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# Outside

## Records on the Pacific Crest Trail and Across the U.S. Earn FKT of the Year

Jenny Hoffman ran across the U.S. in record time, while Karel Sabbe set a new record on the Pacific Crest Trail

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Endurance athletes continued to push the envelope of what's possible in 2023, both in organized races and individual efforts in the quest for records known as fastest known times (FKTs).

The pursuit of FKTs has been growing since trail runners Buzz Burrell and Peter Bakwin coined the term in 1999, but it didn't really become a worldwide phenomenon until the Covid-19 pandemic shut down races, sending athletes on a wide variety of fast solo efforts over trails, roads, deserts, and mountains in either a supported or unsupported style.

In 2015, there were 222 new FKTs reported to the [FastestKnownTime.com](https://www.fastestknowntime.com/), the official FKT arbiter and record-keeper, but that figure grew to 530 by 2018 and to more than 4,729 in 2020. Even though racing has been back to normal since 2021, the pursuit of FKTs continued at a vigorous level, with 2,292 new FKTs recorded in 2023.

Among the top women's efforts of the year, Hillary Gerardi [set a new FKT going up and down 15,777-foot Mont Blanc in Chamonix, France](#) in 7 hours, 27 minutes, 39 seconds. Eszter Horanyi set a new unsupported women's FKT on the grueling Nolan's 14 line in Colorado, traversing the roughly 100-mile, largely off-trail route in 57 hours, 4 minutes. Haneul Lee covered the 207 miles of the John Muir Trail via Whitney Portal for a new unsupported FKT (5 days, 13 minutes, 15 seconds), while Jessica Pekari set a bold new self-supported record on the Pacific Crest Trail (63 days, 7 hours, 31 minutes).

On the men's side, Kristian Morgan set a new FKT (45 days, 4 hours, 27 minutes) [running the 2,190-mile Appalachian Trail from north to south](#) in supported

fashion. Tyler Andrews ran the 25 miles up and down Tanzania’s 19,341-foot Mt. Kilimanjaro faster than anyone ever (6 hours, 37 minutes, 57 seconds) unsupported. And two records went down on Vermont’s iconic 250-mile Long Trail, with John Kelly setting the supported FKT (4 days, 4 hours, 25 minutes, 50 seconds) followed by Will Peterson’s unsupported effort of 4 days, 11 hours, 34 minutes—less than six hours shy of Kelly’s supported mark.

But the pinnacle FKTs of 2023 were [Jenny Hoffman’s record-setting transcontinental run](#) across the U.S. and [Karel Sabbe’s new FKT on the Pacific Crest Trail](#). Hoffman and Sabbe were honored for those efforts as the 2023 FKT of the Year recipients on January 5, based on the voting of the [FKT jury’s consideration of 28 women’s performances and 27 men’s efforts](#).

[LISTEN: FKT Podcast Episode 218: 2023 FKTs of the Year](#)

## A Longtime Dream



(Photo: Courtesy Jenny Hoffman)

Between mid-September and early October, Hoffman, a 45-year-old mother of three and Harvard University physics professor from Cambridge, Massachusetts, covered the 3,037 miles from San Francisco to New York City in 47 days, 12 hours, 35 minutes. Her effort was an astonishing seven days faster than the previous women’s mark and only five days slower than the overall record by Pete Kostelnick, a close friend of Hoffman, set in 2016.

Hoffman's transcontinental run was a lifelong pursuit and her third attempt at breaking the record. Her 2019 attempt ended 2,560 miles and 42 days into her journey when a knee injury sidelined her in eastern Ohio. She was set to go after it again in 2022, but a hamstring injury forced to pull out.

This time, with the support of her six-person crew and more than 1,000 uplifting messages to her tracker, she traversed 12 states and reached her goal of running to the steps of New York City Hall. She wore 11 pairs of shoes during the run and says she consumed "300 eggs, countless cookies, some laughter, and even more tears" along the way.

