



## **FirstEnergy Akron Marathon Course Description**

In our continuing effort to treat each of our participants like a world-class athlete, we wrote this course description from a runner's perspective to help you prepare for your successful race. Our description highlights the many different segments of the course – we think this variety makes our race an excellent choice for first time marathoners, who sometimes struggle with the mental, as much as the physical, challenges in completing their first marathon. We also think that veteran marathoners who like an interesting course and appreciate race-execution perfection will have a wonderful experience here. We know that our marathon is not “fast and flat”, but we think that savvy veterans and thoughtful first timers who understand the changing elevations, and prepare for them, can enjoy a great run on our course, like we hope you will on September 24<sup>th</sup>.

### **The Start, North Hill**

The course begins with runners toeing the starting line in downtown Akron on High Street next to the Akron Art Museum. In the first mile, you will step onto the All-America Bridge, a Y-bridge that offers spectacular views of the Little Cuyahoga River and valley nearly 300 feet below. On a clear day, the sunrise should just be visible on your right. Runners deeper in the pack can also see the race leaders returning on the east side of the bridge, adding to the excitement of the start. This scenic bridge crossing early in the race reminds us of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge at the start of the New York City Marathon. You will reach the first mile mark near Summa Health's St. Thomas Campus before you begin a short jaunt into the North Hill section of Akron. By now you've noticed that the first mile is mostly downhill until the middle, and lowest point, of the Bridge. Even though it may be fun to notch a quick opening mile, we recommend you use this opportunity to relax and ease into your pace. The course stays straight on North Main Street until Tallmadge Avenue where you will turn left. On Tallmadge Avenue you will pass by Findley Community Learning Center and make a sharp right on Cuyahoga Falls Avenue and soon pass the two-mile mark. Once you hit Main Street you will turn right and start the journey back south, once again passing the hospital, this time at the three-mile mark, before traveling back across the Y-Bridge.

### **The University of Akron**

Once over the Bridge, runners will experience their first noticeable incline as they continue south on Broadway Street and make a left at Market Street around mile four. Runners will climb Market Street then turn right onto College Street onto The University of Akron campus. From there you will approach the first relay exchange zone located at Union Park. Marathon and Half Marathon runners will hug the corner as you turn left onto Mill Street. Relay runners will swing

wide and prepare to “pass the baton” to your teammate. From Mill Street you will turn right onto Fir Hill and pass by the Hower House which is listed on the National Historic Landmark Registry. You will notice the course shift from a slight uphill to a slight downhill at this point. Next, turn left onto Buchtel Avenue and make a quick right onto Spicer Street.

### **Firestone Park**

Next up is the five-mile mark near The University of Akron’s InfoCision Stadium. You will cross over Exchange Street and make a right on Power Street. Taking a quick left onto Brown Street, you will notice the elevation start to rise for the second time. Once you pass under the interstate you will be at the six-mile mark. You will continue on Brown Street for over a mile. Once you reach the new Kenmore-Garfield Community Learning Center you will be at the mile-seven mark and the elevation will head back down so you can catch your breath from the last climb. From there you will take a right onto Wilbeth Road and head towards Firestone Park. You will make a right onto South Firestone Boulevard followed by the right onto Aster Avenue and pass by the Firestone Park Branch Library. Next, turn left onto Lindenwood Avenue followed by another left onto N. Firestone Boulevard at mile eight. Enjoy the park setting as you head to South Main Street where you will turn right and head north back towards downtown, quickly approaching mile nine.

### **Back Downtown**

Over the next mile you will pass many Akron businesses, ranging from restaurants to manufacturing plants, on this stretch of a mostly commercial Main Street. You will stay on Main Street until going under the interstate and turning right onto Thornton Street. There will be a quick rise as you run over the railroad tracks and then make a left onto Wolf Ledges to continue downhill until mile eleven when the elevation starts to climb again. On Wolf Ledges, as you approach the Exchange Street overpass, it is important that marathoners and half marathoners stay to the left while relay runners stay to the right. Marathon and Half Marathon will hug the curb as they turn left to continue onto Wolf Ledges. Relay runners will turn wide onto Wolf Ledges and see the second exchange zone on their right.

