

Pittsburgh Marathon course

- 26 miles, 385 yards (add ~5 miles or so if starting or ending at CMU)
- Mostly flat, a few short hills
- Moderate city traffic

It may be best known for its use by runners one weekend in May, but the Pittsburgh marathon course is an interesting city course for cyclists throughout the year. It's mostly flat, not overlong, and takes the cyclist through many well-known neighborhoods of the city. It's fun to try at some point during the Marathon weekend, but the course markings are on the roads year-round, in the form of feet painted on the pavement.

There are two rather different approaches one can take to this ride. One is what we call the "tourist" approach, where one rides the course at a leisurely speed, not always staying right on it, and stops at various interesting sights along the way. It's easy to spend a whole day doing this, as one goes through the heart of the Strip District, the North Side, downtown, the South Side, Oakland, Shadyside, and Bloomfield, with lots of shops, parks, and museums en route.

Another way to ride this is the "marathoner" approach, where you try to ride it as a marathoner would run it, trying to finish the course in one piece in the least possible time. Now, it would seem that you have a huge advantage over the runner (and you do) by being on a bicycle instead of on your feet. Then again, you also have a handicap. You have to obey all the traffic laws. Not only does this involve stopping for the red lights, but in a couple of cases you have to dismount from your bike and run or walk with it, in order to stay on the course. This gives the ride some novelty you don't find in your typical marathon or bike ride.

The course starts on Butler St., west of the Highland Park Bridge near the turnoff for the Zoo parking lot. From there, follow the painted feet west towards downtown, merging onto Penn Avenue when you reach it. (Note: since the last marathon, Butler and Penn have been repaved between the 62nd Street Bridge and 31st Street. During this stretch, you will not see painted feet.) At 21st Street, the course ducks 1 block south to Liberty, where it merges with the last loop of the marathon on Liberty Avenue. Turn right at 16th Street to stay on the first loop, and go over the bridge to the North Side.

When you reach Allegheny Center, the course circles it on the south side of the circle. (Tourists can go through to visit the museums or the mall, or loop around the north side of the circle instead; marathoners dismount and run around with the bike to the other side.) You'll then meander by the park and aviary, continuing out to the West End Bridge. At the far end of the bridge, the marathon course turns left, but since left turns are illegal just go around the West End Circle counterclockwise, or dismount and walk if it looks safe.

The course then follows Carson Street past Station Square and through the South Side. You can then follow it over the Birmingham Bridge and into Oakland, eventually ending up on Fifth. Watch for the left turn onto Aiken; it's easy to miss. (If you don't want to see Shadyside you can keep going on Fifth, since the course will eventually rejoin it). The course then winds its way through Shadyside, Pt. Breeze, Homewood, Highland Park, East Liberty, and Bloomfield. Once you're on Liberty Avenue in Bloomfield, just follow Liberty all the way in to the Point. (You'll have to dismount when you reach Point State Park; there's no bike riding in the park). For the "marathoner" riders, the finish line would be on the far side of the Parkway bridge.

Now that you've finished the course, you might want to take a walk over to the fountain at the point, and take in the view of the three rivers and the cool mist of the fountain itself (if it's turned on). If you finished in less than 2:12, you've beaten the fastest runner on the course.