

McKay Hollow Madness Half-Marathon Trail Run

2009 Course Description

This year's course, for those of you who have run this before, will be significantly different than the past. The start and finish area is in the Picnic Area just as you enter Monte Sano State Park off Nolen Dr. The race will start in the Picnic Area parking lot (if anybody knows where the 15km race starts we'll be using the same starting line) and proceed Right onto Nolen Dr. and head towards the Hiker's Parking lot. At the "triangle" bear to the right on the road where it splits and pass the Hiker's Parking lot (on your right). You'll soon pass by the Park Ranger's house on the Left (wave) and then pass by the first road on your Left. At the second road to your left (a cabin frontage road) make an abrupt HAIRPIN turn onto the maintenance trail and head back the way you've come on this maintenance trail. You'll leave the maintenance trail and touch pavement again onto the main cabin road. Continue on the cabin road a short distance to the intersection with the North Plateau Loop Trail (Blue blazes). Bear to the right slightly as you leave the cabin road and enter the North Plateau Loop Trail. After a short distance on the North Plateau Loop Trail you'll pop out at the Scenic Overlook, pass through the overlook, STRAIGHT, and head down the mountain on the "Barricade Road". Less than a ¼ mile down the Barricade Road you'll come to the North Sinks Trail-head on your right, enter RIGHT onto the Sinks Trail at the wooden sign-post. Now the fun begins!

Drop off the plateau on the Sinks Trail, you'll quickly descend to a four way intersection where the Sinks Trail crosses the Mountain Mist Trail, continue STRAIGHT through the intersection on the Sinks Trail. After descending another pitch you'll reach the intersection of the Sinks Trail and the Logan Point Trail, continue STRAIGHT onto the Logan Point Trail and up a short rise. You'll continue STRAIGHT on the Logan Point trail as you pass by the Stone Cuts Trail. Continue on the Logan Point trail, here fairly level so take advantage of it! Soon you'll come to another intersection, the Panther Knob Trail on your RIGHT, take a hard RIGHT onto the Panther Knob and start CLIMBING! Climb, Climb and climb some more! You'll pass through some magnificent cap stones and boulders, pay attention to the course route here because it goes probably where you don't think it should! Believe me it does go that way! There are blue blazes to follow if you're not sure, the course will be marked though! Watch your head as you head up, probably on all fours, to top out on top of the cap stones you just passed through. Take a breather and admire the panoramic view (if it's not cloudy)! The trail climbs a bit more to the Panther Knob where it tops out briefly before descending again to where it intersects the Stone Cuts trail. Take a hard LEFT onto the Stone cuts trail and follow this wonderful ridgeline for a ways. Continue on the Stone Cuts trail as you pass by the Logan Point trail-head on your left. The next intersection you come to is the Stone Cuts Bypass trail. Continue STRAIGHT onto the Stone Cuts Bypass trail and you'll soon re-connect onto the Stone Cuts trail. The Stone Cuts Bypass merges back onto the Stone Cuts trail and descends back to the Sinks Trail. You'll arrive at another four way intersection, where Stone Cuts trail intersects with Keith trail on your left and the Sinks Trail straight ahead and to the right. Continue STRAIGHT onto the Sinks trail. Just as you start to climb you'll pass by a group of 3 Benches on your left, if you need it there will be water here, probably multiple 1-gallon jugs of water. This will be around the 3 mile mark. This is AID STATION #1 which may or may not be manned. Please help yourself but please

leave enough for those behind you!! Please don't dunk the water jug over your head. It may feel great but you've deprived someone else who may really need that water!

