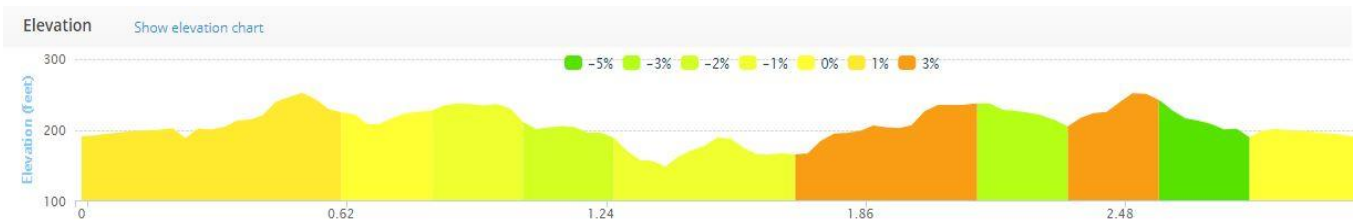


## **Race Strategy: Washington Heights 5K (formerly Coogan's)**

Each and every road race has its own unique course with its particular challenges. Knowing these ahead of time, and preparing yourself to overcome any potential hurdles, will help you perform at your best. Entire books have been written about techniques for preparing for racing. Both physically and mentally. I won't try to re-write those books here, but I will try to give you some insight into this course, make recommendations on ways to plan your race strategy, and help you anticipate a couple of difficult spots – which should help you overcome them more easily than your competition. Plenty of research has proven that visualizing your race and mentally practicing your strategy pays off.

Always remember to run YOUR race. Think of the runners around you, your “competitors”, not as enemies, but as friends who are there to help you do your best – by challenging you. Don't get caught up in any grudge matches or focus too much on any one competitor in the field – instead, feed off of the energy that is all around you, and use it to propel you forward. But know when to let them go, and when to haul them back in.

**The course:** The Wash Hts 5K is a short race, but not without its challenges. The course is mostly out-and-back, and is sort of M-shaped in both directions, with four significant hills (two each way) and a low-spot in the middle. Here is an elevation chart from MapMyRun:



Please take note of a couple of things:

1. The hills aren't THAT bad. The elevation difference between the highest and lowest points on the course is only 103 feet. Don't freak out about the hills, just prepare for them (see below).
2. The hardest section of the race takes place between 1.9 and 2.6 miles.

### **Racing strategy:**

1. **MILE ONE:** Generally trending uphill, you should EXPECT that this mile will feel pretty hard and yet result in a time that is slower than you hoped for – that is OKAY. Don't kill yourself running up that first hill, run steady and strong and let the crowd pull you along, but if one or two runners goes dashing up that hill, just let them go ... trust me, they're coming back soon.
2. **MILE TWO:** This is the fastest mile of the race, mostly downhill. Relax, let gravity bring you down. When racing downhill, remember to keep your body perpendicular to the ground below you (don't lean back, instead concentrate on dropping your hips just a little into the hill). Also, keep your cadence quick (don't overstride – which is like putting on the brakes with every step). You will be coming around the Cloisters and heading back toward the finish during this mile, and you probably won't really catch too many people in front of you during this mile – that's fine, hold steady.

3. MILE THREE - Let's break this down into two parts:
  - a. Part one: From about 1.9 miles to 2.6 miles – this is the hardest section of the race, so it's time to get to work. Because you are smart and because you've read this strategy, you've been holding just a little bit in the tank up until this point in the race. Now it's time to lower your chin, pump your arms, and work this uphill section. You will be passing people, that helps to reduce the hurt. Once you crest this uphill, it's almost all downhill to the finish, so this is where you really make your move (and this is where you churn past those fools who ran the first mile too hard).
  - b. Final half-mile: Let 'er rip, folks. You're over the crest of the hill, so kick it in. I recommend a two-phase kick. As you start the downhill run into the finish, "shift" up a gear and get those legs turning over – hold this pace as you head down under the GW Bridge at 179<sup>th</sup> St. Then, as you emerge from under the shadow of the bridge, "shift" again, this time fully-engaging your arms and really opening up the throttle. You've got about 400 meters to go at that point – so crank it up you can really make up some time on the people in front of you. Remember: We've been doing long intervals so far this winter, so you might not have top speed just yet, but you do have the endurance to hold a long hard finishing kick – go for it.

Good luck to all Harriers racing up in Washington Heights. Armed with this information and this strategy, go kick some serious tail out there.

- Douglas