



INTERNATIONAL  
**TRAIL RUNNING**  
ASSOCIATION

# Trail Running & ITRA report

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**O**ne year ago I was elected president of ITRA. Since then, the pandemic has turned the world upside down, while Trail Running has reached a tipping point where growth + critical mass = the next generation of our sport and community:

### TRAIL RUNNING 2.0

This report highlights the perspective I've gained over the past year from leading the largest Trail Running entity in the world. And answers many questions that have been posed about ITRA, UTMB, our sport, community and future.

It's been humbling.

I believe the future of Trail Running is bright, but we must be diligent in preserving our community and the values upon which it is built. We are at a crossroads in Trail Running. Will we rise to the challenge of welcoming the tremendous influx of new members to our community and teach them our values, or will we allow them to be diminished and eventually forgotten?

It's up to us, each and every trail runner. I'm confident we will together, pursue the path of relentless forward progress and safeguard our community values for us and all to come.

**"THERE IS NO POWER FOR CHANGE GREATER THAN A COMMUNITY  
DISCOVERING WHAT IT CARES ABOUT."**

**– Margaret J. Wheatley**



# PART 1: TRAIL RUNNING REPORT

## TRAIL RUNNING 2.0 - THE FUTURE

**O**ur sport is entering a new phase: Trail Running 2.0. Unwavering growth combined with a critical mass of participants, some 20 million strong, creates an inflection point, a perfect storm for expansion...and tectonic change. The pandemic has accelerated our launch into this new and exciting period as millions have discovered the great outdoors as a respite from these disruptive times. Trail Running will become a beneficiary of this phenomenon.

Sports follow a pattern of evolution. Their formative years begin as a culture, a shared set of values and interests. As more are attracted it becomes a community. Eventually a sport emerges. Then commercialism. This evolution repeats itself for each new sport, some remaining small and close knit, others exploding onto the global theater with the aid of media. Some even become an Olympic sport.

### TRAIL RUNNING'S EVOLUTION

#### The Community Years

1960-1975: Trail running began as a culture, small local gatherings of friends challenging themselves to discover new trails together. These niche groups discovered each other, regional communities were formed, values forged: authenticity, humility, fair play, equality, respect and solidarity.

#### The Sport Years

1975-2000: As the communities expanded the sport emerged: competitions, formal races, times and placement tracked, results reported. The sport and the community existed in harmony.

#### The Global Years

2000-2020: During this era the sport of Trail Running transformed from niche to mainstream with the aid of media: magazines, books, films, podcasts and social media. The community thrived as new entrants discovered the "vibe" of Trail Running as attractive as the sport. Awareness grew of Trail Running around the world.

#### Trail Running 2.0

2020-??: the perfect storm of critical mass (20 million trail runners worldwide), double digit growth (~12% annum) and increasing large organizers, brands and media interest. The sport is on the verge of rapid acceleration. New entrants bring their own expectations in pursuit of the sport. It's typically at this stage of the evolution where the original tenets and values of the community become diluted and eventually disappear.

Inevitably competitive records will fall, a plethora of race opportunities will expand, new products and expanded services will proliferate. But what will become of our hard earned and beloved community? Will the foundational values upon which we were raised and our community rests prevail, or will they be diluted or worst, disappear?

It's up to each and every one of us to decide our fate. We can move mountains with our hearts, minds and feet.

## PREDICTIONS

Trail running has been growing approximately 12% year-over-year globally for over a decade. There are no signs of that trend abating. In fact, the pandemic has only accelerated interest in the great outdoors and trail running stands as one of several sports segments to benefit.

There will continue to be a disproportionate amount of growth in women participants for the next decade, as the sport attracts more runners and walkers from the road and hikers from the dirt. Women love trail running and their innate determination, pain tolerance and embracing community provide a promising foundation for the future. It's about time.

The average age of trail and ultrarunners is dropping. Once regarded as a sport for those who had lost their speed's edge, our sport is attracting some of the most gifted runners on earth. Granted, the ability to make a full-time career as a trail athlete remains elusive due to the niche size of the sport compared to its big brother and sister cohorts on the road and track. But, despite the shortage of funding, the allure of the competition and majestic trails will continue to bring increasing talent into the fold and records will fall.

We are at an inflection point, where our rate of growth plus the critical mass of our participants combine to cause rapid expansion. You see it even despite coronavirus. Our challenge is to maintain our values so that they are not diluted to nothing. That begins and ends in the trenches, grass roots, one runner at a time. This is our Trail Running 2.0 and we all own the outcome of whether we grow together or allow it to fracture us apart. Sustaining our values is key, something we all can agree on despite our differences.

Trail running has always thought of itself as welcoming and diverse. But there's more to be done to assure inclusiveness of all, and our community is starting to step up. A decade from now, it's predicted the diversity of the trail running community will look much different – and better. Efforts must continue to make the trails safer, our impact upon them and the environment less, and opening our arms and hearts to all comers.

For the veterans of trail running, we see encouraging signs of longevity. An increasing proportion of trail runners are able to run several decades. The proliferation of information across the internet, books,

podcasts, videos and through coaches, trainers, PTs and masseuses, has taught the elder generation a thing or two about how to run long into their lives. This has spawned interest in new types of events including traveling overseas and combining races with vacations (“ultracations”?), over 100-mile distances, multi-stage events, team adventure racing, FKTs and self-designed adventures. As a member of this category, there will be a continued interest and importance in local trail running clubs and associations. With an influx of neophytes each year, accessible and local information regarding anything and everything about trail running will be in high demand. Who better to serve this segment of community than the local trail running club?

Our community is shrinking even as it expands to new continents like Asia, Eastern Europe, South America and Africa. More than ever, trail runners are seeking new challenges – both in their own backyards – and abroad. Global friendships are forming, opening the door for learning new techniques, seeing expansive scenery, and having a friendly place to stay with a knowledgeable local in which to share the trail.

