



Race of the Year

The Pikes Peak Marathon and Ascent tops our list of Colorado's best races in 2005



Photo by Buzz Burrell

Runners scrambled and crawled over snow-covered boulders on the way to the summit of this year's marathon.

Not many races have been around for five decades, but the Pikes Peak Marathon, with its long, gloried history, celebrated its 50th birthday this year. We believe it deserves recognition as not only one of Colorado's premiere races, but as the 2005 Race of the Year.

Each August, thousands of competitors from across the globe race up the lung-burning 14,115-foot mountain on Saturday for the Pikes Peak Ascent, gaining 7,815 feet in elevation over 13.32 miles. On Sunday morning, runners travel up and down the mountain during the Pikes Peak Marathon.

King of the Mountain Matt Carpenter holds the course record in the marathon. In 1993, Carpenter blazed the trail in three hours, 16 minutes. The women's course record was set in 1981 when Lynn Bjorklund completed the grueling course in four hours, 15 minutes.

While most Coloradans will never come close to running fast times like those, this race holds a special place in many runner's hearts.

Bill Means of Monument wrote Colorado Runner to say, "These races are both incredible experiences, but more so this year because of their 50th anniversary. Everything about the races is great. The course goes without saying - America's favorite mountain in the summer on a well-maintained trail. How could you go wrong with a course like that?"

Joyce McKelvey of Colorado Springs told Colorado Runner, "Everyone has their favorite race, but for me unquestionably the Pikes Peak Marathon has to rate among the best in Colorado. Having done the marathon eight times and the ascent four times, running (not always running I might add) on Barr Trail is beautiful and challenging. It's a grueling and exhilarating experience. Little wonder the Pikes Peak Marathon has come to be called America's Ultimate Challenge."

Sally Kennett of Salida has fond memories of the race. "The first time I did this run, I remember looking up when the peak came into view and thinking, "OH... MY... Gosh, what HAVE I done?!" The feeling of awe remains."

Trailblazer Fred Barr cleared the way for runners to scramble up Pikes Peak. Barr had good reason to want a path up the mountain. He made

money by leading tourists on burro trips up the mountain. He spent his own money to build the extensive trail network up the eastern side of Pikes Peak and he finished the trail in 1921.

America's Ultimate Challenge began when a nonsmoking Florida doctor wanted to prove he could beat any smoker to the top of Pikes Peak and back down. Arne Suominen wanted to show that smoking could weaken a runner's cardiovascular endurance. Thirteen runners took part in the event on August 10, 1956. The three smokers who took part in the challenge were all disqualified for failing to finish.

At this year's race, international runners won the men's and women's marathons, beating Coloradans to the finish line for the first time in history. Italy's Fulvio Dapit outsprinted Boulder's Galen Burrell in the final seconds to win the marathon in three hours, 58 minutes and 49 seconds. A disappointed Burrell, the 2004 champion, placed just seconds behind in 3:59:01. France's Corinne Favre, a ski instructor in the French Alps and ranked as the world's top women's high-altitude mountain runner, won the women's marathon in four hours, 31 minutes and 20 seconds. Adventure racer Danelle Ballengee and 2004 champion Erica Larson finished just moments behind in one of the closest women's races ever.

Tough weather conditions plagued the marathon and ascent for a second year in a row. Saturday's weather turned dicey when six inches of hail pummeled the top of the mountain. Some runners had to turn around at treeline before they could finish and others were stranded at the top of the mountain for hours before buses could drive down the slick road. On Sunday, the hail turned to slush, making for sloppy and slick trail conditions for the runners.

The marathon was also plagued with a medical disaster. A veteran marathon runner with no history of heart problems collapsed and died while competing. Gary Williams, 59, of Norman, Oklahoma, died of a suspected heart attack after he collapsed two miles from the 14,115-foot summit in the marathon.

In this year's Pikes Peak Ascent, 19-year-old Ryan Hafer made history as the youngest male winner ever. The Colorado Springs resident finished in two hours, 21 minutes and 30 seconds. He set a new age group record in the process.

Lisa Goldsmith of Nederland won her first Pikes Peak Ascent in two hours, 50 minutes and 2 seconds. The 40-year-old Goldsmith pushed past three-time ascent champion Cindy O'Neill of Manitou Springs. O'Neill, 43, finished second in 2:50:40.

Photo by Buzz Burrell



Danelle Ballengee sprints down the mountain.

