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 **VAIL**®

COUGAR RIDGE CLASSIC



VAIL – MINTURN

VAIL RECREATION DISTRICT

14K **2026** 26K

2026 RACER MANUAL

VAIL

“
We never arrive with a plan.
Vail figures it out.”

Vail's pedestrian streets and laid-back outdoor patios are the ideal landing spot for a post race pick-me-up. Whether you're looking for clean cuisine or bar food favorites to recover after the big race, Vail has something for you.



SCAN TO EXPLORE VAIL'S
BARS AND RESTAURANTS

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Additional race details are available at vailrec.com.
For more information, call the VRD Sports Department
at 970-479-2280 or email sports@vailrec.com.

A big thank you to all of our amazing sponsors for supporting the 2026 Courage Ridge Classic 26K & 14K. This race wouldn't be possible without the support of Discover Vail, the Town of Minturn, Vail Daily, Vail Resorts, Howard Head Sports Medicine, The Steadman Clinic and Steadman Philippon Research Institute, Gravity Haus Vail, Evergreen Lodge, Avanti F&B, Vail Honeywagon, Best Day Brewing, New Belgium Brewing Company and Vail Mountain Coffee & Tea.





Vail Mountain was founded by Pete Seibert and Earl Eaton in 1962.

They first climbed Vail Mountain in 1957, thinking it would be the perfect ski area. Little did they know, it's also an ideal area for trail running. Thus, the Cougar Ridge Classic was born. For the third

annual Cougar Ridge Classic 26K and inaugural 14K trail run, we continue to grow into one of the premier endurance runs in Colorado.

Ascending over Vail Mountain and into the world-famous Back Bowls, racers will be greeted with beautiful views of the Sawatch Range. With thousands of feet in elevation gain, this race is not for the faint of heart. However, we hope to set up our racers for

success with our Cougar Ridge race staff, Big Cat aid stations and detailed course markings.

LIONSHEAD ROCK

Lionshead Village in Vail was named after Lionshead Rock, an iconic rock formation on the Cougar Ridge Trail. Formed from eroded Limestone layers, Lionshead Rock overlooked Minturn until March 4, 2014, when the face of the feline rock came tumbling down.

Believed to have cracked due to the freeze-thaw cycle that occurs in the Vail Valley, the same process that originally created the iconic rock formation.

Half of Lionshead Rock is still standing today and provides the perfect outcropping for beautiful views of the town of Minturn and the surrounding limestone cliffs. This will be one of the many views on Vail Mountain and the Cougar Ridge Trail!





Autumn is a magical time in Vail, as nature slows down to prep for its long winter nap.

One of the most spectacular shows on earth can be found right here every autumn, as the fall foliage transforms from summer green into a palette of red, gold, auburn and bronze, a bastion of brilliant hues.

Breathtaking is the only way to describe it, and words alone can't do it justice. Running over Vail Mountain in fall is akin to sauntering through a kaleidoscope, one that leaves you with a mix of bedazzlement and tranquility. The moment you're embraced by the panorama of autumnal colors, the stress of daily life magically begins to vanish. Your step is lighter. Your heart is brighter. Your mind is clear and free.

Slow down even further with a hearty meal at one of the Vail Valley's renowned eateries or sip

on a glass of wine and take in the fresh fare at the Vail Farmers' Market. Explore the historic landmarks and shops. Absorb the love and passion that went into building Vail Village, something you'll feel from the very moment you arrive.

Come with a hunger for adventure, and Vail will sate that, too. Experience mountain biking down the mountainside, or

along a leisurely path that follows the stream. Go horseback riding at Piney River Ranch, golfing at Vail Golf Club, or off-road exploring near Camp Hale. Take a scenic hike (or run) on Berry Picker Trail, Pitkin Creek, the North Trail, or Cougar Ridge! Stroll through the nearby Betty Ford Alpine Garden. Sit on a bench and read under aspen trees or take a gondola ride to the top of Vail Mountain.

This race isn't the only thing happening in Vail! Check out the Vail Farmers' Market Art Show on Sunday. To see everything Vail has to offer, visit discovervail.com/things-to-do





Cradled in the Eagle River Valley, Minturn offers a slice of history among its youthful neighbors, with remnants of the late 1800s visible throughout town.

Named after Robert B. Minturn, a leading 19th-century American merchant and shipping tycoon, the town first embodied the pioneering spirit of early homesteaders. Earning the title of “lettuce capital of the world” thanks to their highly-desired Everkrisp lettuce, the early pioneers built

a strong community foundation that further blossomed with the arrival of miners and the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad in 1887.

