

This Year's Ultra Will Be More Ultra Than Prior Editions

Written by John Estle, co-Director

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There were a number of reasons for lengthening the distance of the Ultramarathon. The most important was that the 50Km distance was too similar to the 42.195Km distance of the marathon. The per-mile pace for the first three to four finishers in the Ultramarathon would have placed those same people in the first 10 finishers of the Marathon. That's not a very different race.

Our belief is that the Equinox Marathon is at the gem around which all Equinox events are constructed. As such, our first and foremost priority is to ensure that the Equinox Marathon is a great event, and that none of the other Equinox events (Ultramarathon or Relay) detract from the Marathon. We want to be sure that the other Equinox events enhance and augment the Marathon.

It was our consensus that the 50Km actually detracted from the Marathon by drawing into the 50Km people who would normally run the Marathon, but thought "well, it's only another five miles," and chose the Ultramarathon. We think lengthening the Ultramarathon from 50Km (31.2 miles) to 60-64Km (37.5-40 miles) will keep the marathoners in the Marathon, and will attract more Ultramarathoners - and will give those who want to try out an ultramarathon a little more incentive to do real "ultra" training, rather than just "marathon" training.

We chose the 60-64Km range because, based upon the results from the first two years, it looks like at least three-quarters of the runners who finished the 50Km within 10 hours will be able to finish 60-64Km with the allotted 10-hour window on Marathon day (8:00AM to 6:00PM). Some people proposed increasing the distance to 50 miles, but we believed that only a very small percentage of those who could finish 50Km in 10 hours would be able to finish 50 miles in 10 hours.

An earlier start or a later finish to accommodate a 50-miler is simply not an option given the complex logistics and volunteer requirements of Equinox Day. AND, beginning next summer those of you who would like to try a 50-miler or 100-miler locally will have the option of doing so in the Sourdough Century, a 100-miler that will tour the domes surrounding Fairbanks next summer.

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Rorik Peterson, the first men's champion of the Equinox Ultramarathon was pretty excited when he heard about the increased distance for this year, as have been several other prospective Equinox Ultramarathoners. We think it will be a great race that will be a big asset to Equinox Day.

The Course

At this time the course is still in flux. But here's what we are thinking . . .

- At the 20-mile mark, turn left on St. Patrick's Road and follow it back to Ester Dome Road
- Turn right on Ester Dome Road and follow the marathon course back to Ballaine Road at about the three mile mark (near Raven)
 - Instead of going out onto Ballaine Road and turning right and continuing on the marathon course, turn left, climb up the "Moose's Schuss", and follow the 12-mile trail to the top of Ballaine Hill
 - From there we are still working on a route, but that route will likely descend the powerline above Pearl Creek School, follow Herreid Road almost out to Ballaine Road, turn left on the trail that parallels Ballaine Road, then cross Ballaine Road at the gate in the split rail fence; (we're still working on how we will connect the top of Ballaine Hill with the powerline above Pearl Creek)
 - At that point, you will get back on the marathon course and follow it back to the Six-Mile Trail near the 2-mile mark
 - From that point we will either follow the marathon course back to the Ring Road, then go to the West Ridge Satellite Dish and rejoin the marathon course at mile 25.75, or we will follow the Six-Mile Trail west to the CIGO Road, then follow the powerline to the T-Field, up the T-Field Road to the Satellite Dish, then finish as in the marathon

When the course is final, we will let you know and will publish maps of it.