Those running the third leg of the relay will join the marathoners and half marathoners to turn right onto University Avenue where runners will re-enter UA’s campus and see Dale Chihuly’s rock candy sculpture. This piece of work is made from polymer materials locally sourced, stands out in the day, and shines in the nighttime sky. You will then take a quick left onto Hill Street followed by a quick right onto Buchtel. You will have a decent ascent up Buchtel Avenue. Here the Half Marathon will turn right onto the main stretch of campus as the Marathon and Relay turn left on College Street. From College Street turn left onto Mill Street and enjoy a significant downhill before turning right onto Broadway Street. On Broadway Street, mile twelve, you will pass the John S. Knight Center and the Akron Art Museum before turning left onto Market Street and then right onto Main Street.

The course will continue as Main Street becomes Howard Street as you approach the Northside District and the green door and barbershop pole known as the Hotel Matthews Monument. This historical area was known as the Howard Street District and was home to many Black-owned

businesses during the early to mid-twentieth century, including George Matthews' barber shop and hotel, as well as local music clubs that often-featured entertainers such as Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong. Today, the Northside district includes a mix of arts, entertainment, dining, shopping, recreation, and downtown living.

Continuing downhill on Howard Street, runners will soon turn left onto North Street, but only briefly, as you will then take a right onto the Towpath Trail just before reaching mile 13, marking roughly the halfway point of the marathon.

### **The Towpath**

As you enter the Towpath, you will notice the historic Mustill Store on your left, where a grocery store was located during the Ohio and Erie Canal Era. This section begins a four-mile trip north on the crushed limestone Towpath Trail. The Towpath is named for the path used by mules to tow barges along the Ohio & Erie Canal from 1832 until 1913, when a great flood destroyed canal operations. Although your journey on the Towpath will last four miles, the path continues north for dozens of miles through the Cuyahoga Valley National Park and ending in Cleveland. This is one of the most scenic stretches of the marathon, as you wind along the Little Cuyahoga River through heavily wooded and a few residential areas. The Towpath's very flat, hard-packed limestone surface provides a softer impact and can offer a welcome physical and mental break on race day, but it also may take a few minutes to adapt to the quietness and the slightly "slower" running surface, due to the less firm push-off. To help with fan support, we have two very lively water stops along the Towpath: the first is located right before mile 14 after you pass under Memorial Parkway, and the second is at the Big Bend trailhead just before the 16-mile mark. About a half-mile before you reach Big Bend, those of you who are area golfers may recognize what was formerly Valley View golf course, now part of the Summit Metro Parks, on your right as you cross a long boardwalk (and a slight rise). You may also spot a family of deer grazing in the meadow on your left.

### **Sand Run Park**

In the sixteenth mile, you reach the end of your Towpath trek and pass a larger-than-life bronze statue of a Native American portaging a canoe, created by Peter Jones, a Seneca-Onondaga artist from the Cattaraugus Indian Reservation in New York. This statue commemorates the northern terminus of the Portage Path, an eight-mile trail used for centuries by Native Americans to portage their canoes from the Cuyahoga River across the Continental Divide to the Tuscarawas River. At the end of the path, you turn left onto North Portage Path and cross one of the course's busier intersections. You will run up a fairly steep but short hill and turn right to enter Sand Run Metro Park and the location of our third relay exchange. Relay runners getting ready for the fourth leg will be stretching and warming up on the grassy lawns in the park, while you start the next segment of the course with a 2.4-mile tour of the shady, winding and yes, rolling, Sand Run Parkway.

The first mile of the parkway is a gradual downhill to a small ford that crosses the parkway. On race day, you will run across a footbridge built just for you. You should still feel good here, but once you cross the ford, around the 18-mile mark, you will begin a challenging part of the course

– the “Rally from the Valley.” The next mile stretch is a steady, but not severe, climb that reminds us of the middle Newton Hills area at the Boston Marathon. Although this climb feels a little easier and is shorter than the entire Newton Hills (including Heartbreak Hill), the ascent is continual and you will feel increased effort, particularly due to some of the early downhill sections. After this mile, you reach Sand Run Road where you will turn left and head up the most significant hill of the race for about 200 meters. We know this will be challenging on race day, coming in the nineteenth mile. One of the simple facts of running in Summit County, Ohio is what goes down, must come up. Once our course drops out of downtown into the Cuyahoga Valley, we must make a return trip to Akron, and we think this is the best route. Still, the thoughtful marathoner will want to be sure to include hills late in their long training runs so they are physically and mentally prepared for Sand Run Road Hill.