With an established railroad, Minturn quickly became a vital transportation and industry nexus, with pioneers transforming

the town into an imperative hub for the mining industry, which was then thriving between Minturn and Leadville. Minturn's vibrancy led to its incorporation in 1904, catering to its growing community. Over the years, Minturn transitioned from agricultural and railroad roots to a beloved mountain getaway.

Despite inevitable changes, Minturn retains its unique character, thriving with outdoor recreation, art, restaurants, and

boutique businesses. Today, Minturn is celebrated as a true mountain town: a friendly haven where the spirit of the Old West greets the new. It invites you to explore its storied streets, to become a part of its living history, and to experience the genuine hospitality that makes it a Rocky Mountain gem.

After the race, be sure to check out Hometown Throwdown, Minturn's fall festival! Find more info on page 18.



TWO SMALL TOWNS, ONE BIG BACKYARD



**MINTURN
& RED CLIFF**
Colorado

Framed by the Colorado Rockies, Minturn and Red Cliff offer a gateway to year round outdoor adventure. Surrounded by the Holy Cross Wilderness, White River National Forest and the Eagle River, the area is a paradise for nature enthusiasts. Close to Leadville, Camp Hale National Monument, and Vail and Beaver Creek ski resorts, Minturn and Red Cliff promote responsible recreation and offer a more casual and affordable option for visitors.

VisitMinturnRedCliff.com

COURSE INFO AND SCHEDULE

The courses are point-to-point, with the 26K starting at Gravity Haus and the 14K starting at Eagle’s Nest on Vail Mountain.

We’re grateful to the Town of Vail and Vail Mountain Ski Resort for hosting the start, and the Town of Minturn for hosting the finish.

The 26K starts with a long, consistent climb up Vail Mountain’s front side to Mid-Vail. Racers then ascend Vail Mountain up Kinnickinnick Trail.

Approaching Wildwood, racers reach 11,000 feet above sea level. They can enjoy the view and claim their title as King or Queen of the Mountain.

The trail grade levels off as it continues onto Ridge Route towards Eagle’s Nest, where the new 14K starts and connects to the 26K. After Eagle’s Nest, racers descend Game Creek Bowl towards the Cougar Ridge aid station. This public trail has bikers and hikers, so be cautious.

The course then descends on the technical but steady Cougar Ridge single-track trail towards Minturn. Racers run through aspen groves before a steep descent onto Minturn roads. From here, they have a mile on pavement to the finish in Minturn’s downtown.

14K COURSE STATS

ELEVATION GAIN
591 Feet

ELEVATION LOSS
3,053 Feet

HIGH POINT
10,688 Feet

LOW POINT
7,861 Feet

AID STATIONS
#1: 1 Eagle’s Nest
#2: Cougar Ridge
#3: Town of Minturn

GEAR DROP
Minturn Finish

RUNNING SURFACE
82% Single-track Trail
8% Dirt/Gravel Road
10% Paved Road

14K racers must ride up Eagle Bahn Gondola at 8:30 a.m. to get to the race start on time.

Spectators may ride up during this time; no pass required!



