

Banff Marathon

A Natural Beauty



North America's only marathon in a national park embraces Banff's wild side

IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE a more beautiful setting for a race than through Canada's first national park. The Banff Marathon is the only marathon in North America to take place entirely within nationally protected parklands, which on its own is a reason to add this event to your running bucket list.

The race was supposed to launch in 2013 but race director Paul Regensburg was forced to make an extremely tough decision in the 48 hours leading up to race weekend. The region was devastated by extreme flooding. Although the town of Banff largely escaped the flooding that plagued Calgary and High River farther downstream, much of the race course was set to run along the Bow River and with some sections submerged. Regensburg also worried about the optics of holding a race in the midst of such devastation and opted to pull the plug on the event. The race shirts, water, energy drinks and bars were quickly donated to flood relief efforts and those that registered were offered a deep discount to run the event in 2014.

Motivated by the emotional comebacks in New York City and Boston in the last couple of years, Regensburg was excited to showcase the park and make the event a celebration of the community. "This will be a very special race with the route

weaving through mountain valleys on closed roads. It will be worth the wait," he told *Canadian Running* in December when registration opened for the second inaugural Banff Marathon.

But this year's race was not without its own smaller scale environmental complication. Both the half and marathon course were set to take over the Bow Valley Parkway, one of Canada's great scenic drives, which was to be completely closed for runners. In the days leading up to race weekend, a pair of male grizzly bears began to do battle over territory, spilling out onto the road around Vermilion Lakes. Bears are a somewhat common sight in Banff and usually steer clear of humans, but these two grizzlies were spotted walking the length of the road refusing to defer to the presence of humans in the days leading up to the race. Park officials decided to close the area to the public due to the aggressive behaviour of the warring 600 lb. grizzlies. Regensburg and his crew have developed a strong relationship with Parks officials and the community through running the Banff Triathlon and they already had an alternative route planned.

The secondary course in Banff tapped into the area's extensive paved trail systems, relying on an out-and-back route

DESTINATION
BANFF
ALBERTA



Race Stats

Event:	The Banff Marathon
Races:	Marathon, Half-Marathon, Grizzly Kids Run
Date:	June, 2015
Registration:	Opens Dec. 1, 2014
Cap:	1,500 total runners
Website:	banffmarathon.com

Photos: Pam Doyle Photography/pamdoylephoto.com, Marathon Photos

