Dear Friends of Cazenovia College Cross Country:

My apologies for being tardy with news from the desert! I didn’t have the technology or the time to report from the road. I didn’t have the time or the energy to report during our first days back. And I didn’t have any attachable photos until we were on our way to yesterday’s meet in Albany (which you’ll hear about on Monday in a separate "Weekend Update").

The primary goal of our first-ever "Learning on the Run" fall break trip was to combine extended travel to a suitable competition with opportunities for our student-athletes to learn about the geography, history, geology, and ecology of a part of the country quite unlike Central New York. The UNLV Invitational provided an ideal meet, and the landscapes of the northern Mojave Desert and the southwestern Colorado Plateau provided new and fascinating territory for our students to explore.

We were wonderfully fortunate to have traveling with our men’s and women’s teams: Joe Behan, Cazenovia College Vice President for Student Development and Dean for Student Life; Dr. Barbara Hager, Cazenovia College assistant professor of environmental studies; and Barb’s husband, Dr. William Shields, SUNY College of Environmental Science & Forestry professor of environmental forest biology. Many thanks to Joe, Barb, and Bill for their professional expertise, insights, safe driving, and time away from home! We also thank Laura Benoit, Theresa Clark, and Jeff Slocum for helping us out with transportation between the College and the airport.

The rigors of traveling by air to a competition were among the experiences that I wanted our runners to witness first-hand. From preparation for departure, to the dehydrating effects of air travel, to the sleep disruption of crossing multiple time zones, this five-day trip was a world apart from the two- or three-hour van rides that our student-athletes normally face prior to competing.

A piece of lost luggage and then a slow line at the rental car agency resulted in the equivalent of a 4:00 a.m. bedtime for our student-athletes two nights prior to the race. That was mitigated somewhat by a noonish wake-up call, but two nights in unfamiliar beds and the general dehydrating effects of the desert proved an additional athletic challenge.

The 5K and 8K courses employed a relatively flat layout in Floyd Lamb State Park, about twelve miles northwest of Las Vegas. Floyd Lamb State Park is located on the former Tule Springs—an important source of water for native Americans, early settlers, and prospectors, and later a dude/divorce ranch. The park includes several small lakes and some (heavily irrigated) lush lawn grass, but the course consists mostly of sand and clay trails through desert scrub. With the characteristically low humidity and the desert mountains as a backdrop in all directions, our course tour and light workout on the eve of the race made for a memorable run.

The races themselves were equally memorable, though the times weren’t what we had hoped for. The men raced first, with gusty winds whipping up small dust devils along the course. Tim Doyon ('09, Bennington, Vt. / Mt. Anthony Union HS) was again the first Wildcat across the line, finishing 22nd in 31:09. Chris Kahovec ('09, Victor / Victor HS) finished two places behind Tim and continued his consistent racing with a 32:50. Ryan Matuszewski ('09, Galway/Galway HS), and Brian Kowalsky ('09, Sauquoit / Sauquoit Valley HS) toughed-out some pre-race dehydration, running to 30th and 31st-place finishes in 36:01 and 37:20. And Gabriel Pec ('09, Atlanta / Georgia Perimeter JC) agreed not to race on a tender tibia, which will help both him and our team in two weeks.

Tiverton, RI / St. Mary Academy-Bay View) appeared least affected by the travel and the time changes as she ran a 5K personal best of 25:39, which placed her 66th in the field of 81. Amy Crysler ('09, Marcellus / Onondaga Central HS) sat out the race to rest a sore knee. Concordia University of California edged Cal State Los Angeles for the team title, with the Wildcats placing ninth. (See the post-race team photo attached.)

Following the meet, we were off to Zion National Park, marveling at the desert mesas of eastern Nevada, the Virgin River Canyon in northwestern Arizona, and the "color country" landscapes of southeastern Utah. In Zion, everyone in our traveling party enjoyed the Zion Canyon Overlook trail (see attached photo), and all of our student-athletes (plus Joe and Barb) made the long hike up the switchbacks (see attached photo) to Echo Canyon and then up to Observation Point (elevation 6,508 feet; see attached photo). Others also saw all or parts of the Hidden Canyon, Angel's Landing, West Rim, and Emerald Pools trails.

We visited the ghost town of Grafton, UT, which is of historical significance due to its being an agricultural (rather than mining) settlement, and which is of some modern cultural interest as the setting of Butch and Sundance's hideout, "Hole in the Wall," in the 1972 movie Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. All of our student-athletes will long remember their early morning training run through desert mesas on the way back to the hotel from the Grafton cemetery (see attached photo).

On our return trip to Las Vegas, we spent the afternoon hiking and climbing in the strange desert beauty of Nevada's Valley of Fire State Park. Soft, deep-red sandstone formations near the east entrance to the Park featured native American petroglyphs and a jumble of cliffs and boulders pocked with thousands of oddly shaped wind-holes (see attached photo). The harder, whiter sandstone formations in the "White Domes" area of the Park offered an elevated perch from which we could view a 360-degree panorama of an almost lunar landscape (see attached photo).

And everywhere we had the opportunity to get acquainted with and examine the flora (prickly pear, beaver tail, barrel, teddy bear, and cholla cacti; Joshua trees; desert yucca; brittlebrush; monkey flower; western box elder; Fremont cottonwood; datura; maidenhair fern; manzanita; Utah serviceberry; Utah juniper; ponderosa pine; pinyon pine; and shrub oak) and fauna (mule deer; ringtail cat; grey fox; western whiptail lizard; canyon wren; wild turkey; and desert raven) of the region. (See the attached photo of Barb Hager offering a lesson in varieties of cacti in the first sunlight of the morning to hit the Zion Canyon Junction on October 9.)

Despite our distance from home, we were again fortunate to enjoy the company and support of a terrific group of family and friends: Ryan's mom, Diane Kriser, and his godmother, Diane Branagan; Chris's parents and younger brothers, Ed, Nina, Andrew, and Michael Kahovec; and Kat's uncle, Joe Nedeau, and his family. Thanks to all for being a part of this very special weekend!

Thanks also to our Athletic Director, Matt Newman, and to the College's senior administration for their support of our program's initial "Learning on the Run" trip! This was truly a collection of experiences that our student-athletes will retain throughout their lives.

Keep in mind that timely information about all of Cazenovia College's intercollegiate teams is available via the new Cat Tracks e-mail service. Cat Tracks is free and easy to find at www.cazenovia.edu/cattracks.

Dave Oja, Head Coach
Men's and Women's Cross Country
Cazenovia College
315-446-6285 (home office)
daveoja@a-znet.com

Cazenovia College Cross Country

Making history . . . one mile at a time.