26K COURSE STATS

ELEVATION GAIN
3,439 Feet

ELEVATION LOSS
3,795 Feet

HIGH POINT
10,981 Feet

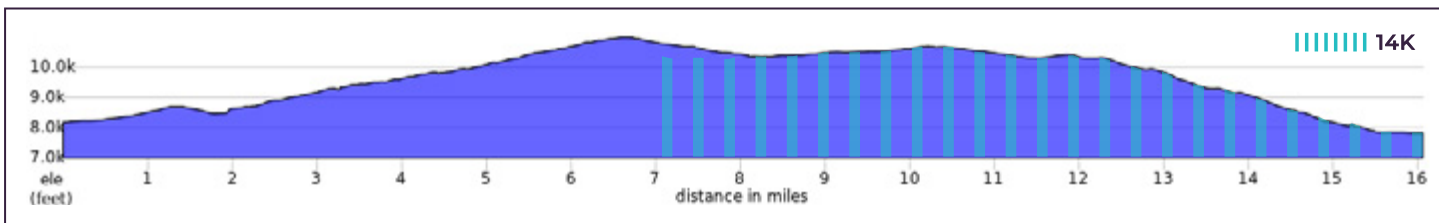
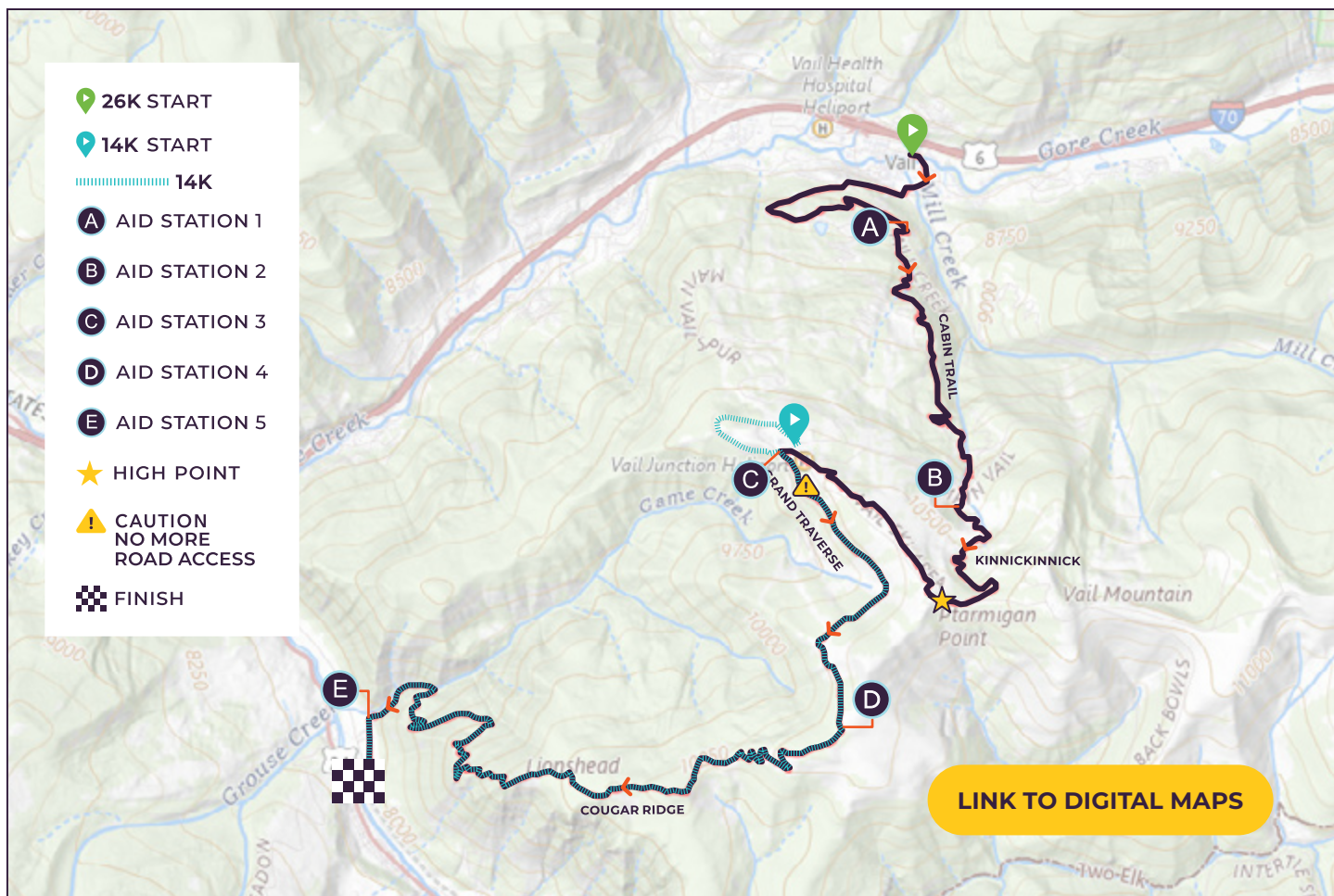
LOW POINT
7,861 Feet

AID STATIONS
#1: Gitalong Road
#2: Mid-Vail
#3: Eagle’s Nest
#4: Cougar Ridge
#5: Town of Minturn

GEAR DROP
Mid-Vail Aid Station
Eagle’s Nest Aid Station
Minturn Finish

RUNNING SURFACE
78% Single-track Trail
16% Dirt/Gravel Road
6% Paved Road

TIME	ACTIVITY	LOCATION	ADDRESS
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 25			
4–7 p.m.	Packet Pickup	Gravity Haus, Vail	352 E Meadow Dr, Vail, CO
SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 26			
6 & 6:30 a.m.	Minturn to 26K Start Shuttle	Town of Minturn	146 Main St, Minturn, CO
6–6:50 a.m.	26K Day-of Packet Pickup	Gravity Haus, Vail	321 E Lionshead Cir, Vail, CO
7 a.m.	26K Race Start	Gravity Haus, Vail	321 E Lionshead Cir, Vail, CO
7:30 a.m.	Minturn to 14K Start Shuttle	Town of Minturn	146 Main St, Minturn, CO
7:30–8:20 a.m.	14K Day-of Packet Pickup	Lionshead Welcome Center	295 E Lionshead Cir, Vail, CO
8:30–9 a.m.	Eagle Bahn Gondola opens	Lionshead Village	699 I-70 Frontage Rd, Vail, CO
9 a.m.	14K Race Start	Eagle’s Nest	Top of gondola
9:45 a.m.	26K Time Cutoff	Eagle’s Nest	Top of gondola
10–2 p.m.	After-Party & Lunch	Town of Minturn	101113 Williams St, Minturn, CO
11:30 a.m.	Awards & Raffle	Town of Minturn	101113 Williams St, Minturn, CO
1 p.m.	Race Finish Closes	Town Minturn	101113 Williams St, Minturn, CO



