

A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of Alfred University

Running through Alfred

by

Morgan Brothers

In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Alfred University Honors Program

May 11, 2021

Under the Supervision of:

Chair: Dr. Robert Reginio

Committee Members:

Matthew Phillips

Laurie Lounsberry Meehan

Introduction

When it came time to think about a topic for my Honors thesis I had no idea what to do. I was overwhelmed by the word “thesis” and figuring out how to tackle a project that had no explicit instructions. Unlike many students, I chose not to do something related to my major in biology. As part of the Honors Program, I wanted this to be a fun and unique project that would culminate my experiences at Alfred. When I had the initial idea, I was hesitant to do something related to running but then I realized how much it has meant to me at Alfred and how much I have learned as a student-athlete. So, I thought about the old book of courses that our team uses and how the need for an updated version had been talked about. It was created in the mid-nineties and many of the distances are no longer accurate. Remaking the book and having it available for reference at practices or even distributing it in some way to members of the team seemed like a task I could accomplish.

I always liked the idea of the book serving as an artifact, one that has passed through the hands of many former runners. They looked at the same pages and ran the same routes. For this reason, I didn’t want to change it drastically; I wanted to preserve the simplicity and ease of use. It crossed my mind to add more details related to each route but I didn’t want it to become crowded by those things. I have observed that the book is highly effective as a visual aid being used by someone that has run the route before as they explain the run to someone new. They can use the map to show where to go and throw in their own little things here and there to make it clearer. As a first-year student that knows nothing about the lay of the land around Alfred, it might be a little more difficult to just open up and use the book alone. However, as you become more seasoned with running around Alfred, the book can just be a nice reminder of what road to turn on or how long a particular run is.

When I joined the cross country and track teams in my sophomore year it gave me something to be a part of outside of just my academics and roommates. It became my running family. I came into college with absolutely no intentions of continuing running on a team, I had sadly said goodbye at my last high school meet. I went for runs here and there assuming it was something that I would never completely cut out of my life. But if someone had told me this is where I'd be four years later, I never would have believed it. I hesitantly took the leap to join the team, almost backing out once because I thought I wouldn't be good enough. I had been dreading going on runs, putting too much pressure on it, and viewing it more as a chore than something I wanted to do. Soon after joining I realized that I truly do enjoy running and that must have been why I couldn't stay away from it.

I want to be clear that distance running is what I am talking about in this thesis. It is important to remember that distance running is different than sprinting. It requires different training and at times a different mindset. A major part of distance training involves logging a bunch of miles each week to build a solid base. This is just more time spent getting the legs used to running. Without the base it will be difficult to ever work on speed. Similarly, if you only run fast every day your body will not be able to properly recover. A large portion of the weekly miles should not be at a fast pace, but rather what we distance runners call "easy miles." This is the type of running when you can easily have a conversation. Heart rate should not be too high, breathing isn't out of control, and therefore it is a pace you can maintain for a pretty long time. Typically, I will do 3-4 easy days of running each week with one of those days being a "long run" which is just the longest run of the week. These days are generally when I will run one of the courses outlined in the book. Easy miles work on the aerobic system which is when the body is producing energy with a sufficient amount of oxygen. Running faster pushes into the

anaerobic system which is without oxygen. It is important to have a training that balances both these systems to see the most improvement in fitness. Anyways, that is enough talk about some of the “technical” parts of training. There is a lot more that plays into it but that could be another whole thesis.

When I started this project, I was advised to include a writing portion to supplement the part with the course maps. I wasn’t sure what the content of the writing should be so I brainstormed plenty of ideas. I initially imagined having short stories or descriptions that would accompany many of the runs. I also considered exploring the history of the Alfred area or track program and possibly connecting with alumni to hear some of their stories, too. Even though the final product doesn’t include most of this, I’m still happy with the result. It turned into a more thoughtful and focused writing about my personal experience with running. It starts to dig into the reasons that I enjoy running. This came after exploring several texts from writers that were telling about experiences in nature and the world around them in a similar manner to when I am on a run. I believe my writing got me thinking much deeper than I had intended at the start.

I want this to be both a practical and somewhat philosophical guide to running for future runners at AU. Practical in that it contains maps of courses around the area along with their distances. Philosophical in the sense that it attempts to convey why running through Alfred became such an important part of my life the last couple years. Through running the courses in the book, I have seen and discovered the area beyond the Alfred campus. Runs have taken me places that I would likely never have gone.

I would like to acknowledge those that had a part in making this thesis a success. First, Dr. Gray for listening to my original idea and guiding me in the direction of people that would be able to help and to my whole committee for getting on board even when I wasn’t exactly sure

what I was doing. Thank you to Dr. Reginio for helping me explore and make sense of all my thoughts about running, for forcing me to fast-write and get all the ideas out on paper, and for making the word “thesis” much less intimidating. Thank you to Coach Phillips for showing me around all these routes the past few years, helping me become a better athlete, and pushing me every day to be the best version of myself. Thank you to the original creators of these course maps for taking the time to put this together all those years ago and map out the distances when I’m sure GPS technology was not as advanced. Lastly, thank you to the countless people that have supported my running in some way since the beginning.

I’m extremely grateful for everything being a runner at AU has given me and so I wanted to leave the program with something in return. I hope this project can be a valuable resource for future AU runners. I hope it can be at least a little piece of their journey as a student-athlete like it was in mine. My time at Alfred University would have been incomplete if I didn’t find my place on this team. It’s always a great day to be a Saxon!

Henry David Thoreau pretty much described walking as a purposeless activity. He meant that it doesn't align with the typical American focus towards material success, so concerned with always working hard that moments may be sacrificed for the payoff. Rather Thoreau walks to separate himself from society and its everyday routines. The walk is not truly purposeless because when he walks he is put into a new headspace where he can think critically about the present moment, it is just purposeless in the everyday sense.

Why do I run? That is a question I may never have a concrete answer for. It is made up of too many little things that all come together to make running what it is to me. It has always seemed like running can bring people together. It creates a community of people that are connected through their dedication and passion for the sport. You could say this is true for any sport or activity but I have always thought running is different. Thoreau says, "I have met with but one or two persons in the course of my life who understood the art of Walking." This stood out to me because I have always felt like people either understand and enjoy everything that goes into being a runner or they don't. He uses the word "art" to describe the simple action of walking as if to say it is more than that, it is something creative and not a utilitarian act to get you from point A to point B. The same is true of running. Running can be defined as movement at a speed faster than a walk in which you never have both feet on the ground at the same time. It sounds pretty basic, literally just faster walking. However, most days I do not run to get to any particular destination but to experience the run itself.

Life moves fast and maybe running is a way for me to try to slow it down. This seems counterintuitive since running is technically at a faster pace than how I spend the majority of my day but let me try to explain. Running can be an escape from the crazy, fast-paced world that we are all living in. Work, school, and family: we are all trying to fit into our many roles and it

seems we are pulled in too many directions at once. And then there is the constant looming threat of social media. All of these things can get overwhelming and stressful at times, and even during the times when I am truly enjoying every minute of the chaos, it still just feels like a day, a week, or a month can go by in the blink of an eye. Thoreau said, "Some of my townsmen, it is true, can remember and have described to me some walks which they took ten years ago, in which they were so blessed as to lose themselves for half an hour in the woods." On a run I am able to temporarily step away from everything else going on and just be present. "To lose yourself" sounds negative, but Thoreau means separating yourself from your usual day to day responsibilities and being able to focus on the moment. I enjoy this and honestly sometimes I think about nothing at all on a run. The time I spend on a run feels different than any other part of my day. I think I am able to recall and describe some of my runs so well after because of how disconnected I am from anything else. Other than my teammates that is because having them to chat with or even run silently next to at times makes the run better. There is a lot more space for me to think and really take in what I may be feeling and seeing.

There is so much more to see around the valley of Alfred than I would have ever known if it wasn't for the many runs on which I've gone. Thoreau said, "There is in fact a sort of harmony discoverable between the capabilities of the landscape within a circle of ten miles' radius...It will never become quite familiar to you." Every run can be a unique experience and even the same route from day to day can feel different. The hills around Alfred are a defining feature of the landscape and show up in almost every run. I have learned that a hill will almost always look worse from far away, they can be so intimidating and you could swear they are almost straight up. But usually as you get closer to the hill you realize that it actually doesn't start until later than it looked and once you're on it you just go. This is similar to when people

are always thinking and worrying about the future. I am guilty of it. So often I am thinking about what's next— tomorrow, next month, even next year. Most of the time spent worrying is wasted because as you get closer you realize it's not so bad and things will play out the way they are supposed to. Even if it's rough, you can usually make it. If only for a half hour, being on a run quiets those thoughts and worries in my mind. I can just look ahead and watch a mailbox get closer and closer, hear the gravel under my sneakers, or smell the crisp leaves in the fall air. I have the space to notice things that might usually go unnoticed. Different days I will be drawn to focus on different things around me and I will never be able to fully exhaust what a particular run has to offer.

Top of the World

Top of the World is the run of all runs. It's the one you hear people on the team talk about and compare every other course to. It is not a run you just go out and do any day of the week; it is done maybe once a year and is thoughtfully picked for a special Sunday long run. I would say it is almost a rite of passage as a member of the team. Every run up to that point is preparing you for it, and once you've done it, you've conquered what is arguably the most difficult route in the book. I have done it twice so far in my time at Alfred and the most recent time was this past fall. This is how it went.

The run started out like most other runs: we waited outside the Annex as all of our watches found a GPS signal. There was something in the mood that felt just a little different though. Even the veteran team members that had done this run before were hesitant to start what they knew lie ahead. I know I was already thinking about the massive hill that would be here in just a few short miles. Meanwhile, the first-year members of the team were unsure of what to think of this mystical run everyone had built up so much. So, we clicked start on our watches and

took the first steps to head to the stop light. We turned right on to Main St and at this point the team was already splitting into two groups. I was hanging in the second group with Sally, Liv, Sam, Holly, and Dory. We ran the two miles into Alfred Station, a nice gradual downhill.

Hesitant to get over-excited and start out too fast we kept a really easy pace. As we got out on to Route 21 and headed towards the high school I could feel us slowing down, our minds knowing we were getting closer to the hill and our bodies not wanting to be there yet. Cars were passing us, and when it was clear, we crossed the road to get to the bottom of Satterlee Hill Rd.

At first you can't see the whole road, but the part you can see is already intimidating. The uphill begins and the talking among us stops after some last-minute motivational words such as "good luck", "we got this", and "see you at the top". This is where it becomes just you and the hill and you have to put all of your body and mind into getting up it. I recalled the first time we ran this route. I made it to the point where the paved road turns into a gravel road. Ominously, I saw a sign that read "seasonal road only." At that point, I had to walk. However, this time, on this run, I knew I was stronger than before and wanted to make it further than that before my legs slowed to a walk. The instant relief of stopping to walk is so tempting but I knew from last time that getting the legs to start up again almost seems to require more effort than just trudging along. The road is framed with trees, no houses that I remember seeing except one near the seasonal road sign. So, I kept on going trying to make it just a little bit further. I would think to myself just to that tree and then that tree. There is a little trench on each side of the road, I would guess for water to flow down. My legs were burning and I was quite out of breath. My pace had slowed upward of 11-minutes, but the goal was to keep running even if it was the type of run that is practically slower than a walk. I looked down at my watch and it was approaching 4 miles. I told myself I could stop to walk for a second when it hit 4 miles and as I kept looking at my

watch the hundredths of the mile were not ticking by fast enough. Finally, I heard the beep and felt the vibration of the 4-mile notification and stopped to walk.

I looked back and saw Sally, Sam, and Liv not too far behind me. We had all spread out. Holly and Dory were up ahead going strong – this hill was probably nothing for Dory the ultra-marathon runner, and she was pulling Holly along with her. The rest of the team was no longer in sight. As I was walking Sam passed me and said good job. She was a first-year totally killing this hill - slow and steady she was making it up - and honestly, that motivated me. Seeing her take on this challenge without even hesitating, knowing that she was probably feeling just as tired yet still had a smile on her face helped me believe I could do it, too. After about a minute of walking I started running again and this time passed Sam and gave her my best out of breath “good job” in return. I don’t remember a single car passing us up the hill- they would have thought we were crazy. I think I only stopped one more time to walk and then I saw the sign that said a stop sign was coming which meant the top was close. I saw Holly and Dory waiting at the top and cheering for me as I approached them. It felt so good to rest knowing the worst of it was behind me. We waited for the others who weren’t too far behind. We hadn’t run up the hill as a tight pack but knowing we were all doing it together helped keep pushing me forward. The hill was over a mile long and definitely felt that way during the run but once we made it to the top it’s almost like you forget a little bit how hard it really was.

Now the six of us were regrouped at the top. Straight ahead was a nice view. I tied my shoes and I think it started to sprinkle a little bit but it didn’t last. We turned right and started running again up a gradual incline. This run wouldn’t cut us a break just yet. We ran straight on that road for a little while and then I saw what I thought was our coach’s car parked on the left side of the road up ahead. We got closer and realized that in fact it was his car. It turns out that

he had dropped it off up there before the run so he could drive a few people back that weren't able to do the whole run that day. Our little group made it to him and he told us to stop. He talked to us for a minute, but I can't remember it super clearly. He wanted us to think about all the hard work we have put in to running – today and up until now. He told us to turn around to face the view and just take it all in. We did and we realized just how elevated we in fact were. I don't know how long (maybe a minute or just 30 seconds) we looked out at the view, no one saying a word. I don't know what exactly I was looking at but I enjoyed it. I remember a lot of sky and hills, like a painting. Was it Alfred I could see so small? I felt so far away from whatever it was. I felt like everything going on down there was so distant and separated from us.

I often ask myself why I choose to endure the physical and mental strain that some runs put me through, why I keep pushing myself even when it hurts a lot, why I don't just stop when it becomes uncomfortable. I find it quite difficult to come to a clear answer. I think part of it is the instinct of humans to always want to see and do more and push beyond the limits. I'm running and training to become a better athlete, improve my overall fitness, and hopefully see faster times at the finish line of races. But there is definitely more to it than that. The feeling after a good run of being tired and knowing I have worked hard and pushed my body is one that I can't get anywhere else. The routine of showing up to run day after day gives me something constant in my life that I can always count on even when other parts of life get crazy. Sometimes we can get caught up in it all though, lose focus, and forget the good parts when we're bogged down by hard days. That is why I think my coach made us literally slow down and just think. Think about how far we have come and why we continue to show up and run.

It was getting a little chilly being stopped up there. Coach told us to keep going and then we were off, a little more than halfway through this 9-mile run. The second half felt like a

completely different run, especially with that little rest. The monstrous hill was completely in the past. I definitely was feeling the fatigue in my legs from it but the downhills were helping me forget. The conversations started back up as we spread out and took over the whole width of the dirt road. We talked about how beast it was of Sam to not have to stop at all and how Liv did pretty awesome for just joining our team like 2 weeks prior. I'm sure there was lots of other random chatter, but a lot of that is just to pass the time and doesn't matter much once the run is over. We came up to a slight right turn on to a paved road. There was a short but kind of steep hill that brings you to an intersection. This point is what I have been told is the "Top of the World."

It is the highest point of the run with the best view. If we had planned for it, it is a perfect sunset viewing spot. We turned right; I was very tired but made sure to look up. This was the start of the full-on steep downhill that lasted over a mile. It is the type of downhill that at some parts is almost so steep you are working extra to hold yourself back so you don't lose control and start going too fast. The paved road twists and turns until we can see the bottom. We are almost down to the bridge in Alfred Station when Holly rolls her ankle and goes down to the ground. The rest of us stop behind her unsure exactly what to do. None of us say a word at first, we give her a minute on the ground hoping that she is okay. She stands up and notices she has ripped a hole in the knee of her leggings. We start running again and it seems she is not hurt. We cross the bridge and turn left to head back to campus. Now it is less than two miles and back exactly the way we came from. This part can be the worst because it is the slightest uphill which can get to you after so many miles. I don't remember anything specific about this part of the run. I feel like we were all tired and just ready to be back. We also run on this part of the road so often it seems to all blend together. We made it back to the stoplight in Alfred and the left turn back to the

Annex felt so good. The legs are on autopilot by then, they are moving but I'm not even thinking about it. We get to the ending spot outside the Annex right where we started and click stop on our watches. The run stops. Nine miles, well over an hour of constant moving and then all of a sudden it is over and the body feels relieved to be finished but also confused by the abrupt stop. The people that got back before us greet us and ask how the run went. They are already stretching and look tired; we join them and it's hard to imagine what we just did. Waking up early on a Sunday morning to not just run 9 miles but with an elevation gain of over 1000 feet. Why did we show up? Why did we secretly look forward to being able to say we did it? If nothing else it was worth this story, this memory, and this time spent with teammates outside of our ordinary routines. We experienced it together in this particular way and the next time it could be very different.

SAXON CROSS COUNTRY

**ROAD COURSES
AND DISTANCES**

2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS

COURSE	DISTANCE (MILES)	PAGE
Tech Loop.....	2.....	1
BP	2.15	2
Hill St	2.4	3
Palmiter.....	2.5	4
Shurfine.....	2.7	5
Pres Loop.....	3.25	6
Sam Run	3.5	7
Coach Hassler's Loop	3.6	8
Sherman.....	3.6	9
Motorcycle.....	4.....	10
Post Office.....	4.....	11
Pres Loop to Hill St	4.45	12
Triangle	4.75	13
Jericho	5.....	14
C-Course.....	5.5	15
Skeleton	5.5	16
Valley Loop.....	6.....	17
Moland.....	6.1	18
McAndrews	6.25	19
Gooseberry.....	6.65	20
C-Course Extended.....	7.1	21
Kathy Grey.....	8.....	22
Loomis.....	8.1	23
High School	8.2	24
Reester-Y	9.....	25
Whitney Valley	9.1	26
House Run	9.4	27

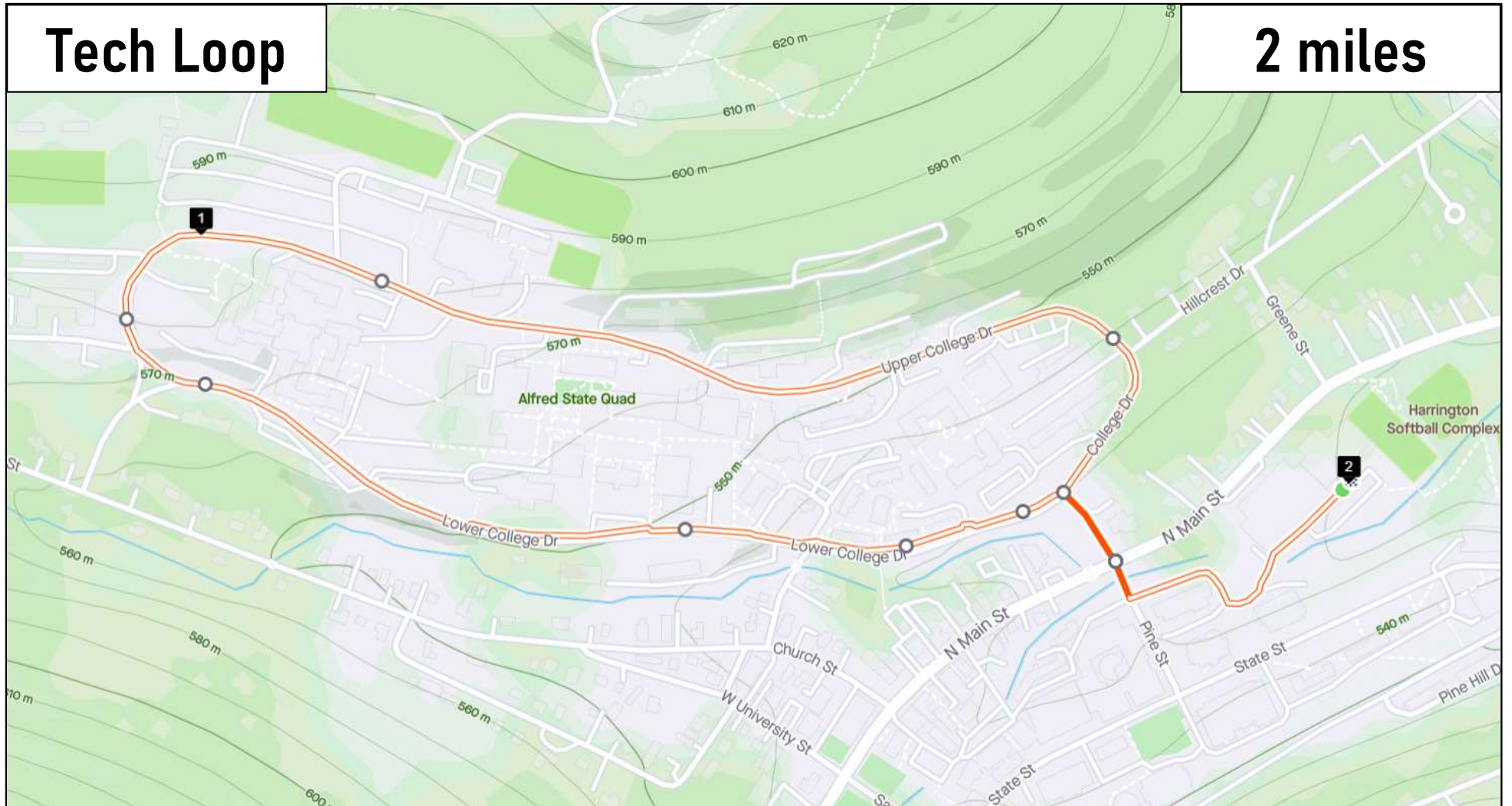
Top of the World.....	9.8	28
Chicken Run	10.3	29
Davey Loop.....	10.5	30
Ice Cream Shoppe	10.6	31
House Run Extended.....	10.65	32
Buffalo Run.....	11.....	33
Codi's Loop.....	11.3	34
Davey Loop Extended	11.75	35
Pingrey Hill Run	13.75	36
House-Buffalo Run	13.85	37
House-Buffalo Extended	15.....	38
McHenry Valley	15.75	39

