

Mountains take 'Centre' stage

In beautiful Centre County

Mount Nittany is one of Centre County's most recognizable natural landmarks. Rising above State College and the area known as Happy Valley, Mount Nittany is a favorite destination for hikers and those who enjoy spending time in the outdoors. For more than 30 years, the Mount Nittany Conservancy has been dedicated to the conservation and protection of the mountain. In 2011, the organization decided it needed to raise awareness of the organiza-

tion and its mission. Avid runners on the board proposed a Mount Nittany race, but the State College area already has a plethora of 5K races, a 10K race, a half-marathon, and even an ultra-marathon. What the area didn't have was a traditional marathon, so the Mount Nittany Marathon was organized and run for the first time in 2013.

This year's marathon will take place on Aug. 31. The marathon doesn't actually take place on Mount

Nittany, but the course does take runners to the mountain. Instead, the bulk of the race is on the Penn State University campus. According to the organization's John Hook, runners start and finish at Beaver Stadium. Along the course, they pass by the Penn State Blue Band practice field (last year Penn State fight songs were pumped out of the speakers to cheer on the runners), run around Mount Nittany, past the Nittany Lion shrine, and finally in back of the picturesque Arboretum.

The marathon's website, mntn.org/marathon, provides details on entry fees and other details.

"We were surprised at the number of first-time marathoners we had in the race last year," says Hook. "At least one-third of the field were 'newbies.' This year it seems like a lot more multiple-marathoners. We had 189 people register last year and 139 crossed the finish line. We are on pace to double the registrations from last year if the rate continues."

New tour at Penn's Cave

Approximately 18 miles east of State College, Penn's Cave is offering a different type of mountain attraction. Dubbed "Nature's Rollercoaster," the Cave Rock Mountain Tour is a two-and-a-half hour Jeep ride that takes guests on off-road trails and obstacles such as ravines, moguls, and vertical climbs.

Insider tip: The tour also includes stops so guests can get an up-close look at the timber wolves and mountain lions at the attraction's Wildlife Park.

"We go from the cave to the mountain top," says the cave's Terri L. Schleiden. "The Cave Rock Mountain Tour is attracting people who otherwise might not come to Penn's Cave. We're seeing grandparents bringing their older grandchildren. Last year a hip hop artist took the tour and loved it so much, he wrote a song about it and recorded a video."

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