

John Van Ekris



Photo Caption: John competing in the 2024 Ultra-Trail du Mont-Blanc (UTMB)

In celebration of this year's 20th annual Prince Edward Island Marathon, we have embraced the opportunity to bring light to people who inspire us. This week we are featuring John Van Ekris.

To begin, John says he cannot tell his story without his wife, Loretta. John and Loretta started running for general health after retiring from farming. Eighteen years ago, John hopped on the treadmill to lose weight. He lost 50 pounds, and continued his running journey by joining local road races with the PEI Roadrunners. John enjoyed running for its physical and mental health benefits, and he still does today. His love for the sport eventually had him putting some bigger challenges on the calendar.

An ultramarathon is defined as an event longer than a traditional marathon of 42.2 KM. A statistic from recent years showed that 0.1% of the world's population has completed a marathon, and much fewer have completed an ultramarathon. To date, John has completed an impressive 22 ultramarathons. He has finished four races over the 160 KM distance, six 100 KM races, and twelve 50-90 KM distance events. To conquer such long races shows John's commitment, strength of endurance and toughness.

John has participated in some impressive races all around the world, and most recently completed the world's most competitive ultramarathon, Ultra-Trail du Mont-Blanc (UTMB). The race requires qualification to get in, which can be a feat in itself. We believe John is the first person from PEI to finish this race! He ran 176 KM through three countries (Italy, Switzerland, and France), finishing the event in 39 hours and 20 minutes. This race has 10,000+ metres of elevation gain, which required plenty of hill training. From training in

Brookvale, PEI to the mountains of France, John's dedication doesn't go unnoticed by the support of his family at his side.

John and Loretta have a close relationship with the PEI Marathon. It was their first marathon and they both ran Boston Qualifying (BQ) times on the course. Not only have they raced several different distances, they have also paced and volunteered at the annual event. John's favourite PEI Marathon memory was seeing Loretta on the Sherwood Rd hill ahead of her BQ pace. They continue to enjoy the running community after the PEI Marathon by meeting up with friends at The Old Triangle.

John's favourite distance is the full marathon. His favourite place to train is on the heritage roads of Fredericton, PEI. He enjoys pre-race pasta and post-race burger and fries. During his long runs he eats Oreos. His favourite piece of running gear is a Buff for its versatility, as it can be worn as a headband, neck scarf/face warmer, wristband, etc. John's advice for this year's participants is to have confidence in your training.

We are very proud of John's accomplishments. His witty character is a pleasure to know. He highlights how supportive the Island running community is, recognizing participants of events will then organize or volunteer at others. John enjoys seeing both familiar and new faces out training and racing. He appreciates that people are always willing to assist anyone new to the sport or distance. Of course, John is one of these supportive people himself. As a volunteer, or as an inspirational finisher of the planet's most prestigious trail race, John brings great value to our PEI running community.

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Tagline: Sisters Sandra Cottreau and Carrie Gregory will be writing a weekly column in The Guardian leading up to the 20th Annual P.E.I Marathon Weekend on Oct. 20.