COVID-19 has disrupted many event organizers globally. This will cause many to fold up their tent in frustration or economic trauma. It will also attract others who will fill the temporary vacuum of demand outpacing supply. Larger established commercial sports event operators will surely gaze upon our double-digit growth and seek to capitalize; you’re already seeing this happen. The event organizer segment will become slightly more consolidated over the next decade, leading the way to high quality races, several trail series and safe and intriguing courses. This will attract the larger brands who, in turn, will help increase the ability for elites to make and extend their career as a professional athlete. We hope they adhere to our community values.

Trail Running however, is founded upon the small race organizers. Our entrepreneurial spirit, kind hearts and deep passion for and commitment to community, at the very local level, is what sets Trail Running apart from other sports. This is not going away, thank goodness. Without our independent small race organizers, we would have no place to periodically gather, renew old friendship, ignite new ones and celebrate our sport and community together.

Our “why” as trail runners is as diverse as the terrain. We each have a personal quest – whatever the motivator – which remains at the center of our persistent participation and joy we extract from our community. Although our own reasons for trail running may evolve, what the community offers us remains constant, diligent and deeply meaningful.

Trail running will continue to be a *theater for life*, motivating us to find our truths, expand our curiosity, discover ourselves more fully. On that we can be certain if we remind ourselves why we love our sport so much: its our community. And there is no community without values.

*Portions of this article were first published in February 2021 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary edition of Ultrarunning Magazine and reprinted with permission*

## PART 2: ITRA report

Overcoming unpredictability is an admirable trait of trail runners. Problem solving under stress, setting goals and discovering newfound capabilities are attributes that bind trail runners no matter age or continent. These assets have been called on more than ever during these disruptive coronavirus times. We're a social community which has temporarily retreated to our home trails, longing for reuniting at trail races and events. Thankfully we've been able to continue to practice our craft outside, albeit more solo, maintaining our physical and mental well-being.

ITRA has undergone change during the pandemic. In April, 2020 Michel Poletti, co-founder and director of UTMB Group, resigned as president of ITRA. He'd been the only leader of the organization since its 2013 inception. I was elected his successor to finish out the four-year term. It is a privilege and I was very humbled when three of our ITRA founding members, Allesandra Nicoletti, Carlos García Prieto and Jose Santos offered to engage and augment our Leadership Team to help with the transition and future direction.

Below in the **The Purpose of ITRA** section I answer the oft asked question, "Why does ITRA exist?"

The summary: *to safeguard our Trail Running community values and be THE reference for our sport.*

It's a grass roots movement and takes a village to ensure our values don't become diluted by growth. More below.

In 2020, ITRA began taking steps to become an independent non-profit by securing ownership of its core assets and intellectual property (licenses, finances, legal, operations and technology, intellectual property, etc.). Much of the fore-mentioned had been intermingled with or owned outright by UTMB Group, whereby ITRA had neither control nor increased value of its intellectual property. Additionally, ITRA needed to correct a public perception that ITRA *was* UTMB. I report in the **Status Summary** below which is encouraging.

The summary: *we are making great strides to complete the goal of ITRA becoming independent and self-sustaining.*

Last I provided an extensive **Appendix: Questions & Answers** section whereby I list many of the questions I've been asked during my first year in office and try to provide a clear, concise and factual answers. The topics are arranged by: Our Sport, Our Community, ITRA Business & Organization, ITRA & UTMB, ITRA Technology and ITRA Initiatives.

## DO YOU CARE ABOUT OUR VALUES? THE PURPOSE OF ITRA

The most common questions I'm asked about ITRA (pronounced "EE-tra") is "why"? Why does ITRA exist?

***ITRA is the only organization dedicated to preserving our values.***

As a sport evolves from culture to community to mainstream the preponderance of attention is paid to competition, records, gear, technique, nutrition, training, recovery, etc. We aspire to and admire our elite athletes, test ourselves against the clock and each other, discover challenges that motivate, inspire and transform.

In our pursuit of the above, we might be unaware of the accompanying community that exists within the sport and furthermore, be unfamiliar with its values. Left unchecked, the sport will eventually lose its values and without which there is no foundation for a community.

That's where ITRA comes in. We exist to help the community of Trail Running safeguard its values as it grows. Do you care about these values:

### **AUTHENTICITY, HUMILITY, FAIR PLAY, EQUALITY, RESPECT AND SOLIDARITY**

If you answer yes, by becoming a paid member of ITRA (€8/\$10 per year) you are expressing your interest in keeping our Trail Running community alive and vibrant. ITRA's role is to help preserve our values by educating, sharing, discussing, reminding and assisting you – and organizations that serve you – so we don't lose our community as we grow.

Why is Trail Running the only segment of running that is consistently growing double digits year after year? Yes, it's accessible, easy to learn, fairly inexpensive, not too time consuming, an efficient source of fitness. All logical reasoning. But the true reason we are so passionate about our beloved sport is our *community*. I've a saying about Trail Running,

***"You come for the sport and stay for the community"***

Many decades ago, our founders sought to commune with the environment while challenging themselves against Mother Nature. Interest grew, friends joined and slowly small races were established for competition and camaraderie. These humble beginnings became the foundation upon which our community was built, and values carved.

*Authenticity, humility, fair play, fairness, respect and solidarity.* These were - and remain our Trail Running community values. Without values, there is no community.

***Without community, Trail Running is just another sport.***

Preserving values is a noble mission; some might say impossible. How can a single organization possibly protect, teach and preserve values for the global Trail Running community? Won't the growth of the sport dilute if not eliminate the values in pursuit of competition, personal achievement and profit?

Possibly. It's certainly the case in other sports who at one time had a tight community to accompany the sport. Look at triathlons, surfing, climbing, mountain biking as examples. Will we too fall prey to an inevitable disappearance of our core values at the hands of growth and prosperity?

I, for one, believe Trail Running is different. After 40+ years within the community my passion and commitment to Trail Running has grown exponentially. It's what led me to my beloved running club in New England, Trail Animals Running Club (TARC) and then to ITRA.

I believe ITRA is well positioned to rally our runners and organizers to assure our beloved community is preserved by preventing our values from being trampled and dismissed.

