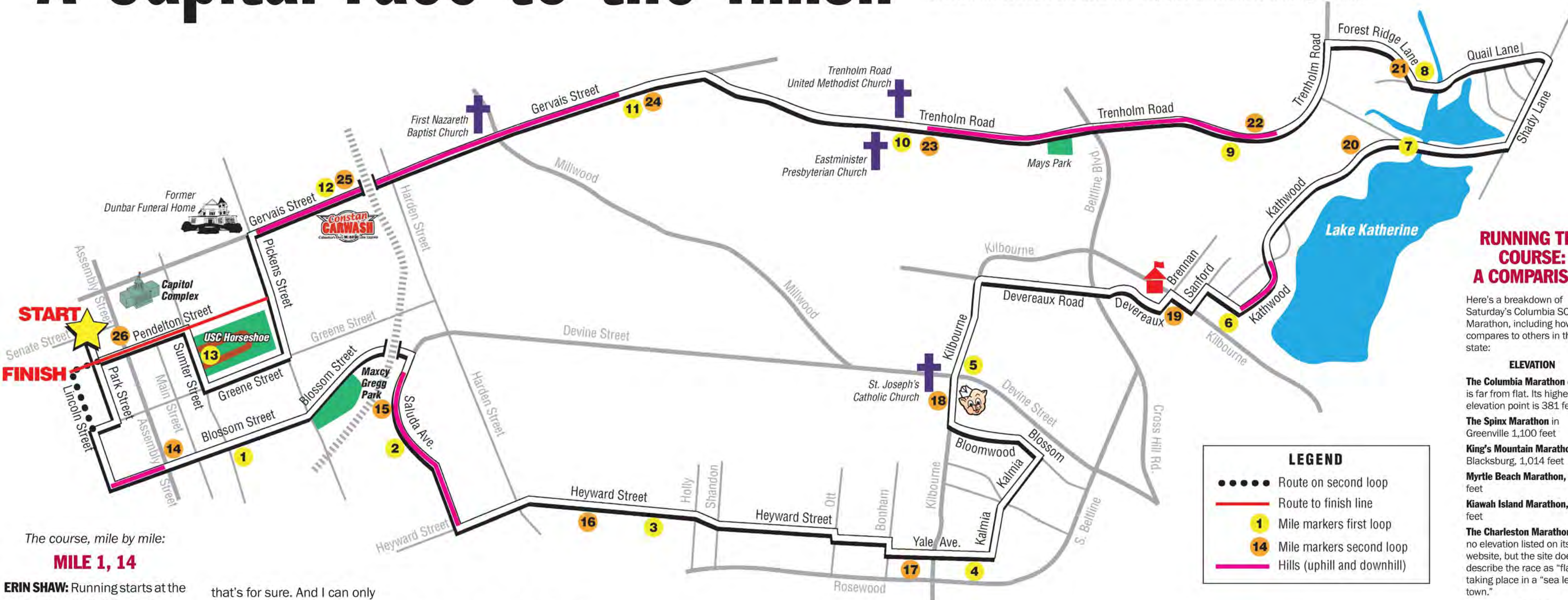


A Capital race to the finish

Erin Shaw, an intern for The State, ran the Columbia S.C. Marathon course in advance of Saturday's race. Here's her mile-by-mile breakdown, with additional commentary from Dan Hartley, the marathon's race director. The course is one 13.1-mile loop that runners have to navigate twice.



RUNNING THE COURSE: A COMPARISON

Here's a breakdown of Saturday's Columbia SC Marathon, including how it compares to others in the state:

- ELEVATION**
- The Columbia Marathon** course is far from flat. Its highest elevation point is 381 feet.
 - The Spinx Marathon** in Greenville, 1,100 feet
 - King's Mountain Marathon** in Blacksburg, 1,014 feet
 - Myrtle Beach Marathon**, 50 feet
 - Kiawah Island Marathon**, 20 feet
 - The Charleston Marathon** has no elevation listed on its website, but the site does describe the race as "flat" and taking place in a "sea level town."
- RUNNERS**
- The Columbia Marathon** is expecting around 700 runners. Including the half-marathon and 10K, there will be about 2,500 racers on the course.
 - Spinx Marathon**, more than 400 runners
 - Kiawah Island**, almost 800 runners
 - King's Mountain**, more than 800 runners
 - Charleston Marathon**, almost 900 runners.
 - Myrtle Beach**, almost 1,800 runners
- PERKS**
- If you're from Columbia, the biggest perk of the Columbia Marathon is its convenient location. The Myrtle Beach Marathon, the Kiawah Island Marathon and the Charleston Marathon all offer picturesque beachside panoramas during the run. The Charleston Marathon also greets finishers with a bowl of shrimp and grits, a great snack if you can stomach it after running 26.2 miles.

