?

"We're good Democrats," the wife said defensively, "but not that good."

"We're only out with the kids for a little walk and a picnic lunch," the husband added.

"We're just a couple of Government workers trying to get ahead," explained the wife.

A man named R. R. Britton, a retired Defense Department official, came sloshing by with his wife. Britton, class of

1917 at Dartmouth College, turned out to have been an early member of the Dartmouth Outing Club.

"When I first got there," he recalled, "half the students wore snowshoes and the other half skis. When I left, it was all skis, and I guess it still is."

But the Brittons were not in the midst of a 50-mile march, either. They were merely taking the air along the canal.

The only suggestion of long-distance walking came in the Towpath Museum, from a man done up in city clothes, with a necktie, overcoat and gloves. He was J. W. Bowling, deputy director of Greek, Turkish and Iranian affairs for the State Department.

Bowling is, as well, a walker who has hiked from Washington to Cumberland, Md., and back—a distance which makes the Attorney General's hike look like a stroll down to the corner for a bottle of milk and some fig newtons.

50-Mile Course

"I've been studying the maps," Bowling said, "and I've worked out a course that comes within a tenth of a mile of the 50 miles the President is talking about."

Bowling's course runs from Point of Rocks, Md., 48.4 miles down the Potomac to the Tidal Lock at the end of the towpath. The additional 1.6 miles, he figures, could be done by backtracking to the footbridge at 34th st. nw., then backtracking again to Rock Creek Parkway.

None of this is idle conjecture with Bowling, who hopes soon to assemble a group of State Department officials who will be willing to prove that diplomats are every whit as ambulatory as Marines or Attorneys General.

Certainly, the State Department men will present a less bizarre spectacle than White House Press Secretary Pierre Salinger and several dozen newsmen who are committed to making a stab at the 50 miles Friday.

But Salinger, a 5-foot-9-inch, 185 pounder who usually hides behind a long cigar, spent Sunday training for the forced march with a 6-mile hike around Lake Barcroft, which he reportedly finished in an hour and 45 minutes.

He pronounced himself "in better shape than I thought I was," but allowed that he was "not in shape like the Attorney General; I am a representative of the unfit of the Nation."

Salinger said Sunday's was the only training he was going to do. Consequently little is expected of his effort.

But then, scoffers expected little of five Illinois Boy Scouts who wore out their scoutmaster Saturday and turned in a phenomenal 13½-hour time for the 50 miles. The important ingredient, as in any endurance contest, is heart.

It will take more than heart, though, to match the current record holder, the Air Force psychologist from Amarillo. Not only was his time a scorching 10½ hours, but United Press International reported that the officer, Lt. Col. Ronald C. Force, 45, had vowed to "dog trot the last half mile, rest a moment and then spring the final 200 yards."

Perhaps the word should have been "sprint," but the President would probably be more pleased if it should turn out not to have been a typographical error.

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United Press International

Hiking Shoes Get a Rest

After shedding his hiking shoes, Attorney General Robert Kennedy relaxes at Camp David, Md., yesterday following a 50-mile walk from Great Falls. Kennedy was driven the last 15 miles of the 65-mile trip, after he had outlasted four companions. Story on Page A1.