



Chesapeake Bay Bridge Run/Walk

By Judy Colbert

Some bridges were designed and built with pedestrians in mind. New York's Brooklyn Bridge, San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge, and the International Rainbow Bridge between Niagara Falls, NY, and Niagara Falls, Ontario, come to mind.

Others are strictly for motorized vehicles, with the occasional exception. The 24-mile bridge over Lake Pontchartrain, Louisiana, has a marathon race periodically. Some 35,000 people walked the Mackinac Island, Michigan, bridge this past Labor Day Monday, its 65th year.

And, then, there's the Chesapeake Bay Bridge walk/run on the William Preston Lane, Jr., Memorial Bridge between Annapolis and Kent Island. After the opening of the second span, the original, east-bound span was closed for maintenance in 1974. Towson Cub Scout master Dan Donnelly asked Governor Marvin Mandel and the Department of Transportation if his troop could walk the bridge before it was reopened to vehicular traffic. It didn't happen that year, but it did happen on April 27, 1975, when approximately 18,000 walkers crossed the 4.3-mile span.

While gephyrophobia (fear of bridges) paralyzes some people when they have to drive across what many consider the scariest bridge in the country, they're liberated when they set foot on it. The early walks encouraged just about everyone from toddlers in strollers to wheelchair users to explore the bridge. I took Donna Biess one year. Legally blind, she delighted in seeing the expansion joints moving back and forth, watching the freighters going to and from Baltimore, and peering at the osprey nests in the spans' girders. Norman Aronovic remembers walking the bridge twice while pushing his quadriplegic buddy, John Lacombe. "We spent most of the walk observing the behinds of unencumbered participants. John loved the chance to do something cool that walkers did." Participants received a certificate of achievement.

Barbara Mistrik and a friend "stopped to take a photo and realized the bridge's movement is much more noticeable when not walking. Then, I took up sailing and that filled the same time slot! I sailed under the bridge during the walk/run. Now there's a way to see it!"

"You walked from Kent Island to the western shore," remembers Mary Ann Ferrin. "They had food and things to do at Sandy Point. You then got on a bus to return you to the island." The cost was \$1 for those over six for the bus ride. For a few years, they had activities on Kent Island at the industrial

park. At least once, wildflower seed packages and 15,000 pine seedlings were distributed.

Michael Rosendale, of Rosendale Realty, sent links to newspaper articles that recall there were guest appearances by Puffin, the Baltimore Oriole, Mother Goose, Captain Andy the Crab, and the Blue Angels flew overhead in 1987.

"The trips across the bridge involved taking pictures," says John Conley, Kent Island Heritage Society. "These days, I am pretty sure it takes me longer to get to the bridge from Chester than it did for my family to walk across it."

The walk became increasingly popular, and in 1991, 65,000 people walked across, and 3,000 ran. Participants were limited by the parking spaces available in the designated lots. Forty children became lost, and numerous people became sick, reported Samantha Moore in the Queen Annes Record Observer. Following the walk, participants enjoyed pony rides and food vendors with piping hot pizza, pit beef, crab cakes, crab soup, fried clams, hamburgers, hot dogs, French fries, egg rolls, and funnel cakes at the business park.

Eventually, there were cancellations due to inclement weather, security issues, maintenance, and budget cuts. Then, the pandemic canceled it.

By the time the event reappeared, it had changed. It was now a 10K (6.2-mile) race and walk that drew about 20,000 people. It's been moved from early spring to the first Sunday in November. Participants go from the western shore to Kent Island.

Corrigan Sports Enterprises (CSE) is sponsoring the run/walk again this year, scheduled for Sunday, November 12, starting at 7 a.m. and participants will go in waves. Racers go first, walkers later. Ryan Corrigan, CSE director of sales, says, there will be a "HUGE post-race party! The celebration includes live music, great food, refreshing drinks, and family-friendly activities. All proceeds will benefit Athletes Serving Athletes, Chesapeake Conservancy, and Walk the Walk Foundation."

Registration currently starts at \$80, plus fees for parking and other options. To keep the Bay free of unnecessary negative environmental impacts from the race, it's considered a "cupless" race. Participants are expected to bring their own water bottle or container. For additional information, see Bay Bridge Run (thebaybridgerun.com).

Judy Colbert is the author of *It Happened in Maryland* and *It Happened in Delaware*, Globe Pequot Press.