*** All courses start and end outside the doors of the Joyce and Walton Center (Annex)

*** Numbers in black squares on map represent the mile marks

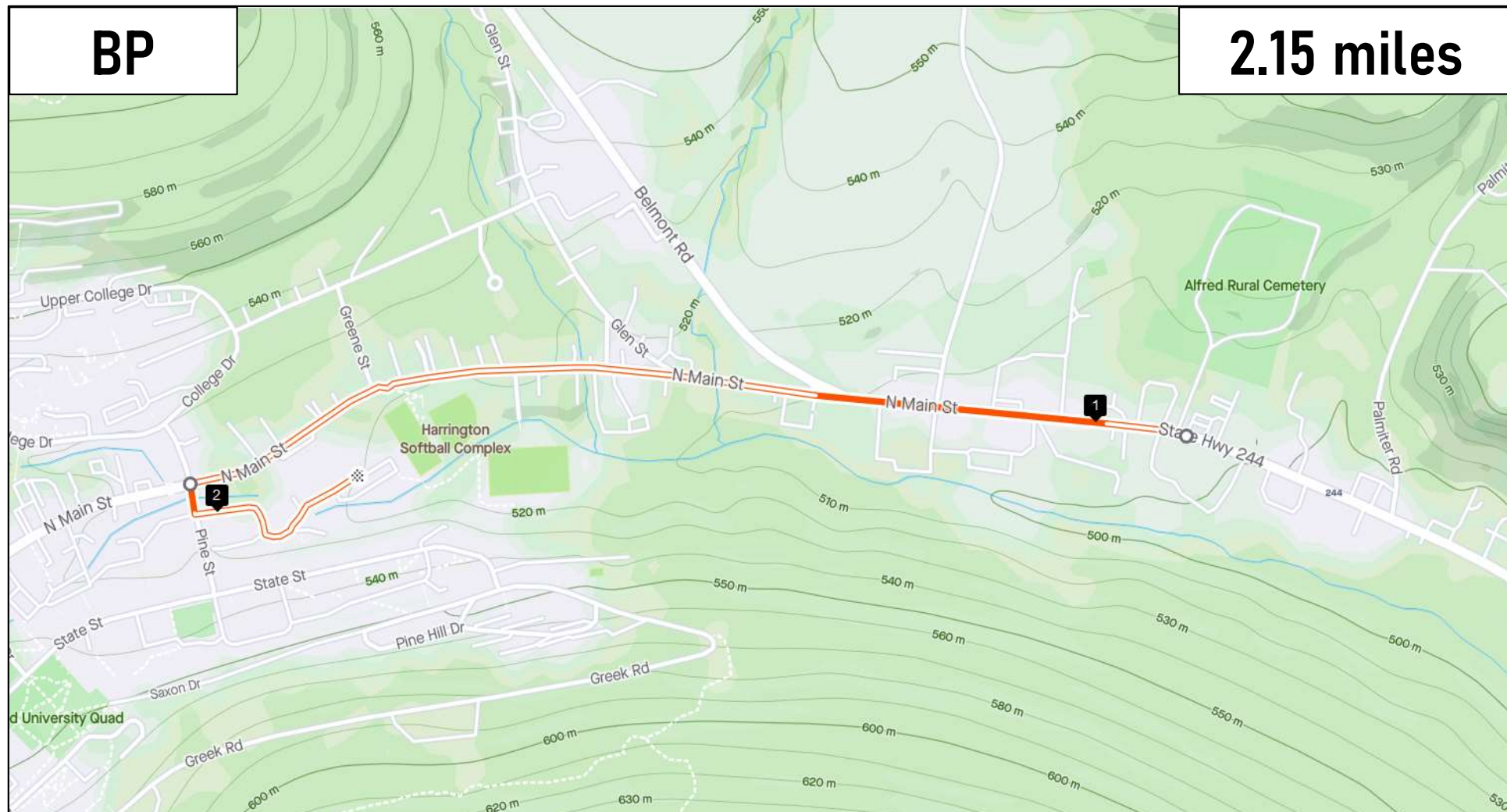
Tech Loop

2 miles



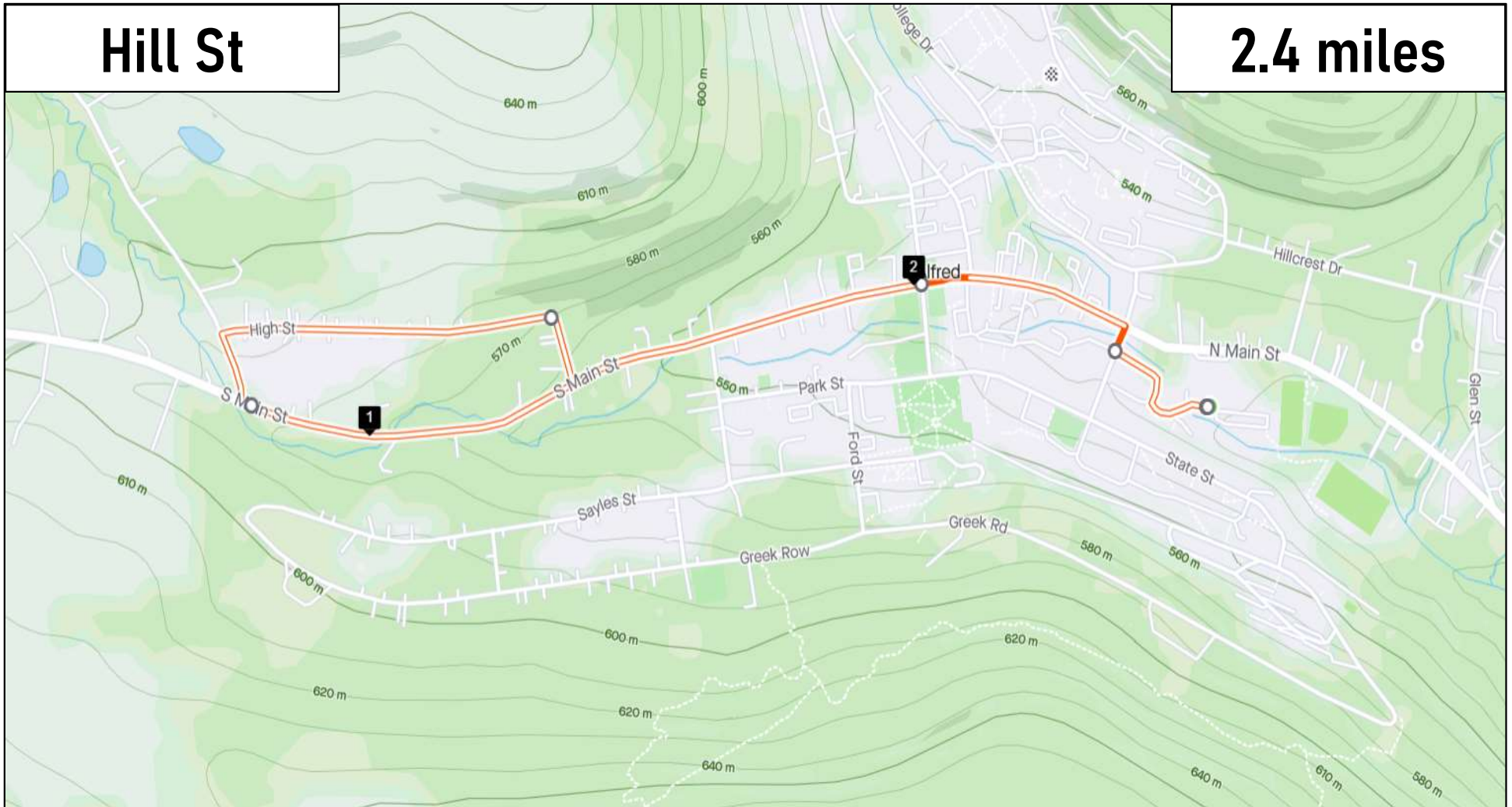
BP

2.15 miles



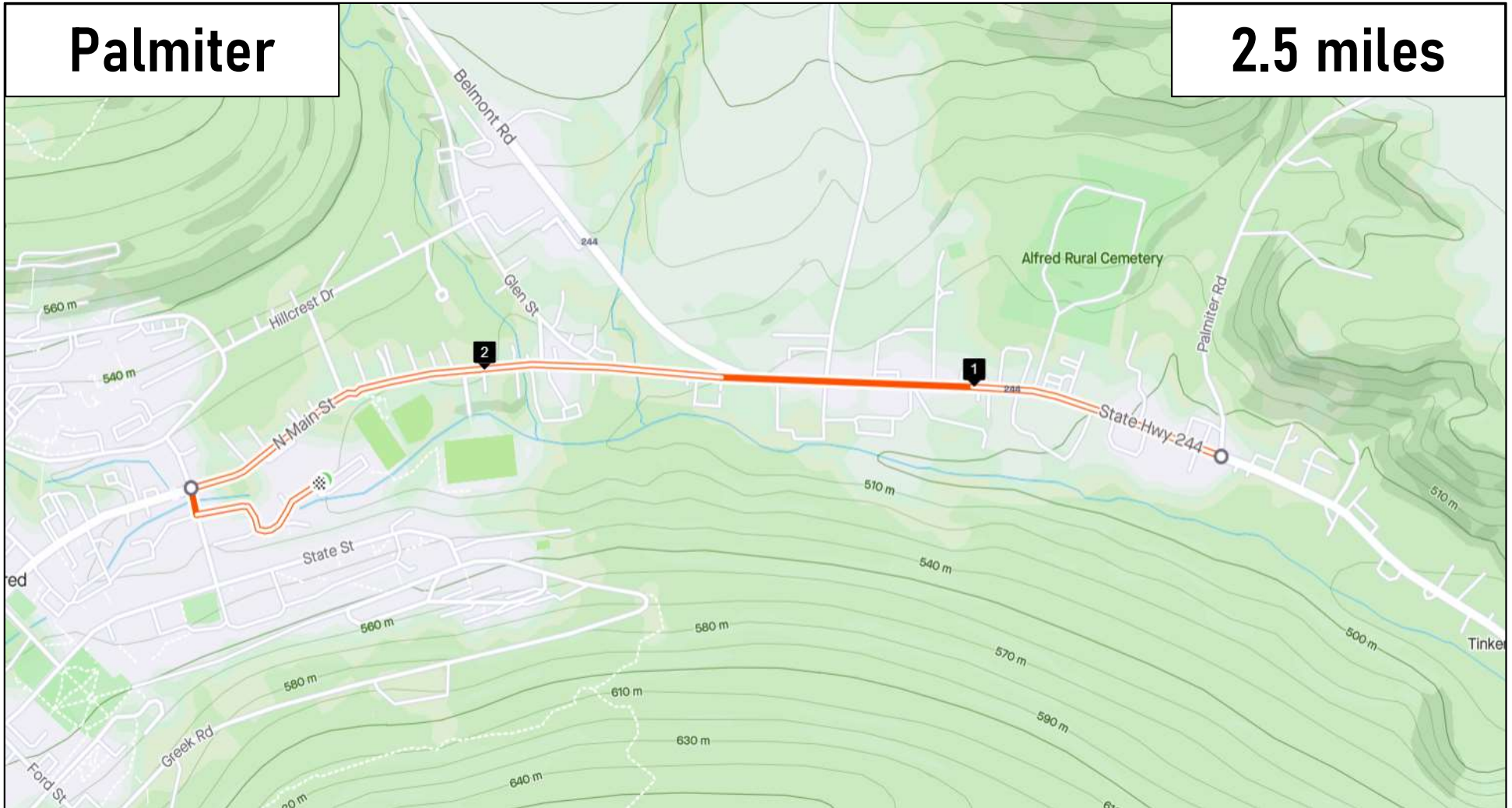
Hill St

2.4 miles



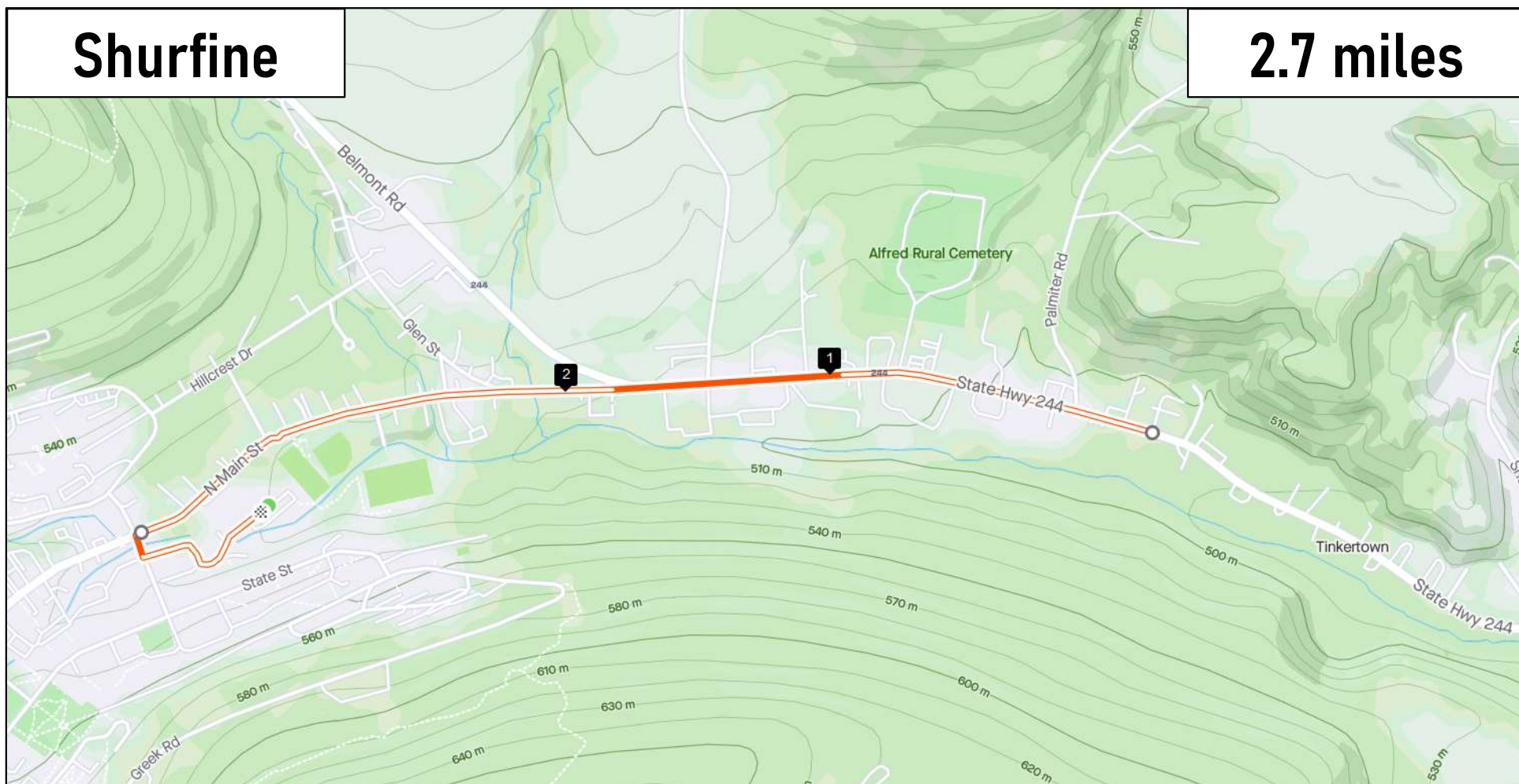
Palmiter

2.5 miles



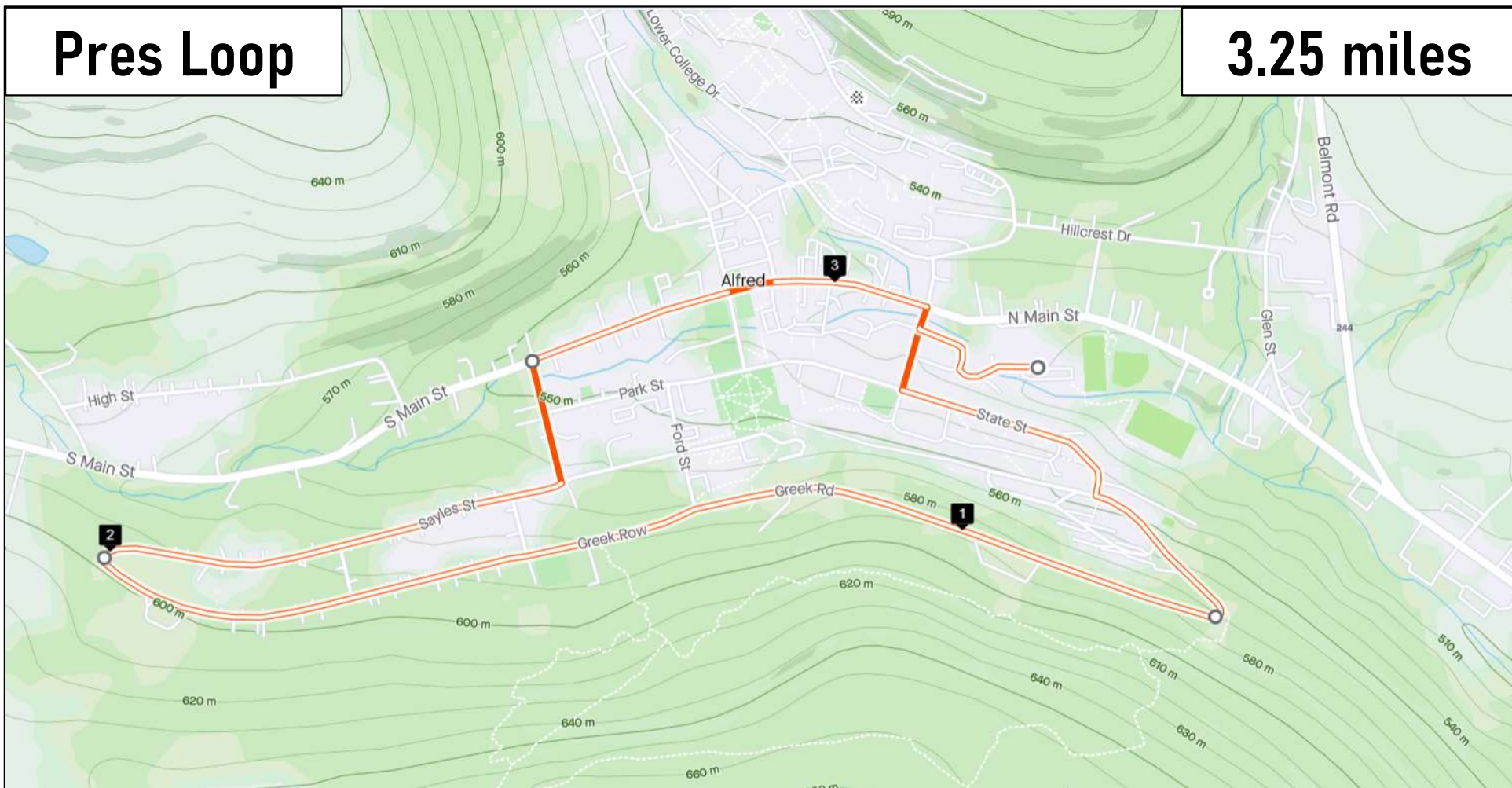
Shurfine

2.7 miles



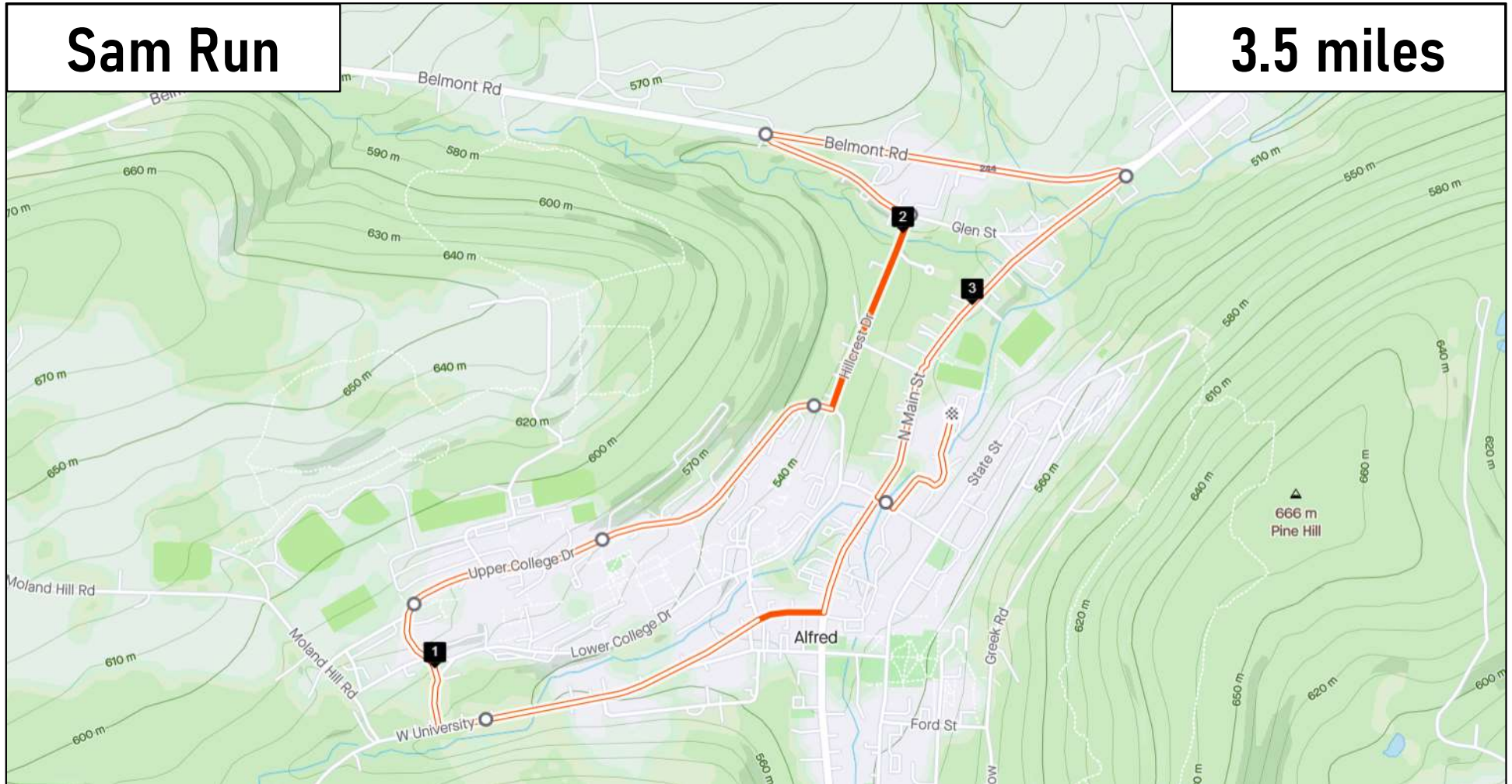
Pres Loop

3.25 miles



Sam Run

3.5 miles



Coach Hassler's Loop

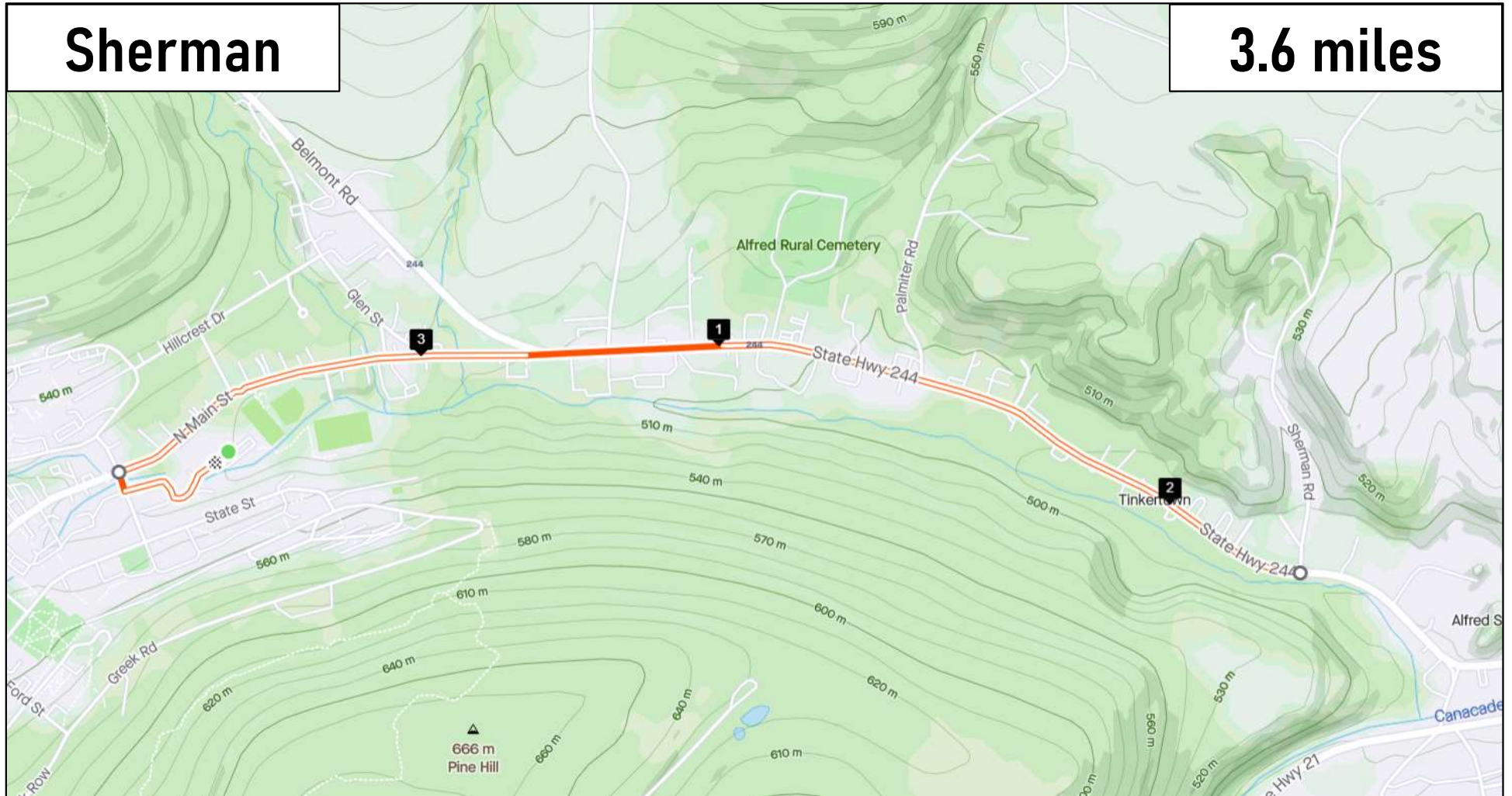
3.6 miles

The map displays a topographic view of a region in Alfred, Maine. The route is highlighted in orange and consists of the following segments: 1. A northward segment on State St. 2. A westward segment on N Main St. 3. A southward segment on S Main St. 4. An eastward segment on High St. The route is marked with numbered points 1, 2, and 3. The map includes contour lines indicating elevation, with labels such as 540 m, 560 m, 580 m, 600 m, 620 m, and 640 m. Other streets shown include Hillcrest Dr, Glen St, Belmont Rd, Park St, Ford St, Sayles St, and Greek Rd. A creek is visible flowing through the area.