26K MILE	14K MILE	ALTITUDE	WAYPOINT	+ MILES	+/_ ELEVATION	AVERAGE GRADE
0		8,169'	26K START - Gravity Haus			
2.2		8,732'	Aid Station #1 - Gitalong Rd	2.2 Miles	+ 695 Feet	5.3%
5.1		10,250'	Aid Station #2 - Mid-Vail	2.9 Miles	+ 1,409 Feet	8.6%
6.7		10,981'	Race High Point - Wildwood	1.6 Miles	+ 832 Feet	9.4%
	0	10,311'	14K Start - Eagle's Nest			
8.1	1	10,326'	Aid Station #3 - Eagle's Nest	1.5 Miles	- 632 Feet	-7.1%
10.3	3.1	10,675'	Aid Station #4 - Cougar Ridge	2.1 Miles	+ 362 Feet	3.2%
15.5	8.3	8,042'	Aid Station #5 - Minturn	5.2 Miles	- 2,873 Feet	-4.4%
16.1	8.9	7,830'	FINISH - Downtown Minturn	0.6 Miles	- 43 Feet	-1.8%

ORANGE = 26K CUTOFFS IMPOSED, SEE NEXT PAGE FOR DETAILS

AID STATIONS, DROP BAGS & CUT-OFF TIMES



Thanks to Skratch Labs, our aid stations will be stocked with electrolyte hydration, in addition to a variety of snacks and water.

BIG CAT AID CLASH
Don't forget to vote for your favorite aid station at the finish!

We are grateful to our local non-profits, who will be manning the aid stations and cheering you on. These amazing organizations are heavily involved in the growth of the Vail Valley and our community. They are volunteering their time to keep your energy levels high when the course gets rough!

Our aid station organizations are competing in the Big Cat Aid Clash. They are trying to earn your vote as the King Clowder (that's a group of cats in case you didn't know). There will be a Big Cat Aid Clash Kiosk at the finishing area

for racers to vote for their favorite aid station. Expect silly shenanigans and fun vibes as they try to earn your vote while you're grinding away.

The King Clowder will win a financial prize/donation to their organization for being the coolest cats on the mountain.

FIRST AID & SUPPLIES
Thanks to Vail Mountain Resorts and Vail Mountain Rescue, we will have experienced medical staff on course for racer safety.

We are grateful to have the Steadman Clinic at the start and finish to help with any medical needs. Ask their skilled athletic trainers and they can either help or recommend a professional.

DROP BAGS
Drop bags need to be labeled with your name, bib number and aid station destination. Please keep drop bags small (less than 20L). We will have tarps/trucks near the race start, labeled with which aid station they will be delivered to. Place your drop bag at the appropriate tarp/truck for delivering to aid stations. We are not responsible for gear delivered to incorrect locations. Our drop bag vehicles will depart the 26K start at 6:55 a.m.

Eagle's Nest is roughly halfway through the 26K course, so prepare accordingly for seven miles in the White River National Forest.

Drop bags will be returned to the Town of Minturn finish and awards by course close at 1 p.m. on Saturday. It is your responsibility to pick up your drop bag. If you

forgot your bag because you wanted to race home too, please contact us at sports@vailrec.com.

CUT-OFF TIMES
In accordance with our safety plan, Vail Resorts, USFS and our volunteers' time and safety, cutoff times will be strictly enforced. Runners not leaving an aid station by the cutoff will be instructed to drop out and take the gondola to Vail or run back. We're not responsible for your safety; take what you need from the aid station and stay safe. If this is your first endurance run or you're unsure of the cutoffs, plan on having crew support to get to the after-party and awards.