***It's a movement. Trail Running is a coalition of diverse, passionate people with a common thread: we love our community.***

This must be done as a grass-roots movement, bottom up. ITRA is not the king in the castle but the farmer with pick axe in hand. Our role - our mandate - is to serve the people of Trail Running. To provide a platform for them to help their friends, local club, association and so on become familiar with our community and thus our values.

It is there, one-on-one values are taught and practiced. In that moment when we reach to pocket a piece of trash found on the trail.

***When we encounter a fellow competitor in distress and forego our race to assist her or him.***

When we finish our race, and bring a chair to sit and watch those behind us finish, cheering them on and sharing in their joy. It's how we open our hearts and minds with a new runner during a long training run. It's when we volunteer to crew for a friend, sleeping in cars, worrying about their health, washing their blistered feet and providing endless encouragement. And then they do the same for you.

These and so many hundreds more are the pieces that sewn together create the unique fabric of our Trail Running community. Beneath it all are our shared values.

With all of the excitement surrounding our growth, new races, series, gear, techniques, nutrition, competition, etc. - we ask you to carve a little place in your heart for Trail Running values. It won't cost you anything. It doesn't take much time. It's easy to do.



***If you practice our Trail Running values, you'll be teaching by example, the most powerful and effective way to ensure they remain strong and relentlessly undiluted, thus helping to preserve our most coveted aspect - our community.***

That's ITRA's purpose. It's our job. To help each and every one of you to help each other safeguard our Trail Running community values.

We ask you simply live our values. Teach others by example. And if possible, join ITRA (it's the cost of 3 cups of coffee) to provide us the ability to help you keep our community strong and vibrant. Thank you.

One trail, one heart, BOB CROWLEY, president, ITRA

## ITRA STATUS SUMMARY

ITRA is making very good progress towards our independence and ultimate ability to deliver the best services possible to our membership, safeguard our community values while responsibly growing our sport. In partnership with Ultra Technology Group and Atiba we have developed and delivered over *one million lines of code* to create a modern, scalable and progressive technology platform, where the intellectual property is owned exclusively by ITRA. This includes a completely new suite of our “technology stack” (see below for details) and partnerships with statistik D-U-V, Trace de Trail and Ultrasignup.

We have closed a for-profit entity within ITRA that compromised our non-profit status, confused our constituents and was costly to maintain. We’ve created independent audited financial accounts and governance, relocated our accounts to Switzerland, where we are headquartered and paused all non-essential spending including our annual General Assembly and all Leadership Team meetings, now conducted via live stream. We maintain a small office in Chamonix but no longer cohabitate with UTMB or share resources.

With coronavirus, all of our community has struggled to find ways to remain viable. ITRA took early measures to reduce overhead costs, anticipating a reduction in membership dues. We have received tremendous generosity from runners and organizers, maintaining their membership even though the majority of races were cancelled. We are extremely humbled and grateful for your support. Even so, our income was down 40% in 2020 and we anticipate a similar result in 2021 as the impact of the pandemic persists.

Despite this, we have been able to implement the majority of initiatives described above to secure our independence and create a platform for future growth and scalability.

On a personal note, I am fortunate and proud to have such a dedicated team at ITRA who are passionate about our sport and community. Our elected 17-member Steering Committee (what I call “Leadership Team” members) from around the world, five person Professional Team in Chamonix, 64 elected National Representative representing 44 countries, dozens of non-elected volunteers and our valued partners have been insightful, relentless and focused during these disruptive times. Thank you for your dedication and service.

I’ve assembled a detailed Q&A in the Appendix below which addresses many of the questions I’ve been asked during the first year of my term as president. These inquiries come from runners, organizers, media, partners and researchers and I’ve tried to be as transparent and concise as possible in the hopes this will provide a fresh perspective of ITRA’s past, present and future. If you’d like these or other questions to be addressed further, we have contact information at the bottom. I will make myself available as much as possible.

We are at a crossroads in the history of Trail Running. Steep growth, diversity, global expansion, increased competitiveness, commercialization, environmental impact, societal inclusion, youth development, safety, physical, mental health and wellness - all while trying to safeguard our values upon which our community is built.

ITRA's role is to lead: foster discussion, educate our constituents and assist our community members to grow our sport responsibly. We believe it can be done. It indeed takes a village. We are honored to play a role in helping assure future generations of Trail Running. Thank you for your passion and support.

# APPENDIX: Q&A

## Q & A SUMMARY

- ITRA is pronounced “EE-tra”.
- ITRA's core purpose is to safeguard Trail Running's values.
- ITRA is the only organization in the world dedicated to assuring our Trail Running community's values do not become diluted or disappear.
- ITRA serves all Trail Running constituents: runners, race organizations, brands, clubs, associations, etc.
- ITRA is the worldwide reference for Trail Running, offering numerous services like Performance Index, race rating and ranking & calendar and runner insurance to runners and organizers
- ITRA is the sole representative of Trail Running with the world governing body of our sport, World Athletics (WA). ITRA is not a governing body; that's WA and country federations.
- ITRA is a non-profit. We derive no commercial benefits from Trail Running.
- ITRA is independent and relies on modest membership from runners (€8, \$10/year) and organizers to thrive. [<https://itra.run>]
- Despite public perception, UTMB and ITRA are neither the same organization nor competitors (more details below).
- As Trail Running has reached an inflection point of growth and critical mass, the threat of our community's values being diluted or disappearing has never been greater.

# Q&A - THE DETAILS

## OUR SPORT

### **Q: What is the size of the sport of Trail Running?**

A: Measuring the number of people who walk, hike or run trails at least once a year, there are over 20 million participants in the sport of Trail Running worldwide<sup>1</sup>.

### **Q: What are the demographics of trail running?**

A: Summary below:

- i. 1.8 million ranked (ITRA Performance Index), 20+ million participants worldwide<sup>1</sup>
- ii. Nearly 10,000 trail running events around the globe
- iii. 77% men, 23% women (we will update next survey to include non-binary)
- iv. 45% increase in women participants over past 5 years
- v. Average age dropping and currently at 40 years old (90% between age 25-55)

### **Q: What is the growth rate of Trail Running and why?**

A: ~12%/year<sup>1</sup>. Participants surveyed asked “why” they participate in Trail Running provided these top ranked answers: 1) positive feeling from being outdoors, 2) easy to learn, access and inexpensive, 3) mental and physical health.