Anyhow, after you've topped off your bottle(s) continue up the Sinks trail to the intersection with the Mountain Mist trail; make a hard LEFT onto the Mountain Mist trail. Continue STRAIGHT on the Mountain Mist trail (yellow blazes) for the next 1.4 miles, passing by some awesome overhanging cliff walls to your right. This is another good section to make up some time as the route is only slightly uphill with a few short but steep ups, but not too taxing (but it is pretty rocky)...yet! You'll come to the intersection with the Goat Trail right where the Mountain Mist trail switchbacks to the right to head back up to the plateau. Skip the switchback and continue STRAIGHT onto the Goat Trail. You'll descend the mountain again on several switch-backs as you make your way over to the Warpath Ridge trail. At the intersection of Goat trail and Warpath Ridge Trail you'll basically make a RIGHT and another RIGHT (you'll understand when you're there) to continue NORTH and up the Warpath Ridge trail. This intersection is known as the "Grassy Knoll" sort of a short access trail between Goat Trail and Warpath Ridge Trail. Anyways continue NORTH and UP, UP, UP the Warpath Ridge trail, it is very steep in parts! Eventually, after what seems like forever, you'll top out on the Monte Sano plateau and arrive at the ONLY full service Aid Station on this course at around 5 ¼ miles, right at O'Shaughnessy Point. This is AIDSTATION #2. Take a breather here and refuel and top off that bottle, bottles or pack you're going to need it! If you are having second doubts about being able to go the whole distance, this is the best place to stop or deviate from the course to get back to the start. The aid station personnel can assist you if you decide you've had enough. Please make sure you are ready to continue as the remainder of the course is fairly inaccessible and equally or more difficult than the course already covered.

If you've decided to continue, you'll leave O'Shaughnessy Point following the South Plateau Trail (white blazes) Counter Clockwise out of the Aid Station. Continue on the South Plateau trail for another short way until you reach the intersection of the trail that this race is partially named after, the McKay Hollow Trail on your LEFT. Take a LEFT onto the McKay Hollow Trail (yellow blazes) and DROP, DROP, DROP down into the McKay Hollow. After about ¾ of a mile you'll bottom out as you sort of bare to the RIGHT and stay on the yellow blazed McKay Hollow Trail (you'll understand when you're there). This next section is again fairly runnable and mostly level as you make your way deeper into McKay Hollow. It could be really muddy though which is why people call this "Slush Mile." After nearly a mile you'll reach the intersection with the Natural Well Trail as you cross a creek bed. This is a "T" intersection. Look to your right and up, that is the way you'll, eventually, be finishing so make a mental note to save some energy for that effort! Now, instead turn LEFT onto the Natural Well trail at the "T" intersection. You'll go just a short distance, crossing multiple creek beds and ascend a short hill when you'll arrive at another trail intersection. This is the intersection of Natural Well and Arrowhead Trails, as marked turn RIGHT onto the Arrowhead Trail, you may notice some additional signage here as you will be finishing this race by coming back to this same intersection but UP from the Natural Well trail, don't go DOWN Natural Well trail at this time, take that RIGHT onto Arrowhead Trail and go on. This section of Arrowhead Trail takes you very deep into the McKay Hollow and into one of the many drainages in the Hollow. Stay on the Arrowhead trail for the next 6/10 of a mile as you cross two major stream beds and a man-made cedar bridge before you arrive at AID STATION #3 (and #4) which may or not be manned at

the intersection of Arrowhead Trail and Natural Well Trail (this is the second place Natural Well and Arrowhead intersect, you just came from the first place) Just like AID STATION #1 there will be water only here, probably in multiple 1-gallon jugs. Please help yourself but please leave enough for those behind you!! Please don't dunk the water jug over your head. It may feel great but you've deprived someone else who may really need that water!

