

The 2023 Northern Arizona Trail Runners Association Year-End Report!

Folks, as 2024 approaches, registration will open for the October 12th, 25th running of the Soulstice Mountain Jackie Weintraub Memorial Trail Run at 6 PM New Year's Eve! Save \$10 thru January 3rd at <https://runsignup.com/Race/AZ/Flagstaff/SoulsticeMountainTrailRun>.



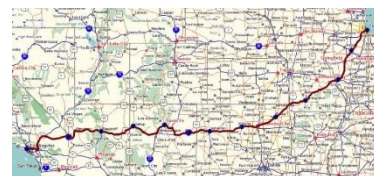
2023 marked NATRA's 22nd year of never missing a Saturday adventure, no matter the weather. We kicked off the year with a dreary, cold, and rainy New Year's Day run and never looked back. Once the rain quit later that day, it seemed the snow just kept falling until April. That made Sedona an even more special getaway for our winter runs! As the year ended, we have been seeing record turnouts for our trail runs down south.

NATRA's 55 group adventures covered over 350 miles on more than 60 trails. In addition to our regular favorites, we added quite a few new routes including the Walker Basin Road high above the Verde Valley, the Transept Trail in the Village of Oak Creek, and the fantastic new Mount Elden/Dry Lake Hills trails including the new Brookbank, Pluto, and Little Dipper.



NATRA again coordinated the Northern Arizona online racing calendar of 33 events and as always, organized the 19th annual Flagstaff Running Series. Many thanks to Run Flagstaff's team of Vince Sherry, Ray Langlais, and Gail Hughes who helped us time and track runner's participation. We were once again thankful that Loven Contracting Inc. sponsored the Series, its colorful running socks, and provided volunteer support at each race. Caleb Schiff again stepped to the plate offering a Pizzicetta pizza to 80 participants who completed four of the five races. Stay tuned to natra.org for forthcoming details of what I can't believe is now the 20th Annual Summer Running Series value package.

Throughout the year, we engaged runners across the country with our "Take a Walk in the Woods; Get Your Kicks on Route 66 Virtual Challenge," where 117 participants have through 2024 to complete the challenge's 2271 miles from Chicago to Santa Monica. Many participants journaled their virtual adventures in our [Facebook Group](#). You can still register for free as an individual or multiple-person team at <https://runsignup.com/Race/AZ/Flagstaff/kicksonroute66>



In February, NATRA, Trail Running Escapes, Verde Valley School staff and students supported the Sedona Half Marathon as we have done since its inception, this time with our "Addams Family" theme. This year's race is on February 3rd, so register ASAP at <https://runsignup.com/Race/AZ/Sedona/SedonaMarathonEvent> and NATRA will be there to keep you entertained with yet another zany table.

In July, we hosted the 15th annual FREE Randy Wilson Memorial 4 on the 4th. Nearly 50 walkers and runners participated, and we collected several boxes of canned food for the Flagstaff Family Food Center. Thanks to Bruce Higgins for leading this effort.





When our dear friend and mentor Jack Welch passed away in July, NATRA bought 200 “Walk the Walk, I’m with Jack” buttons so that his group known as the “J-Walkers” could proudly wear them at the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Flagstaff (BBBSF) Half Marathon and 5K, and so that all attendees at his Buffalo Park memorial service could wear one in his honor.

Speaking of the BBBSF Half Marathon, in August, NATRA volunteers staffed the always busy 2/11 mile Aid Station once again supporting Flagstaff’s oldest race, now in its 46th consecutive year.

On September 9th, we co-sponsored Flagstaff Biking Organization’s Pedals vs. Pistons vs. Horseshoes vs. Hiking Boots trail maintenance day on the Fort Valley Trail System. More than 50 volunteers put in nearly 100 drainage ditches to help maintain one of our favorite trails. NATRA rewarded the volunteers by sponsoring the Fratellis Pizza luncheon.



With regards to new trails, NATRA donated \$500 to help solidify the City of Flagstaff’s planning efforts for a new realignment of the Don Weaver Trail in Picture Canyon. As Picture Canyon is one of our favorite places to run, we hope to see this re-route constructed next year.