AID STATION	26K MILE	14K MILE	CUT-OFF TIME	GEAR DROP	NON-PROFIT
Aid Station #1 - Gitalong Road	2.2			NO	SMALL CHAMPIONS
Aid Station #2 - Mid-Vail	5.1			YES	VAIL VALLEY CHARITABLE FUND
Aid Station #3 - Eagle's Nest	8.1	1	9:45 a.m.	YES	TBD
Aid Station #4 - Cougar Ridge	10.3	3.1		NO	VAIL VALLEY MOUNTAIN TRAILS ALLIANCE
Aid Station #5 - Minturn	15.5	8.3		NO	RED SANDSTONE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PTO
Finish	16.1	8.9	1 p.m.	YES	

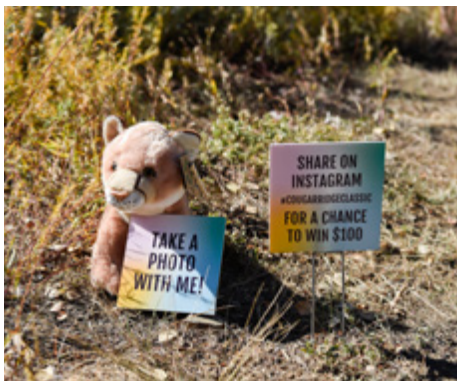


PHOTO CONTEST

Keep an eye out for this cougar on the course. If you spot it, snap a photo, share it on Instagram or Facebook with **#cougarridgeclassic** to enter for a chance to win \$100.

The winner will be announced at the award ceremony!

And don't forget to follow us on Facebook and Instagram to see all the photos from the race!

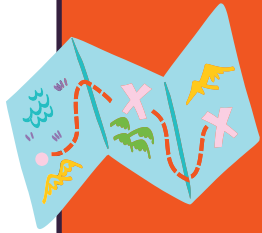


TIPS & TRICKS



Download the course GPX and study the intersections, elevation profiles and distances between aid stations. **Utilize our digital map and Ride w/ GPS** to stay on course or pre-run!

Course markings will be **RED** signs with **WHITE** arrows pointing you in the correct direction. A confirmation sign will always follow an intersection to confirm you are still on course and cones will block off any confusing intersections.



Have a copy of the course map with you, either a paper copy or on your phone.

Colorado has a dry climate at a high elevation. Drink plenty of water and stay hydrated.



We are running in the White River National Forest. Please be mindful that you may encounter a wild animal along the trail.

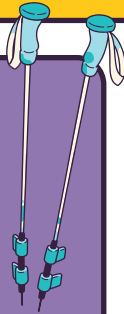
Do not feed or approach. Make noise, look big and do not attempt to pass until they move along.

You are permitted to carry bear spray.

The Rocky Mountains are known for sporadic weather, so bring extra layers and utilize the gear drops at the top of the mountain. The morning will be chilly and will warm up quickly as the sun crests over the Gore Range.



Consider using trekking poles. You'll be traversing over a mountain, and they may be your savior on the ups and downs.



Pour some water on yourself if you're hot. There will be ice at the Mid-Vail and Eagle's Nest aid stations as well to cool off with.

Bring sun protection. You will be climbing 3,410 feet closer to the sun, so protect your skin from those damaging UV rays.



RACE POLICIES & DISQUALIFICATIONS

You can find our policies for deferral, cancellations, transfers and refunds on our website at vailrec.com.

Note that the Cougar Ridge Classic does not issue refunds.

Follow course markings to avoid disqualification and show respect to others.

Failure to follow "leave no trace" principles will result in disqualification. Restrooms are available at start, finish, Mid-Vail, Wildwood and Eagle's Nest!



AFTER-PARTY & AWARDS



After-party and awards will take place at 11:30 p.m. at the Town of Minturn.

AWARDS & PRIZE PURSE

We have an elite category, where the top three men and women of the 26K will receive a cash prize presented by Discover Vail. The prize purse is \$500 for first, \$300 for second and \$150 for third.

In addition to cash prizes for top 26K finishers, awards will be given to the top three places in each category. Categories are

by gender and age groups in 10-year increments for the 26K and 20-year increments for the 14K. Along with awards, we have some amazing gear to give away! We will randomly pull winners during the race so check the raffle board at the finish to see if you won!

Don't forget to stick around after the race! Enjoy lunch at participating Minturn



establishments by using the lunch voucher on your bib! We will have beer, alcoholic and non-alcoholic, at the finish thanks to New Belgium, Vail Brewing Company and Best Day Brewing.

LUNCH VOUCHER PARTICIPANTS:

The Mexican Bar & Grill
Sunrise Minturn
Rocky Mountain Taco
Crazy Chicken
Kirby Cosmo's BBQ
Magustos Pizza
Vail Mountain Coffee & Tea

WE'VE GOT YOUR BACK



EVEN WHEN IT'S YOUR KNEES

Don't ignore the aches and pains that prevent you from getting after it. The experts at Howard Head Sports Medicine provide individualized treatment plans to reduce pain, restore function, strengthen and get you back on top.

