



# LIONBYTES

AN OCCASIONAL COMMUNICATION TO SUPPORTERS OF THE NEMEA CENTER

AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2008

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## New Nemean Games a Great Success

Robert Knapp

The fourth iteration of the revived Nemean Games was a great success in June. The athletic events took place on Saturday, June 21<sup>st</sup>, at Nemea. Over six hundred participants from around the world were on hand, as were over three thousand spectators. There were, as has become traditional, two events: the 100 stadia (approximately 100 meter) footrace in the ancient stadium and the 7.5 kilometer mini-marathon from the temple of Herakles at Kleonai over the hill and down into the valley to the stadium. The Society for the Revival of the Nemean Games took the lead in planning and making the necessary (and quite complicated) arrangements for the event.



Photo: Jeffrey Tseng

The tent/locker room/apodyterion

The Nemea Center's Field School was taking place at the same time, so undergraduate and well as graduate students were on hand. Steve Miller gave them a fascinating talk on ancient games at Nemea and successfully recruited many to help in the final preparations. They worked hard to get the stadium ready for the race, paint lines on the track, set up the *hysplex* (starting gate) there, erect the tent where the ancient 'locker room' (*apodyterion*) was located, prepare the *arballoi* (oil containers) and palm branches, and supply help and guidance to visitors on the day of the

ning and making the necessary (and quite complicated) arrangements for the event. Their Honorary President, Steve Miller, was especially instrumental in bringing this all about, as was the current President Stathis Skleris, and fellow Society members Tassos Tagaras, Giorgos Kostouros and Giorgos Bouhoutsos, the Society's Vice President.



Photo: Jeffrey Tseng

Running the race



Photo: Jeffrey Tseng

Leslie Lemire prepares the aryballoi

The Nemea Center for Classical Archaeology — Berkeley, California & Nemea, Greece  
*Bringing the Past to the Present*

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Opening Ode at the Temple of Zeus

Opening ceremonies were impressive as a chorus of Greek women sang an ode to Nemean Zeus and wound from the Temple of Zeus to the Stadium. In the Stadium, they processed to the waiting dignitaries there before the altar to Zeus and Demeter.



Procession into the Stadium

Steve served as all-around handyman for the ceremonies of the entire event. The closing ceremonies came all too soon,



Closing ceremonies

after a memorable day of races and experiences. For the first time, I ran in the Games. It was an exhilarating experience. But even more so was sitting on the ground above the stadium floor and seeing group after group race down the track to the cheers of the audience. ([Click here for a video of one of those races!](#)) You really felt like you were back in time, watching the chitoned contestants put their 'all' into the race and for the fastest, rejoicing in crossing the finish line first.

Both Director Kim Shelton and Director Emeritus Steve Miller were on hand, of course. Kim was a judge, while Steve served as all-around handyman for the ceremonies of the entire event. The closing ceremonies came all too soon, after a memorable day of races and experiences.

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Photo: Jeffrey Tseng

Once and current directors at the Games

## Berkeley Grad Student Was There!

Daniel Shu

Along with the other graduate students and undergraduates working in the Museum for the summer, I participated in the Games and spent a good part of the week before the games helping Professor Miller prepare the stadium. I and the other GSIs fought off an assortment of spiders and other dangerous insects to pull out wood from behind Bowker house that had probably not been touched since the last Nemean games; and we spent a morning and afternoon with the undergraduates trying to erect a scaffolding for the *apodyterion*, although in the end it was built mostly through the expert hammering and framing of the local men. We also set out benches and blankets for spectators, swept paths, watered the track, painted chalk lines, and helped Professor Miller install and adjust the hysplex,

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which is a marvel to see in action. But the most remarkable sight before the games started was the covering over the *apodyterion*, or changing tent, which was a controlled chaos where local men, graduate students, undergraduates unrolled a massive canvas tent over the hastily erected wooden scaffolding, pulling and lifting



Dan Shu Finishes the Mini-Marathon

all at once and shouting orders to one another while the tent threatened to collapse at any moment. The closest thing it must come to, in its mixture of uncertainty and cooperation, is an old-time barn raising, and it was beautiful.

