



## 2026 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 26<sup>th</sup>.

### Elevation

Before we begin our tour of the course, let's first give a quick overview of the elevation you will encounter along the way. There is a total elevation gain of approximately 1015 feet and 1030 feet of elevation loss. Below is a list of climbs to help you in your training and mental preparation for this marathon.

Location	Distance	Total Feet	Grade	Mile
Elevation gains of 1.5% or higher				
High St.	0.1	19	2.75%	.1-.2
High St. bridge	0.3	24	1.70%	1-1.3
Main St.	0.3	21	1.50%	2.5-2.8
N. Firestone BLVD.	0.7	50	1.45%	3-3.6
Bellows St.	0.2	18	2.10%	4.1-4.2
Main St.	0.2	28	1.60%	5-5.2
Buchtel Ave.	0.3	54	3.10%	7.7 -8.0
High St.	0.1	20	2.60%	12.4-12.5
Towpath Bridge	0.3	26	1.90%	15.1-15.4
Portage Path	0.5	50	1.80%	16.2-16.7
Sand Run	1	108	1.90%	18.1-19.1
Sand Run Rd.	0.3	75	5.30%	19.1-19.4
Garmin	0.5	71	2.50%	22.1-22.6
Significant Downhill (3% or higher)				
Fir Hill	0.3	45	-3.10%	8.1-8.2
Mill Street	0.1	25	-9%	8.5-8.6
Howard	0.3	80	-7%	12.2-12.5

## **The Start**

The course begins with participants toeing the starting line in downtown Akron on High Street next to the Akron Art Museum. The course starts with an uphill section, so watch your initial pace as your breathing rate may increase right out of the gate. The initial hill is relatively quick and is met with a downhill section, so you can settle into pace over the first mile. You will continue through the heart of downtown on High Street, which turns into Main Street once you cross over the High Street bridge near mile one. Over the next two miles, you will experience rolling terrain while passing many Akron businesses, ranging from restaurants to manufacturing plants, on this stretch of a mostly commercial Main Street.

After nearly three straight miles, you will approach the first turn on the course, making a left onto E. Firestone Boulevard and you will head for Firestone Park.

## **Firestone Park**

Firestone Park is a gradual uphill, so don't be alarmed if your breathing rate increases through this section. From E. Firestone Boulevard, you will veer right onto S.

Firestone Boulevard passing Harvey Firestone inspired Firestone Park that resembles a shield. From there, you will turn left onto Aster Avenue followed by a left onto N. Firestone Boulevard which completes the shield around the park just past mile four.

From N. Firestone Boulevard, you will make a right onto Bellows Street, which will be an incline until you reach Archwood Avenue. At Archwood, you will make a left and enjoy a downhill section toward Main Street. At Main Street, make a right and you will travel northbound. Depending on your place in the race, you may see runners as they make their way southbound on Main Street headed to mile three. You will continue on Main Street for the next mile. Once you move under the interstate and pass mile six, you will turn right onto E. Thornton Street followed by a left onto Wolf Ledges Parkway.

## **The University of Akron**

At this point, near mile seven, you will be approaching the first relay exchange zone located on Wolf Ledges entering into the University of Akron's Campus. For Marathon and Half Marathon participants, you will stay to the left side of the road through the exchange zone. Relay participants will stay right and prepare to "pass the baton" to your teammates. From Wolf Ledges, you will turn right onto University Avenue as you get a glimpse of 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 and pass EJ Thomas Hall. From Hill Street, turn right onto S. Forge Street followed by a quick right onto College Street, and left onto E. Buchtel Avenue. E. Buchtel Avenue will be the most challenging hill on the front half of the course. As you cross the top of the hill, you will be at mile eight. From E. Buchtel Avenue you will make a left onto Fir Hill and notice the course shift to downhill as you recover from the E. Buchtel Avenue Climb. On Fir Hill, you will pass by the Hower House which is listed in the National Historic Landmark Registry. The next several miles are mostly downhill or relatively flat compared to the first eight miles. Next,

turn left onto Forge, which turns into Mill Street where you will pass Quaker Square. This is the home of the original Quaker Oats factory where oats were processed through the silos that you see. Catch a glimpse of them before you turn right onto Broadway Street. On Broadway, you will pass the familiar home of our Health and Fitness Expo, the John S. Knight Center.

### **North Hill**

Near mile nine, you will step onto the All-America Bridge; a Y-shaped bridge that offers spectacular views of the Cuyahoga River Valley nearly 300 feet below. Participants deeper in the pack can see the race leaders returning on the west side of the bridge, adding to the excitement at this point in the race. You will reach the 10-mile mark during your short jaunt into North Hill, Akron's International District. The course continues straight on North Main Street until Cuyahoga Falls Avenue where you will turn left. Just before mile 11, you will take a sharp left onto Tallmadge Avenue passing the Findley Community Learning Center. Once you hit Main Street, you will turn right and start your journey back into Downtown.

### **Downtown**

On Main Street, you will pass back over the Y-bridge, this time at the 12-mile mark. Just after the bridge, Half Marathon participants will stay left while the Marathon and Relay participants will stay right. At Market Street, Half Marathon participants will turn left onto E. Market Street while the Full Marathon and Relay participants will turn right.

After the split, Full Marathon and Relay participants are on E. Market Street and will take a quick right on Main St. Once on Main Street you will encounter the split for the second relay exchange zone. Marathon participants will stay right, and relay participants will stay left. After the Exchange Zone both Marathon and Relay participants will continue onto Howard Street. Through this section of the course, you will pass through the Northside District and pass 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, participants will soon turn left onto North Street, but only briefly, as you will then take a right onto the Towpath Trail near mile 13, marking 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 softer 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 after mile 14 after you pass under Memorial Parkway, and the second is at the Big Bend trailhead just after 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 or other wildlife in the meadow on your right.

### **Sand Run Park**

At mile seventeen, 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 short hill and turn right to enter Sand Run Metro Park and the location of our third relay exchange zone. 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 supportive race-day neighborhood block parties. You will cross the 20-mile mark while on

Overwood Road. Take a left on Wiltshire Road and 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 popular rock band The Black Keys!

Near the 22-mile mark, 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” ending 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 will be on your left 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**

After passing the country club, you will cross the 24-mile mark and 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. As you descend Market Street, House 330 will be on your right. The former iconic Tangier Restaurant now marks the beginning of LeBron James Family Foundation-sponsored landmarks, including the I Promise School. 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 freshly updated Main Street. Gain a glimpse into the future of downtown with newer businesses and the Akron Rubber Worker sculpture, at which point you have less than a quarter mile to the finish line, just past the historic Akron Civic Theatre, at the newly renovated Lock 3.

## **Our Review**

We know our course isn't the "flat and fast" track some participants 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