

Zane Grey 50 Mile and 50K

Participant Guide

Zane Grey Highline Trail Runs

Mountain Meadows Ranch, Christopher Creek, AZ

April 18, 2026

Executive Rules Summary

We hope you read this manual in its entirety, but here is a summary of what we think are the most important points. It is our goal to provide you with a safe, well-organized, and spectacular running experience. In order to do this, we ask that you help us by abiding by these guidelines.

1. No whining.
 2. No dogs at any aid station, the start, or the finish line. Dogs are strictly prohibited from Mountain Meadows Ranch and are not permitted on the property.
 3. The Run Director has final authority on any question that may arise during the run.
 4. Your bib number should always be visible from the front.
 5. You must leave each aid station by the posted cutoff time. If you return after that, it will be assumed you have abandoned your run attempt.
 6. No littering.
 7. No stashing of supplies along the course and no accepting aid except within 400 yards of a designated aid station.
 8. You have agreed to be pulled for medical and safety reasons if it is determined that such action is in your best interest.
 9. Aid station captains have the authority to act on behalf of Zane Grey Highline Trail Run management.
 10. Crews are only allowed at the Tonto Fish Hatchery, 260 Trailhead, and Rim Top Trailhead aid stations.
 11. Pacers may begin pacing their runner at the 260 Trailhead (mile 34.6) or the Rim Top Trailhead (mile 39) aid stations.
 12. Runners departing Rim Top Trailhead (mile 39) after 3:00 p.m. must have a working flashlight in order to continue.
 13. Trekking poles are allowed.
 14. Alcohol is not allowed on the property of Mountain Meadows Ranch.
 15. Enjoy yourself!
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Introduction

Welcome to the thirty-sixth running of the Zane Grey Highline Trail Run! This manual provides Zane Grey runners and their crews with information to help prepare for the 2026 run weekend and the run itself. Over the years, our run has greatly matured, and we are looking forward to the best run yet.

Run Organization

At the center of all run organization is the Run Director (RD), Joe Galope. He has authority over all activities during the run and will ensure it goes smoothly. At all times during the run, he or his designee can be reached via the Amateur Radio Network or in person along the course.

Runner Information

The following are some general notes to help runners prepare. However, nothing can prepare you as well as getting out on the course and becoming familiar with the terrain and run conditions. This manual, as well as the course description, images of the course, profiles, runner list, and other information, is also available on the Zane Grey home page at: <http://www.zanegrey50.com>

The Courses

The courses are closed. That means runners are required to follow the specified route.

The courses start on the Mountain Meadows Ranch property in Christopher Creek. The first mile climbs a dirt road to the northern edge of the property, where you will exit through a gate into the Tonto National Forest. From there, you will cross Christopher Creek, where, depending on the water flow, it could be calf-deep, or you may be able to hop from rock to rock to avoid getting wet. This will be the first of several water crossings throughout the day.

Mountain Meadows Ranch is NOT ACCESSIBLE prior to race day to preview the start finish of the course. It is private property.

You then link up to the Highline Trail at the See Canyon Trailhead, just under a mile into the run. You will follow the Highline Trail until you reach the Derrick Trail. At 5.8 miles into your run, you will follow the Derrick Trail downhill all the way to the first aid station at mile 8. From there, you

follow the scenic Horton Creek Trail back up to the Highline Trail. At mile 11.4, you turn left and follow the Highline Trail all the way to the Tonto Creek Fish Hatchery Aid Station at mile 15.5. Then turn around and follow the Highline Trail all the way back to the See Canyon Aid Station.

There is a **water-only** aid station at Horton Springs (mile 19.6). The water will be untreated water gathered directly out of the spring.

Upon reaching See Canyon, 50K runners return to Mountain Meadows Ranch to finish.

Fifty-mile runners continue on the Highline Trail to the 260 Trailhead aid station at mile 33.5. Then they head up the Mogollon Rim on the Military Sinkhole Trail. Once reaching the top, runners turn right and follow the Rim Overlook Trail, where they will take in spectacular views. They cross FR300 and reach the Rim Top Trailhead at mile 38. From there, they take the General Crook Trail to the aid station at the Drew Trailhead at mile 44. It is all downhill from there: down the Drew Trailhead to the Highline Trail, right on the Highline Trail, and then left for the shortcut back into Mountain Meadows Ranch for a 50-mile finish.