During the games themselves, I ran in the 7.5k Footsteps of Heracles event with fellow graduate student Noah Kaye and two undergraduates. After changing into our chitons we were driven from the stadium to the starting line, and on the ride out were able to preview from

the bus the whole course in reverse, which went from the Heracleion in Kleonai through vineyards and olive groves to the town of Kleonai, up several very daunting switchbacks, over a plateau and down into the Nemea valley. The switchbacks proved to be as punishing on foot as they had appeared from the bus, but the locals of Kleonai lined the streets to offer us water and encourage us up the hill, and upon reaching reached the top we were rewarded with panoramic views. The best part of running the race came at the end, when we entered the *apodyterion*, pulled off our shoes, and ran through the ancient tunnel. There was something very surreal in emerging from the dark tunnel into the stadium and seeing friends and classmates cheering on each side.

In all the Games were an exhausting but enjoyable break from working in the museum. For my efforts I was rewarded with spider bites, sore legs, more Nemea 2008 t-shirts than I know what to do with, and a great way to see the valley.

## A Berkeley Undergrad's 'Take'

Steven Kenyon

The morning following my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, I forced myself to shake off the effects of the previous evening's celebrations and to get my body focused on the race at hand. It was June 21<sup>st</sup>, and thanks to The Society for the Revival of the Nemean Games and some dedicated volunteers (myself included), it was a day for celebration. As an undergraduate student enrolled in Professor Shelton's Nemea Field School, we had been kindly asked by former Professor Stephen Miller to lend any extra hands we could to the preparation of the games one week in advance. Preparation included erecting a protective structure around the remains of the ancient *apodyte-*



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Field School students and Director Shelton prepare palm leaves for the Games in the *apodyterion* tent

*rium*, painting the track's lane lines, building spectator benches, and putting together an authentic *hysplex* for the starting line. Our efforts, in collaboration with a handful of other native Greeks (many of whom only spoke Greek), proved successful on that hot yet lovely Saturday. The races had been divided up by gender as well as by age, so kindly placing the young adult males ages 18-24 at the peak of the afternoon, 3pm. Each race had 12 participants; one other fellow Nemea Field School undergraduate and I competed with five students from Colorado as well as five Greeks. As we changed into our chitons and headed down the ancient tunnel, a deter-

mined yet overwhelming sensation raced through my body. To think of the many great athletes before us who had previously entered the stadium and lined up at those stone starting blocks was something quite unreal. Before I could even begin to soak it all in, the race had begun and then was over just as quickly. As I exited the stadium minus the palm branch of victory, I still kept my head held high at the thought of just how lucky I was to have enjoyed the experience. Truly breathtaking.



Preparing the track



The *hysplex* ready for action



Photo: Jeffrey Tseng

Running the race



Photo: Jeffrey Tseng

The winner

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## An Old Guy Runs the Races

Donald Studebaker

The day of the race dawned. We were to run by age group and gender. Men first, then women, then younger men and children of both genders but in different groups. I was



Friends of Nemea Diana and Don Studebaker

one of the Old Guys, and we were to run first, so eventually we were let into the locker room. We then crowded around the entrance to the tunnel. The stadium, like most of those from Ancient Times, consists of a big horseshoe shaped berm. People spread their blankets on the rising ground their blankets on the rising ground to watch. The athletes enter the stadium through a stone tunnel, which at Nemea is still preserved as it was back then. It's under restoration, with scaffolding, but you can still use it. One of the ranking judges arrived, managed to get us

together despite the polyglot of languages we spoke, and administered the oath. I think one of the competitors was in his 80s. There have been competitors in their 90s. Finally we were called forth, and a tall, strong-looking young man with a good voice for heralding and a good sense of pronunciation in several languages, announced each one of us to the crowd. A trumpet blared as each of us ran toward the starting blocks. One gets one's lane assignment by drawing a lot. The lots were in a bronze helmet, and consisted of big white stones in which letters of the Greek Alphabet had been etched and painted. The *hysplex* was drawn tight and ready. The *hysplex* is an affair of ropes that allows the starter to release all the runners at the same moment. Nemea is the first place to make use of the actual device in modern times. The Greek equivalent of "Ready, Set, Go!" was cried out, and the *hysplex* went down. I took off (I am told) like a bullet from a 45 Magnum. I thought of nothing but getting to the end as fast as I could. But then -- something started to go wrong. Inside myself I felt like a pinball machine being lifted and tilted. My balance was going. I kept pumping my legs, but they were landing unevenly. I went tumbling, ass over teakettle, as the saying goes. My legs landed, my head struck, my shoulders and ribs. Then I scrambled up and started running again. Epinephrine is a great pain killer. I ran, single-mindedly, but noticed that I was passing another man in another lane. I reached the end, threw up my hands, and thanked Zeus. Then I noticed that I was hurting.

