

A Brief History of Ultrarunning

A dark blue, diagonal shape that starts from the bottom left corner and extends towards the top right, creating a triangular area at the bottom of the slide.

Context

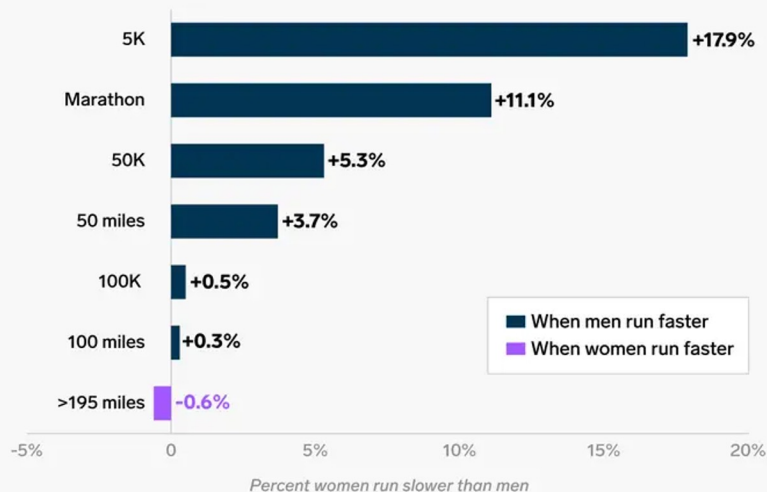
- A marathon distance is officially 42 kilometers, or 26 miles and 385 yards^[1]
- An ultramarathon is any distance over this
- Typically ultramarathon events start at 50 kilometers/31 miles
- The upper limit is continually being pushed
 - 300 mile races
 - 3,100 mile races
 - 48-hour races
 - 6 day races

The First Marathon

- The legend of Pheidippides from 490 BC
- Ran from Marathon to Athens after the Battle of Marathon was won by the Greek over the Persians, subsequently collapsed and died
- Routes vary from 35 kilometers/22 miles to 40 kilometers/25 miles
 - Depends if he ran around Mount Pentelicus or over Mount Pentelicus
- Other Greek sources say that instead, Philippides ran from Athens to Sparta and back, a distance over 240 kilometers/150 miles^[2]
- The first modern marathon took place in the lead-up to the modern Olympics in 1896^[3]
 - Distance was 24.8 miles^[4]
 - As a way to generate hype around the event, which took place in Athens
 - Male-only event
 - First Olympic marathon for women occurred at the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles

