

Equinox Marathon: 50 years running

RUNNING OR HIKING THE EQUINOX MARATHON AND RELAY IN SEPTEMBER IS A RITE OF SEASONAL PASSAGE FOR MANY FAIRBANKSANS, AND THE PATCH THAT ONLY FULL MARATHON FINISHERS RECEIVE IS A BADGE OF HONOR. IT'S RECKONED BY MANY TO BE AMONG THE TOUGHEST MARATHONS IN THE COUNTRY.

UAF's involvement has been integral to the Equinox from its inception. The course begins and ends in front of the Patty Center, and miles of the route wind over UAF's ski trails. Like many sporting events, maybe all of them, the Equinox has many layers and many stories. You can compile quite a list of startling statistics over 50 years of 26.2 miles, and some deeply personal observations, such as those shared by Ned Rozell on page 23.



The original Equinox Marathon finisher's patch, designed by Gail Bakken, one of the race's founders. The coveted patch today remains virtually unchanged and is still handed to every person who finishes within 10 hours.

- 1963** The Equinox Marathon is founded by UAF ski coach Jim Mahaffey and UAF skiers Nat Goodhue, '65, and Gail Bakken, '65, among others. The inaugural race features 143 starters and 69 finishers. Goodhue in 3:54:22 and Bakken in 6:08:00 are the winners. The race begins and ends, as it has every year since then, in front of the Patty Center.
- 1964** The Equinox is the largest marathon in the world, and will be again in 1966 and 1967.
- 1969** With no entry fee, a record 1,630 people register. There are 1,160 starters (260 runners and 900 hikers) and 821 finishers. Entry fees of \$1 for hikers and \$2 for runners are instituted the next year, and fewer people sign up.
- 1972** The Boston Marathon, begun in 1897, allows women to run officially for the first time. The Equinox has allowed women to compete from its inception.
- 1984** ▼ Stan Justice, '75, runs 2:41:30 to set a record that still stands and has never been seriously threatened.
- 1990** A two-person team relay race, quickly a popular option, is added. The next year it is bumped up to a three-person relay.



UAF photo by Samuel Winch.



UAF photo by Maureen McCombs.

2,400

Elevation (feet)

400

Start

Beluga hill

UAF trails

"Muskox farm"

Bottom of Ester Dome

1992 The race is not officially held due to heavy snowfall, but several dozen runners complete the course anyway. Counting that year, the Equinox is one of the longest continuously held marathons in the country.

1995 Race fans can demonstrate their dedication by purchasing a lifetime bib, which means they have a guaranteed prepaid race entry every year; by the 2012 race, 50 lifetime bibs have been sold. Fans can also pay for sturdy metal signs used as route or milepost markers. Many of these are purchased by families or friends to commemorate deceased runners.

2002 Susan Faulkner, '95, breaks the women's record by more than three minutes in 3:18:16. Her record still stands.

2009 For those for whom a marathon just isn't quite long enough, race organizers add a 50-kilometer/31.2 mile ultramarathon.

2010 Steve Bainbridge, '93, retires as the longest-serving Equinox race director; he first took over as RD in 1995. John Estle and Susan Kramer step in as co-directors. (Estle also served as RD from 1985 – 1989.)

2011 The ultramarathon distance increases to 64 kilometers/40 miles.

2012 The 50th Equinox sees 1,251 entrants, exceeding 1,000 participants for the first time since 1969. A record 825 people (counting one for each relay team) finishes. Eric Strabel is the fastest man in 2:45:15, and Emily Routon is the fastest woman in 3:25:40. The last official hiker comes in at 9:36:00. Five women and 27 men complete the ultramarathon: Ivaylo Benov is the men's winner, in 5:36:02; Stephanie Kuhn is the first woman, in 6:45:20. The youngest marathon finisher is Alexander Greene, 9; the oldest is Phyllis Church, 77. Finishers are from 29 Alaska communities, 14 states and four other countries — Canada (3), England (2), Germany (1) and Japan (5).

2013 The Equinox is inducted into the Alaska Sports Hall of Fame.

Sources: Matias Saari, Steve Bainbridge, John Estle and www.equinoxmarathon.org

Learn more about one of the world's toughest marathons at www.uaf.edu/aurora/.

Equinox Marathon course profile



Fairbanks artist Kes Woodward created this limited edition giclee print to commemorate the 50th Equinox Marathon.

Back to the UAF trails

26.2 miles