You'll notice a great deal of markings here as you'll be coming back through this intersection on your return trip (and sprint to the finish ha ha!). Anyways you want to take a RIGHT onto the Natural Well Trail; you should begin climbing almost immediately (a good indication that you're going the right way!). This section of trail is indeed very rough so take your time and be cautious. You'll climb UP, UP, UP for almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile passing by THE Natural Well (on your right) along the way before finally topping out on an old fire-break road. About a $\frac{1}{4}$ after topping out you arrive at another intersection of Natural Well and Arrowhead Trails (this is the third place where these trails intersect, you've already seen the first two). Take a LEFT onto the Arrowhead trail. This is an excellent trail to run fast down if you still have the legs for it, but remember that glimpse you had at the last climb? Take it easy and save some juice! Anyways this is a fun, mostly gradual descent that can be fun to run. Enjoy. After almost a mile of downhill you'll bottom out as the trail swings drastically to the East. Shortly after bottoming out you'll arrive at another intersection, the route goes LEFT up past the old cistern; do not follow the Bike Bypass trail! Up a short section of trail you'll pass the remains of a cistern which may or may not have water in it. I've refilled my water bottles here plenty of times with no bad effects, but buyer beware anyways. Just be smart about it. Continue past the cistern and a stream crossing and after a short ways you'll see that Bike Bypass trail come in from your right, do not turn right but keep heading STRAIGHT on the Arrowhead Trail. Another short distance and you'll arrive at another intersection; veer RIGHT onto the Big Cat Trail, DO NOT GO STRAIGHT ON THE BYPASS TRAIL. The Big Cat Trail is a special extension to the Arrowhead Trail that is one of the most beautiful sections of trail (in my opinion) in the entire Monte Sano State Park, followed by a short, nasty hill climb back up to the Arrowhead Trail. The Big Cat Trail sort of zigzags then descends a small drainage until veering back North. Just after heading back North the trail turns LEFT and UP a short but steep section of trail, this is Big Cat Hill. Believe it or not people have ridden bicycles up this trail but I've never seen it! Anyways after grunting up this last bit of Big Cat Trail you'll arrive back at the Arrowhead Trail; take a RIGHT at the "T" intersection onto Arrowhead trail. Continue on Arrowhead trail for the next nearly 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles of mostly level, fast trail. This is one of the last places to really hammer if you are so inclined as after this section you've got a technical descent following by an un-ending climb to the finish! So get hopping! As you near the end of this section you'll cross over some man-made cedar bridges (just like the one you crossed over much earlier). Not long after you cross the last cedar bridge you'll arrive at the intersection of Arrowhead and Natural Well trail. This is the location of your last Aid station, AID STATION #4 which is the same as AID STATION #3 do you remember? Remember the drill, refill you're container but leave some behind for the poor souls behind you! Just so you know you have almost 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ miles to the finish from this spot, most of which is uphill! When you're ready to leave, from the direction you were coming into this aid-station take a RIGHT onto the Natural Well trail, you should be dropping immediately so that is a good sign that you're on course!

Remember how rough it was climbing Natural Well trail earlier? Well it's more of the same now but you're going downhill so be even more cautious! After a couple switch-backs you'll cross a wide stream bed that can be VERY SLIPPERY with slick moss so be careful! On the other side of the stream bed you'll probably have to climb on all fours to get out; that's okay. Continue downhill on the Natural Well trail and you'll cross McKay Creek which at a minimum is a pile of loose rock, but may actually have water flowing here. You should be able to cross without getting your feet wet (though your feet probably are already soaked at this point and that cold water might actually feel good!). Cross the McKay Creek and begin the long climb to the finish (I'm lying there is still a slight downhill coming up, but it really is a huge net climb!). Leave McKay creek temporarily as you ascend only to level out and then descend back to McKay creek. Cross the creek again and continue climbing, it may seem that you are climbing a stream bed at times and, well, it is when it rains really hard! Eventually after climbing a bit you'll arrive at the intersection of Natural Well and Arrowhead trails (this is the first intersection of these trails you came to a long time ago). Do not go left onto Arrowhead (unless you want to get some extra mileage) but instead go STRAIGHT continuing on the Natural Well trail. Just past that trail intersection begins the last downhill on this course (actually there are a few almost inconsequential downhill grades in this last section, but you'll be too busy grasping for air to realize it). Enjoy it while it lasts (not very long) as you cross over a couple of stream beds and arrive back at the intersection of Natural Well and McKay Hollow Trail (remember this?). This time go STRAIGHT onto McKay Hollow Trail and immediately begin the hellacious climb to the finish. This is a very tough climb, very technical with several areas of exposed, shear drops so take your time (you'll probably be pretty tired by this point so taking your time goes without saying) as you would hate to fall off; not because of threat of injury but the fact that you'll have to climb back up! Keep going, UP, UP, UP, UP! The good news is once you top out you're done! Seriously, just keep climbing and eventually you'll spot a rock wall and pavilion above you (if you take the time to look up). The left side of that pavilion is your goal; that is the FINISH LINE. After about ½ a mile of climbing (it will seem like longer) you should arrive at a relatively level spot where, if there is water flowing, you'll hear the waterfall then see the waterfall and looking up above the water fall is that rock-wall and pavilion. Go for it; a couple last switchbacks and just as you pop off the trail onto the plateau the finish will be somewhere in the vicinity of the small rock pavilion. FINISH and STOP!