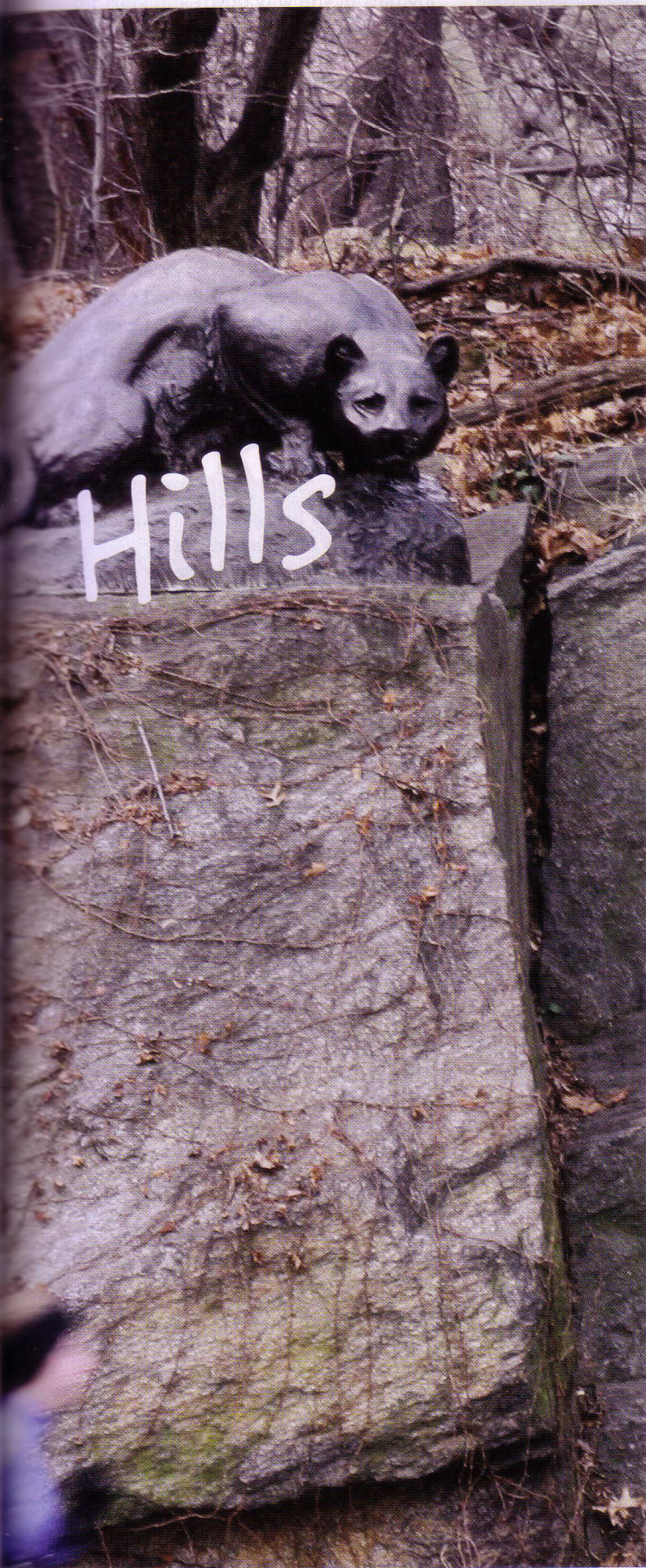




# Runs for the





## How, why, and where to run hill-repeat workouts in the five boroughs

by Jack Crager

**M**isery notwithstanding, an uphill climb can be a runner's friend.

"Just like scales on the piano, the more you practice hills, the better you get," says Shelly-lynn Glover, the co-director of NYRR Running Classes and co-author of *The Competitive Runner's Handbook*. "Your body learns what you teach it. If you run the hills of Central Park at race pace or faster and you race on those hills, then on race day you'll perform familiar skills with finesse."