3.6 miles

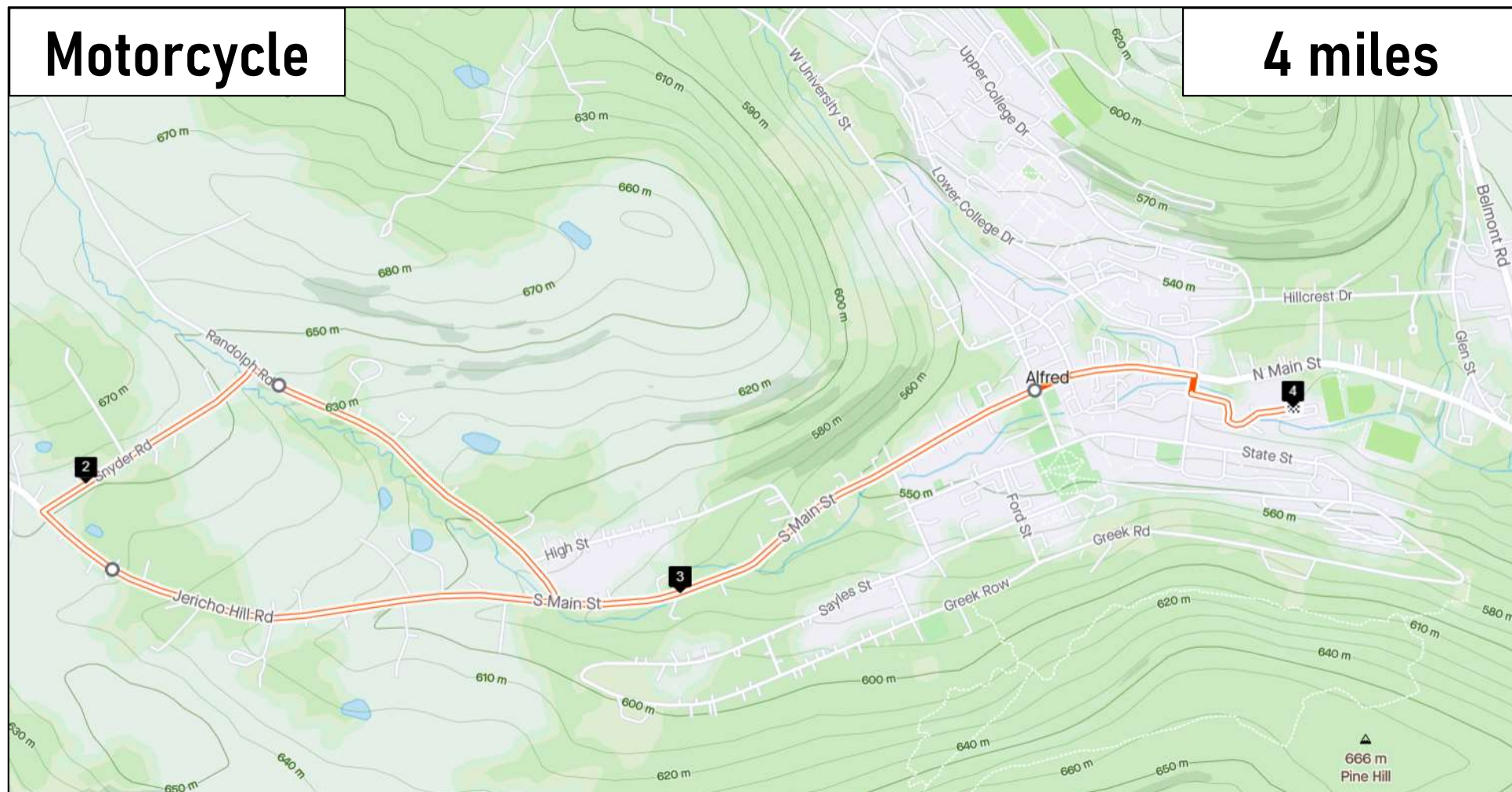
Sherman

3.6 miles



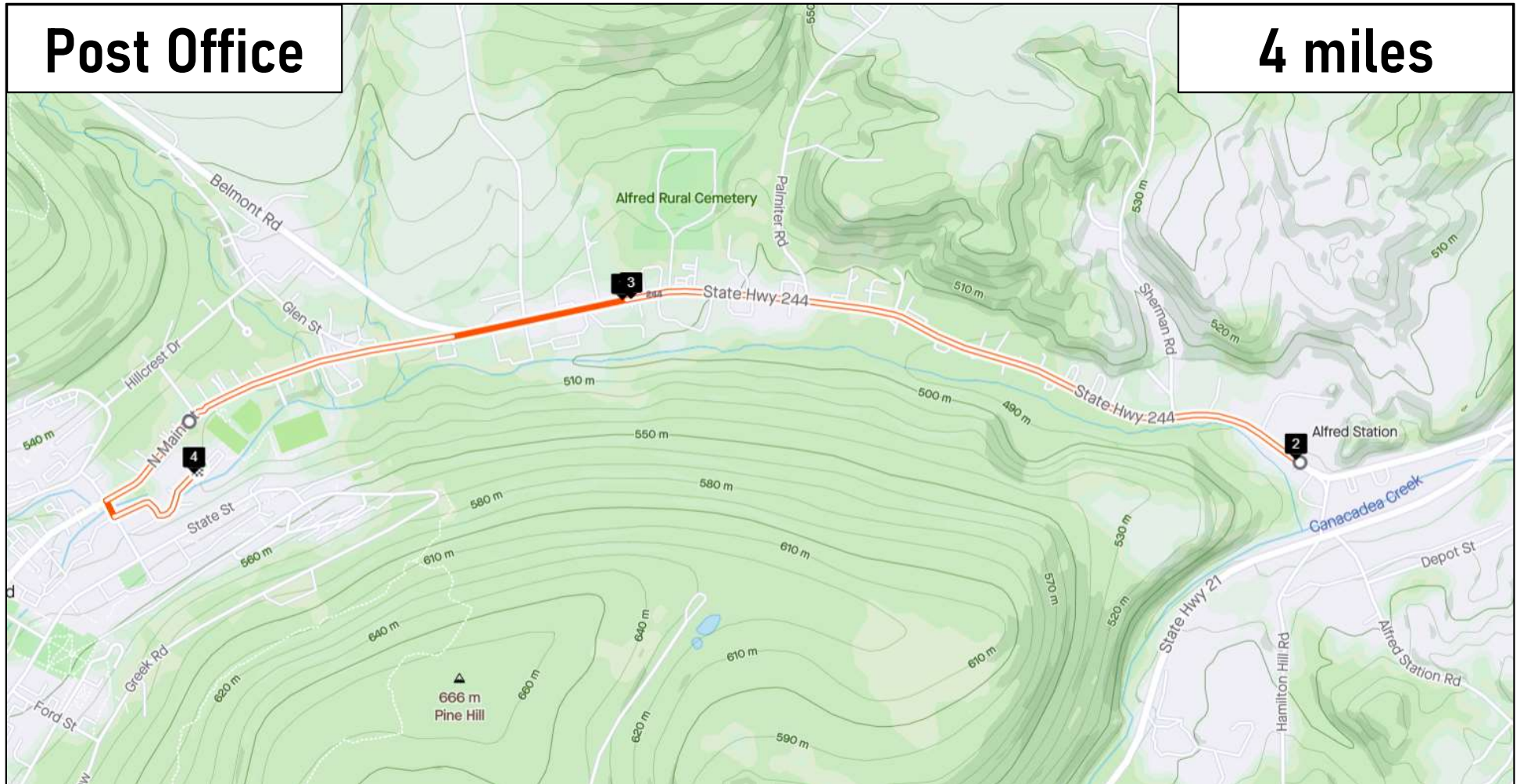
Motorcycle

4 miles



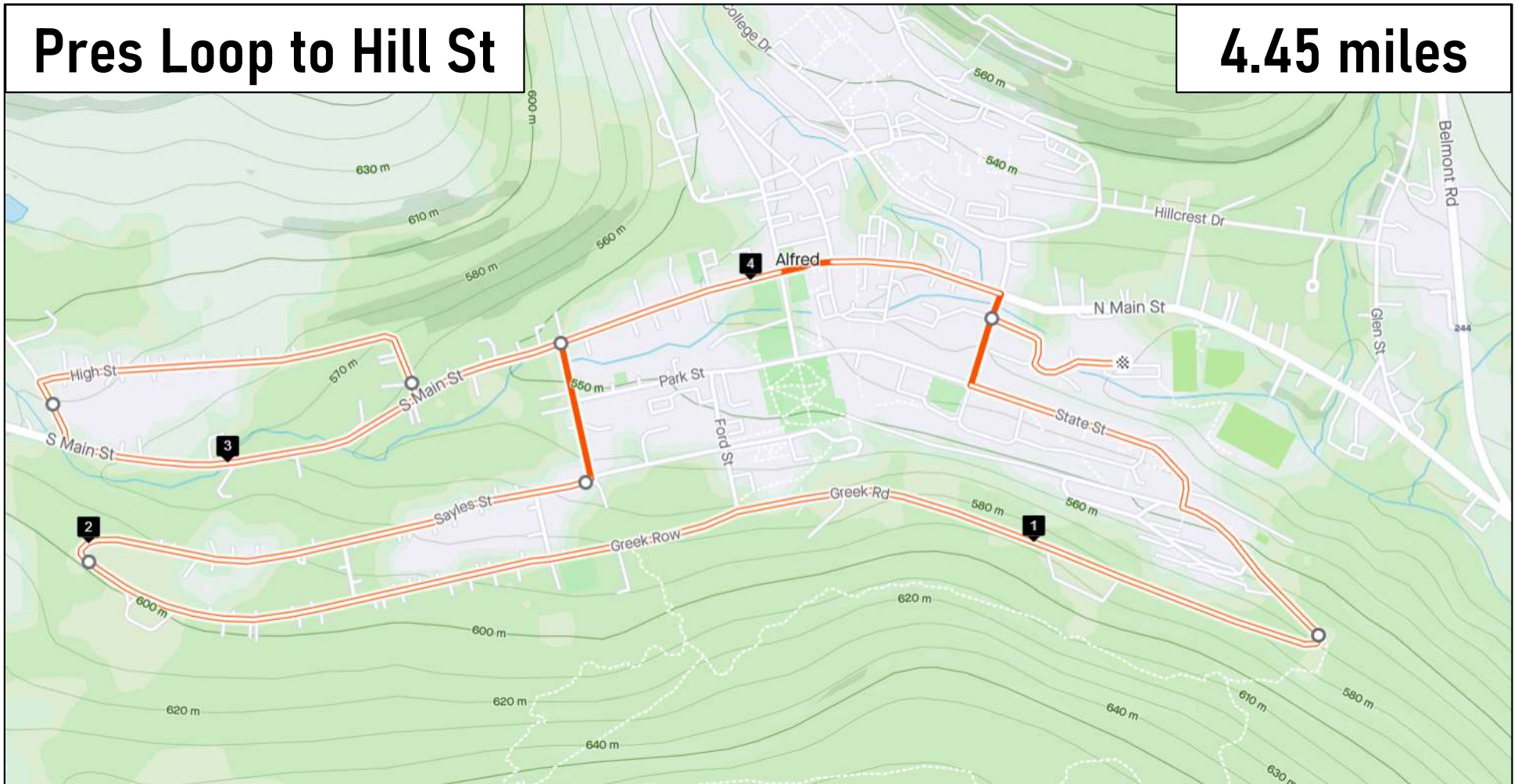
Post Office

4 miles



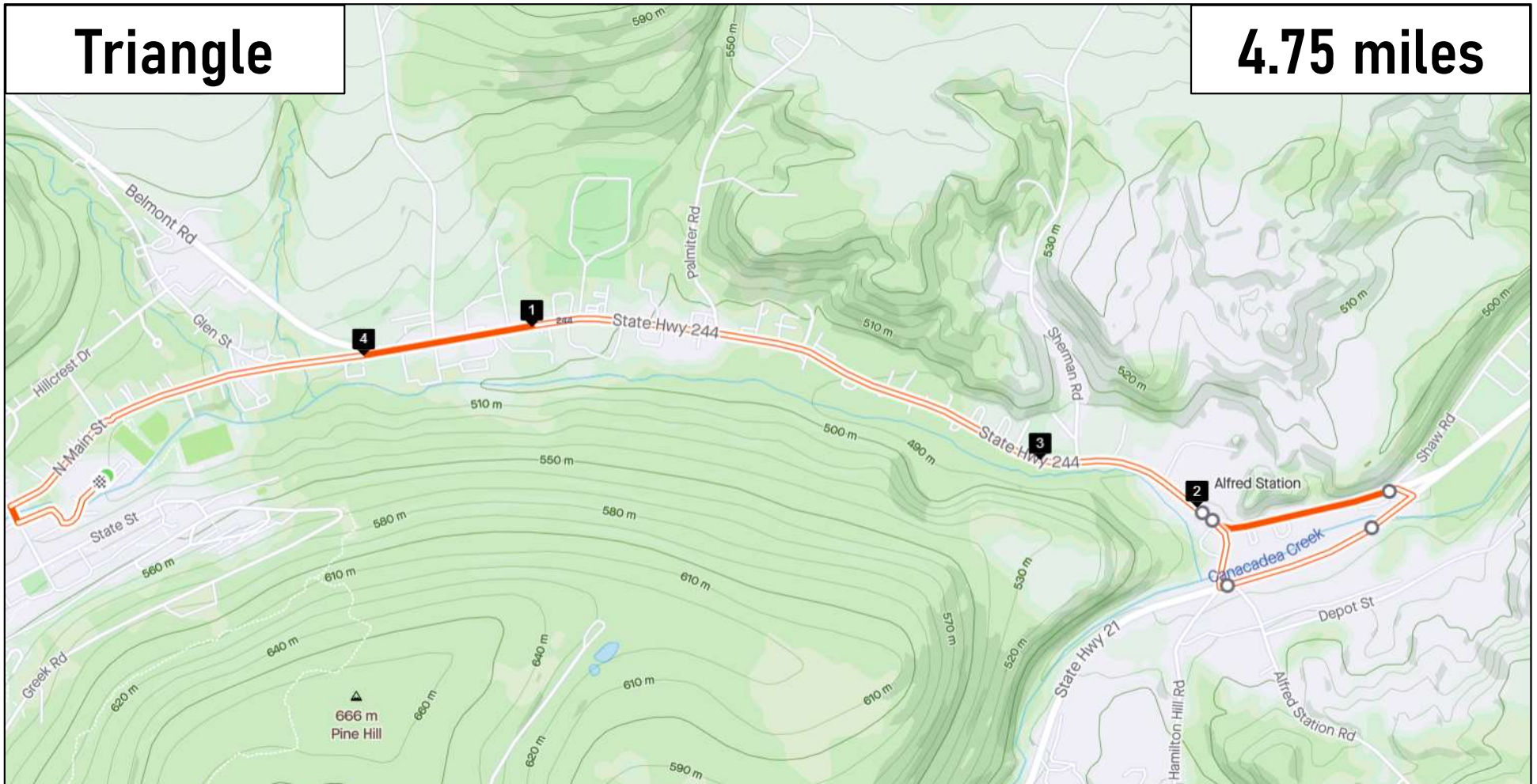
Pres Loop to Hill St

4.45 miles



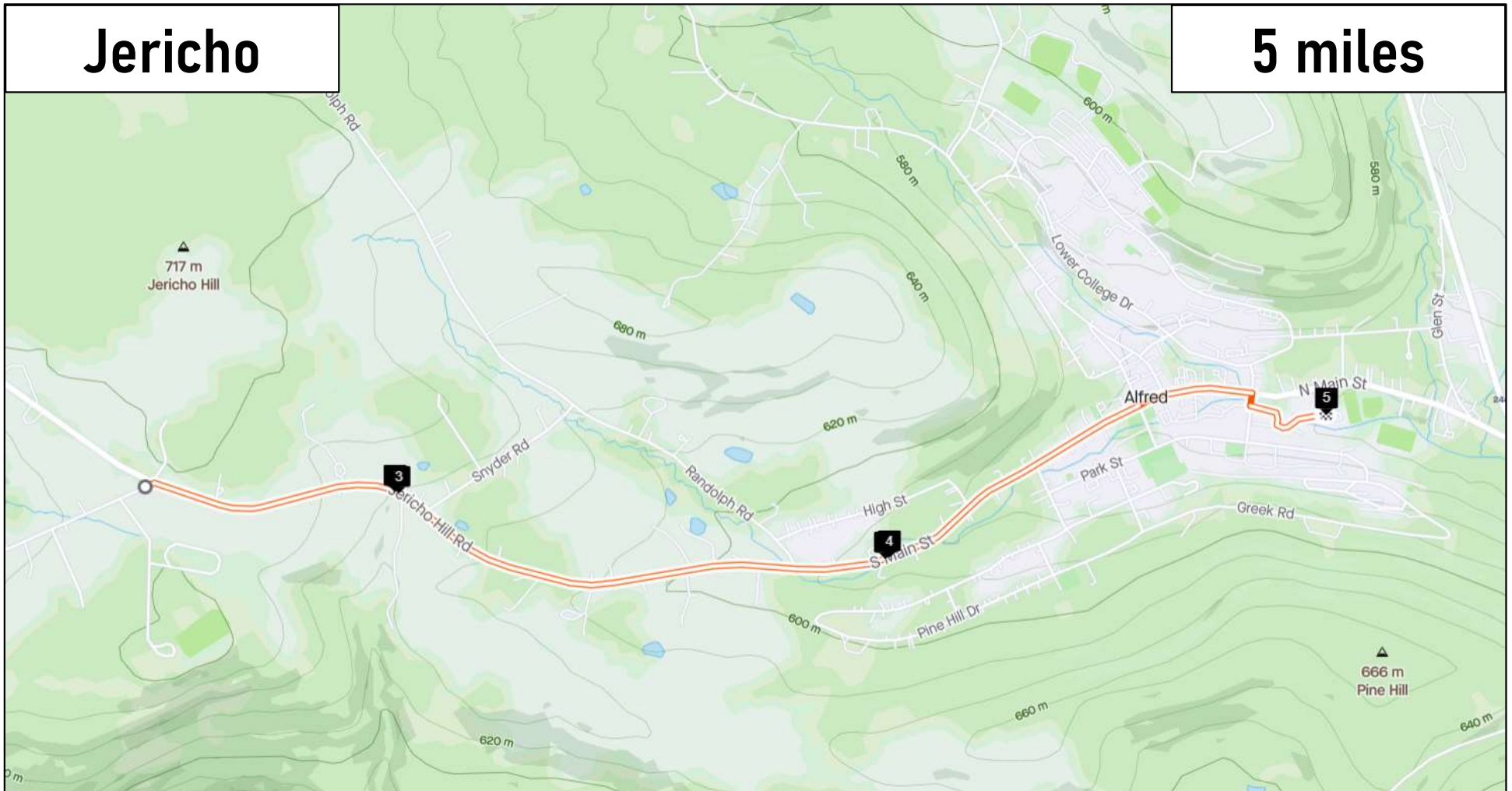
Triangle

4.75 miles