The course, mile by mile: MILE 1, 14

ERIN SHAW: Running starts at the crosswalk next to Monterrey Mexican Restaurant, which is at the corner of Senate and Park streets in the Vista. Even without the chaos and excitement of race day, I felt good taking my first steps at 7 a.m. in the predawn darkness. The first incline on Blossom Street by USC's Strom Thurmond Wellness and Fitness Center was manageable but a little awkward because I was still trying to figure out my pace.

DAN HARTLEY: You can look at this as the first of four hills on each loop. This one is relatively short, but you'll notice it. All of Park Street will be blocked off to accommodate the initial giant pack of runners.

that's for sure. And I can only imagine it requires even more willpower on the second loop. At least on race day there will be an aid station toward the top.

HARTLEY: All aid stations will be equipped with water, Gatorade, oranges, bananas and energy gels.

MILE 3, 16

SHAW: Running through the Shandon neighborhood on Heyward Street is pretty, relaxing and easy. It's a good stretch to let your mind wander. I liked imagining how all the old houses looked on the inside.

HARTLEY: Heyward Street is definitely one of the prettiest parts of the course. There are no hills to speak of, and it's a large, tree-lined street.

MILES 4 AND 5, 17 AND 18

SHAW: I ran up a few bunny

hills, which actually felt pretty energizing. And the hills added some variation to the flat terrain.

HARTLEY: Mile 2½ to mile 9 (and mile 15 to 20, roughly) are easy. There are a couple of risers and rollers but plenty of flat and downhill sections. I tried to eliminate as many of the hills as possible. Trust me, if I had wanted to make it harder, there were definitely some harder hills.

MILE 6 AND 7, 19 AND 20

SHAW: I still felt good when I got to the aid station at mile 6. I grabbed Gatorade. I started to see Lake Katherine poking through the gaps between the trees and houses. It's in full view around mile 7. Running somehow seems easier in beautiful places.

HARTLEY: Up until now, the marathoners and half-marathoners are running the same course, but there are two places in miles six and seven where the halfers veer left and the marathoners continue straight.

MILE 8, 21

SHAW: The quiet calm of the neighborhoods disappeared when I turned left onto bustling Trenholm Road. I shuffled along as cars whizzed by, becoming acutely aware of how sore my ankles were.

HARTLEY: Cars will be steered as far away from runners as possible on race day by blocking the oncoming traffic lane.

MILE 9, 22

SHAW: This was the hardest

part of the course for me because it's almost all uphill. As soon as you think you've put the long incline behind you, another one comes into view. I felt like a turtle, but thought: "This is my first half. You only get one. I want to make it good!"

HARTLEY: From miles 9 to 10, you're climbing the majority of it. You can actually break it up into three mini-climbs, with the last one being the steepest.

MILE 10, 23

SHAW: I was rewarded for my hill-climbing efforts with a nice downhill stretch on Gervais Street. I picked up my pace here to make up some time.

HARTLEY: Once you turn left on Gervais, it's a nice flat-to-downhill stretch all the way past Harden (Street). You get a nice view of downtown here and get the feeling of,

"Hey, I'm getting close now."

MILE 11, 24

SHAW: The I'm-light-as-a-feather feeling vanished at the end of mile 11 when I started a short but steep two-block climb. It was work to pick my knees up, but I imagined the finish.

HARTLEY: This is the last hill on the loop. It starts at Gregg Street and tops out on Barnwell Street.

MILE 12, 25

SHAW: I turned left on Pickens Street knowing I was in the home stretch. I was almost too zoned-out to notice when I passed the USC Horseshoe on my right. It's one of Hartley's favorite parts of the course.

HARTLEY: You're downtown, you're on USC's campus and you know you're close.

Note: At the Pendleton Street intersection on the first loop of the marathon and the half-marathon, runners go straight and then turn right on Greene Street before running by the Horseshoe. On the second loop of the marathon and for the 10K, runners turn right on Pendleton and head to the finish. That's why the first loop is longer by 1,000 feet.

MILE 13, LAST MILE

SHAW: I finished! I was red-faced and exhausted, sweaty and happy it was over. I felt like I needed to lie down for, oh, days. But I did it.

HARTLEY: 10K runners and half-marathoners will have three finish lanes. Marathoners will stick to the left and head for their second loop.

— Erin Shaw, Special to The State