A Two-Way Gender Disparity

Women run faster than men after 195 miles



Source: RunRepeat

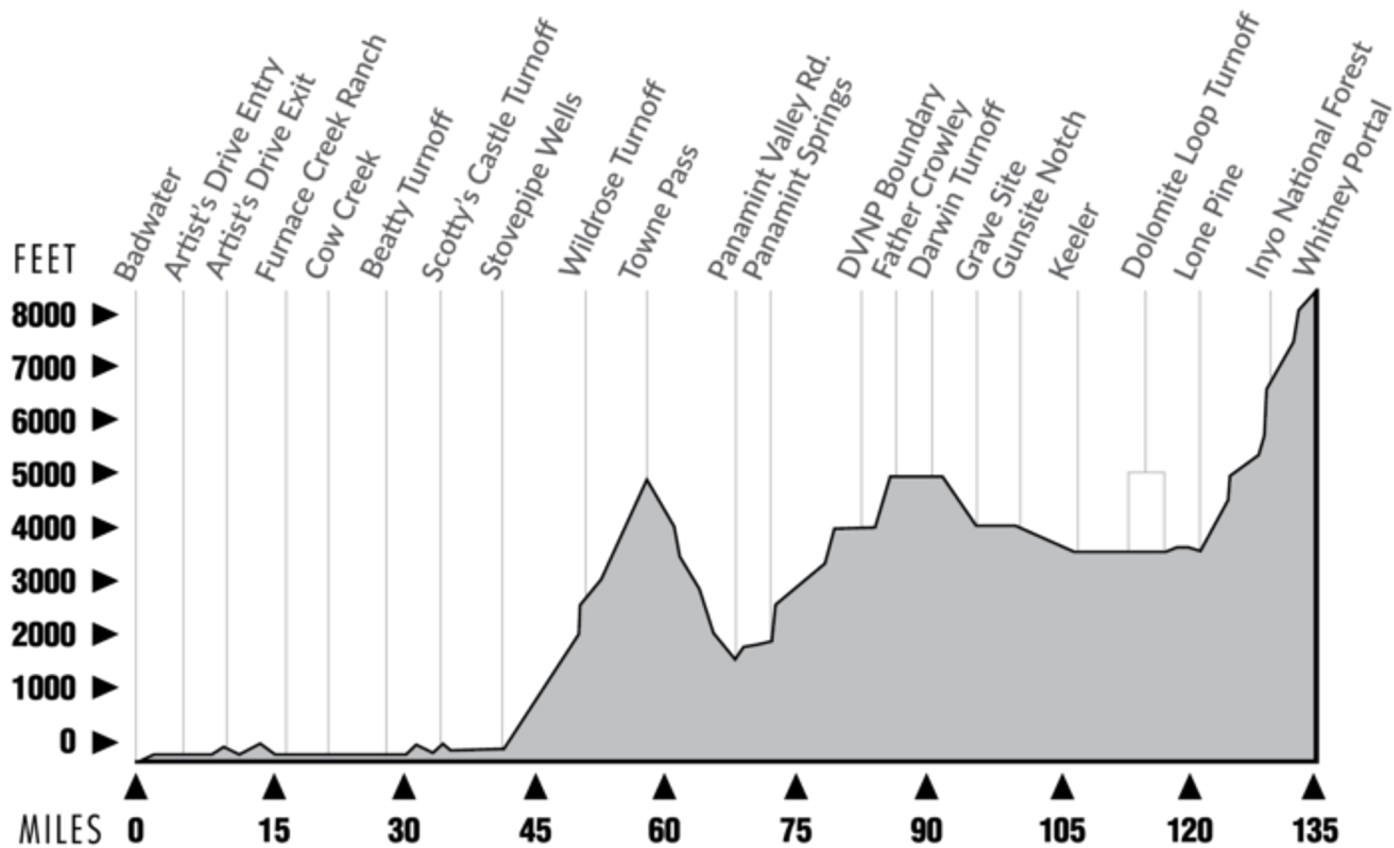
INSIDER

- It feels like “conventional wisdom” that when it comes to most athletic events, men tend to outperform women
- Plenty of articles and studies looking at gender differences in race pace
 - Like [this one](#) from 1997 that looks at ultramarathon distances
- Chart on the left shows that this assumption starts to flip as the distances get longer