### **Q: What is ITRA’s role within the sport?**

A: ITRA was founded in 2013 for the purpose of safeguarding our community values and being the reference for our sport. Trail Running values include humility, authenticity, fair play, respect, solidarity and fairness.

### **Q: What trends or changes do you see in our sport?**

A: The sport has grown consistently at ~12% per annum<sup>1</sup> for 15 years. The number of women entering Trail Running is double men. A sport easy to learn and practice, Trail Running has more recently begun focus on inclusion of all races and genders, a trend which will only accelerate. The average age is dropping and the community is placing greater emphasis on youth development.

### **Q: Who are World Athletics (WA)?**

A: World Athletics (WA), formerly International Association Athletics Federation (IAAF), is the world recognized governing body of the sport of Athletics (Running, Track & Field) including Trail Running.

<sup>1</sup> ITRA, Statista, World Athletics, Ultrarunning Magazine, RunningUSA.org

**Q: What is ITRA's relationship with WA?**

A: Trail Running is one of 13 sport disciplines for which ITRA is the sole recognized global reference (including athlete rankings and race ranking and rating). ITRA and WA are partners.

**Q: What is the relationship of ITRA to World Mountain Running Association (WMRA) and International Association of Ultrarunners (IAU)?**

A: There are 13 recognized sports with World Athletics. This includes Trail Running, Mountain Running and Ultrarunning. ITRA, World Mountain Running Association (WMRA) and International Association of Ultrarunning (IAU) are the sole recognized global reference body for each sport respectively. All four organizations coordinate the World Champions of Mountain and Trail Running.

**Q: Does Trail Running have World Championships?**

A: Yes. The World Championships of Trail Running are held every two years in a rotating host location. The 2021 World Championships were scheduled for November in Chiangmai, Thailand. Due to the pandemic, the 2021 WC will be postponed until February, 2022. The 2022 edition will be the inaugural year combining ITRA, World Mountain Running Association (WMRA), International Association of Ultrarunning (IAU) and World Athletics (WA) as co-operators.

**Q: Who is hosting the Mountain and Trail Running World Championships (MTRWC)?**

A: Chiangmai, Thailand is the host city for next WC. World Athletics, ITRA, WMRA and IAU are collaborating co-organizers.

**Q: Who gets to represent their country in the World Championships?**

A: WA's affiliated national members and federations. These countries are invited to participate in the World Championships by selecting and sending a team of elite women and men athletes.

**Q: Will Trail Running become an Olympic sport?**

A: It's of course possible. But the trail is long. As the participation in and popularity of Trail Running continues to grow, the quality and quantity of elite competitors improves and the World Champions increase country participation, the odds improve.

**Q: Why are so many commercial entities trying to create their own race series and declaring their finale a "World Championship"?**

A: It's a perfect storm; Trail Running is the fastest and most consistently growing segment of running and one of the more prodigious sports in the world. The community has also reached a critical mass with tens of millions of participants across the globe. It's expected, (and welcome) that commercial entities want to capitalize.

Race series are a proven way to attract and retain participants while engendering loyalty to the sponsor/organizer brand. Although we've asked commercial race series organizers to refrain from using "world championships" in their naming convention (as there is only one officially recognized World Championship for Trail Running by World Athletics (which ITRA co-organizes)), some have elected to utilize the title regardless.



# OUR COMMUNITY

## **Q: Why does ITRA exist?**

A: Our charter and mission are to safeguard the global community of Trail Running's values and be the reference for the sport. This means to encourage growth in the form of adding participants AND new races, brands and events; *commercialization*. With most sports that grow rapidly, the values and culture suffer, becoming diluted as new participants and commercial entities enter and bring with them their own ethos and culture. Our role at ITRA is to prevent this dilution from happening. We endeavor to encourage growth - *responsible* growth - by ensuring our community values remain intact.

## **Q: What is ITRA's purpose?**

A: ITRA works with runners, race organizers, brands, federations, associations, clubs and World Athletics to grow the sport responsibly by educating our constituents about our community values and providing reference information useful for ensuring ongoing collaboration.

## **Q: How does ITRA safeguard Trail Running values while encouraging growth which may dilute those values?**

A: It requires assistance from a broad set of resources, mostly volunteer, and the majority of trail runners that care enough about preserving our Trail Running values and culture to take a stand, help teach our values through actions, acts of kindness, tolerance, patience and when necessary, walk away from people or entities that refuse to subscribe to our way of life. Safeguarding our community values is a grass-roots.

## **Q: Who does ITRA serve?**

A: ITRA serves every trail runner and race organizer in the world. We also serve the country trail running associations and clubs. Our National Representatives assist the associations and clubs by promoting and developing our community values and growing the sport.

## **Q: What is ITRA's relationship with country Trail Running federations?**

A: Trail running federations for each country are members of both World Athletics. ITRA provides guidance and services to the federations and associations including a bi-annual World Championships. Our National Representatives also assist the federations by promoting and developing our community values and growing the sport.

## **Q: What can a runner do to help ITRA?**

A: Become a member for a nominal annual membership fee of 8€/ \$10 per year, practice our values and spread the news about ITRA to friends and fellow runners.

## **Q: What can a race organizer do to help ITRA?**

A: Become a member for a nominal annual membership fee based upon size, practice our values and spread the news of ITRA through events, promotions and communications.

## **Q: What benefits do runners receive as an ITRA member?**

A: There are several:

1. Most importantly, a paid membership is helping us to help you safeguard the values of Trail Running through outreach, education and proactive initiatives.
2. Access to your personal Performance Index as well as all other runner's index (1.7 million) and ability to rank, compare and filter your PI with others by age, region, category (race distance), etc.
3. Access to the world's most comprehensive trail running race event calendar and rating and ranking of each race to assist runners in finding and selecting events best suited for their objectives.
4. Runner insurance at significantly reduced rates.

