

# Pikes Peak Ascent Canceled for 2020; Marathon May Still Go On

Pikes Peak Marathon + Ascent Press Release

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For Immediate Release

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This year, due to circumstances driven by COVID-19, the Pikes Peak Marathon board of directors has canceled the Pikes Peak Ascent and plans to seek approval at the state level to hold the Pikes Peak Marathon according to modifications required to meet state public health guidelines.

A full refund will be made available to Pikes Peak Ascent runners. They can also defer their entries to the 2021 race or donate half their race fees to El Paso County Search and Rescue and the Rocky Mountain Field Institute. Should Pikes Peak Marathon runners desire not to participate this year, they have the same options for a refund, deferral, or donation up until June 20th.

“We feel that it is impossible to hold a version of the Ascent that would both be safe for runners and volunteers, and meet our standards for a quality event,” said Ron Ilgen, President of Pikes Peak Marathon, Inc. “We are working with El Paso County Public Health to apply for a variance to hold the Marathon, but chances of approval are unknown at this time.”

“This is not a decision the Board of Directors came to lightly, and the well-being of our community is at the forefront of our thoughts during this difficult and uncertain time,” Ilgen continued.

Registered runners for both races will be receiving emails laying out their options in detail. More information about each race follows.

## **Pikes Peak Ascent - August 22, 2020**

The size and format of this event, a one-way race of 1,800 runners to the top of Pikes Peak with van transportation to the base, drove the decision to cancel it outright. Both the large number of runners and the need for safe transportation off the summit are problematic due to COVID-19 restrictions. With social distancing requirements, race organizers could not secure enough vans or volunteer drivers to carry runners down safely and in a timely manner.

As well, with the summit being an active construction site, there simply isn't sufficient space to protect hundreds of runners as they queue up for the ride back down, especially in adverse weather. The construction also means we cannot allow personal vehicles to travel to the summit to pick up their runners. While organizers considered the option of a 13-mile race halfway to the summit and back down, the trail congestion would have been problematic from a public health standpoint.

These complications unique to the Ascent have tied the board's hands. With limited options at the summit, a safe, efficient, and enjoyable event simply isn't possible.

Runners have the option to defer their entry to 2021, receive a full refund, or receive a 50% refund and donate the rest to El Paso County Search and Rescue and the Rocky Mountain Field Institute. For runners who defer or donate their entries, race qualifying times for 2020 will be honored for the 2021 event. Ascent runners have until July 1 to make a selection. After that, the race registrar will issue runners a full refund. The Marathon filled in January, and there are currently 200 people on the waitlist.

### **Pikes Peak Marathon - August 23, 2020**

Due to the limited number of runners allowed in the marathon, and because most runners self-power themselves off the summit, race organizers are hopeful that a variance will be approved to allow the historical event to take place in 2020. The board plans to apply for a variance to state Public Health Order 20-28 that must be approved by El Paso County Public Health, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, and ultimately, the governor. Ilgin said, "We are hopeful that with a detailed plan for additional social distancing and health and safety measures, the state will consider our request to hold the Marathon with the appropriate changes required for 2020."

That said, if the race is held, it won't look like it has in past years. The board is examining every aspect of the race including the aid stations, post-race parties, awards ceremony, etc. While the goal is to provide a high-quality event, the safety of the runners and volunteers is paramount. More details will be published once approval is granted.

Runners who choose to participate in the race will have to adhere to posted rules and safety guidelines. Those wishing to withdraw from the 2020 event will have the option to defer to the 2021 race, receive a full refund, or donate 50% to El Paso County Search and Rescue and the Rocky Mountain Field Institute and get a 50% refund. Again, qualifying times for 2020 will be honored in 2021 for those who defer or donate.

Marathon runners who wish to withdraw have until June 20 to make a selection. After that, the registrar will assume runners want to stay in the potential 2020 event. If the Marathon ends up ultimately being canceled, more options will be provided at that time.

## **Background Information**

The Pikes Peak Marathon, founded in 1956, is the second-oldest continually held marathon in the United States, taking runners from Manitou Springs, Colorado, to the summit of Pikes Peak at 14,115 feet, and back down for a total of 26.2 grueling mountain miles. It and its sister race, the Pikes Peak Ascent, each climb about 7,800 vertical feet up the historic Barr Trail on the east face of the mountain. The Ascent, which climbs 13.3 miles to finish at the summit, used to be held on the same day as the Marathon but became its own event in the 1980s due to its popularity. The Marathon was home to the first official women's marathon finish in the U.S. as Arlene Pieper crossed the finish line in 1959.

Manitou Springs resident Matt Carpenter holds the men's speed records for both the Ascent (2:01) and the Marathon (3:16), both set during the Marathon in 1993. Colorado runner Kim Dobson holds the women's Ascent record (2:24), and Maude Mathys of Switzerland set a new women's Marathon record of 4:02 in 2019.

The races, some of the most well-known and competitive trail races in the world, draw more than 2,000 mountain runners and their families to the local area each August. Pikes Peak Marathon staff estimates the local economic impact of the weekend at about \$3.5 million between lodging, dining, and shopping. The Pikes Peak Ascent has its field capped at 1,800 runners, who are divided into waves by qualifying time. The Pikes Peak Marathon has fewer runners at 800 and also starts in waves.

The Pikes Peak Ascent and Marathon are the pinnacle events of the local Garden to Peak Series (formerly Triple Crown of Running), which also includes the Garden of the Gods 10-mile Run and the Barr Trail Mountain Race, both of which have been canceled for 2020. The Pikes Peak Marathon has also been part of the international Salomon Golden Trail World Series since 2018, bringing many of the world's top mountain runners to Pikes Peak. That series has been scaled down this year due to travel restrictions and health concerns.