[Don gets bandaged up and, undaunted, heads for the long race.]

The races in the stadium were continuing when we put our chitons back on, they loaded us on busses, and we headed for the Ancient Temple of Herakles at Kleonai, where the

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race was to start. The same man who had administered the oath in the morning got up on some high stones and began to speak in Greek. The poor man now looked so frazzled from his work load that I did not wonder he seemed a bit harsh. We had the oath administered, we were told there would be water along the way, and then we crowded together for the start: and started! I and the others grabbed the water set out for us. The real runners quickly distanced themselves from those of us who were not. But so far I was staying with the pack. Only the road went up, and up. There was more water, and occasional things made of stone that one wanted to stop and look over, only it was a race, and one kept going. An historian friend pulled ahead. A young woman who had translated pulled ahead. I began to take walking breaks more frequently. I am guessing I was now three quarters of the way back, with old folks and children behind me. We came to the first houses. People of all ages had chairs in front of their houses, still on the dirt road, and bless them, they cheered every one of us. Pavement appeared, and then we were back in the town, about in the middle. People in tavernas cheered, and though I could barely breathe, they sure made me smile and wave. More water. The roadside was littered with empty water bottles. Past the church, hairpin turn up and back, through more houses, more cheering, and finally, still going uphill, I left the town. About this time a bus pulled up beside me and the driver ask: "Are you all right?" I smiled and waved. I realized this was one of the busses stationed along the way for people who just couldn't go any further. Some of the children who had joined the race were aboard. I kept going, more walking than running, and noted the really interesting flora that grew in various piles of stone. Were those ancient or modern ruins? I wondered. A policeman came by on his motorcycle. "Are you all right?" Smile, wave... A little bit of downhill, and a fork in the road. Another bus there, more water, and a man waving us to the right: and uphill. "Are you all right?" By now I was moving alone. There were still people behind me, but I think we were all walking. The great crowd of real runners was long gone, up ahead. About then the road started to descend into the Nemea Valley. I passed the little park which has been built where the ancient spring flows. Only it was not flowing, and needs repair. I passed the churchyard, all pristine and mainly white with graves. Finally I entered the site of the stadium, left my shoes in the locker room (we were allowed to use shoes for the long race, though we ran barefoot in the stadium), ran through the tunnel, and made a lap around the track, to end before the altar of Nemean Zeus and Demeter. I said my thanks, then went to look for my wife, Diana. Others came behind me. So, once again, I was not the last. The games were over, and the ceremonies commencing. The winners had headbands and palm branches, and were called forth to receive their victory crowns of wild celery. It has been a simply marvelous day.

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## See It on Video!

Here are a number of video links. Just click on each one and the link will take you to the video. If it doesn't, copy and paste the address into your browser.

Running the 2008 Race (Robert Knapp video)

<http://video.google.com/videosearch?>

Ancient Olympic Games (but actually about Nemea) (HeinemannVideo):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4rZsaRMOjtg&feature=related>

Nemea 2008 (ERT video): great video shots, but commentary is in Modern Greek:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P\\_vkSaqiPQc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P_vkSaqiPQc)

Nemea 2008 Ancient Greeks Celebrated Festivals (part I): great shots, but, again, the commentary is in Modern Greek:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNg1SJ28ZxU>

Greek Games—a brief Reuters video on the Games (ignore the 'Spartans':

[1855040534778961138&ei=08TXSNOwO4qK\\_QGat7iuAg&q=nemea&vt=lf&hl=en](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1855040534778961138&ei=08TXSNOwO4qK_QGat7iuAg&q=nemea&vt=lf&hl=en)

A Step Into History (video narrated by Steve Miller for 2004 Games):

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-3557610600780871576&ei=9MjXSPWuGZGu-AHxvNW7Ag&q=nemea&vt=lf&hl=en>