

## 2014 Promise Land 50K: The BEST 50K in the Country

By Dr. David Horton

The Promise Land 50K (PL 50K) has it all: gravel roads, forest service roads, grassy roads, smooth single track-trails, rocky single-track trail, one-half mile of pavement, water crossings, pre-race camping, pre-race bonfire, great pre-race pizza and desserts, post-race picnic, camping at the start/finish, big climbs, big descents, uphill start, downhill finish, waterfall and stream, a FEW extra miles, beautiful flowers, GREAT views, Patagonia running shorts to finishers, lots of prizes given in a FAIR and RANDOM drawing, MORE young people running ultras than any race you will ever see, and GREAT aid stations. I'm biased . . . but it is the BEST 50K in the country.

The PL 50K is the third race in the Lynchburg Ultra Series/Beast Series and the hardest of the three spring ultra 50K's. This marked the 14<sup>th</sup> year of the race and the course has not changed one step. This is not something many races held this long can say.

The PL 50K attracts lots of young ultra runners from Liberty University and Virginia Tech. One of the requirements of my advanced running class at LU is to complete an ultra. I had 13 students running and all 13 completed the race. Ten other LU students ran the race as well. There was also around 15 Virginia Tech (HOKIES) running the race. Most of the aid stations were also manned by LU students. Promise Land definitely has a young flavor to it.

Holly Bugin (West Point, VA) won the first two races of the LUS (Holiday Lake and Terrapin Mountain 50Ks) earlier this year. There was no reason to suspect that she would not do likewise at PL. Kathleen Cusick (Alexandria, VA) was seeded second. Cusick won the Hellgate 100K in December 2013 and had placed second at the Bull Run 50 Miler only two weeks earlier. Local runner Alexis Thomas had finished second to Bugin at the HL 50K.

Rudy Rutemiller (Blacksburg, VA) was seeded first in the men's race. He was second at Terrapin Mt. 50K and second by 7 seconds to Eric Grossman at the 2013 Hellgate 100K. Guy Love (Blacksburg, VA) had been running very well and was seeded second. Jeremy Ramsey and Jake Reed (both from Lynchburg, VA) are also fast and familiar with the course.

Jake Reed was a previous winner of the PL 50K and wanted to show the young Hokies a thing or two and took it out VERY fast. His lead was increasing at each station. It was two minutes at AS 1, six minutes at AS 2, eight minutes at AS 3, stayed eight minutes to the next one, and increased up to 10 minutes by AS 5, (Colon Hollow - 16.3 miles). I had told runners that this is where the race really starts. On the return trip to Cornelius Creek, Reed's lead still stood at nine minutes. At this point, the INFAMOUS climb up Apple Orchard Falls Trail begins and you climb back up to the Parkway. By the top at Sunset Fields, Rutemiller had closed to within four minutes with five miles to go with most of it DOWNHILL. Darren Thomas (Colorado Springs, CO - a former Hokie) had started the climb with Rutemiller but fell back slightly.

Reed put his head down and pressed on to the finish with Rutemiller charging but UNABLE to close all the gap completely. Reed ran the last mile in 5:14 with Rutemiller running the last mile in 5:04, taking the victory in 4:39:27, a PR for him on this course and the 7<sup>th</sup> fastest time ever on the course. Rutemiller finished 31 seconds later for 2<sup>nd</sup> place in 4:39:58. Thomas took 3<sup>rd</sup> in 4:44:56.

Arriving at AS 2 (Reed Creek - 8.6 miles) first for the ladies was Aline Maddux (Denver, CO) and Elaine Griesbach (Mt. Airy, MD) in 1:48. One minute behind them was Bugin and Beth Frye (Boone, NC). By AS 5 (Colon Hollow -16.3) Bugin had a two- minute lead over Griesbach and Frye. By the next aid station (Cornelius Creek - 23.9 miles), Bugin had pulled away to an eight-minute lead over Frye and Griesbach. From there, Bugin continued to pull away finishing in 5:47:45 to take the victory with the 10<sup>th</sup> fastest time ever on the PL course.

The BIG surprise to me and most everyone else was who took second for the ladies. One of the LU students in my running class who was running PL for her first ultra was Mikala Reiman from Caledonia, NY. At the bottom of the BIG climb up Apple Orchard Falls Trail, Reiman was four minutes behind Frye and Griesbach. By the Parkway, Reiman had passed these two ladies and had a two-minute lead over Frye. Reiman took 2<sup>nd</sup> place in her first ultra in 6:02:38. Frye was 3<sup>rd</sup> in 6:03:14. She was also the Masters winner for the ladies. Alexis Thomas came on strong at the end taking 4<sup>th</sup> place in 6:05:59.

Mario Raymond (Bowie, MD took the men's Master's victory in 5:21:40. The Grand Masters winners were David Peterman (Stow, OH) and Tammy Godin (North Grafton, MA) in 5:32:52 and 6:50:31 respectively. The Super Masters titles went to Doug Blackford (Todd, NC) and Dru Sexton (Roanoke, VA) in 6:43:05 and 7:09:35 respectively. There were 16 men over 60 years of age that finished the race and only one lady . . . what's up with that? The oldest finisher was Gary Knipling (Mason Neck, VA) who two weeks earlier had completed the Bull Run 50 Miler.

Keith Knipling, Kevin Townsend, and Dorothy Hunter all received their 10 -year embroidered golf shirt for a decade of running PL. Gene Potter finished PL for the 14<sup>th</sup> time in 14 years.

We owe much to Bob and Kari Anderson of Woodbridge, VA. Thanks to their VERY generous donation, the bathhouse and pavilion at the Promise Land Youth Camp were re-modeled. The owner of the camp, Temple Baptist Church, made a Start/Finish line for the PL 50K with plaques honoring the Andersons. Thanks guys.

As I said at the start, the PL 50K is the BEST 50K in the nation. Who thinks they know of one better???