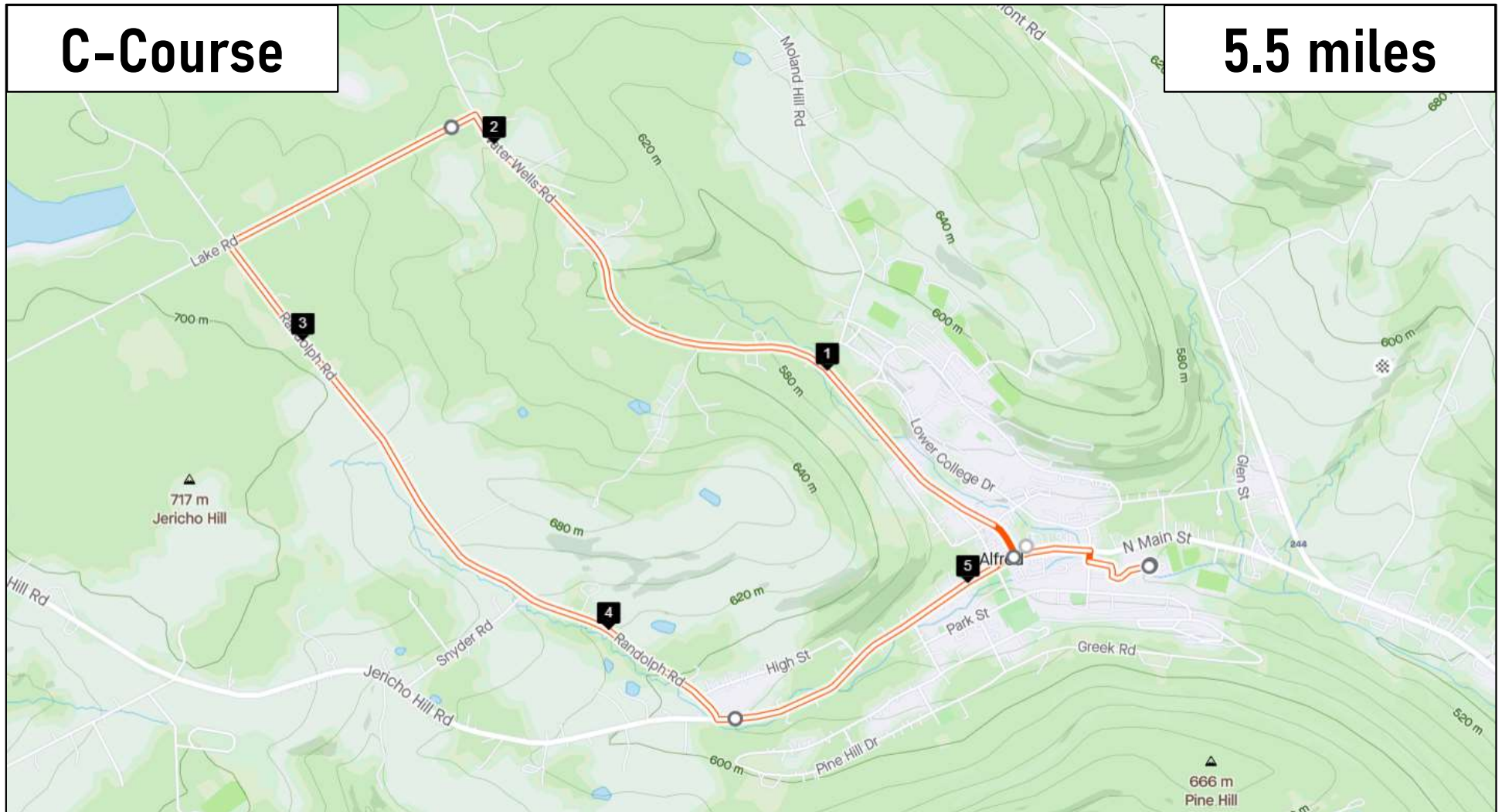
Jericho

5 miles



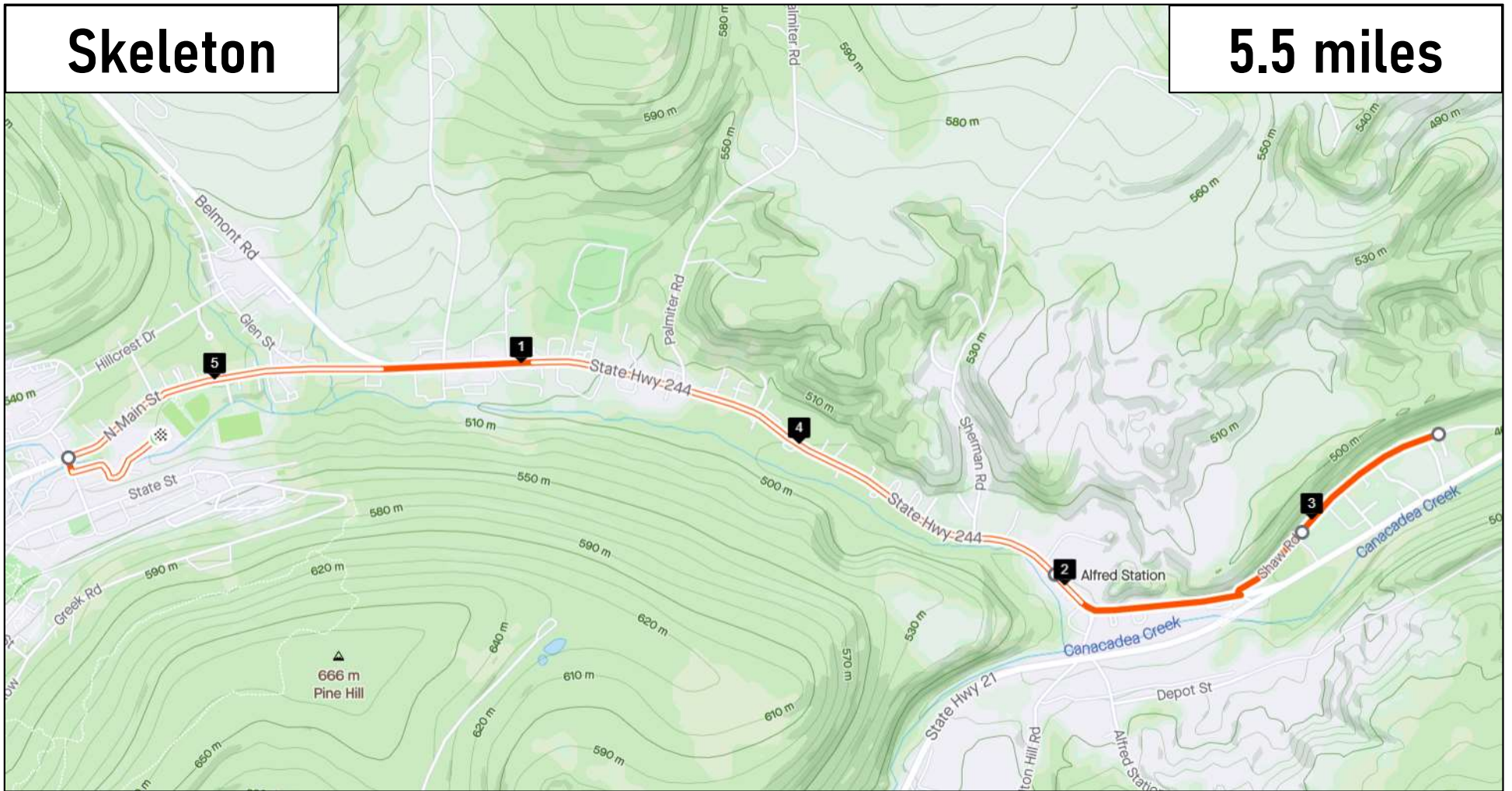
C-Course

5.5 miles



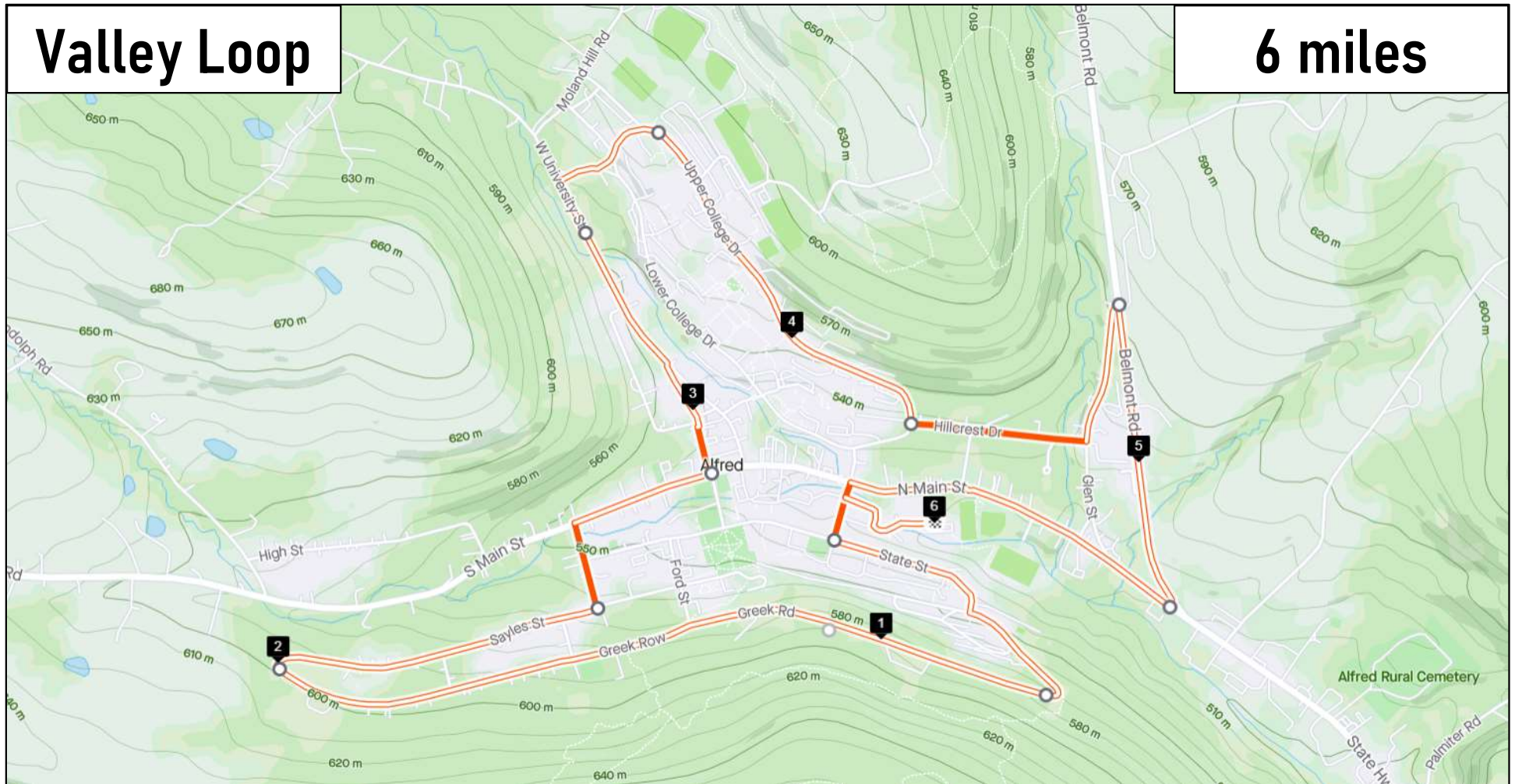
Skeleton

5.5 miles



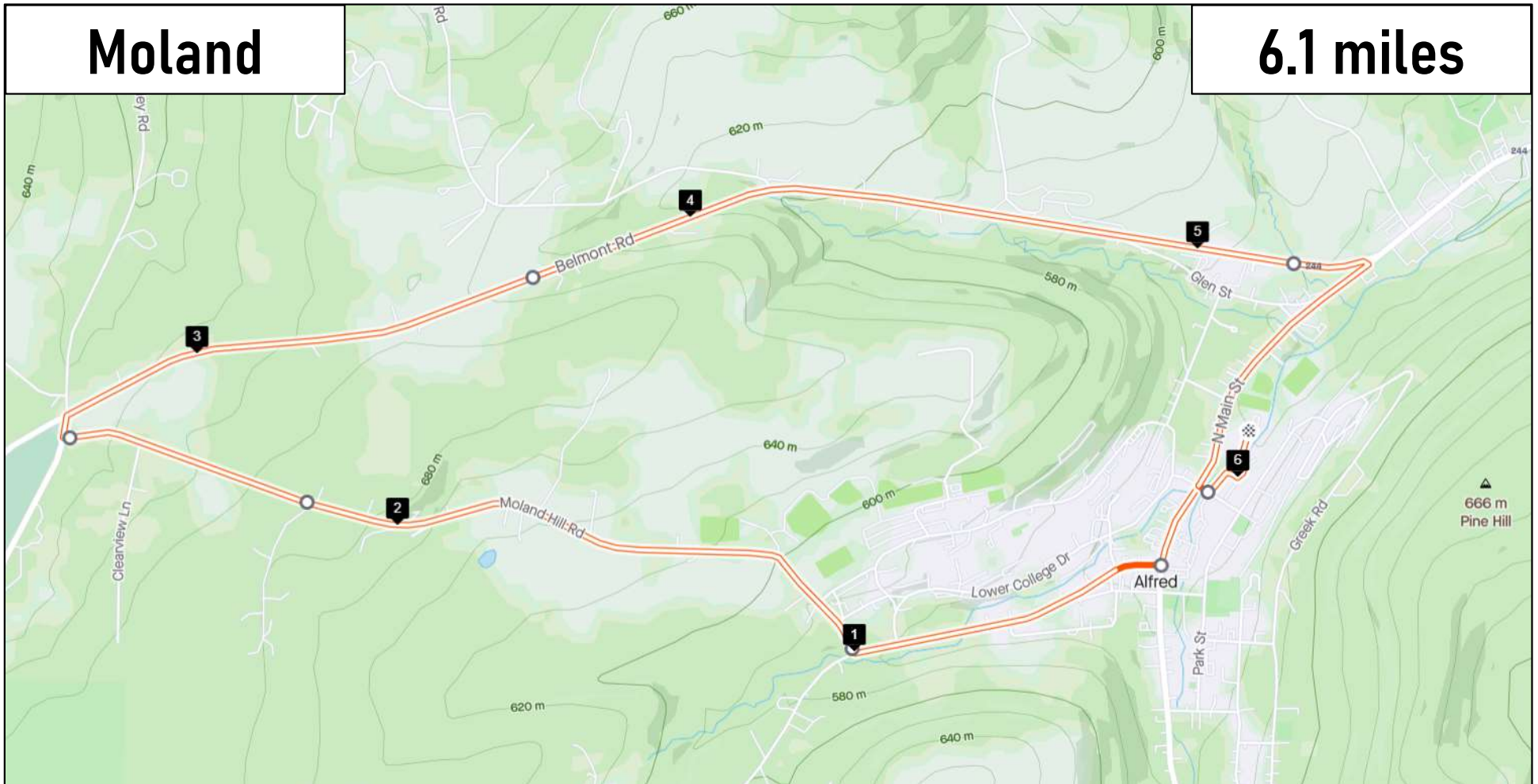
Valley Loop

6 miles



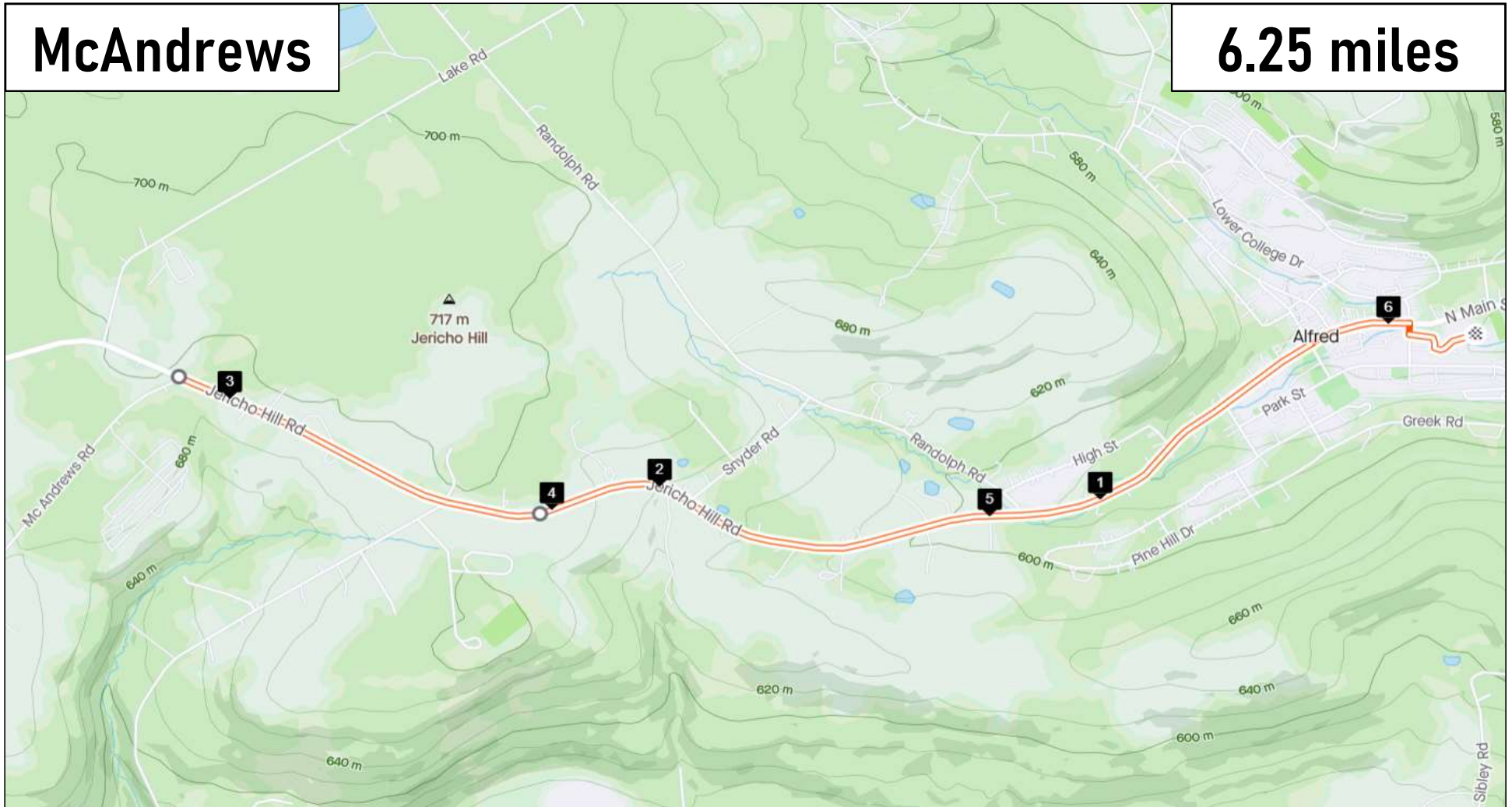
Moland

6.1 miles



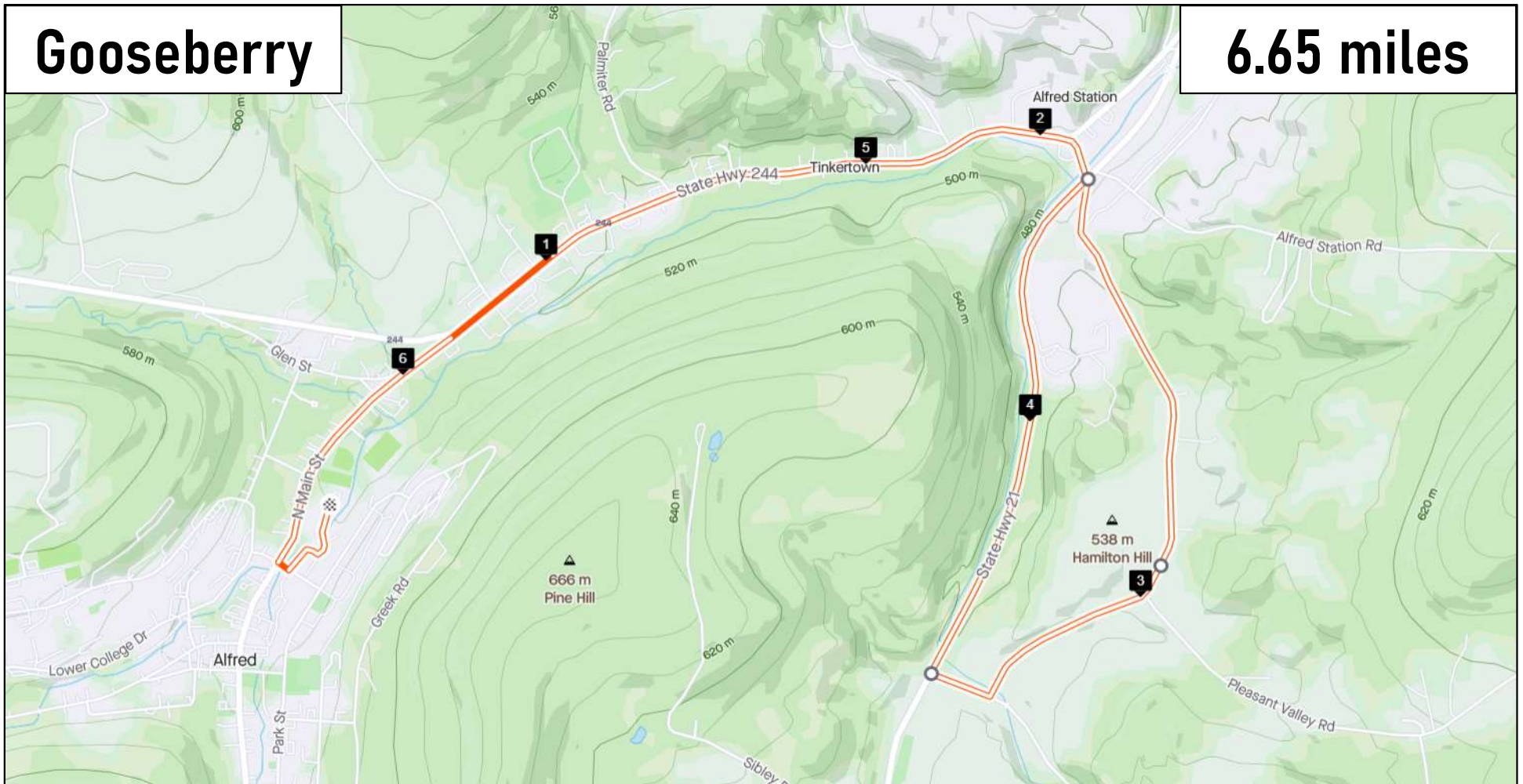