5. Modify and merge your results, personal information space
6. Rate races you have participated in
7. Advanced interactive statistics tools and graphics
8. Membership in the greater Trail Running community focused on safeguarding and preserving our values.

**Q: What benefits do organizers receive as an ITRA member?**

A: There are several:

1. Most importantly, a paid membership is helping us to help you safeguard the values of Trail Running through outreach, education and proactive initiatives.
2. Ability to create your tracks from .gpx files and link to Trace de Trail
3. Easily duplicate evaluated races
4. Add points of interest on your tracks
5. Unlimited private tracks & sharing private tracks
6. Customized elevation profiles with icons and text and race evaluations
7. Safety guidelines
8. Easy upload of start lists and race results
9. ITRA point check - control runner's experience
10. Finisher index check - check runner's level

# ITRA BUSINESS & ORGANIZATION

**Q: How do you pronounce “ITRA”?!**

A: EE-tra

**Q: Why did Michel Poletti resign as president of ITRA?**

A: Here is a link to a news story covering his resignation: <https://trailrunningspain.com/2020/04/07/michel-poletti-resigns-as-itra-president-to-focus-upon-management-of-utmb-and-ultra-trail-world-tour/>

**Q: Why did you volunteer to become a candidate for the presidency of ITRA?**

A: I had only been elected to the ITRA Steering Committee in mid-2019 so 6 months into my four-year term when Michel Poletti resigned. I joined ITRA to primarily focused upon safeguarding Trail Running’s values and helping the sport grow responsibly. The values which underpin our Trail Running community are what attracted me to our sport and have kept me within the community for over forty years. I like to say about Trail Running, “People come for the sport and stay for the community”. I welcomed the opportunity to take a turn at leading this global noble effort.

**Q: What was the state of ITRA upon your becoming president?**

A: Fiscally, ITRA was very sound with successive years of year over year growth, a balanced budget and surplus in the bank account. 85% of the income came from race organizer’s memberships which were based upon their entity size. These organizers receive numerous benefits from ITRA, including access to offering ITRA Points (which has been confused as synonymous with “UTMB Points”). The balance of the income came from runner memberships and runner insurance.

Directionally, a good portion of ITRA resources (human and financial) were being invested in intellectual property that was owned by UTMB. These products and services benefited other race organizers and runners too but UTMB maintained control.

Organizationally, ITRA is complex. Its charter was conceived by Michel Poletti and other founders as a pseudo sports federation and international non-profit. This resulted in Statutes that required all leadership of ITRA to be elected (except for 14 co-founders who had three perpetual seats on the Steering Committee). Each Steering Committee member has a four-year term, many of which are not coterminous. The qualification to become a candidate are minimal and do not consider any specific requirements for organizational skills (i.e., marketing, management, sales, finance, media, fund raising, etc.) that are typically necessary in a non-profit. All Steering Committee members are volunteers. Another 64 National Representatives (NRs) are elected to represent both runners and organizers in their respective countries and region. This manifests itself similar to the United Nations, whereby every NRs and for that matter every ITRA member - organizer and runner - possesses a vote(s) for approving the past and present budget and changes to the ITRA Statutes.

**Q: What qualifications do you possess to lead ITRA?**

A: In summary, not enough. But I’m doing the best I can.

I am a business entrepreneur having co-founded or led several early and mid-stage companies in media and technology. I subsequently became an investor, co-founding my private equity firm where we purchase majority control of small to midsize businesses and team with management to grow the business collaboratively. As an entrepreneur I appreciate how to lead, set strategy and objectives, assemble organizations and execute towards meeting goals and overcoming obstacles; not unlike a trail runner in an ultra-running race. As an investor I understand the pressure to grow and balance between prosperity and values, financial reward and quality of life. I rely on these 45 years of learnings and experiences in leading ITRA.

I appreciate the challenges of race organizers (I’ve been one myself). I understand and respect the commitment to growth and profitability for which larger race and event organizers strive (I’ve operated and invested in these types of businesses). I am empathetic with trail runners and their desire to challenge themselves, mark and share their achievements, socialize and be safe (I’ve been a trail runner for 40 years).

My cv/business profile can be found here: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/bcrowley>

**Q: What if any discoveries did you make about ITRA upon becoming president?**

A: There were several. First, the realization that ITRA owned none of its core assets (except its brand “ITRA” and co-owned the databases with UTMB) despite having paid for them handsomely. Second, the overhead costs were substantial for an entity of this size and a non-profit.

Second, we needed to “tidy our house” a bit in finance, accounting, legal and operations, not very exciting but very important and necessary. We instituted an annual budget forecast and monthly variance analysis. We put in place several checks and balances regarding spending and accounts. We clarified and updated contracts and third-party relationships.

We tightened our financial belt in anticipation of the pandemic and its negative impact on our sport and our income.

85% of our income is derived from race organizers. We determined this a risk of income concentration from a single source and laid plans to increase our membership of runners through outreach and new services.

**Q: Are you leading ITRA in a new direction from your predecessor and why?**

A: Before accepting the presidency nomination and subsequent office after the vote, I researched the history of ITRA, original documents (meeting minutes, topics discussed, notes, initiatives and outcomes) and founding principles (a summary of those can be found here: <https://itra.run/About/History>). What was clear then was ITRA was formed to safeguard trail running values and foster the responsible growth of the sport as well as become the reference for global Trail Running.

ITRA was trying to adhere to this founding mission, but at times veered off course, placing more emphasis on initiatives that grew the sport, especially for organizers and in particular for UTMB, and less focus on the runners and the smaller organizers or running clubs.

I have endeavored to lead ITRA in a direction back to our founding principles of safeguarding our trail running values while encouraging responsible growth in our sport. And to be the recognized reference for our sport. This is summarized in four major initiatives:

- 1) Values: educate the trail running community at both the grass roots and large organizer levels,
- 2) Independence: develop and own all key intellectual property and assets to assure ITRAs independence and flexibility,
- 3) Runners: focus increasing emphasis on runner memberships and needs and
- 4) Reference: expand our availability of information regarding our sport for the benefit of all constituents.