"This journey has been decades in the making," Hoffman [wrote on her blog](#). "I've always been driven to tackle the biggest, highest, longest, hardest thing in front of me. Since childhood, I've dreamed of crossing the U.S. under my own power. As an adult the dream intensified, fueled by gratitude for the beauty of this country and the freedom it affords to dream big, work hard, and achieve audacious goals."

She was joined by runners along the route and supported by her family and friends throughout the massive endeavor. She had the joy of running the final miles of her journey with friends and family members, including the final 20 miles with her 14-year-old son. As a bonus, they ran 11 miles from New York City to the ocean together the next morning.

"An interviewer (from The New York Times) asked him, 'What did you learn from watching your mom do this?' And he said, 'Well, I learned I can do anything I set my mind to.' And that was so heartwarming for me to hear that my son learned that," Hoffman said.

After Hoffman and her family got home, her son took that inspiration one step further. He told his parents he was going out for a run and would be back in an hour. But when he didn't return after three hours, she and her husband got worried.

"We're looking at our watches. Kid's not back yet. We were like, is this a parenting fail? Should we do something?" Hoffman recalls. "He comes back four and a half hours later, and he had taken my watch and run a marathon by himself—no aid stations, no planning—and he finished in 3:38. So it's really rewarding for me to see that my kids observe what I do and take on challenges of their own."

A three-time U.S. national champion ultrarunner, Hoffman followed her record-breaking run by running 138.7 miles to finish 23rd place at the IAU 24-Hour World Championships on December 2 in Taiwan and help the U.S. to a fifth-place finish in the team standings.

## Reclaiming the Record



(Photo: Courtesy Karel Sabbe, by Nicholas Triolo)

Sabbe is a 34-year-old Belgian dentist who has set several notable FKTs in recent years, including the [FKT on the northbound Appalachian Trail](#) in 2018 (41 days, 7 hours, 39 minutes) and [the 1,550-mile Via Alpine Red Trail route](#) (30 days, 8 hours, 40 minutes) between Slovenia and Monaco in 2021.

He set his first FKT in 2016 when he lowered the supported record on the PCT (52 days, 8 hours, 25 minutes), but then Timothy Olson surpassed it in 2021. After achieving a longstanding goal of finishing the 100-mile course of the dastardly Barkley Marathons in Tennessee last spring, Sabbe decided to return to the PCT in the summer.

This time around, he covered the 2,592-mile route with 400,000 feet of vertical gain six days faster—and five days faster than Olson’s FKT, despite having to take a 50-mile detour because of heavy snow conditions that closed the trail in Washington. Traveling south to north between early July and late August, he completed the route in 46 days, 12 hours, 50 minutes.

### **[RELATED: Karel Sabbe Shatters the Pacific Crest Trail FKT By Five Days](#)**

Sabbe’s secret to breaking the record by such a decisive margin? He didn’t think about the old record.



“If you go into an FKT attempt with the current FKT in mind, you’re limiting yourself,” Sabbe said on the [FKT Podcast](#) last summer. “My goal was to get the best out of myself every day.”

By recalibrating his thoughts to focus on the possibility of what he could do, instead of what someone had done before, he was able to average 58.1 miles and about 9,000 feet of elevation gain a day, for 47 straight days. The old record pace was around 51 miles a day.



(Photo: Courtesy Karel Sabbe)

Will he go back again if someone breaks his mark?

“To me it’s a closed chapter,” he said. “The way I see it, my FKTs, like the one on the Appalachian Trail, as well the one on the Via Alpina, I feel like I gave everything, and everything went great and I’m happy with the results. With the PCT, despite the heavy snow and detour, I don’t think I could have done it a day faster, or that I want to go back and try to go even faster. I was able to push as hard as I wanted to go. The teamwork with my crew was incredible, and it’s just such a nice experience I can look back on it with pride.”

Tune in to [Episode 218 of the FKT Podcast](#) to hear how Hoffman and Sabbe reflect and break down their FKT efforts with host Heather Anderson.