A Selection of Events

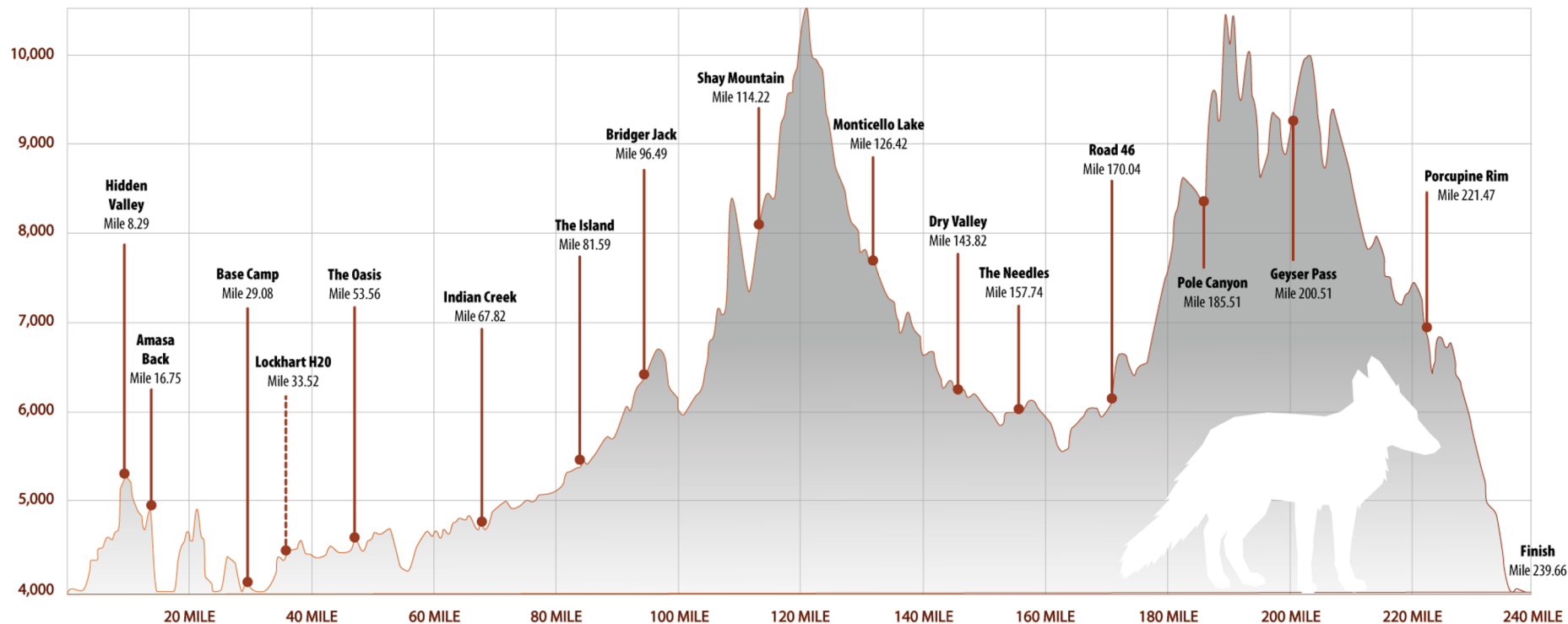
- [Western States 100](#)
 - Started as a horse race^[6]
 - Male record: 14:09:28
 - 8:30 per mile
 - Female record: 15:29:33
 - 9:18 per mile
- [Badwater 135](#)
 - Runs from Death Valley to Mount Whitney
 - Lowest elevation in North America (280 feet below sea level) to the highest point in the contiguous US (8,300 feet above sea level)
 - Male record: 21:33:01
 - 9:35 per mile
 - Female record: 21:44:35
 - 9:34 per mile
- [Yukon Arctic Ultra](#)
 - "The World's Coldest and Toughest Ultra"
 - Takes place in February
 - Marathon
 - 100 Mile
 - 300 Mile
 - 430 Mile
- [Self-Transcendence 3100 Mile Race](#)
 - 5,649 laps around one city block in Queens, NYC
 - 0.5488 miles/883 meters per lap
 - Streets do not get closed down
 - Male record: 40 days 09:06:21
 - Female record: 45 days 12:28:44
- [Barkley Marathon](#)
 - [The Race That Eats Its Young](#)
 - 100-ish miles
 - Climbing Mount Everest 5-ish times
 - No trail, no GPS, no smart phones
 - Acceptance letter begins with "I regret to inform you that you have been accepted..."
 - 9 years before the first winner
 - 2.11% of participants have completed the race^[7]
 - Male record: 52:03:08
 - ~~No female has finished~~
 - Female record: 59:59:21
- [Moab 240](#)
 - 31,564 feet of elevation gain/loss
 - Male record: 55:49:58
 - 13:59 per mile
 - Female record: 57:55:13
 - 14:30 per mile