We again staffed the Mile 80 Hull Cabin Aid Station at the Flagstaff to Grand Canyon Stagecoach Line 100-Mile, 55K, 100-Mile Mountain Bike Race, and Relays in September. Our volunteers had a blast supporting exhausted runners and bikers with quesadillas, tomato, vegetable, and chicken soup all night long. If you plan on registering save the September 21st/22nd dates for next year and follow updates at <https://runazt.org/flagstaff-to-grand-canyon-stagecoach-line-100/>



For those of you who attended October’s magical Soulstice race, the out-and-back design of the first part of the course allowed every runner to watch the exciting showdown between Flagstaff’s legendary ultra-marathoner Rob Krar and Olympian Rachel Smith pass by them under the eerie light of the partial eclipse. The race was followed by the epic and longest-ever Pay N’ Take party at the Langner Ranch that included the Aspen



Sports raffle, and live music featuring guitarist Paul Webber. Master of ceremonies Michael Whalen even started two hilarious and fun new traditions, the Soulstice beer chug-a-lug and a hot dog eating contest!



The biggest winners of course are all the kids who benefit from BBBSF mentoring programs. Thanks to our many shirt sponsors, the Aspen Sports raffle, and runners who donated \$400 of their Arizona Charitable Tax credit to BBBSF, we raised over \$10,000 to create and support one-to-one mentoring relationships that ignite the power and promise of youth.



I continued to be so touched by how the Government Prairie community has fully embraced Soulstice. One local put out a flock of pink flamingos and signs welcoming runners to the race. Then as I stood at the finish line, the landowner adjacent to the starting line introduced himself and excitedly offered to allow parking next year on his ranch. Chris also said he would break out his griddle and

flip pancakes as runners finish. So next year, you can have breakfast ahead of the big post-race party at the Langner’s Little Pup Ranch.



For Soulstice's 25th running, we are going to have even more fun highlighting the historic Beale Wagon Road that is adjacent to the north end of the course. My Pal Eric Souder's camels Rakuda and Gamal will be at the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Flagstaff Aid station, and they will attend the post-race party so that runners can get selfies with them. [Click here to learn more about the role camels played in the construction of the Beale Wagon Road between 1857 and 1859.](#)

Getting into Soulstice will be even more competitive as we have now reached 142 legacy runners who have run the race at least seven times and are guaranteed entry before the new lottery date of May 1st. This year we welcomed eight runners into the Legacy Club so congrats to Shanen Aranmor, Erin Celona, Brian Grayum, Lianne Lydum, Larry Phoenix, Alain Soutenet, Susan Spinnelli, and Jim Straight.

While most who register by April 30th will get a spot, the earlier you register the more chances you will have to win a refundable guaranteed entry when I randomly draw five runners monthly ahead of the lottery.

The easiest (and FREE) way to get into Soulstice is to grab one of 25 guaranteed spots for runners who wish to donate their \$421 (individual) or \$821 (per couple) Arizona Charitable Tax Credit to Big Brothers Big Sisters of Flagstaff. Those who do so can also attend the April 6th, FREE Big Brunch at Twin Arrows Resort. While it seems too good to be true, if you owe state taxes, you can get the credit instantly (dollar for dollar) when you do your taxes or you will get your refund back shortly after April 15th. You can learn more at <https://www.flagstafftaxcredit.org/about>. I hope to fill 25 seats at NATRA tables at the Twin Arrows event! This year donors will also get \$100 in raffle tickets for the Soulstice post-race party. If you'd like to take the FREE guaranteed entry through the Arizona Charitable Tax Credit and attend the April 6th brunch (or take the credit and not attend) please respond to this 30-second poll with your name and email at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/WJGRCPN>.



In early November, we provided a dozen volunteers who ran as running buddies for the girls, provided parking control, and served as course marshals.



On Thanksgiving morning, we again supported the 42nd annual Flagstaff Road and Track Club Turkey Predictor Run where 74 participants enjoyed much warmer temperatures and cold wind chills to predict their 2-mile time around Buffalo Park. There were many families with 3 generations of runners participating!

Finally, in December we hope to see many of you on Christmas Morning at 9 AM for two laps celebrating the day in Buffalo Park and a week later ringing in the New Year by meeting at 9 AM at the Marshall School parking lot and running the Flagstaff Urban Trail System north to Cheshire and back.

As always, happy trails to 2024, and we hope to see many of you on a Saturday group run soon!

Sincerely, Neil Weintraub, Director NATRA LLC