McAndrews

6.25 miles



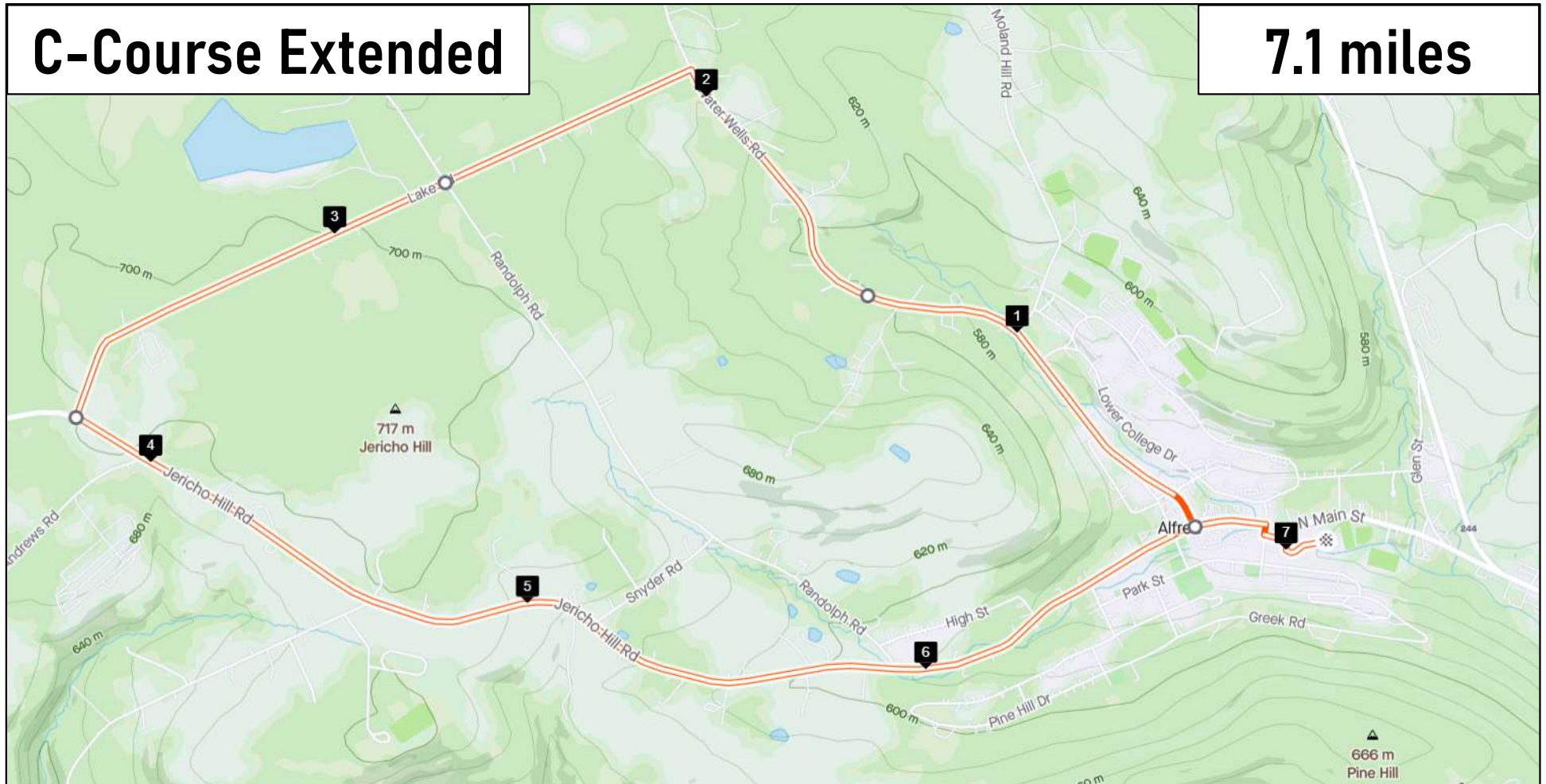
Gooseberry

6.65 miles



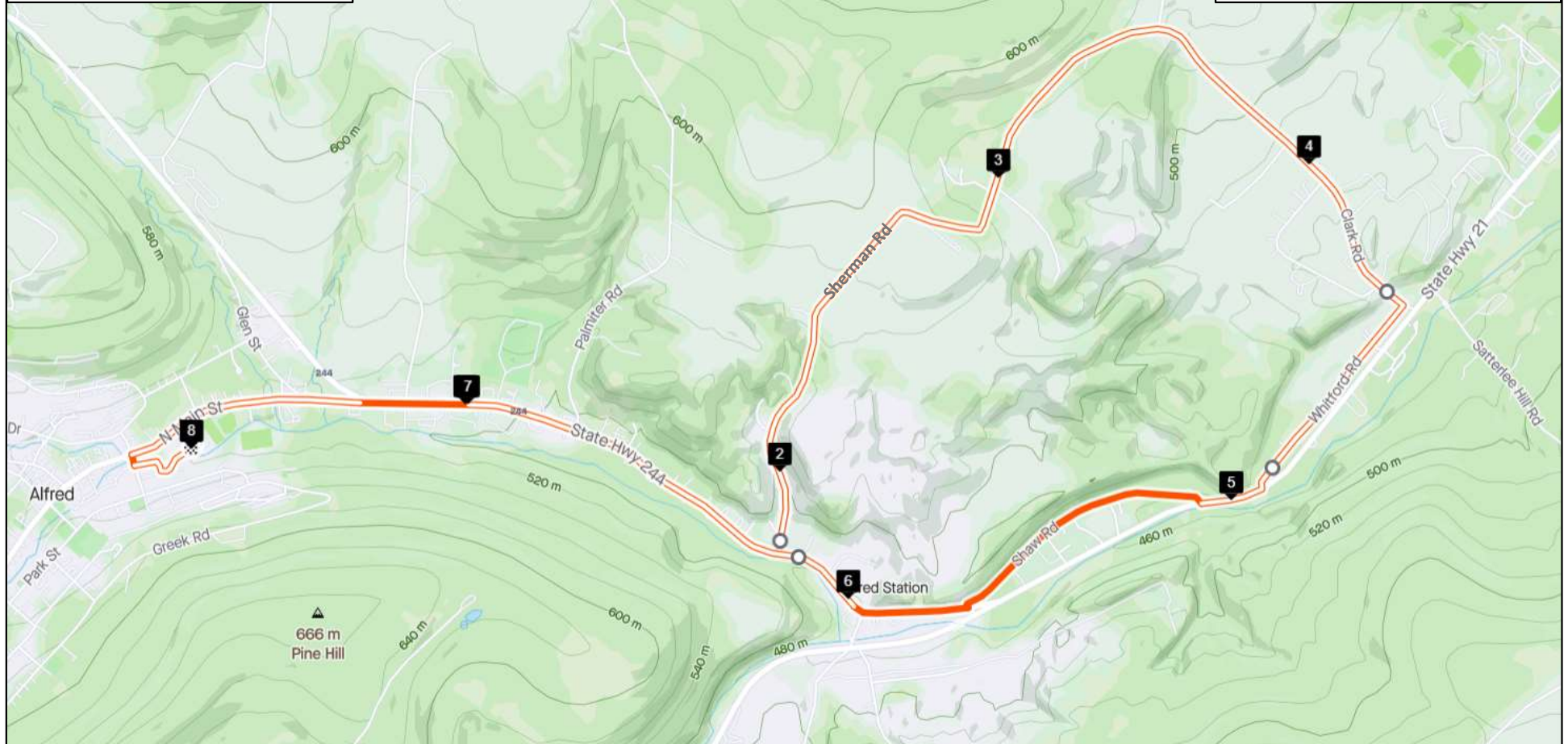
C-Course Extended

7.1 miles



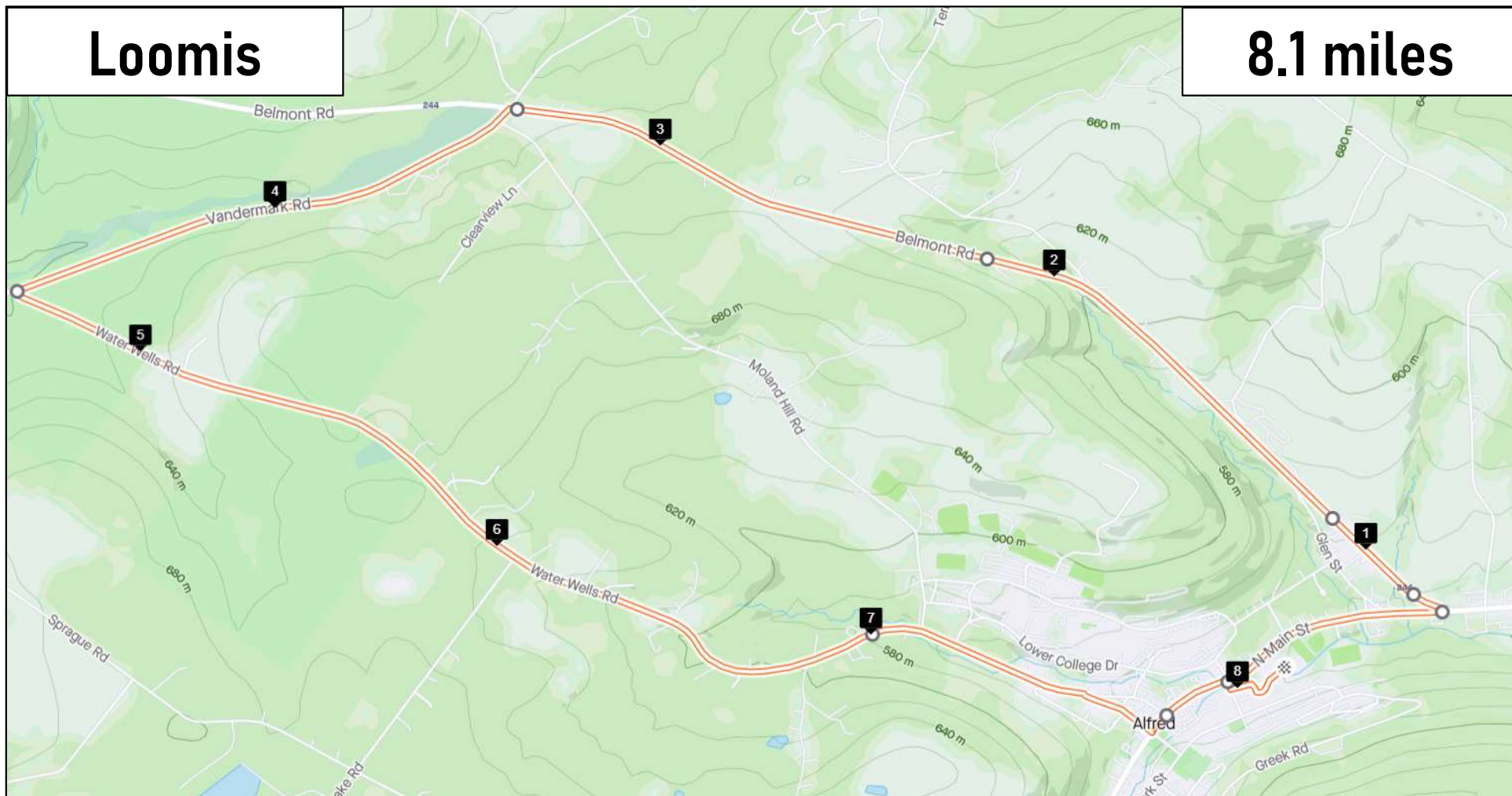
Kathy Grey

8 miles



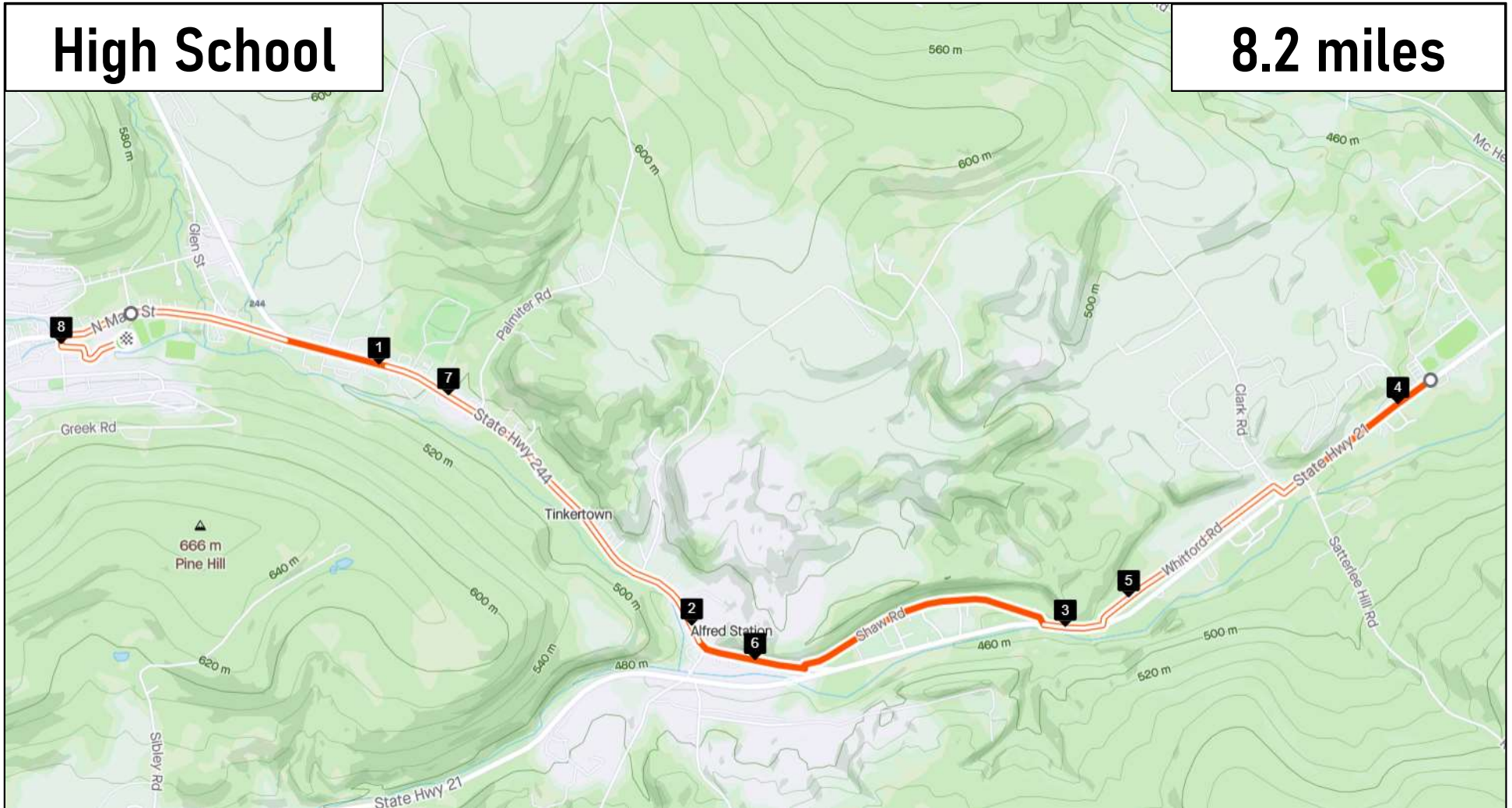
Loomis

8.1 miles



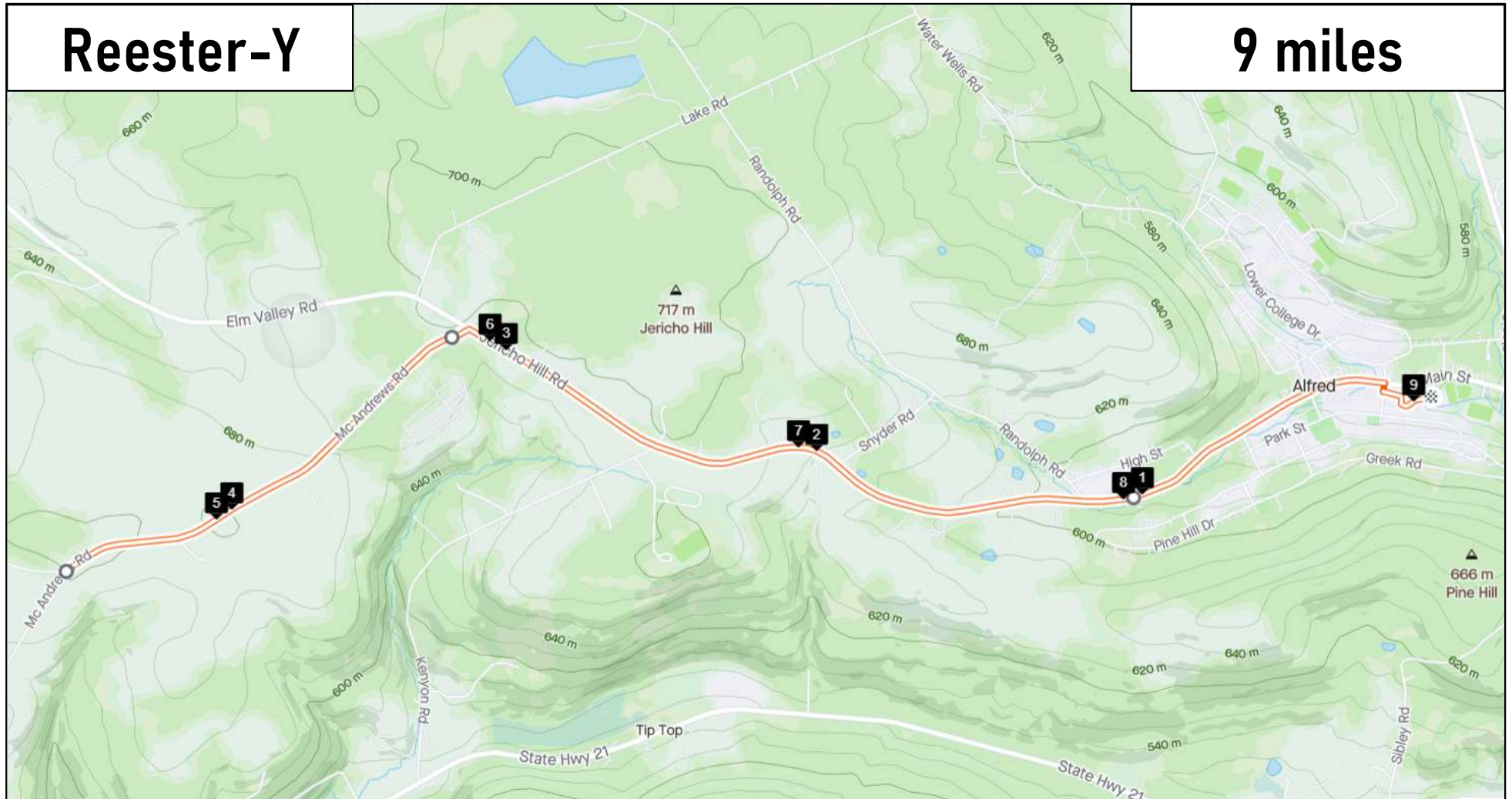