The Rest of the Best

Not everyone can win the top prize. Here are our picks for some of Colorado's other top events.



Photo by Derek Griffiths/Colorado Runner

Having fun at the Evergreen Town Race.

Best Marathon: The Fort Collins Old Town Marathon is held on a fast, scenic course that travels through the Poudre Canyon. The marathon is held in early May. The race organization is top notch and runners walk away happy. The race is touted as having the highest percentage of finishers in the nation that qualify for the Boston Marathon. For 2006, this race is being renamed the Colorado Marathon and will include a 15-mile mini marathon. It will be the fifth anniversary of the race.

Best Half Marathon: The Boulder Backroads Half Marathon just celebrated its seventh year and has grown into a spectacular race. There is always great competition on the rolling course that travels Boulder's dirt, county roads. With more than 2,000 half marathon finishers, attendance at this year's race showed a lot of growth. Coupled with a full marathon event, the race expo at the Boulder Reservoir is one of the best in the state. It's a great way to celebrate after your long hours of training finally pay off!

Best 10 Miler: The Garden of the Gods Run celebrated its 29th consecutive year in 2005 and has been a 10 Mile event since 1994. The beautiful, challenging course attracts 1,000 runners each year with top notch competition. The course travels through Garden of the Gods park in Colorado Springs each June. Race day is the only time people can run on the park roads through the stunning redrock formations without worrying about heavy summer traffic.

Best 10K: The Evergreen Town Race is one

of Colorado's fastest races. If you want to set a personal best or watch lightning fast runners compete, this is the race for you. With a course that runs down Upper Bear Creek Road, runners are treated to spectacular scenery the entire race. Finishing at the Evergreen Lake House, festivities include a post race brunch, free beer, and free massage. This year, the competition was outstanding with the top four runners finishing within 10 seconds of each other, with a winning time of 30 minutes and 51 seconds. The race benefits the Alpine Rescue Team.

Best 5K: The Stadium Stampede at Invesco Field in Denver has it all - a fast course, prize money and a fantastic post-race event. The reigning female world half marathon champion Constantina Tomescu-Dita has won the race three years in a row, finishing in 16:37 this year. The men's winning time was 14:42 by David Kiruri, an average of 4:44 minutes per mile pace. The race offers \$3,000 in prize money for the top runners as part of the Colorado-Wyoming USATF Championships. There is a great post race expo at the Bronco's Fan Fair. The race benefits the Denver Broncos Charities Fund and the Saint Joseph Hospital Foundation.

Best Ultra: The Leadville 100 Miler had more finishers than ever before in 2005 with 213 participants finishing the race. Race champion Matt Carpenter smashed the course record, showing that the competition could be heating up in this ultra tough, ultra challenging, ultra distance run. The course runs from Leadville to the ghost town of Winfield and back, climbing 12,600' Hope Pass twice and featuring a total elevation gain of 31,200 feet. This course is breathtaking. Literally.

Most Scenic: The Rim Rock Run 37K in Grand Junction is held in the Colorado National

Monument. Every November runners race through redrock canyons and climb over majestic mesas. The pre-race pasta dinner features a guest speaker each year. Its a difficult race that takes on an odd distance (the 22.6 mile course travels from gate to gate on the paved Rim Rock Drive), but the stunning views are worth every minute of pain.

Best Trail Race: The Barr Trail Mountain Race is a 12 mile run held on Pikes Peak in Manitou Springs. This race is extremely well organized with volunteers from the community and aid station helpers from local high school cross country teams. The race fills up fast and gives prize money to the top runners. Every dollar of a runner's entry fee is donated to local charities.

Best Weekend Getaway Race: The Festival for Runners in historic Durango offers a marathon, a half marathon, a trail 25K and a 50K. Race director Matt Kelly encourages runners to challenge their limits by registering for the Durango Double by participating in two of the events on back to back days. Participants travel from across the nation to visit the gem city of southwestern Colorado.

Best Race Series: The Teva Vail Mountain Trail Running Series offers five summer races, ranging in distance from a 5K to a half marathon. The races can be wickedly tough for runners who aren't prepared for the high altitude trail climbs, but many runners say they find the challenge exhilarating. The post-race door prizes are worth showing up for and age group winners get great prizes like free trail running shoes.

Editor's note: The winning races are from November, 2004 until October, 2005. If you have an opinion for next year's awards, email jessica@coloradorunnermag.com.

Photo by Jeff Recker



Runners near the start of the Rim Rock Run in Grand Junction.