BADWATER® ONE THIRTY FIVE

MOAB 240 ELEVATION



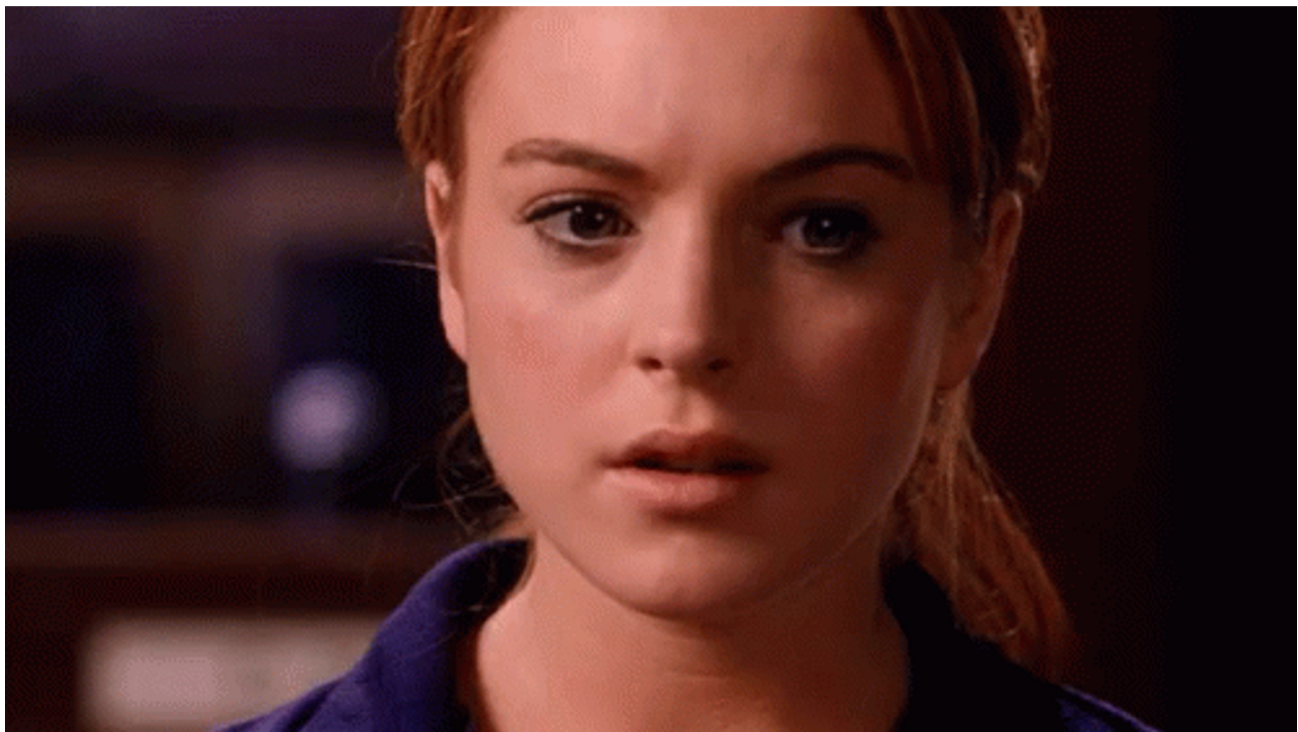
More Events

- Backyard Ultras

- Original and most famous event is [Big's Backyard Ultra](#)
 - Created by the Barkley Marathons madman
- Typically a set distance per loop, one loop per time period
- 4.167 miles/6,706 meters per loop, 1 loop per hour
 - 100 miles per 24 hours
- To stay in, your mile pace has to be 14:24
- A loop is often referred to as a "yard"
- If you are not the last runner standing, your official result is a DNF
- Current record is tricky
 - 101 yards (420.83 miles), set by two people
 - Because the last two runners retired together, nobody "won"

- 48 Hour Races

- [Sri Chinmoy 48 Hour Festival](#)
- World record for distance covered set at 270.505 miles^[8]
 - 10:39 per mile
 - With a 40 minute nap
- Previous female record set in February 2023 at 255.668 miles
 - 11:16 per mile
- Male record: 262.1811 miles
 - 10:59 per mile



Addendum

- [The State of Ultra Running 2020](#)
 - A big study, lots of data
- [North American Ultrarunning Participation](#)
 - More data

Sources

1. [World Athletics - Marathon](#)
2. [Wikipedia - Marathon - Origin](#)
3. [Wikipedia - Marathon - Modern Olympic marathon](#)
4. [History of the Boston Marathon](#)
5. [Women are faster long-distance runners than men, and it's probably because they've got more estrogen](#)
6. [A Horse Race Without A Horse: How Modern Trail Ultramarathoning Was Invented](#)
7. [Barkley Results Spreadsheet](#)
8. [Oklahoma native Camille Herron sets world record for 48-hour running](#)