HOWARDHEAD.ORG

 **HOWARD HEAD SPORTS MEDICINE**
VAIL HEALTH

TRANSPORTATION & ACCOMMODATIONS



We recommend parking in Minturn and taking the race shuttle to Vail. This gives you time to utilize the start facility and have quick access to your vehicle at the finish.

MINTURN PARKING

There is parking in the [Minturn Municipal Lot](#), adjacent to the Minturn Saloon.

VAIL PARKING

There is paid parking in the Vail Village Parking Structure. [Visit \[vail.gov\]\(http://vail.gov\) for summer rates.](#)

TRANSPORTATION

The 26K will have two shuttles from Minturn to Vail prior to the race at 6 and 6:30 a.m. The 14K will have one shuttle from Minturn to Vail prior to the race at 7:30 a.m. There will be a shuttle to Vail available to racers periodically after the race.

VAIL LODGING

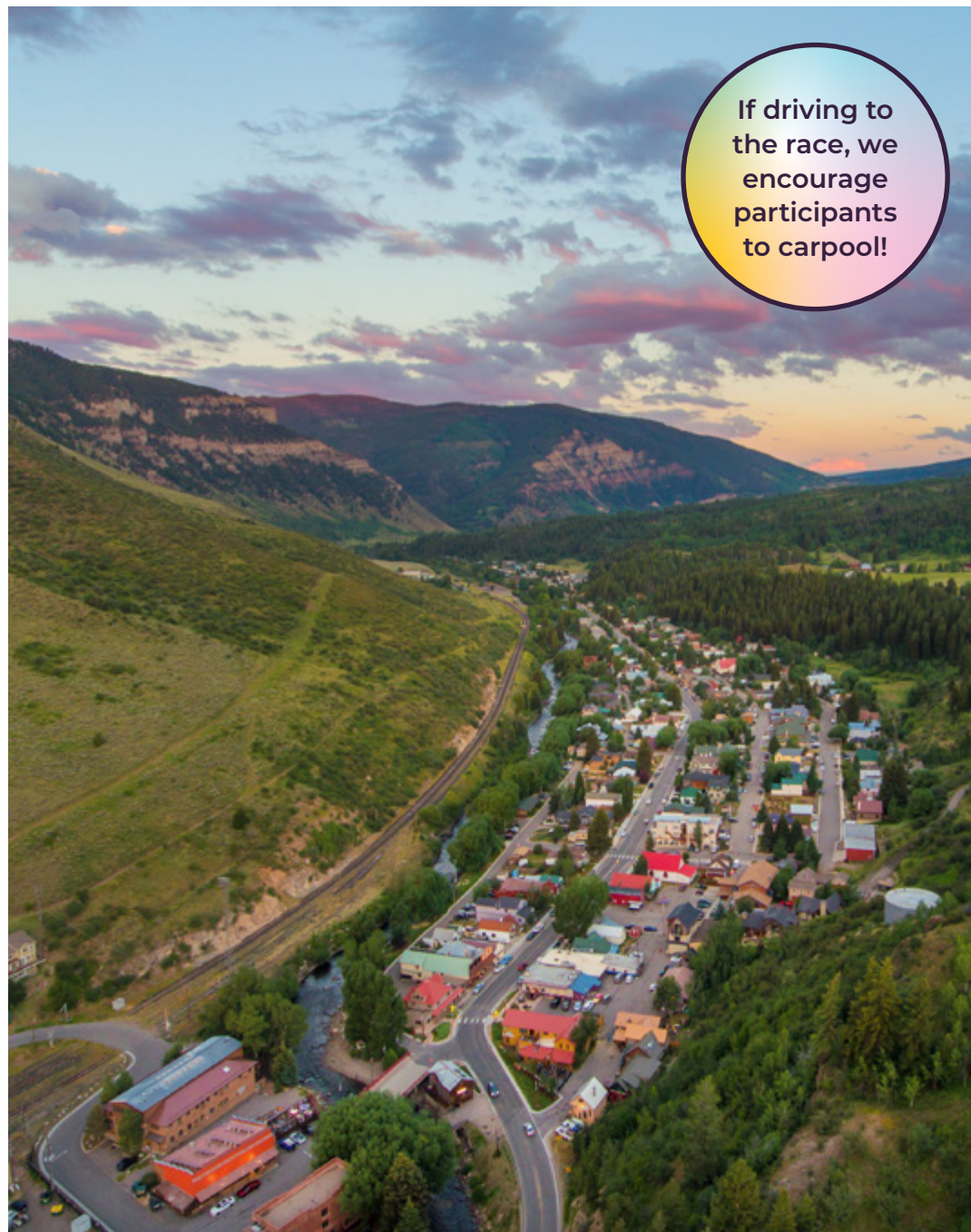
Check out [Discover Vail](#) to see all your lodging options!