High School

8.2 miles



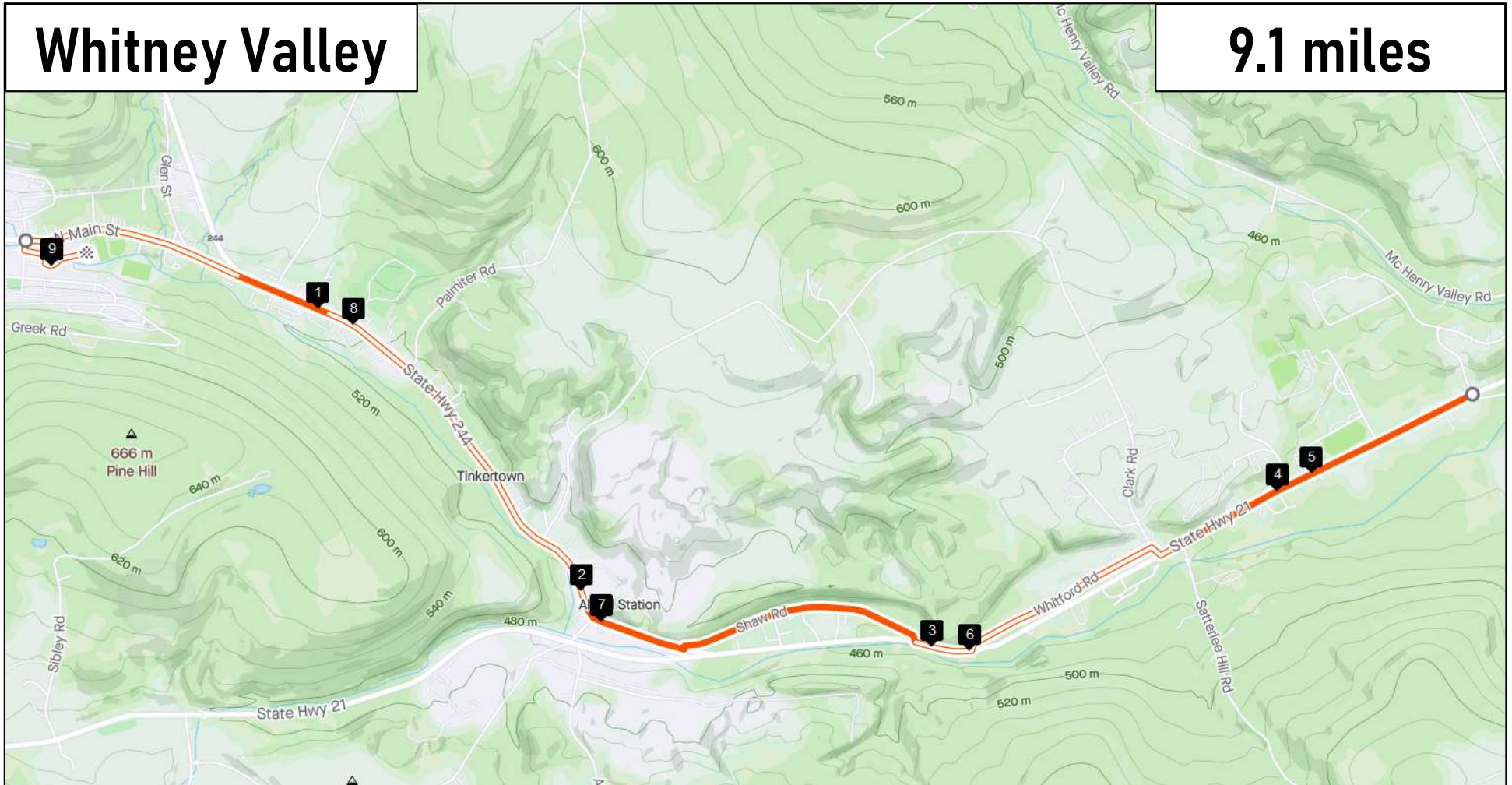
Reester-Y

9 miles



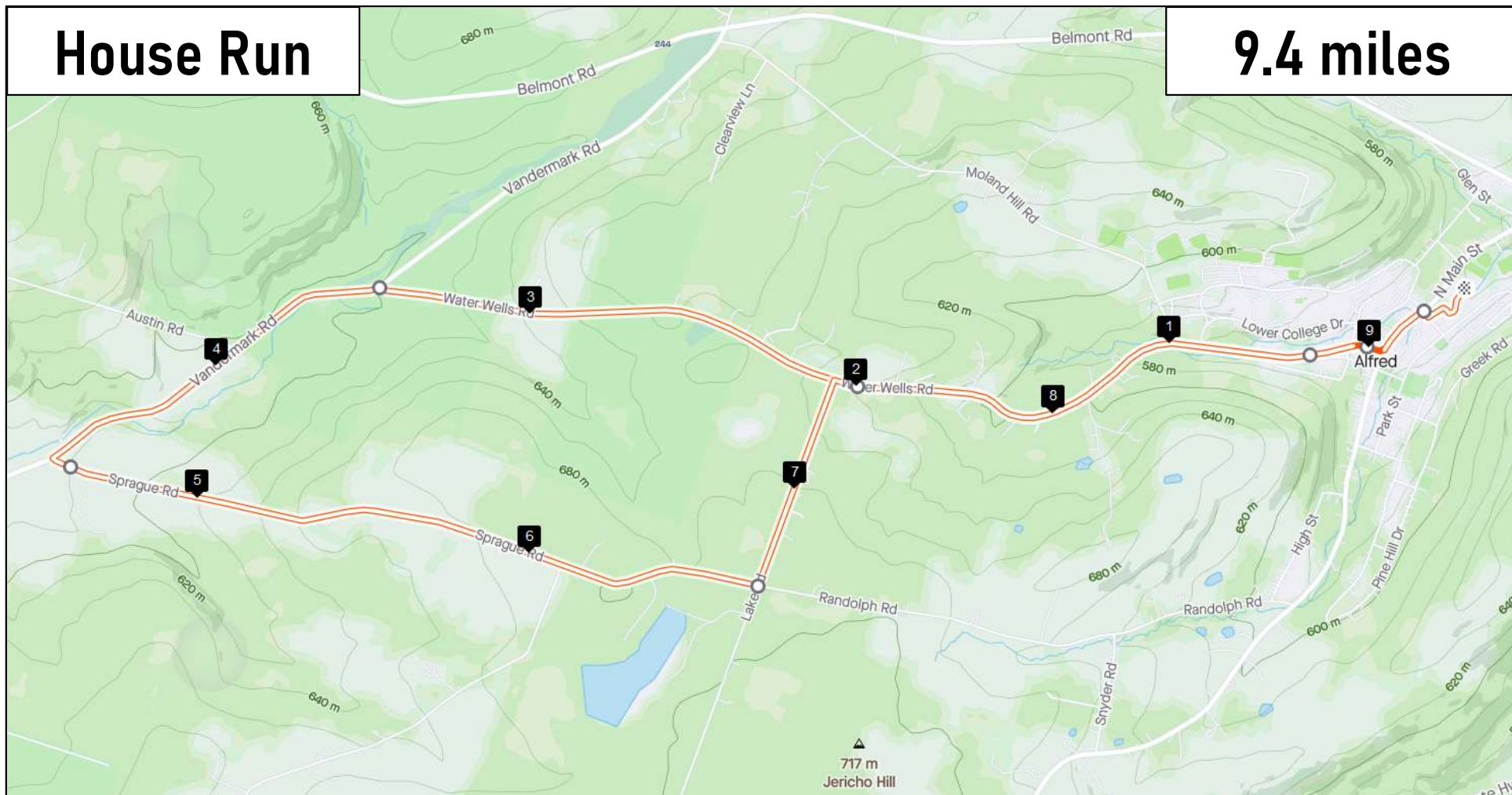
Whitney Valley

9.1 miles



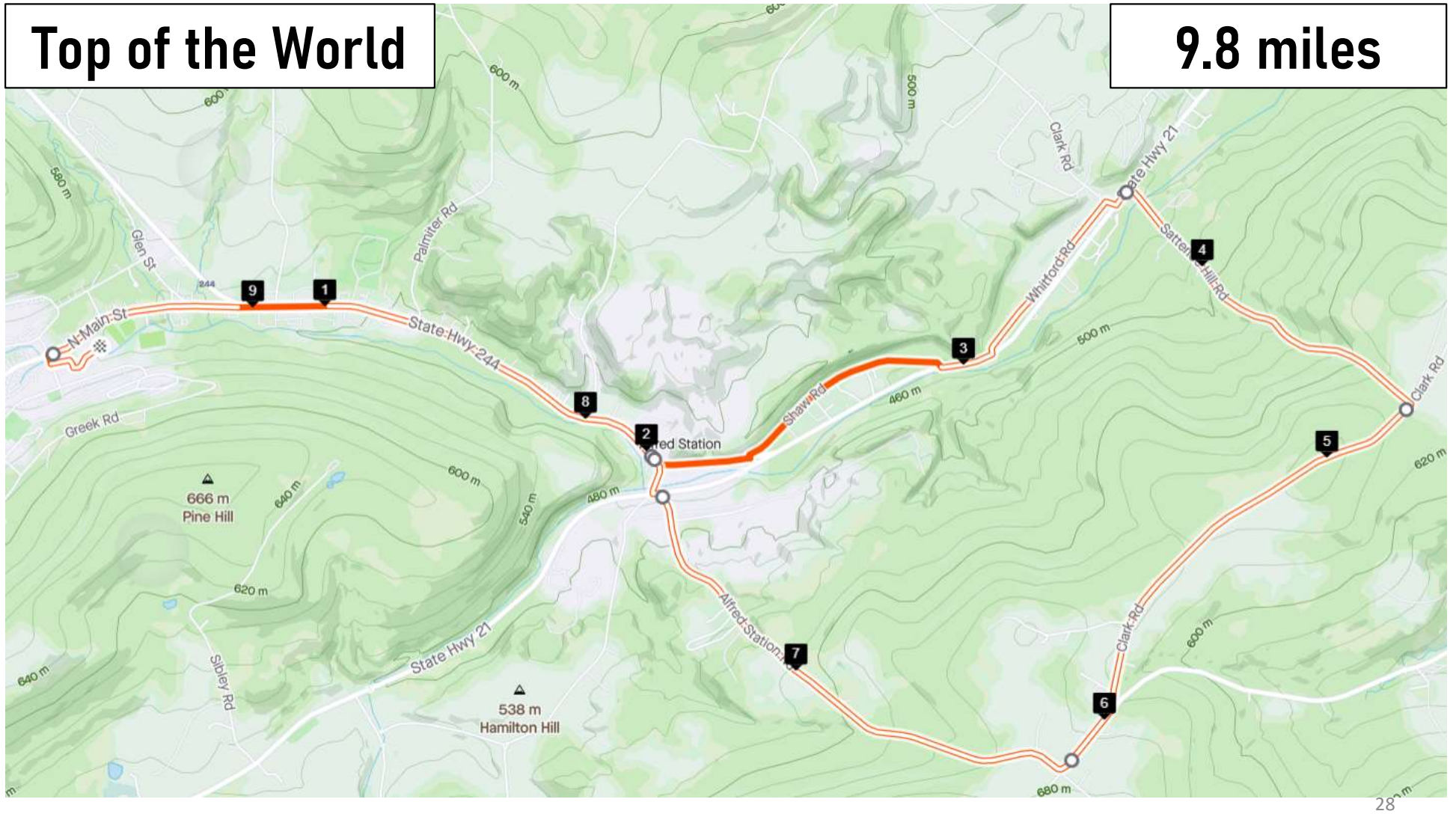
House Run

9.4 miles



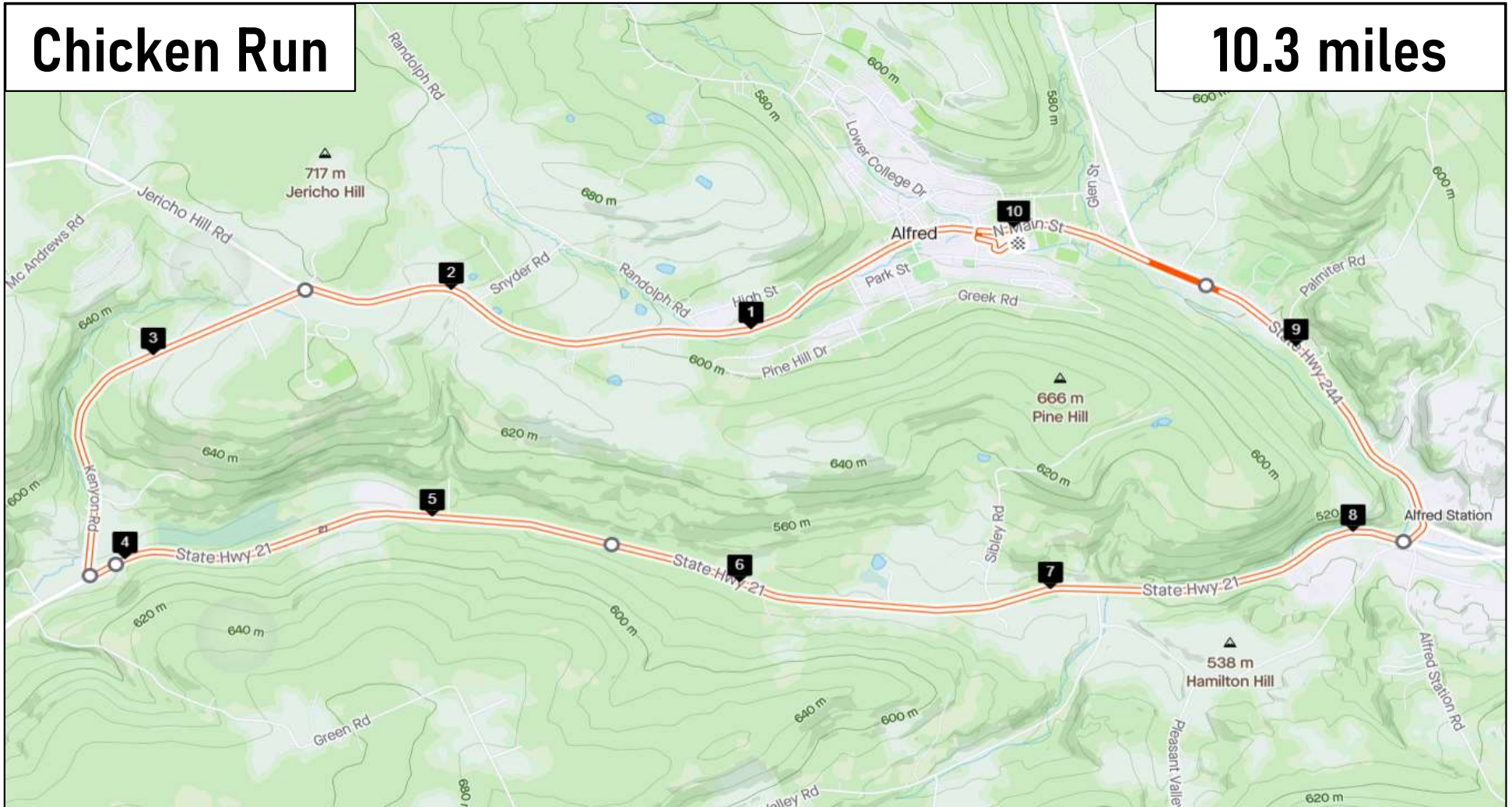
Top of the World

9.8 miles



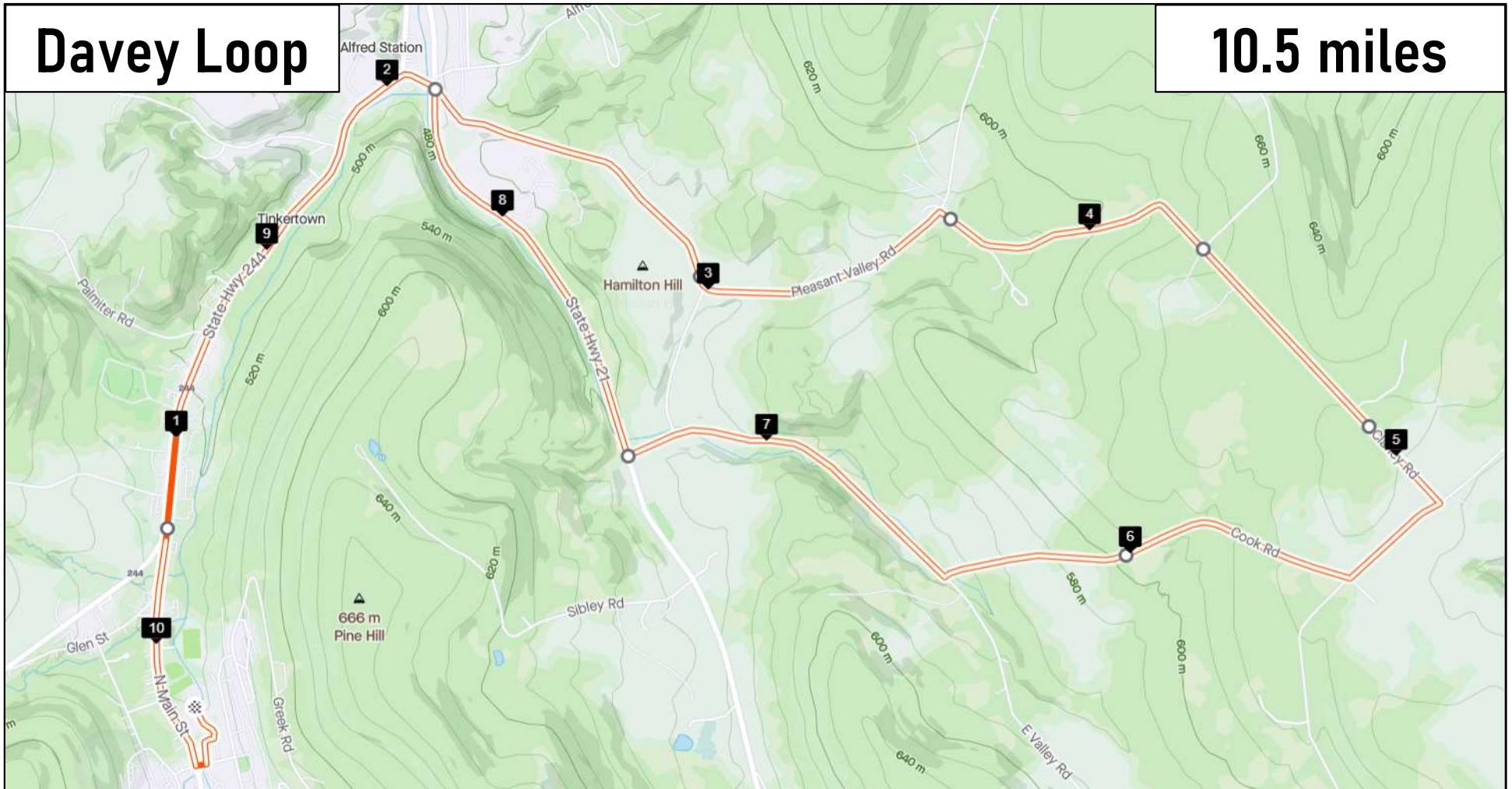