**Q: Why did some of ITRA’s founders re-engage as Leadership Team members?**

A: There had been a split amongst ITRA founders regarding the direction ITRA was evolving; some in favor, some against. Upon my election and mandate to achieve independence and return to the founding principles of safeguarding our community values while responsibly growing the sport, some of those who had been disillusioned by ITRA’s direction, offered to re-engage and assist us with our mandate.

**Q: What is the size of ITRA’s membership?**

A: We’ve 150,000 runner and organizer accounts. We rank 1.8 million runners from 163 countries with our Performance Index (PI). There are nearly 8,000 trail races listed in our event calendar.

**Q: How has COVID-19 impacted ITRA?**

A: Our income was off 40% from 2019 in 2020. We are forecasting about the same income for 2021, although we remain ahead of plan year to date thanks to the generosity of our runners and organizers who continue to renew their membership during the coronavirus period.

We have reduced all non-essential expenses, reorganized and restructured to gain efficiency and preserve our cash reserve. This leaves us with little extra funds for our NRs or new initiatives. That said, we are 75% complete with our technology transition which will position us for further efficiency and new service offerings. We will continue to find creative ways to move forward with our mission despite the obstacles, as all trail runners do when confronted with challenges.

**Q: Why did you change name of Steering Committee to Leadership Team?**

A: I thought it was a more apropos in that we rely upon our elected members to not just “steer” but lead.

**Q: Who are the members of the Leadership Team?**

A: Allesandra Nicoletti (IT), Alen Palaska (HR), Carlos Garcia Prieto (ES), Cristina Murgia (IT), Emily Schmitz (US), Harri Janinen (FI), Janet NG (HK), Enrico Pollini (IT), Jose Santos (PT), Marina Hyytiainen (ES), Zanas Nikos (GR), Sarah Keyes (US), Mario Rui da Silva Lela (ES), Monica Imana (PE), Antoine Barthelemy (FR), Bob Crowley (US)

**Q: Why did you eliminate the Executive Board?**

A: By our Statute our Executive Board still exists. But in practice it added an unnecessary layer of formality and hierarchy. We strive to flatten the organization and enable leadership to participate in initiatives for which they are passionate and capable regardless of title.

**Q: How many National Representatives (NRs) exist and what is their purpose?**

A: 64. Each NR has been elected by ITRA runner and organizer members of each country. NRs are spokespersons for the trail runners and organizations within their national community, commit themselves to promote the responsible development of trail running while conveying the values of the trail running safeguarded by the ITRA.

**Q: Why haven't we heard more from your NRs?**

A: That's a ITRA leadership problem, not our NRs. With the transition to independence compounded by coronavirus, we have failed to provide adequate support to our valued advocates in the field. With major hurdles behind us, we are going to turn out attention to activating and supporting the NRs hereto. I will be personally be accountable for this initiative.

**Q: Why do you have the annual General Assembly as a live streamed event verses in-person as it had been?**

A: By streaming the annual General Assembly we avoid meaningful costs at a time when we must tighten out belt.

**Q: What are the challenges you are facing at ITRA?**

A: For two straight years since taking office in April, 2020 the pandemic has created a temporary drastic reduction (~40%) in income for ITRA. This at time when we needed to invest in significant core assets. With diligent and focused support from our Leadership Team and partners, we have been able to sustain our viability and advance our transition to independence - but it hasn't been and won't continue to be without disruption.

Our new technology (Performance Index, Race Rating & Ranking system, website and content management system and administration system) equals over one million lines of coded software. Our partner at Ultra Technology Group and Atiba have been tremendous. We continue diligent focus on completing the final pieces of the software and stabilizing the platform. Has it been without incident? Absolutely not. We have achieved in just six months what could take developers many years to complete. We've work left to do and strive for completion in Q3/Q4, 2021.

Our strategy has been slowed by the need to complete the technology transition first. In addition, the pandemic has caused us to tighten our belts financially with little room to spare. We endeavor to do what we can with creativity, collaboration and a mountain of Professional Team elbow grease and volunteer commitment until we can utilize our new systems to accelerate new service offerings and streamline our operation.



The future looks bright albeit the horizon a bit further away.

We are shifting our source of income more weighted towards the runners. This does not mean we are abandoning services and products for our organizers, quite the opposite. But we need to play some catch up in accelerating new services our runners want and need.

We need memberships to fuel the development of these new initiatives. Initially our services are good, but they need to be great. We ask everyone to be patient as we complete our transition to independence and settle the technology platform. Then we will begin introducing new and exciting services.

By becoming a new member or renewing your membership now you will be helping us help you to add new and valuable services and most importantly, safeguard our community values. Our membership is very modest (8€/10\$ per year): <https://itra.run>,

**Q: Can I as a runner volunteer to help ITRA? How?**

A: Yes! Contact Kasia at: [katarzyna.melcer@itra.run](mailto:katarzyna.melcer@itra.run) . We welcome volunteers in a variety of areas. You can also be of great assistance by becoming a member of ITRA. Our membership is very modest (8€/10\$ per year).

*Go here to learn more and join: <https://itra.run>*

## ITRA & UTMB

**Q: Is ITRA part of UTMB or independent?**

A: ITRA is not part of UTMB Group. ITRA is an independent non-profit headquartered in Switzerland with a small office in Chamonix.

**Q: Why has there been a perception that ITRA and UTMB are the same organization?**

A: ITRA was co-founded in 2013 and led by the co-founder and co-director of UTMB Group, Michel Poletti. Michel led both organizations - ITRA and UTMB - simultaneously. Many people have interpreted that ITRA and UTMB were part of a joint organization, which is not true. But the misconception was understandable.

ITRA's services provide benefits to runners and race organizers including UTMB by encouraging runners to earn ITRA Points to gain access to the possibility of running UTMB or several races. It also encourages race organizers to become members of ITRA to gain access to providing ITRA Points which in turn would presumably cause more runners to register for an organizer's race.

The Ultra Trail World Tour (UTWT) which is a multi-continent race series co-founded and now controlled by UTMB Group also utilized and benefited from the ITRA Point system as well as the ITRA Performance Index, Race Rating & Ranking system.