### Why Run Hill Repeats?

The training adage that "hills are speed work in disguise" was coined by Olympic marathon champion Frank Shorter in the 1970s. "My belief is you always want to work on your leg speed," explains Shorter. "The way your legs are moving when you're going up a slight incline is like the way they move when you're sprinting. And you're gaining a certain strength at that effort."

Shorter often incorporated hill repeats—several hard uphill runs with recovery jogs back down—into his regimen of two high-effort workouts per week combined with lots of miles at an easier, conversational pace. "I used the hills as a break from going to the track—it's what I called next-best training," says Shorter, who now resides in Boulder, CO. "And there are times when you should do it, to avoid injuries or mental staleness."

Indeed, hill repeats offer numerous benefits. "The angle of the hill will recruit the specific fibers used at that angle as well as some others," notes Glover, an exercise physiologist. She cites several rewards: strengthening quadriceps, thighs, calves, abdominals, and gluteal muscles; raising fatigue threshold; burning extra calories; improving form and running economy; and building mental toughness and confidence.

"My old training partner called hills 'tushie tighteners,'" Glover adds. "Who couldn't use a tighter tush?"

### The Hows of Hills

Theories vary on the ideal length and incline for hill repeats, but Shorter says less can be more. "You only need between 200 to 400 meters," he says. "And it should be a gradual slope." For most runners, a 3-percent to 5-percent grade is plenty.

Glover concurs. "The 'nastiness' quotient of a hill does not an exponentially a stronger runner make," she says. The body needs to adapt over time, or you'll get hurt. She cites the example of a New Jersey runner who trains in

*Jack Crager is a writer and longtime NYRR member. He lives in Manhattan.*



the very hilly Palisades area along the Hudson River. "He may run very well in Central Park, but not necessarily faster than someone who practices on Central Park hills," says Glover. "However, they both are likely to run better than someone who doesn't practice on hills."

### Easy Does It

Shorter says he usually toned down interval workouts in the hills, compared to what he'd do on the track. "I didn't do quite as many repeats," he says. "If the hill was 400 meters long, I'd do 10 times going up, jogging back down,

rather than 12 repetitions that I would do on the track. And I would run at the same perceived effort—I would do hill repeats at what I felt was, say, a 65-second effort on the flat. I would acknowledge that I was going more slowly, but maintain the effort."

Both Shorter and Glover recommend that downhill segments be used for recovery-jog time to avoid injury. "I advise runners to stay in control on the downhill and not to over-stride or allow their feet to slap the ground when they hit," Glover says.

When repeating a hill that's longer

than about 400 meters, one option is to jog part of the way down and start up again in a new spot. "You can run a hard minute uphill, jog down to a new starting point, then repeat," says John Shostrom, a member of the Brooklyn Road Runners Club and a competitive 55-59 age-group runner. "I sometimes do six or eight repeats in a hard-medium alternate pattern—that is, a total of three or four hard, and three or four at medium effort."

Many runners use hill workouts as a transition from base-training to sharpening for their peak racing season. One

## 10 Great Hill Workouts in NYC

Here are some choice local places—suggested by runners in each of the five boroughs—to practice hill repeats.

### Cat Hill (Central Park)

Named after the statue of a lithe panther perched on a rock outcropping, this hill starts just north of the Central Park Boathouse Café on East Drive near 75th Street and ends near the Metropolitan Museum at 80th Street. The most common hill in NYRR races, this quarter-mile stretch has a grade of about 3.7 percent. (The grade of a slope, measured by vertical climb divided by horizontal distance, is often hard to determine; grades listed here are approximate.)

### Harlem Hill (Central Park)

Also known as the North Woods Hill or 110th Street Hill, this starts at the north end of Central Park near Seventh Avenue and climbs about a third of a mile onto West Drive (if you run counter-clockwise). Its gradually increasing grade averages about 4.4 percent. "Runners training for the Boston Marathon often use 110th Street Hill for preparation," says Glover. "It's not the Boston hills, but it gets the job done." The key is to move through a gradual progression of increasing challenge, Glover notes, which is exactly what's required to ascend Harlem Hill.