Chicken Run

10.3 miles



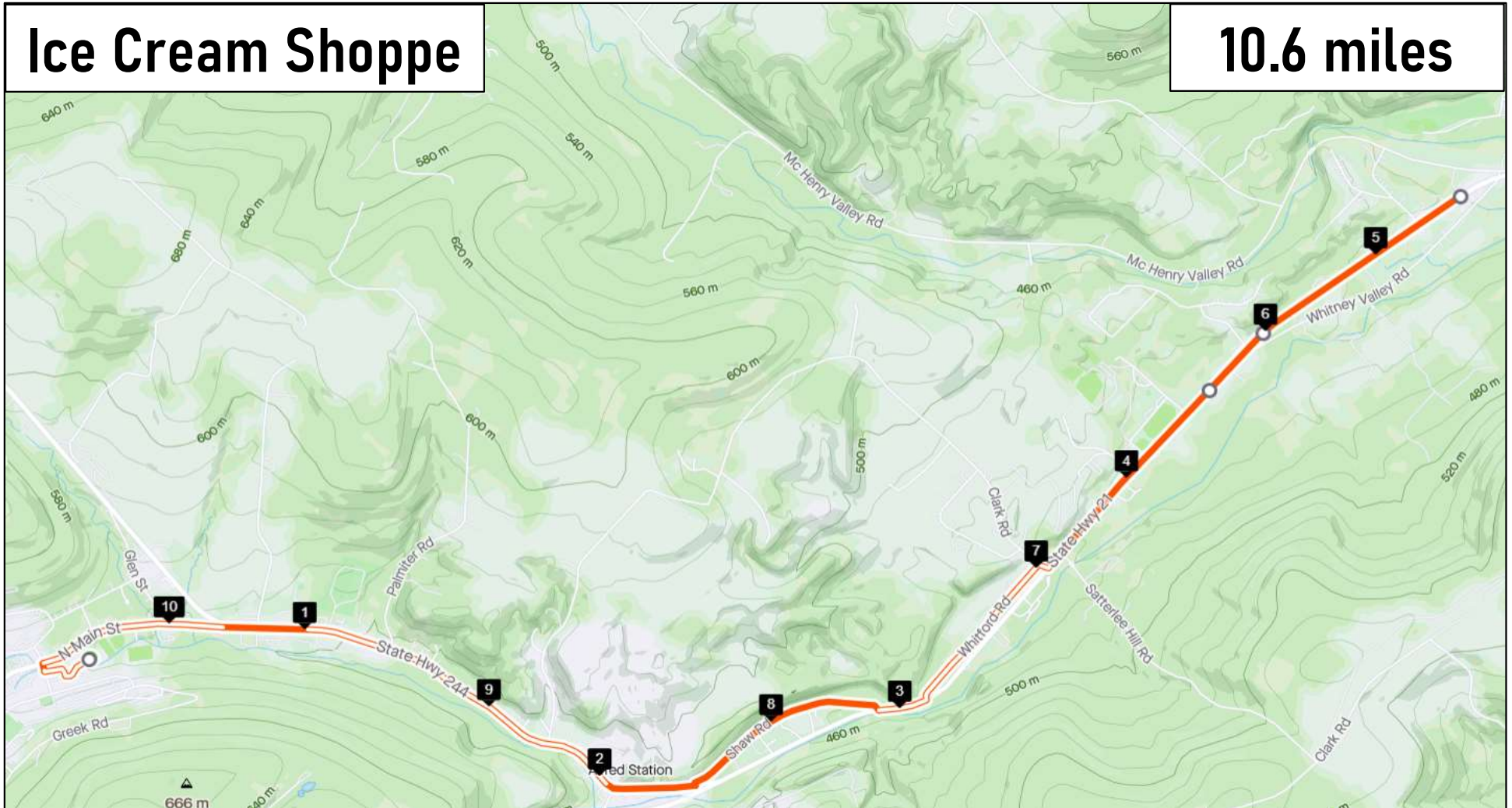
Davey Loop

10.5 miles



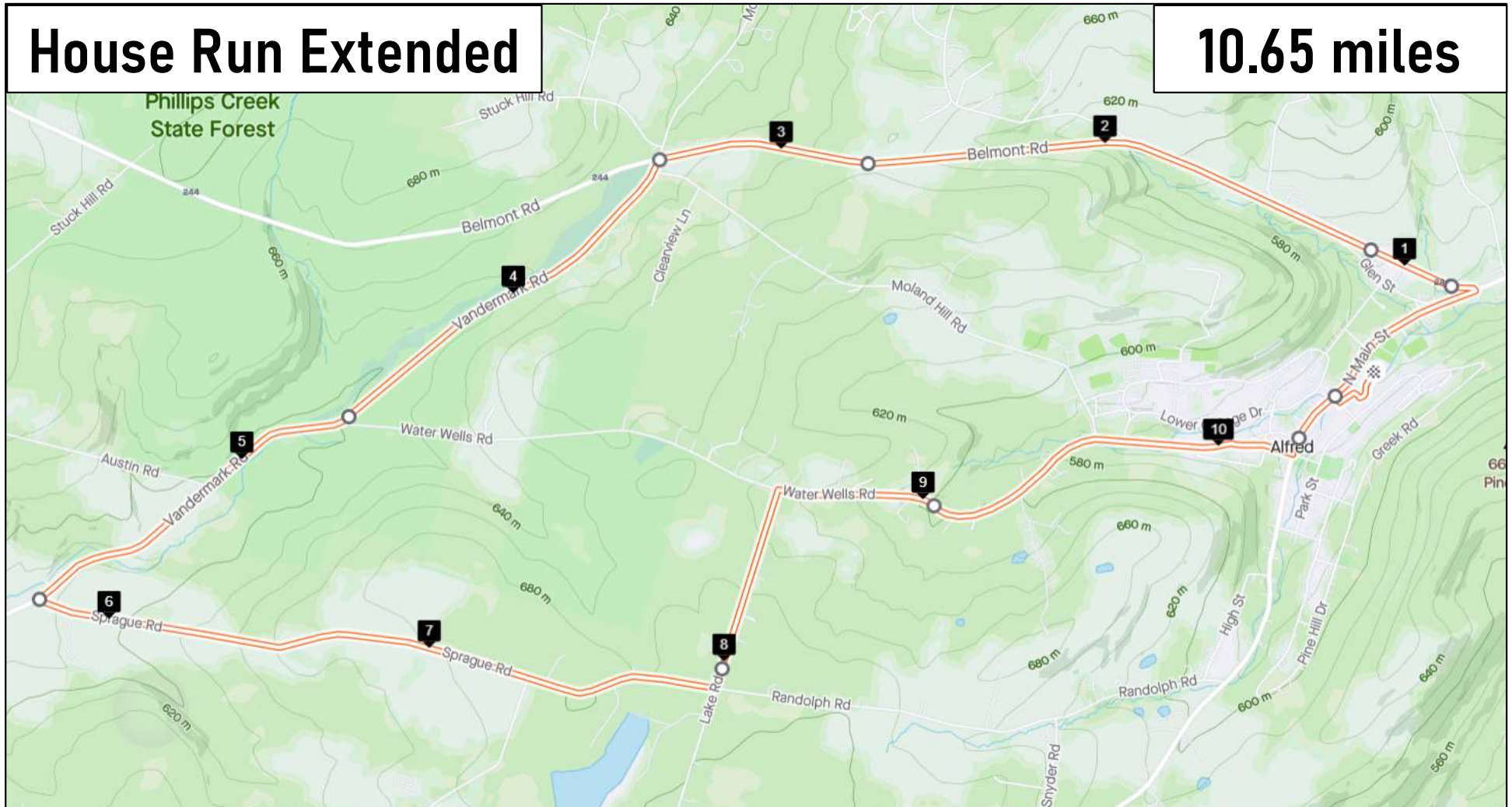
Ice Cream Shoppe

10.6 miles



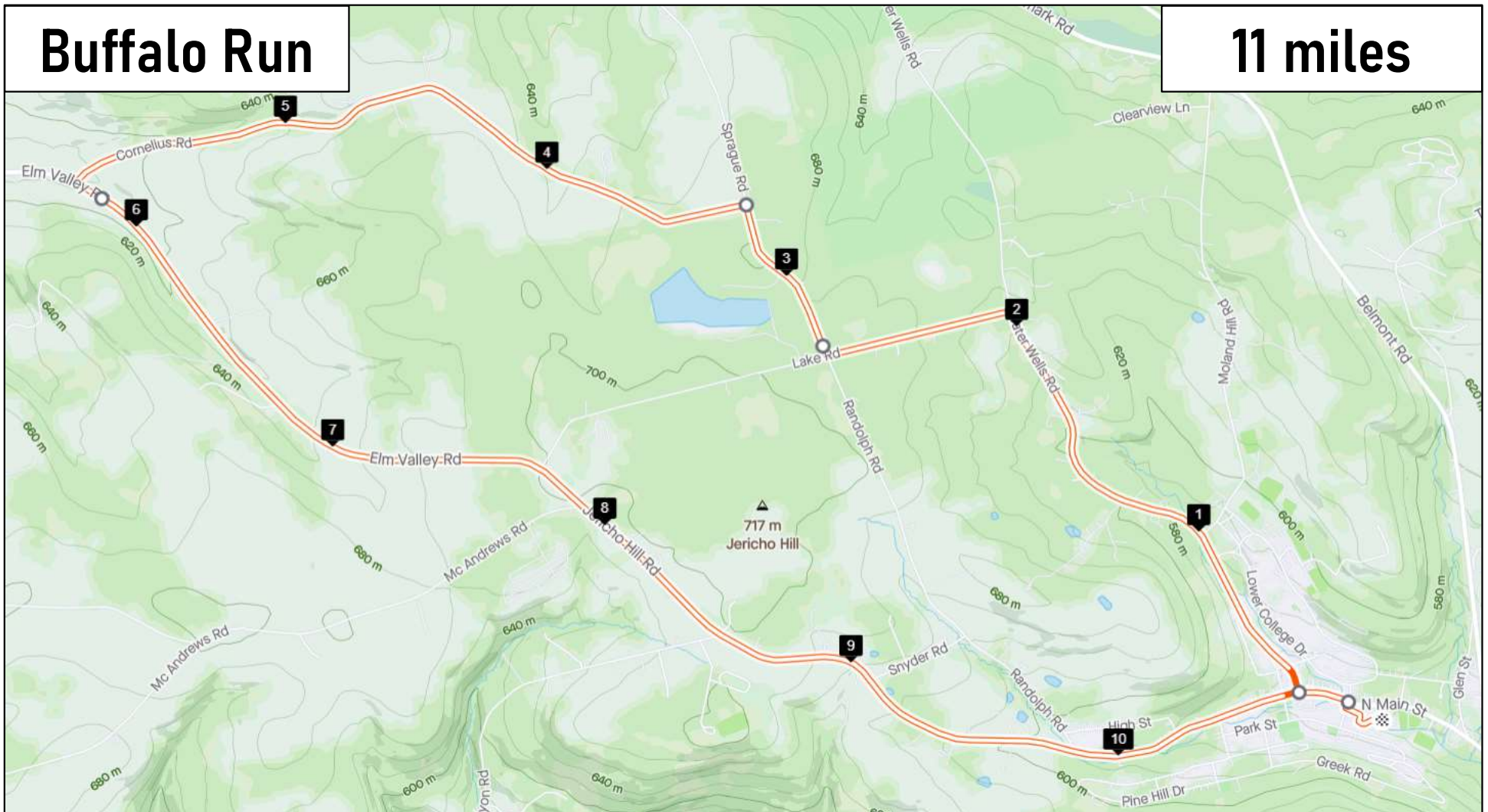
House Run Extended

10.65 miles



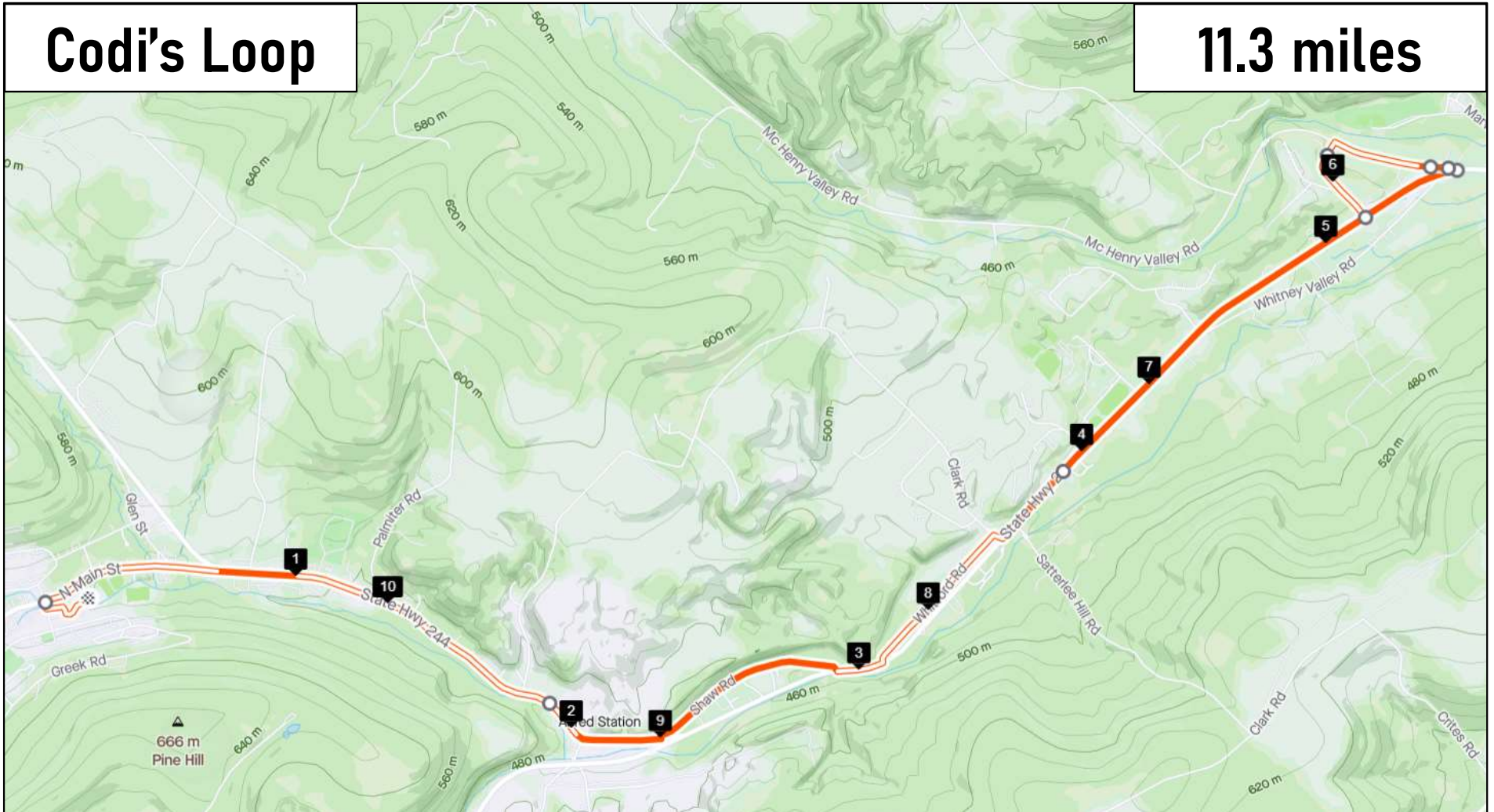
Buffalo Run

11 miles



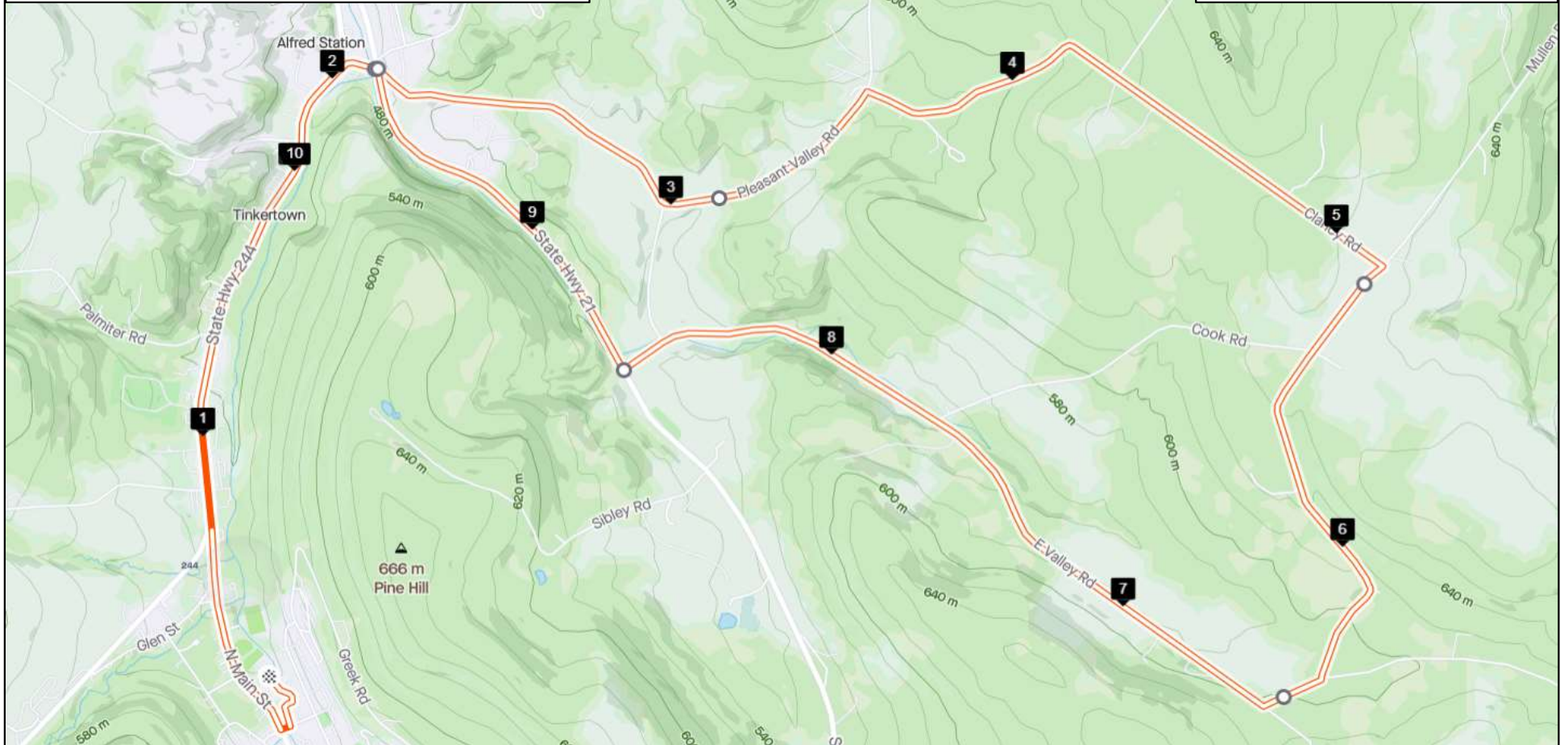