Other possible reasons contributing to misperception ITRA and UTMB were synonymous:

- All of the intellectual property created and paid for by ITRA remained the exclusive property of UTMB Group or Didier Curdy (Performance Index was created and owned by Didier, a co-founder of ITRA and friend of Michel Poletti) with the exception of the databases and website content, the former was co-owned and shared with UTMB. This IP includes ITRA website and content management system, ITRA Performance Index, ITRA Race Rating & Ranking system, ITRA Operations and Administrative system - essentially all the technology upon which ITRA operates.

- The core intellectual property that ITRA relied upon, namely ITRA Points, Race Ranking & Rating, Performance Index, etc.), was built and maintained by LiveTrail (<https://www.livetrail.net>) a technology company based in France founded and co-directed by Isabelle (Poletti) Viseux, Michael Viseux and includes David Poletti and at one time Estelle Poletti on the team.
- 10 of the 14 founding members of ITRA in 2013 were colleagues or friends of the Poletti family from France.
- ITRA shared offices with UTMB in Chamonix. From time-to-time ITRA and UTMB co-mingled initiatives.

Some or all of the above information, most of which has been known publicly over time, may have led observers of ITRA to perceive ITRA and UTMB are one and the same organization.

**Q: What is the current relationship between UTMB and ITRA?**

A: ITRA is very proud of UTMB's accomplishments in Trail Running, we celebrate their success and are grateful for all they have done for Trail Running and ITRA over the years. We continue to hold them in high regard and stand ready to serve them as a race organizer, as we do with all organizers around the world.

I am very grateful for the contributions Michel has made to ITRA and more broadly Trail Running. I believe his heart and mind are deeply committed to our sport. It must have been difficult at times when the needs of ITRA were not always aligned with those of UTMB.

**Q: Is UTMB a competitor of ITRA?**

A: No. They are one of many race organizers we serve. We are not competitors as we do not provide race events or seek commercial gain from the sport of Trail Running.

We view all organizers, commercial and non-profit, as a valued member of the worldwide trail running community. UTMB has earned a tremendous reputation and loyal following which is to be commended and we regard them as an important member of ITRA and the trail running community which we serve.

**Q: Did UTMB offer to continue to provide ITRA with technology?**

A: Yes. UTMB offered the option for ITRA to continue to use their intellectual property (Race Rating & Ranking system, website, content management system, administration system and Performance Index at a price higher than previous and yet ITRA would still not own its core assets. This seemed an imprudent path for ITRA since our income would continue to be used to create and maintain a system that ITRA depended upon yet was controlled and owned by UTMB which also gained direct benefit from for their commercial operation<sup>1</sup>.

Therefore, we sought alternative solutions and allowed our agreement with UTMB Group to lapse.

**Q: Why does ITRA and UTMB both have a Performance Index, Race Rating & Ranking system?**

A: ITRA has the only recognized Performance Index, Race Rating & Ranking system and race calendar by World Athletics (WA) our sport's global governing body. UTMB Group has re-introduced all of the intellectual property that was once marketed as and paid for by ITRA (Performance Index, Race Rating & Ranking system) as their own proprietary system, which they've a right to do since indeed these assets were always owned by UTMB Group and Didier Curdy.

Any commercial race and event organizer like UTMB/Ironman has the freedom to build their own proprietary tools that emulate what ITRA provides. By partnering and utilizing ITRA's tools, organizers eliminate confusion, enhance cooperation and greatly reduce the tremendous cost to build, update and maintain technology that inevitably will create higher event registration fees.

<sup>1</sup>All of the intellectual property created and paid for by ITRA remained the exclusive property of UTMB Group or Didier Curdy (Performance Index was created and owned by Didier, a co-founder of ITRA and friend of Michel Poletti) with the exception of the databases and website content, the former was co-owned and shared with UTMB. This IP includes ITRA website and content management system, ITRA Performance Index, ITRA Race Rating & Ranking system, ITRA Operations and Administrative system - essentially all the technology upon which ITRA operates.

**Q: Which Performance Index is the “real PI” recognized by World Athletics and the Trail Running community?**

A: ITRA.

ITRA is an independent non-profit and derives zero financial benefit from the Performance Index other than modest membership fees which pay to maintain the PI along with all other ITRA services. All income ITRA derived from membership and services provided is reinvested 100% back into the sport and community of Trail Running. There are no profits taken. Our first and only commitment is to the Trail Running community, not commercial shareholders.

**Q: Which PI is utilized by UTMB Group for qualifying for their races and World Series?**

A: UTMB.

**Q: Why do we need two performance indexes? Can't UTMG Group just utilize ITRA's PI?**

A: Yes, and the offer remains open.

**Q: Why does UTMB Group maintain a parallel race calendar and rating and ranking system to ITRA?**

A: UTMB, at least for now, prefers to keep their intellectual property proprietary rather than share it with ITRA and possibly other commercial entities.

**Q: What is ITRA's relationship with larger commercial race organizers (e.g., Spartan, Salomon, Ironman, XTERRA, UTMB, etc.)?**

A: ITRA is here to serve all race and event organizers in our sport - both non-profit and commercial. In fact, we have a regular exchange of cooperative ideas and initiatives ongoing with several of the above-mentioned entities who have reached out to ITRA for advice, guidance and collaboration. We welcome the opportunity to provide input to assure as they grow and prosper their actions remain consistent with our Trail Running community values.

## ITRA TECHNOLOGY

**Q: Why is technology important to ITRA?**

A: All of our outreach, communications, statistics, databases, Performance Index, Race Rating & Ranking and website rely upon technology to function. As do any new service or product we offer. It is at the foundation ITRA and core of all we do.

**Q: What technology does ITRA own?**

A: Up until recently, we co-owned our database with UTMB Group. But in June, 2021 we finished a complete rewrite of our entire technology platform in just six months and now own all of our technology intellectual property including database, website, Performance Index, Race Rating & Ranking system, customer management system and administration system.