### East Drive in Prospect Park (Brooklyn)

Brooklynite John Shostrom points to this hill, 400 meters long and with a grade of a bit more than 3 percent, as a great place for repeats. "On the east side of Prospect Park, start from just north of Center Drive, near the zoo, and run north up to near the top of the park," says Shostrom. "The run can also be extended around the north end of the park to practice transitioning from uphill to downhill running."

### Ruppert-Yorkville Towers Walkway (Upper East Side)

On East 91st Street between Second and Third Avenues lies a full city block closed to traffic. It runs north of the Ruppert Towers building and south of its sister Yorkville Towers, just off the small, quaint Ruppert Park. This diagonally bricked road is 200 meters long with a grade of around 3 percent. "It's a multi-purpose hill," says Upper East Side resident and NYRR member Douglas DaSilva. "It's great for traffic-free hill repeats."

### Hippo Playground Hill in Riverside Park (Upper West Side)

Starting at the north edge of this popular kids' park (near 91st Street) and curving eastward toward Riverside Drive, this hill is 150 meters long with a grade of approximately 6 percent. A slightly longer and less steep hill proceeds south from the same spot toward the Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial Monument.

### Queensboro Bridge (Queens to Manhattan)

The 59th Street Bridge may or may not leave you "Feelin' Groovy," depending on your view of an incline between 3 and 4 percent. One of the more challenging uphill stretches of the ING New York City Marathon course (near mile 15), the half-mile from Long Island City to Roosevelt Island makes for a nice hill-repeat workout with great views—and boosts confidence the next time you encounter it in a 26.2-mile race.

### Yellow Trail in Forest Park (Queens)

"I suggest Forest Park for hill and trail workouts," says LuAnn Mestre of the Hellgate Road Runners in Queens. In the lush eastern section of Forest Park's 538 acres lie a series of color-coded trails and bridle paths winding through the native hardwood forest. The Yellow Trail, beginning near Metropolitan Avenue and Forest Park Drive East, offers a one-mile loop of rolling hills.

### Lily Pond Avenue off Fort Wadsworth (Staten Island)

One of the tougher hills of the Staten Island Half-Marathon (around mile 7.5) is a quarter-mile segment where Father Capodanno Boulevard merges into Lily Pond Avenue, just south of McLean Avenue, at the western edge of Fort Wadsworth. With a wide sidewalk, this hill can be practiced under the shadow of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge—sure to inspire training for your next ING New York City Marathon.



hill workout per week is plenty for most runners—though top-level competitors sometimes include two hill sessions per week in their schedules.

However you choose to do hill repeats, you can reap the benefits of speed- and resistance-training combined. “If you do interval work every week, then you don’t really have to worry about your speed on your longer runs,” Shorter believes. “You don’t have to go to the track [for intervals]. As long as you’re getting your legs going faster than your race pace, you’re fine.”

#### **Inwood Hill Park (Northern Manhattan)**

This 196-acre wilderness area is chock-full of hills; take your pick! One great spot for repeats starts near a meadow right off the bay area of the Harlem River (just past a soccer field), where the trail heads north and curves toward the Henry Hudson Parkway. Here the grade is more than 6 percent for about a half-mile, making it useful for repeats at differing starting points. Its proximity to the popular meadow area makes it less isolated, relatively, in a wilderness park where safety can be a concern.

#### **Cemetery Hill in Van Cortlandt Park (The Bronx)**

This is no place for wimps. “You haven’t lived until you’ve died in the hills of Vanny,” writes NYRR Running Classes co-director and *The Competitive Runner’s Handbook* co-author Bob Glover. Van Cortlandt boasts the infamous Cemetery Hill, which “winds and climbs about 100 feet in about 300 yards of pure torture,” Glover notes. “The Van Cortlandt family’s remains reside there,” he adds, “not those of runners that didn’t make it up the steep grade.” Indeed, with a varying slope that tops out at about 10 percent, this is a toughie. Repeat at your own risk. ■