There are now dozens of ultra runners who have a good working knowledge of the course. Many of them are more than willing to lie about the course details and difficulty. Many runners have also written web-accessible impressions of the run. This may be the most rugged trail you will ever run. Expect obstacles that will include, but are not limited to, rocks, fallen trees, rocks, foliage overgrowth, rocks, massive erosion, rocks, river crossings, and the occasional rock.

Course Marking

It is the runner's responsibility to know the course. We put in a considerable amount of effort to properly mark the course to keep runners on route. However, runners still need to pay attention to their surroundings, and it is not uncommon for course markings to be either removed or vandalized.

The course marking will consist of orange ribbon with black polka dots hanging from trees. There will also be orange survey flags stuck in the ground. At key intersections, there will be signs hammered into the ground with directional arrows. Additionally, blue and white ribbon will be used to indicate areas that are off course.

GPS track files of the route are available on the website if you own a navigation device.

The Weather

Prepare for any kind of weather. Keep in mind you will be running at altitude. Typical weather is chilly in the morning, hot during the day, and then cold after the sun goes down.

Training

You are responsible for being trained well enough to endure this trail safely. The 50-miler is a “postgraduate” run, not just a harder or higher version of some other trail 50-miler. It is up to you to devise a training program that will get you to the end of the Highline Trail in condition to participate in what can be a very enjoyable experience.

Fauna and Flora

The altitude range of this run is 5,300 to 6,900 feet. Forests of aspen, pine, and spruce are common. Animal life may be encountered.

Stay clear of elk; they can be ornery at times. Bears (black, not grizzlies) are present, though very seldom seen. Mountain lions may also be encountered. The rule with these critters is to back off slowly, stand tall, and raise your arms to appear larger. Try to avoid getting between any animal and its young. If you are attacked, defend yourself—a sharp whack with a stick might discourage the animal. After all, there is plenty of smaller prey out there.

Dropping Out

While no one likes to contemplate it, there may come a time when it is smarter for you to drop out than to continue. Also, you may miss the cutoff times or be pulled for a medical reason. While you are likely to be upset at that time, you must inform the run organization that you are not continuing.

Please locate a radio operator or aid station captain and inform them of your withdrawal. Also, it may be very hard for us to arrange transportation for you from your dropout point to the finish. You may have to wait many hours for this, as we may have to coordinate a vehicle via radio. All we can promise is a best-effort attempt.

Cutoff Times

Cutoff times will be strictly enforced. They are provided in this guide and will be posted at each aid station, so there will be no ambiguity. The aid station captain is given the authority to enforce the cutoff times.

- **Noon** at the Tonto Fish Hatchery, mile 15.5
- **1:30 p.m.** at See Canyon Trailhead for 50-milers. From here, 50-milers may head directly back to the finish and get credit for a 50K finish if they miss this cutoff.
- **4:30 p.m.** at the Rim Top Trailhead

50K runners who are concerned about making the noon cutoff time, may start with the 50-mile runners. Their overall finish time should be over 7-hours only.

The following is the rule:

YOU MUST LEAVE THE AID STATION BEFORE THE CUTOFF TIME.

If you “check out” and then come back into the aid station after the cutoff time, you are considered to have abandoned your attempt at the run.

We do not like splitting hairs so finely, but we wish to prevent past problems from recurring. These rules are being made clear to all so that our aid station personnel, who also get tired and confused late at night, can concentrate on helping runners and not on sharpening their debating skills.

You are all experienced ultra runners. We have developed these cutoff times based on previous years’ results, and they are quite generous. If you miss the cutoff time, your chances of finishing are low; please try to be mature enough to recognize this. Do not debate cutoff times with the aid station personnel.

Even if you badger one of them into letting you go on, the Run Director still has the authority to deny listing you as a finisher. In addition, we may bar from future runs anyone who disobeys rules and threatens their safety or the safety of aid station personnel.

We have to convince the search and rescue organization, as well as the administrators of the Forest Service, that we are doing what is reasonably possible to make this a controlled event. If they are concerned that we are not taking reasonable steps, we may lose our ability to put on the run in future years.

Bib Number

Your bib number should always be visible from the front. We recommend pinning it to a leg of your shorts. It may get covered up if you pin it on your shirt and plan on wearing layers at different times during the run.

Runners are tracked entering and exiting aid stations by their bib number. It is very important that we are able to keep track of everyone.

Crew and Aid Station Protocol

We are guests in the National Forest through which we run. We have to share this land with other users so that we may all safely enjoy our weekend in the mountains. The following guidelines were prepared to help your crew if you decide to have somebody meet you around the course.

Do You Want a Crew?

Before deciding on a crew, you must understand that runners are responsible for and accountable for all the actions and behaviors of their crew and pacers before, during, and after the run.