**Q: Why has ITRA built a new technology platform?**

A: In our prior regime we paid for the creation of all of the above assets yet neither owned them or controlled them. Since ITRA's ability to function and scale depends upon technology, these are core assets that must be owned and controlled by ITRA. Initially we hoped to come to an agreement with UTMB Group to continue to build and provide these technologies but their terms were unacceptable in price, length of contract and refusal to allow ITRA to own the assets for which they paid. We were left with no alternative but to create our own intellectual property.

**Q: What is the ITRA technology built upon and by whom?**

A: Below is the complete technology stack:

Database: Amazon Cloud RDS SQL Server – Microsoft SQL Server 2017

Backend: .Net 5 / Csharp

Frontend: Razor Pages, Bootstrap 5, Knockout.JS, JQuery, Leaflet.js

Third Party API connections: TraceDeTrail, Saferpay, RapidAPI, GeoDB, Google Maps, Assurinfo

**Q: Is the ITRA Performance Index different from UTMB?**

A: The original ITRA Performance Index which was built by Didier Curdy is now being used exclusively by UTMB/Ironman. ITRA has built an entirely new Performance Index and in the process improved and modernized aspects to make it both more precise and streamlined to operate and maintain. The results of the two indexes are similar for each runner but not exact due to our improvements. The UTMB/Ironman Performance Index (PI) is new and utilized by UTMB/Ironman for purposes of rating and ranking athletes within their sphere (UTMB/IM World Series, etc.).

ITRA is using a similar approach to our prior system (owned by Didier Curdy/UTMB/IM) for calculating race scores and the PI, but changes were implemented in the new algorithm in order to have, we hope, an even more accurate and fair formula. Meaning that we are still using a scale up to 1,000 and that we will still consider for the score's calculation the main factors that affect performance that is distance and elevation but on the score calculation we have added a new correction factor: average altitude.

On the PI formula we slightly changed the weights given to the 5 best scores because that we felt too much weight had been given to a single isolated outstanding result when compared with runners having at least 2 or more scores over the last 36 months.

**Q: What benefits are gained by ITRA's new technology platform?**

A: Flexibility, scalability, control, speed to add new services and products.

**Q: Why did ITRA change the event categories?**

A: We felt that having race categories ranging from XXS to XXL and based on the "effort-km" notion was not clear enough. ITRA is still using the "km-effort" (relation between elevation and distance) to evaluate race difficulty level but we wanted a clearer system with categories based around known typical distances with which everyone can identify.

The new categories will be: Vertical, 10k, Half marathon, Marathon, 50K, 50M, 100k, 100M, and Endurance (beyond 100M).

For calculation purposes and also because the exact distance of a trail race usually differs from the distance that is announced due to measurement inconsistencies (different GPS methodologies etc.), or marketing reasons, we've allowed for a wide enough distance interval when identifying each race category. This way all race results will be taken into account

**Q: Is the new technology working properly?**

A: Yes, but we've work still to finish. We are up and running but as with any technology project of this scale (over 1 million lines of code) we will encounter bugs which require identification and fixing. That will continue into the Fall and then we should achieve stability. We ask for patience from our runners and particularly organizers as we judiciously work to achieve stability. There will be abnormal delays in some areas for a period but we are working as fast as possible.

# ITRA INITIATIVES

## **Q: What initiatives is ITRA undertaking?**

A: As soon as we stabilize our new technology platform, we will commence introducing new services and products for our runners and organizers that they have been asking for from ITRA. They will include advanced integration of .gpx and mapping,

## **Q: What is the Safety & Health Commission?**

A: Led by Dr. John Anderson (US), a team of doctors from around the globe provide ITRA and our organizers and runners with safety guidelines, coronavirus protocols and are working on creating a database for recording all fatalities in our sport and accompanying media (articles, podcasts, etc.) to educate runners on how to adventure safer and make the better choices “in the moment”.

## **Q: What is the Environmental Commission?**

A: We are forming a new commission to partner with global environment advocate to educate our community on initiatives for trail preservation, maintenance, protection and reducing our sport’s carbon footprint. If you are interested in participating, please contact Kasia at: [katarzyna.melcer@itra.run](mailto:katarzyna.melcer@itra.run).

## **Q: Are there other commissions planned for the future?**

A: Yes. We plan to form the following commissions:

- 1) Youth Development: we will partner with global youth development advocates who are actively engaging in grass roots programs to development and operate programs to educate, encourage and support youth to discover trail running. If you are interested in participating, please contact Kasia at: [katarzyna.melcer@itra.run](mailto:katarzyna.melcer@itra.run).
- 2) Inclusion: we will partner with organizations around the world focused on improving inclusion and safety of all races and genders in trail running. If you are interested in participating, please contact Kasia at: [katarzyna.melcer@itra.run](mailto:katarzyna.melcer@itra.run).

## **Q: What statistics do ITRA research and report on?**

A: In 2020 we introduced our first set of infographics concerning the demographics of trail running. We also introduced the initial COVID-19 protocol for race organizers, which was updated in July, 2021. In the future we intend to offer updated and more in-depth statistics that trace the growth and changes in our sport and community.

## **Q: What other initiatives will ITRA offer in the future?**

A: We intend to begin offering an e-newsletter to all members with topical news of Trail Running, a new podcast targeted at our global audience and a larger and more comprehensive race calendar and rating and ranking system. We are investigating the possibility of bundling our membership with country federations, creating a Wikipedia for Trail Running with search and access to in-depth and broad information concerning our sport (“ITRA xChange”) and possibly a global database whereby ITRA members can contact each other and provide local advice on trails and even an offer to run together, grab a meal or offered housing (“ITRA Connect”). We’ve so many great ideas from our members we are busting with excitement!

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## **Q: If I (runner, organizer, media, federation, association, club, brand) have additional questions who can I contact?**

A: We hope this report has been informative and helpful. We also appreciate your consideration to join the movement to safeguard our Trail Running values by renewing or becoming a member of ITRA.

If you’d like an interview, to discuss anything contained within this report or find out more about how you can be part of the Trail Running movement, please send an email to Astrid Renet: [astrid.renet@itra.run](mailto:astrid.renet@itra.run).