



Celebrating 40 Years of World Athletics Mountain & Trail Running History

Canfranc, June 20, 2025 — On September 25, more than 80 countries and 1,700 athletes will gather in Canfranc-Pirineos for a landmark World Championship, marking 40 years of official mountain running competitions. This historic event will also be the first time that Spain, through the Royal Spanish Athletics Federation (RFEA), hosts the unified global championship featuring all five race formats: Under 20, Uphill, Classic, Short Trail, and Long Trail.

Back in 1985, the Alpine village of San Vigilio di Marebbe in Italy's South Tyrol hosted the inaugural Mountain Running World Championship. Organized by the World Mountain Running Association (WMRA), it set in motion a decades-long journey that now reaches its pinnacle this September in the Pyrenees.

From that first alpine race to the upcoming spectacle in Canfranc, the evolution of the World Championships has followed a varied path, introducing new distances, expanding age categories, and forging key alliances that finally brought mountain running and trail running under a unified banner. Yet the spirit of the sport remains unchanged: to conquer the slopes, climbing and descending mountains powered solely by leg strength and heart.

This year's edition marks a milestone, tracing a remarkable trajectory from the original WMRA-only event with just 38 athletes to a global competition encompassing five distinct races. Now jointly managed by the WMRA, IAU, and ITRA, and held under the umbrella of World Athletics, the championships will welcome nearly 2,000 participants. Representing Spain with pride, the RFEA takes on the honor and responsibility of hosting this historic moment in the world of athletics for the very first time.

Three Key Eras in the Evolution of Mountain and Trail Running World Championships

1985–2019: WMRA Leads the Way – Uphill, Classic, and Junior

It all began in an alpine refuge in 1984, when several European federations founded the International Committee for Mountain Running — now known as the WMRA. One year later, they launched the first **World Mountain Running Trophy** on the slopes of San Vigilio, Italy. The competition alternated between **UPHILL** years, focused solely on grueling vertical ascents of over 1,000 meters, and **CLASSIC** formats, featuring fast-paced ascents and descents over courses of up to half marathon distance.

Youth development was soon incorporated, with the introduction of **JUNIOR** races spanning 6 to 8 kilometers. Over time, WMRA expanded its scope by adding a **LONG DISTANCE** format, pushing the limits to races of up to 45 kilometers. Legendary athletes like Andrea Mayr, Marco

De Gasperi, and Jonathan Wyatt built their enduring legacies in these races—stories we'll delve into further below.

2007–2019: IAU and ITRA Expand into Ultra Distances

While WMRA had already extended the race format with the **Long Distance Challenge** (now part of today's Short Trail), launched in 2004 at Sierre-Zinal, the true leap into ultra territory came in 2007. That year, the **International Association of Ultrarunners (IAU)**, the global governing body for ultradistance running, inaugurated the **Trail World Championships** with an 80 km race in Huntsville, Texas.

A new era of ultra-distance heroes was born — a momentum that grew with the arrival of the **International Trail Running Association (ITRA)** as a partner at Annecy 2015. Spain's **Luis Alberto Hernando** became a dominant figure, winning a historic triple crown (2016–2017–2018), while France's **Nathalie Mauclair** made history as the first woman to take double gold (2013, 2015).

2019–2025: Unification under World Athletics

In 2019, a pivotal moment arrived. **World Athletics** officially recognized mountain and trail running as a global athletics discipline and announced a historic unification of efforts between WMRA, IAU, and ITRA. Together, they launched a single biennial championship cycle, giving birth to the **World Mountain & Trail Running Championships (WMTRC)**.

WMTRC: One World Championship, Five Races

The first joint edition, **WMTRC 2021**, took place — after a COVID-related delay — in **November 2022** in Chiang Mai, Thailand. For the first time, all **five official formats** were contested under one global banner:

- **Under 20**
- **Uphill**
- **Classic**
- **Short Trail** (approx. 45 km)
- **Long Trail** (approx. 80 km)

In 2023, the event moved to **Innsbruck-Stubai, Austria**, and in 2025 it will arrive in **Canfranc-Pirineos**, a key alpine hub in Spain's Aragonese Pyrenees.

A Royal Flush of Champions

Across four decades, four extraordinary athletes have etched their names into the history books with unmatched skill and charisma:

- **Andrea Mayr** (Austria): Eight-time WMRA champion and reigning 2024 Uphill world champion.
- **Jonathan Wyatt** (New Zealand): Six-time world champion and a legend of the classic mountain format.

- **Marco De Gasperi** (Italy): Wyatt's great rival and one of the most versatile mountain runners ever.
- **Luis Alberto Hernando** (Spain): Three-time world champion in the ultra format under the IAU/ITRA umbrella, dominating from 2015 onward.

On the Road to Canfranc-Pirineos 2025

Over the past four decades, the Mountain and Trail Running World Championships have evolved in both form and scope — from the humble alpine trophy of 1985 to a global celebration uniting mountain and trail running, speed and endurance, youth and experience. And yet, the compass continues to point true north: toward the sweat, pain, and courage poured into every ascent and descent by each man and woman on the course.

This coming September 2025, **Canfranc** will raise the curtain on a new chapter — honoring the legacy of those early pioneers in San Vigilio and the champions who followed: **Mayr, Wyatt, De Gasperi, Hernando** — athletes who made the mountains their kingdom.

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