

## 2015 Holiday Lake 50K-----The Most Dangerous Race in the Beast Series—20<sup>th</sup> Annual

By David Horton

There are six races in the Beast Series. The easiest one is the Holiday Lake 50K (HL). It has just over 2,100 feet of elevation gain with a variety of surfaces (single track trail, forest service roads, and 1.4 miles of pavement). It is a double loop course, run clockwise the first loop and counterclockwise the second loop. Runners get to see everyone ahead and behind them as they run the second loop.

The start and finish of the race is at the Holiday Lake 4H Educational Center. The Center cooks a GREAT pre-race pasta meal on Friday night. There are heated lodges for runners to stay in as well. You can come and park your car, eat, sleep, run the race, receive your well0-earned award, take a shower, and never leave the Center.

Because of the easy access for everything, a lot of runners use this as their first ultra. Typically, we have a lot of Liberty University and Virginia Tech runners competing. This also marks the first race in the Lynchburg Ultra Series (LUS) and the Beast Series.

We had a few new things at HL this year. For the first time in many years, we had online registration. Also, we had Poke-E-Joe's preparing the post-race meal. With it being the 20<sup>th</sup> year, I thought more runners would enter. Normally, we register about 360 to 380 runners. This year, we had 262 runners enter the race. Why was there a decrease? I don't know for sure, but I think a part of the reason is because there are SO many ultra races to choose from.

All sub 8-hour finishers received a long-sleeved Patagonia shirt. The top 10 men and women and age group winners, received an embroidered Patagonia backpack. For the first time ever, the overall male and female winners also received a beautiful trophy made by Bob Heltibridle's company. The top LU and VT male and female runners also received an embroidered blanket. Rebekah Trittipoe, Grattan Garbee, Marc Griffin, and Lesley McPhatter were presented with their embroidered Nike dry fit golf shirt for completing the HL 50K ten times. Amy Albu, was presented with the same shirt for her 15<sup>th</sup> completion of HL. Each entrant was awarded a BEAUTIFUL PINK shirt designed by Helen MacDermott.

In the heading for this report, I said that HL was the most dangerous event in the Beast Series. In 2013, Andrew Charron was sent to the hospital for a severe cut below his knee that required MANY stitches to close. In 2014, Amy Albu was sent to the hospital with a broken leg. In 2015, Elena Bragg, was sent to the hospital for a SEVERE cut that required 19 stitches to close. Elena did this at mile 2 in the race. Our medical director for the race, Dr. George Wortley, treated all three of these injuries as best he could on site. We have sent runners to the hospital in the other Beast races but not like these we have had here for the last three years. Who will be sent to the hospital next year at the 2016 HL 50K??? These folks EARNED the Best Blood Award. One good report came out of the 2015 race. Albu returned to HL after her broken leg last year and finished as the 14<sup>th</sup> female of 71 female finishers. Now, I want to see Elena come back in 2016 and run well too.

Shaun Pope (Black Mountain, NC) was seeded 1<sup>st</sup> and Michael Jones (VT student) was seeded 2<sup>nd</sup>. Brandon Taylor (LU student) was seeded 3<sup>rd</sup>. I really thought that these men would take the top three spots and they did. In the ladies division, Bethany Patterson (Richmond, VA) and Martha Nelson

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(Washington, DC) were seeded 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> respectively. In 2013, Bethany passed Martha in the last mile and beat her by just a few seconds.

As expected, Pope and Jones took the lead with Jones leading and Pope just a few seconds behind through the first several aid stations. They completed the first loop in 1:50 with Nicholas DiPirro (Charlottesville, VA) just 2 minutes back in 3<sup>rd</sup> place. Taylor came through the turnaround in 6<sup>th</sup> place, 8 minutes behind the leaders. Taylor is a student in my running class and he had said he was going to take it easy the first lap and then pick it up on the second lap. He did just that. At the first AS in the second loop, Pope had pulled away to a 3-minute lead over Jones and DiPirro. Taylor had closed the gap to 5 minutes on Pope. At the next AS, Taylor had closed the gap to 2 minutes behind Pope with Jones dropping to 4 minutes behind the leader, Pope. Because of an injury, DiPirro dropped out at this point. Taylor closed to within two minutes of Pope, but Pope responded by picking up the pace and taking 1<sup>st</sup> place with a time of 3:43:52. Taylor took 2<sup>nd</sup> place in 3:47:27. Jones took 3<sup>rd</sup> in 3:51:46. VT runners took 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> places. What are they feeding them in Blacksburg???

As expected in the women's field, Patterson and Nelson took the lead from the start. In the first loop, they were never separated by more than a few seconds because of stops at the AS or stopping to use the restroom. They completed the first lap in 2:10, on record pace (course record of 4:22:04 by Holly Bugin). They stayed together through the last AS. With about a mile to go, Nelson had to face her nemesis, nausea, and threw up several times. She later told me that she did not eat or drink ANYTHING during the last lap. With about a mile to go, Patterson picked up the pace and Nelson failed to respond.

Patterson crossed the finish line in a new course record of 4:22:41, beating the course record by 23 seconds, running the last mile in 6:50. Martha just missed the old record taking second place in 4:23:26. Patterson won HL 50K in 2002 in 4:42, 13 years and 3 kids later running almost 20 minutes faster. Nelson threw up in 2013 and 2015 and still was just beat by a few seconds. If she ever gets that under control, Patterson and others better look out.

Daniel Spearin (Crozet, VA) and Michelle McLellan (Elizabethtown, TN) took the master's titles in 4:15:42 and 4:57:39. Grand master's winners were Matt Prescott (Roanoke, VA) Sophie Speidel (Charlottesville, VA) in 4:41:12 and 5:07:36 respectively. Jerry Jared (St. George, VA) and Dru Sexton (Roanoke, VA) took the super master's titles in 5:46:11 and 5:57:03 respectively.

In 1991, I chased Scott Grierson (trail name Maniac) on the Appalachian Trail. We both had a goal of sub 56 days with the record at that time being 60.5 days. I finished in 52 days and 9 hours, Maniac finished in 55 days and 20 hours. Maniac brought two of his three sons to run the race. Stanley, age 15, finished in 6:29:26 and his other son Stephen, age 12, finished in 7:07:51, the second youngest finisher ever at the HL 50K. He had another son, 8-year-old Spencer, who is thinking about running it next year. Maniac NEEDS to man up and run it next year as well.

The HL course was covered in snow and a DEEP slush last year and times were about one hour slower than normal. This year, the weather (25 degrees to 48 degrees) was perfect. The top 7 men broke 4 hours and the top 10 ladies broke 5 hours.

What does the next 20 years hold? I don't know, but I have no plans for stopping as the Race Director.