### **West Akron**

As you crest Sand Run Road and gather yourself, take a quick mental break and check out the Fairlawn Country Club golf course on your right. Next, turn right onto Overwood Road, known for its block parties. You will cross the 20-mile mark shortly before turning left onto Wiltshire Road as you start your return trip to downtown Akron. Here you will notice a gradual ascent followed by a nice descent before Wiltshire Road becomes Fairfax Road as you cross North Hawkins Avenue and approach Firestone Community Learning Center and our last relay exchange zone. Firestone is known locally for its arts and swimming programs and was the high school home of Challenger astronaut Judith Resnik, rocker Chrissie Hynde and, more recently, Dan Auerbach and Patrick Carney, better known as The Black Keys!

Fairfax Road merges with Castle Boulevard as you begin to head south, before crossing a set of railroad tracks. Next you will turn left onto Garman Road. This brief, flat section will allow runners to gather themselves before starting the gradual rise on Garman which brings you to “Heart Rate Hill” and the 22-mile mark in front of the impressive gates of Stan Hywet Hall and Gardens. Although this last climb is shorter and lower than Sand Run Road Hill, expect it to again spike your heart rate, so be prepared to ease up this hill if you can.

Stan Hywet, a grand estate built in the early 1900s by Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company founder F.A. Seiberling, lies ahead of you as you turn left onto the property through the gates onto the tree-lined driveway. You will loop around the Carriage House and into the parking lot before making a right onto North Portage Path (yes, the same Portage Path you left a few miles back when you entered Sand Run). Here you will proceed south through a grand residential section of town. Some slightly rolling terrain with tree-lined streets should provide shady relief and allow you to enjoy the last neighborhood feel of the race. You will soon pass Portage Country Club on your right.

### **Back to Downtown**

Just after the 24-mile mark, you turn left onto West Market Street, passing through the Highland Square neighborhood, home to the annual PorchRokr Festival, a one-day music and arts festival where bands partner with residents and play live music from their porches! Here the course offers a very runnable downhill section, hopefully providing some physical and visual relief.

You can see downtown clearly ahead, and you now know that your trek will soon be over. If you have anything left in the tank, start spending it here – the 25<sup>th</sup> mile can be one of your fastest splits on race day if you have paced yourself well. After the nice descent, a short uphill just after the 25-mile mark as you pass the LeBron James Family Foundation-sponsored I Promise School on your right. Speaking of LeBron, St. Vincent-St. Mary High School (LeBron's alma mater) will soon be on your left. One final slight climb at the Seiberling Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse and a right turn onto Main Street turns you south for the home stretch, with less than a half mile to go.

### **The Finish**

The finish will highlight the newly updated Main Street, Main Street businesses and the Akron Rubber Worker Sculpture. This will offer the chance to let it all go and finish with an extended kick, as the last .3 mile of the race is flat and straight with the finish in front of the Civic Theatre!

### **Our Review**

We know our course isn't the "flat and fast" track some runners look for, but we think it is a fair course with a lot of variety. The uphill sections are runnable and well-spaced out. If you don't press the early rolling hills, downhills and flat portions too hard, they provide a solid base for your later climbs. We think that the changing terrain and the wide variety of course segments make this a great race both for first-time marathoners and for veterans who relish running a perfectly executed event. Most of all, we think you will be surprised by, and enjoy, the scenic beauty of our course. We have tried to give you a personalized tour and a unique perspective of Akron, with side trips past natural beauty, scenic vistas, local landmarks and wonderful neighborhoods.

Along with all the race organizers, we are gratified each year by the consistently positive and enthusiastic comments from our participants. We hope that this personal tour will help you have a great race day!

The Akron Marathon Board, Staff & Volunteers