Codi's Loop

11.3 miles



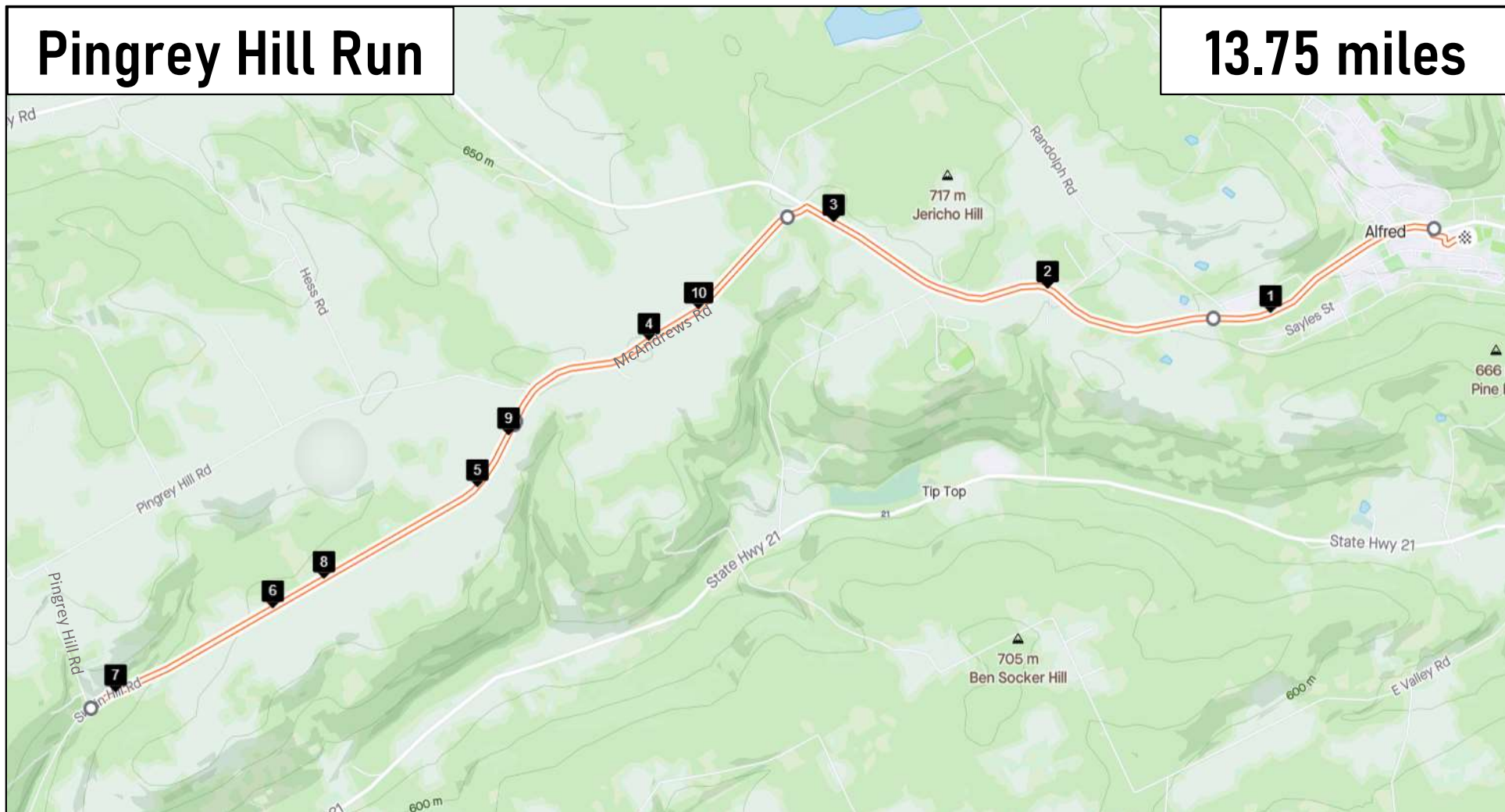
Davey Loop Extended

11.75 miles



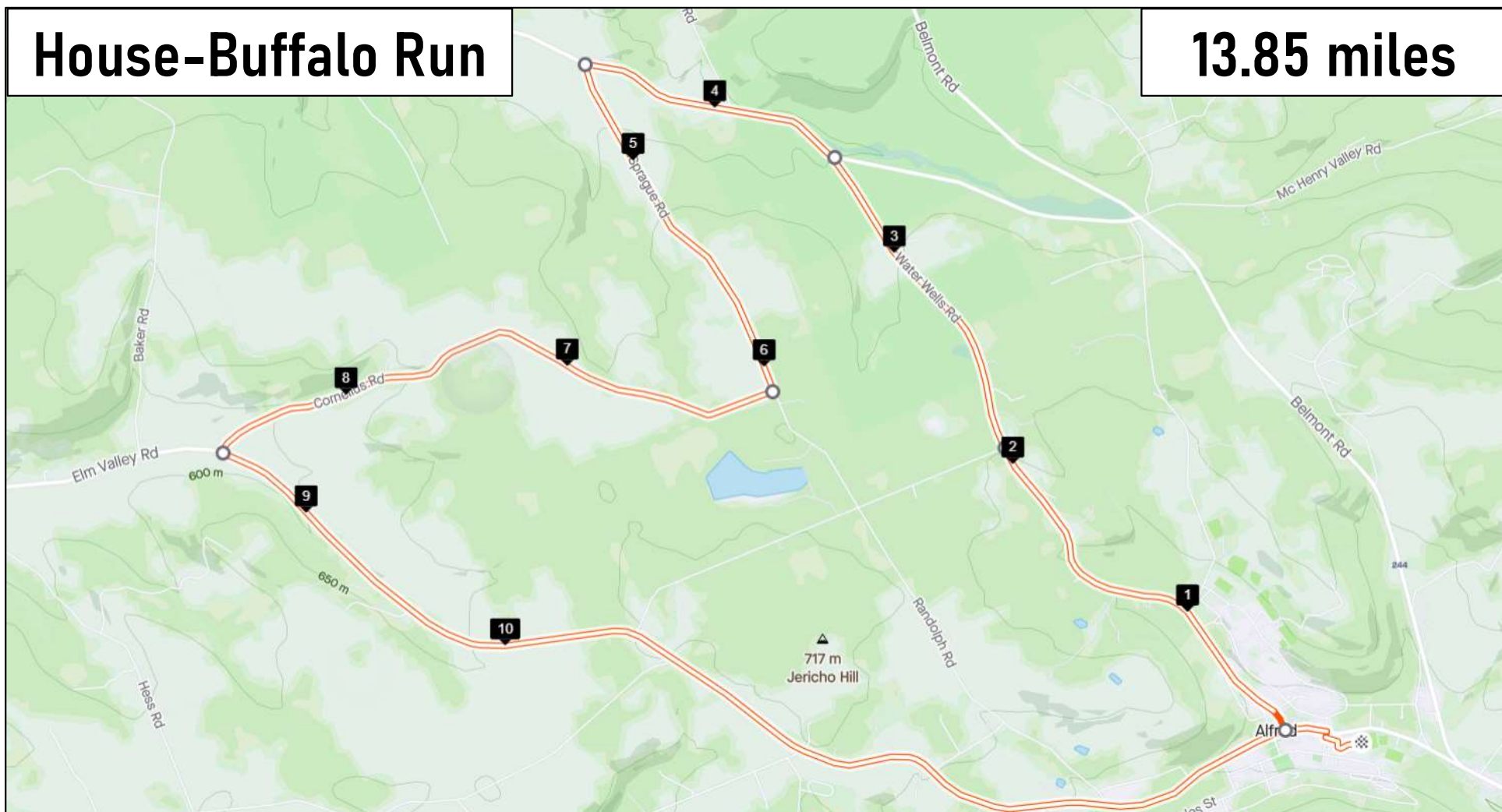
Pingrey Hill Run

13.75 miles



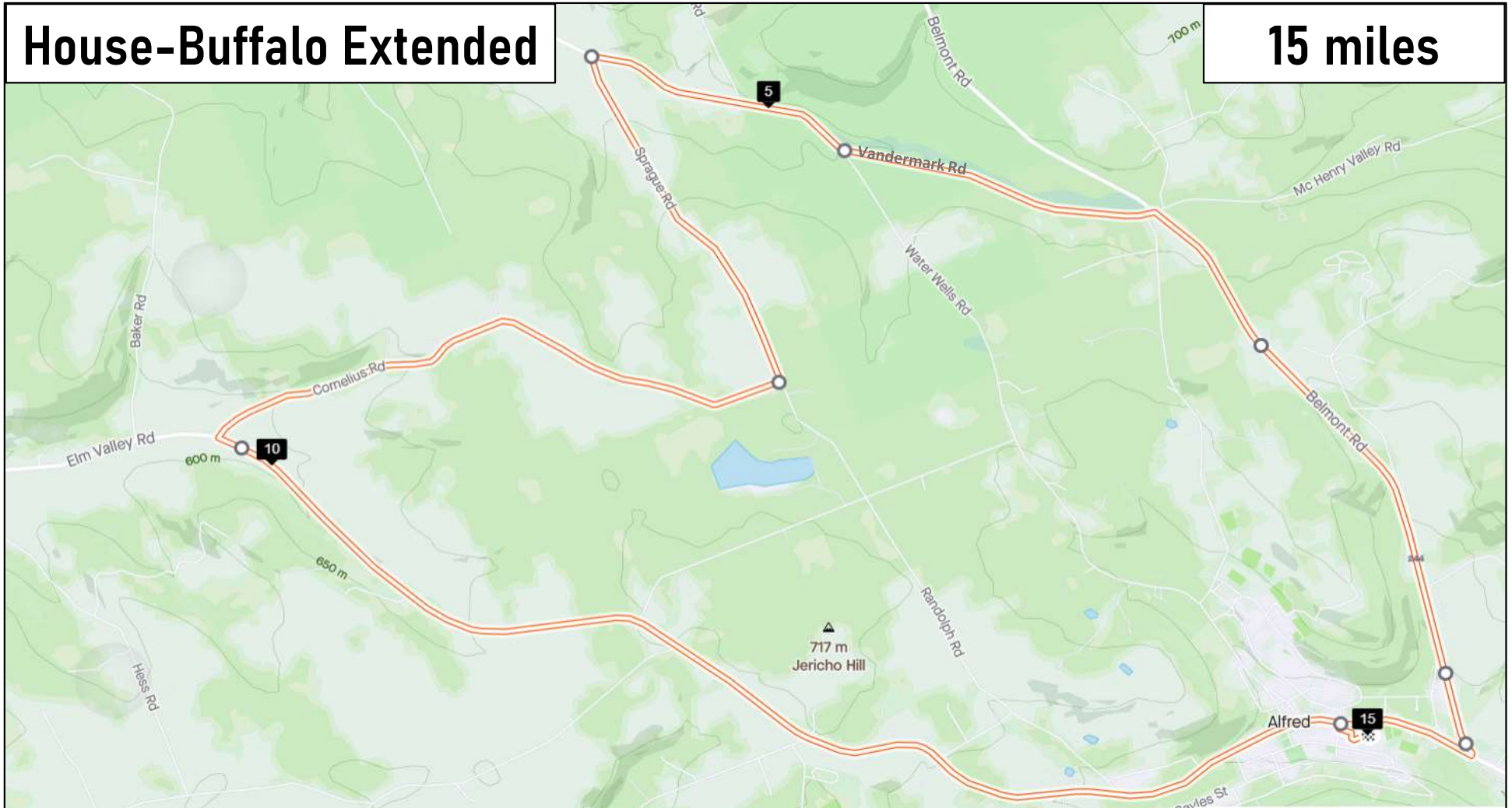
House-**Buffalo Run**

13.85 miles



House-Buffer Buffalo Extended

15 miles



McHenry Valley

15.74 miles