EVERGREEN LODGE

With its prime location in Vail Town Center (between Vail and Lionshead Villages), Evergreen Lodge is a short walk or a ride on the complimentary town shuttle, to world-class shopping, dining, summer and winter activities. Racers can receive a group discount by booking online [HERE](#) or by calling them directly at 970-476-7810 and referring to **Cougar Ridge Classic 26K Trail Running Race.**

VAIL REALTY CONDOS

If a hotel isn't big enough for you, check out our partners at Vail Realty. They have the largest selection of condo and home rentals in the Vail Valley! Visit vailrealty.com/vail-vacation-rentals to book while they're available!





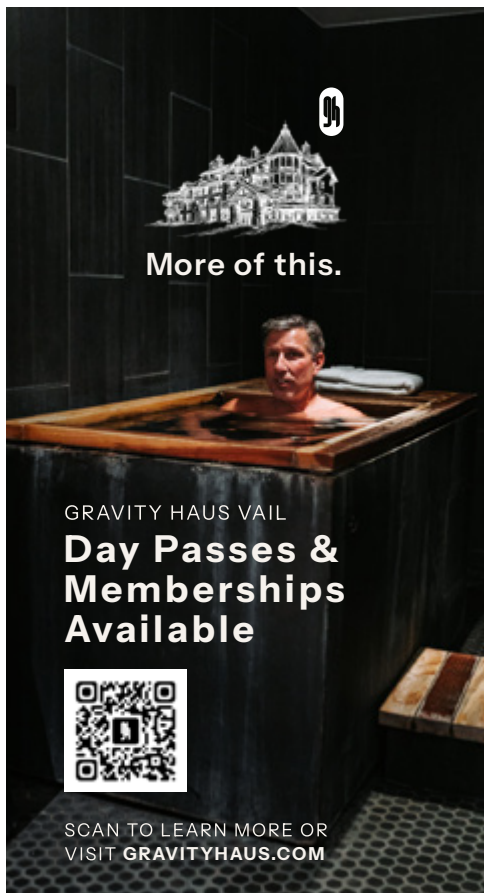
GRAVITY HAUS VAIL

Thanks to our partners at Gravity Haus, racers can book a room with their **discount code: COUGAR RUN**. Enjoy everything Vail has to offer with a beautiful location inside Vail Village, looking at Gore Creek and the beautiful Vail Mountain you'll be running up! Gravity Haus Vail has a limited number of rooms for our racers, visit gravityhaus.com to book now while they are still available!

If you want to be within walking distance of the start and Gravity Haus is booked - there are tons of other options for hotels in Vail Village and Lionshead Village. You can be within a 1-10 minute walk to the race start.

**DISCOUNT CODE:
COUGAR RUN**





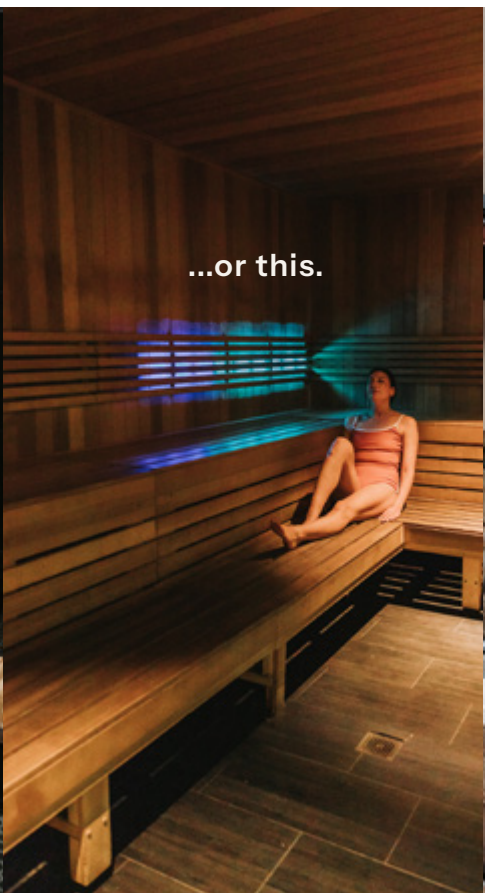
More of this.