Please consider carefully whether you really want to have a crew for this run. Runners are not allowed to accept aid between aid stations. Any runner who takes aid where they should not may be disqualified. We will try to make sure that, with the available aid station supplies and your drop bags, you will be able to compete without worrying about a crew.

This is not to say that we do not want your crews to enjoy the mountains—far from it. Part of the reason for coming to the area is to get up into the high country, but we would prefer that people do it without the pressure of trying to beat runners to the next aid station, trying to meet schedules, etc.

A good way to be involved is to volunteer to help at an aid station. We could always use more hands, because some of these aid stations are going to be open a long time. Contact us at **HLT50Mile@gmail.com** if your crew would like to do this. They will be better able to follow your progress, as each aid station will be connected via radio to the others.

Can I see my runner at the first aid station (mile 8)?

Not exactly. The actual aid station is located at the Upper Tonto Creek Campground. Parking there is very limited, and there will be other people camping who may still be asleep at that early hour. We would like to avoid disrupting the other people using the campground.

However, you can park at the Derrick Trailhead parking lot, hike about a half mile up the Derrick Trail to see the runners headed downhill before they take the Derrick Spur Trail over to the aid station. You will not be allowed to give them anything other than cheers and love. You may accept items from the runner such as a jacket, trash, etc.

Crew Rules at Zane Grey Aid Stations

The purpose of the Zane Grey aid stations is to give each runner aid in their attempt to reach the finish line. As long as crews share this purpose, they are welcome at the **crew access** aid stations. If a crew chooses to ignore the following guidelines, their runner is at risk of being disqualified.

The 10 Zane Grey Crew Commandments

1. The aid station captain is in charge of the aid station. It is up to them how the aid station will be organized and where crews will be allowed.
 2. Crews are allowed into the aid station only when their runner and pacer are present.
 3. Pets are not allowed in the aid station and are strictly prohibited from the finish line property.
 4. Children are allowed within an aid station only under the direct supervision of an adult. This includes the start and finish.
 5. Food, drink, blankets, medical supplies, etc. at the aid stations are provided for the comfort and use of the runners and their pacers.
 6. Crews are asked to help us protect the fragile environment that we utilize. Please pack out all trash and equipment when you leave.
 7. There are no bathroom facilities at most aid stations. Please keep this in mind and help us protect this part of the country.
 8. Excessive noise, raucousness, and partying are not part of an effective aid station. Please save your celebrations for when your runner crosses the finish line.
 9. Crews may give runners aid within 400 yards of the aid station. Please do not go out on the course and give aid between aid stations, nor should runners or their crew stash aid for runners along the course.
 10. Alcohol is not allowed on Mountain Meadows Ranch property.
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Parking

In some instances, parking is scarce and roads are very narrow. Parking may be difficult or impossible. Please be considerate. Remember there are many vehicles on these roads in the summer, and some of these vehicles are quite large.

Make sure all road sections, switchbacks, and intersections can be safely negotiated by other vehicles. Cooperate with posted signs and with aid station personnel if they ask you to move your vehicle.

Giving Your Runner Aid

Runners may receive aid from their crew **only** within 400 yards on either side of those aid stations at which crew access is allowed.

If your crew gets to an aid station early, we suggest they locate your drop bag, open it, check the contents, and set them out ready for use.

Keep in mind that your crew must not interfere with the aid station volunteers, and this means that crews are not allowed in the central core of an aid station unless the runner is present.

Runners in Vehicles

Runners are not allowed to take a ride in a vehicle if doing so advances their progress or compensates for runner error. If they do, they are considered to have abandoned their attempt at the run. They will not be allowed to continue, and if they do, they will not be listed as finishers and risk being barred from entry in future runs.

Runners may, after checking into an aid station, rest and get warm in a **stationary** vehicle. Once you have checked out of the aid station, you may not get back into any vehicle. If you do so, you will be disqualified.

Drop Bags

Runners are allowed to provide four drop bags for the 50-mile, or one for the 50K. We will transport them to Tonto Fish Hatchery, See Canyon, 260 Trailhead, and Rim Top Trailhead.

An aid station representative will pick these up at the starting line on race morning and transport them to the aid station locations. After use, make sure any recoverable items are packed in the bag and that other items are properly discarded. Place the bag at the designated location for transportation back to the finish line.

Additionally, there will be an area to leave a start/finish line drop bag at Mountain Meadows Ranch.

Pacers

Pacers are allowed to accompany runners from 260 Trailhead to the finish. Pacers may meet their runner **only** at crew access aid stations.

