

Thank you for registering for the Half Marathon at [Rattlesnake Ridge Run](#), coming up this Saturday, April 16!

After the late blast of winter weather we've been having, I (Eric) traversed the ridge trail to trim back blocking logs and branches and check the conditions. We'd like to give you an update on what to expect, recommended gear, and your options. (We'll also send a pre-run email Friday morning with important run details.) The short version of the conditions report is that this will be the snowiest year ever for this event, and we expect significantly slower finishing times.

TRAIL CONDITIONS

As of Tuesday night, there was snow on the trail for all but the first and last kilometer or so. Here is the conditions description from the start at the Snoqualmie Point trailhead:

Some slushy snow on the trail begins within the first mile of the course, as the trail gains elevation fairly quickly. The snow gets deeper and more frozen as you ascend, topping a foot deep by the 4-mile mark at Grand Prospect. Most of the course to this point is frequently traveled, so it is somewhat compacted and thus runnable in regular running shoes, if somewhat more slowly. Beyond Grand Prospect—including to aid station #1 at 4.6 miles and beyond—the trail is less frequently traveled, and you can expect your feet to sink in several inches with each step, making running difficult. This is especially true once the trail follows the edge of the clearcut area or meanders into the logged area, as the lack of forest cover allows deep, wind-blown, powdery snow that can be up to 1.5 or 2 feet deep. I made a snowshoe track along the trail from Grand Prospect (4 miles) to Rattlesnake Ledge (8.3 miles), including this section; my tracks slightly compacted the snow and should mitigate the post-holing problem at least a little bit, but you should still expect to sink around 8 inches with each step if you're just wearing running shoes (the result of my own testing at around 170 pounds with size 11 running shoes), meaning most people will be reduced to walking through this section. These slow, powdery running conditions persist until roughly the 7-mile point, when the snow gradually starts to become firmer (due to more thawing/rain and re-freezing) and not as deep. Also, once you pass the summit of Rattlesnake Mountain around 6 miles in, the downhill slope will make it easier going. The final 1.9 miles down to the level of the lake is the well-traveled trail to Rattlesnake Ledge, and the heavy foot traffic has compacted the small amount of snow so that it is icy in places for around 1.5 miles. This is the only part of the course where I felt like I might slip and fall if I did not step carefully (in my road running shoes without microspikes).

GEAR

The [forecast for Rattlesnake Mountain](#) is for temperatures to remain a few degrees below freezing from now through the time of the race, with light snow Thursday and Friday. The run day forecast is for cloudy skies and only light wind in the morning, with light snow and higher winds in the afternoon.

The cold weather combined with rugged snow conditions and no vehicle access for emergency evacuations means it will be important to have some removable warm layers. **We will require everyone who starts the Half Marathon to have a fleece or thermal shirt, a wind-resistant shell, and a warm**

hat/beanie, in addition to their wicking base layer. The scenario we are trying to avoid is that a runner works up a sweat going up the mountain on the way to the aid station, they get tired in the deep snow and slow down significantly, then they get chilled and become hypothermic with no quick way to receive assistance. There is also the possibility of injury or someone dropping out and needing to walk slowly or wait in 28-degree weather for help. We additionally strongly recommend tights or other pants and—unless your hands tend to be warm—gloves.

Because of the softness of the snow leading to postholing, the 2-3 miles from Grand Prospect to the downhill slopes beyond the summit would probably be better handled with running snowshoes. The tradeoff is having to carry them to the top of the mountain and then the rest of the way back down to Rattlesnake Lake. Footwear is your choice, but the question is whether you want to avoid post-holing for the middle few miles of the ridge with deep and powdery snow, or whether you're okay walking or running very slowly through this section to save the weight and hassle of carrying snowshoes. Trekking poles could be a good option to keep good balance and footing in the deep snow section and over the icy final descent. Microspikes or shoes with spikes would certainly help ease the final descent and might lend some additional traction in other parts of the trail, although they could be annoying on the gravel of the final out-and-back.

OPTIONS

Due to the slow conditions, we recommend anyone whose pace would be pushing up against the course closing time under normal conditions NOT participate. Anyone who wishes to pass on running in these extraordinarily demanding conditions can get their choice of a credit of their registration fees toward another race or a full refund. Alternately, you can switch to the 5-mile distance and get a credit or refund of the difference in price. If you're up for the strength-sapping experience of running/walking through deep snow in the winter wonderland of the ridgetop, and you are aware of the risks and have the gear needed to reduce those risks, then you are welcome to run the arduous but beautiful Half Marathon on Saturday. If you'd like to take the refund or credit, [email us at events@mergeo.com](mailto:events@mergeo.com) at your convenience (before or after the race). If you'd like to change distances, you can either [email us](#) ahead of time (a bit easier for us) or show up to the 5-mile check-in on race day to switch distances and get a new bib number.

Yours on the (snowy) trails,

Eric, for the Northwest Trail Runs team