GRAVITY HAUS VAIL

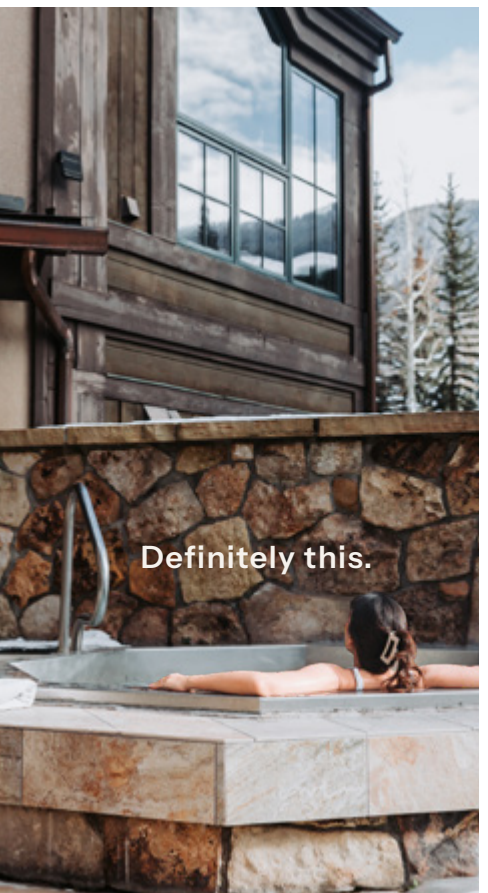
Day Passes & Memberships Available



SCAN TO LEARN MORE OR VISIT [GRAVITYHAUS.COM](https://gravityhaus.com)



...or this.



Definitely this.

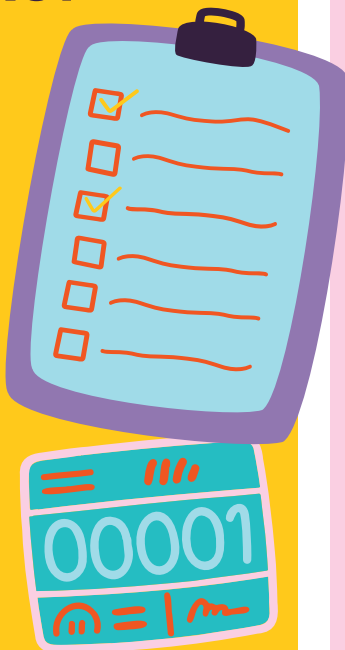


PACKET PICKUP

FRI, SEPT. 25

You can pick up your packet, bib and race swag the day before the race at Gravity Haus Vail from 5–7 p.m.

If you can't make it on Friday, you can pick up your packet, bib and race swag the day of the race. 26K racers can pick up at Gravity Haus between 6–6:50 a.m., 14K racers can pick up at the Lionshead Parking Structure from 7:30–8:20 a.m.



RACE DAY **SAT, SEPT. 26**

Racers can pick up their bib near the race start locations. 26K will be at Gravity Haus between 6–6:50 a.m. and the 14K will be at the Lionshead Welcome Center between 7:30–8:20 a.m. Bathrooms and water fountains are located inside Gravity Haus, the Welcome Center and parking structures near the race start. Please note there are limited resources available on course.

The 26K race will start at 7 a.m. The start line will close 10 minutes after at 7:10 a.m. The 14K race will start at 9 a.m. at Eagle's Nest. **14K Racers need to ride up the Eagle Bahn Gondola by 8:30 a.m.** to arrive on time. The after-party and awards will be held in the Town of Minturn between 10–2 p.m.

Join us for lunch in Minturn! Racers will get **FREE** lunch at participating restaurants with their meal ticket on their bib. See page 12 for more!



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HOMETOWN THROWDOWN 2026

"WE'RE GETTING THE BAND BACK TOGETHER"
JOIN US FOR THE SCHWING DADDY REUNION

IN THE HEART OF DOWNTOWN MINTURN, IN BETWEEN THE BUNKHOUSE & MINTURN WHISKY CO

MUSIC - KIDS GAMES - DRINKS - FOOD

MUSICAL LINEUP:

1:00- 2:30PM - QUADRASONIC

3:00 - 4:30PM - MANMAKER

5:00 - 7PM SCHWING DADDY

BEVERAGE VENDORS:

BEER BY VAIL BREWING CO.

WHISKY DRINKS BY MINTURN WHISKY CO.

WINE BY WILD MOUNTAIN CELLARS

26 SEPTEMBER 2026
1PM - 7PM

BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE TOWN OF MINTURN.

VAIL BREWING CO, MINTURN WHISKY CO, & WILD MOUNTAIN CELLARS.

FOOD VENDORS WILL BE ON HAND WITH A VARIETY OF FOOD OFFERINGS.

WWW.MINTURN.ORG @GOMINTURN (FB & IG)





COUGAR RIDGE CLASSIC

VAIL – MINTURN 26K & 14K

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