

Active Tourists: The Vasque Golden Leaf Half Marathon is our favorite way to see the foliage.



■ Sky Runs

What better way to take in the reds, yellows and oranges of the Rocky Mountain's fall foliage than a trail run in a mountain town? We've compiled a list of the biggest, baddest sky runs in the state, some with terrain steep enough to force you to stop and peep at those leaves.

By Jayme Otto

COURTESY UTE MOUNTAINEER

IMOGENE PASS RUN

SEPTEMBER 11 • OURAY

Rick Trujillo was the first person to run the 17.1 miles from Ouray to Telluride in 1974. (He did it as a training run for the Pike's Peak Marathon.) Locals liked the idea so much they made it an annual event. Six participants competed in that first Imogene Pass Run. Today, over 1,500 people run the grueling race, which sells out every year despite notoriously squirrely weather conditions. imogenerun.com

LA SPORTIVA EVERGOLD 10K TRAIL RUN

SEPTEMBER 12 • VAIL

New for this year, the course takes runners along the lower portions of the Vail Trail and through Vail Mountain's trail system, negotiating singletrack and Forest Service roads with an average grade of 11 percent. Gatorade stations at miles 2 and 4 ensure no one keels over during the 1,900 feet of elevation gain in six miles. vailrec.com

FEED THE HEATHEN

SEPTEMBER 18 • GLENWOOD SPRINGS

One of the steepest ski runs in the state, Sunlight Mountain's The Heathen falls beneath your feet at a breathtaking 52 degrees. Which is precisely why the Sunlight Winter Sports Club decided that running up it would make for a good (read: lung busting) fall fundraiser. The 5K course starts on a snowmobile catwalk, then charges straight up the mountain ... and back down. You'll do that loop twice, either by yourself or with a relay teammate. bit.ly/9hW1WV

RUN RABBIT RUN

SEPTEMBER 18 • STEAMBOAT

A 50-mile ultra through the mountains of Routt National Forest, Run Rabbit Run is best approached more like the tortoise than the hare. Starting in the ski area at nearly 7,000 feet, the course contains 9,000 feet of climbing in total, including a jaunt across the Continental Divide and a 10,568-foot top-out on Mount Werner. Slow and steady. steamboat50.com

MOUNTAINAIR MARATHON

SEPTEMBER 19 • GUNNISON

Yeah, you're running a marathon from Crested Butte to Gunnison, but it's easier than it sounds because the course descends slightly along most of the route. Starting at 8,800 feet in Skyland, a mile south of Crested Butte, runners follow scenic Hwy 135 along the East River before turning off onto a country road into Gunnison, ending at the Western State College campus at 7,700 feet. runmountainairmarathon.com

VASQUE GOLDEN LEAF HALF MARATHON 2010

SEPTEMBER 25 • ASPEN

All hail the most beautiful foot race in the Rockies. Now in its 33rd year, the 13.3-mile course winds through trails and roads from Snowmass Village to Aspen. Traversing hilly mountain meadows, colorful aspen forests and fragrant fields of sage, the 1,000 blissed-out runners barely feel the burn of racing at 9,000 feet. utemountaineer.com/GoldenLeafdefault.html

CRESTED BUTTE FALL COLOR CLASSIC

SEPTEMBER 26 • CRESTED BUTTE

New this year, this half marathon heads from Kebler Pass down to Ohio Pass, offering sprawling views of the Ohio Creek Valley in full fall color. Run entirely on dirt trails and roads, the race is mostly downhill with a couple of cattle guard crossings. Keep an eye out for overzealous spectators, a.k.a. cows, on the course. cbfallcolorclassic.com

RIM TO RIM ROYAL GORGE RUN

OCTOBER 2 • CANON CITY

Another inaugural event (anyone picking up on the sky running trend yet?), Rim to Rim offers runners a choice of either a 5K or 10K out and back through the rolling hills on the northeast side of Royal Gorge Park. The course traverses a suspension bridge, built in 1929, that's 1,000 feet above the Arkansas River. rimtorim.net

LAIR O' THE BEAR TRAIL RACE

OCTOBER 9 • EVERGREEN

Fifteen miles west of Denver, Evergreen is at a reasonable enough elevation (7,220 feet) for sky-running neophytes. The 10-mile out and back course begins in the Lair O' the Bear parking lot, and traverses the relatively new Bear Creek Trail. Looking for something a little more sissified, err family oriented? There is also a two-mile fun run/walk the same day. evergreenrecreation.com