Pacers **must** check in and out at the aid stations. This means leaving their names before heading off with their runner. This is to ensure that we know how many people are out on the course at all times.

Reminder: Pacers are responsible for getting themselves to and from aid stations.

A runner may have only **one pacer at a time**. Pacers are not allowed for the 50K distance.

Aid Station Menu

Below is the minimum that we plan to have at aid stations:

Energy replacement drink (lemon-lime Gatorade), sandwiches, pretzels, potato chips, hard candies, cookies, soda crackers, bananas, cola, ginger ale, Mountain Dew, water, and ice.

Schedule

Friday, April 17

Kohl's Ranch Lodge Inn

202 S. Kohl's Ranch Lodge Rd, Payson, AZ 85541

- **4:00–8:00 p.m.** Race number and packet pickup begins in the loft above the main lobby.

Saturday, April 18

Mountain Meadows Ranch

630 Mountain Meadows Dr, Payson, AZ 85541

- **4:30–5:15 a.m.** 50-mile late bib number pickup and drop bag drop-off
- **5:30 a.m.** 50-mile race start
- **5:51 a.m.** Sunrise
- **6:00–7:15 a.m.** 50K late bib number pickup and drop bag drop-off
- **7:30 a.m.** 50K race start

Runner Cutoffs

- **Noon** – Fish Hatchery (mile 15.5)
- **1:30 p.m.** – See Canyon (mile 27.8), for 50-milers
- **5:30 p.m.** – Rim Top Trailhead (mile 38), for 50-milers
- **6:58 p.m.** – Sunset. Runners leaving Rim Top Trailhead after 3:00 p.m. **must** have a flashlight with them.
- **9:00 p.m.** – Last runner expected to finish

Directions to Crew-Accessible Aid Stations

Start/Finish Line – Mountain Meadows Ranch

The hamlet of Christopher Creek is 20 miles up Highway 260 from Payson. Once in Christopher Creek, take Mountain Meadows Drive, which is right next to the Creekside Steakhouse. Follow the dirt road and take a left at all the Y intersections. It is about a half mile up the road.

15.5-Mile Aid Station – Tonto Fish Hatchery

From Highway 260, turn left onto Zane Grey Highway / NF289, across from Kohl's Ranch. Continue 4.3 miles up the hill to the aid station.

34.6-Mile Aid Station – 260 Trailhead

About 5 miles east of Christopher Creek on Highway 260, between mileposts 278 and 279. Roughly 27 miles east of Payson.

39.0-Mile Aid Station – Rim Top Trailhead

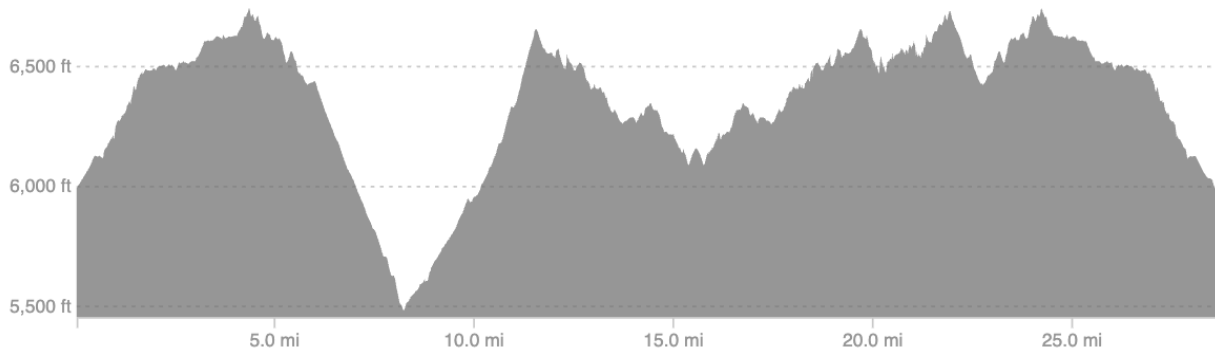
Continue east on Highway 260 for 3.5 miles, then turn left on FR300 toward Woods Canyon Lake. The trailhead will be on your right.

Elevation Profiles

The **50-mile elevation profile**



and a **50K elevation profile**



Volunteering / Course Marking

Interested in volunteering or assisting with course marking?

Reach out to the Race Director, **Joe Galope** at **HLT50Mile@gmail.com**, or **Honey Albrecht** at **honey.albrecht@gmail.com**, who is managing the course-marking efforts.