

2016 Promise Land 50K: The Best Trail Race in the East

By Dr. David Horton

The 2016 PL 50K was held on April 30. This was the 16th year of the race on the EXACT same course for EVERY year. I REALLY believe it is the BEST 50K in the East. You say I am biased because I direct it and started it. Yes I do and yes I did . . . but it DOES have LOTS going for it such as:

1. Classic course with 7,400 feet of climb during early spring with great wild flowers
2. Pre-race bonfire and pizza blast Friday night along with the best desserts brought by runners
3. More than 75 percent of runners camp out Friday night for the food and fellowship pre-race
4. Patagonia sweatshirts to top 10 men and women and age-group finishers
5. Patagonia shorts for sub-10 hour finishers
6. Same GREAT course for 16 years in a row
7. Great post-race food catered by Poke-E-Joes Barbecue
8. Third race in the Lynchburg Ultra Series and Southwest Virginia Triple Crown
9. Lots of drawings for DryMax socks and Patagonia gear
10. Colorful entry T-shirts designed by Helen MacDermott
11. Highly competitive field for men and women

Seeded first in the men's field was Darren Thomas (Blacksburg VA). Thomas won the 2015 PL 50K. Seeded second was Nicholas Dipirro (Crozet, VA) who won the 2016 Dam 50K. Seeded third was Matt Thompson (Crozet, VA) who won the 2016 Terrapin Mt. 50K. Seeded fourth was Aaron Saft (NC) who had won the 2016 Holiday Lake 50K. There were also many other very fast males.

Seeded first for the ladies was Bethany Patterson (Richmond, VA). Patterson had won the 2015 PL in the fourth fastest time ever, and her goal this year was to break the PL ladies course record. Sarah Schubert (Charlottesville, VA) had won the 2016 Holiday Lake 50K, beating Bethany by a couple of minutes.

Through AS 3 (11.9 miles), the lead pack in the men's race consisted of three Hokies, Thomas, Leif Van Acker, and Jonathan Ryder. These three teammates stayed pretty well together until Colon Hollow (Mile 19.3). After this point, Thomas put it into race mode and pulled away to an easy victory in 4:40:47—13 seconds slower than in 2015.

By the second time runners reached Sunset Fields (Mile 26.7), Thompson had worked his way up to second place, 10 minutes behind Thomas, but 7 minutes ahead of third place. After crossing the Parkway, Thompson missed a turn and ran MILES off course. I asked him if he FOLLOWED markers and he said no, that he was just focused on keeping second place. He finally finished in 61st place. I'm assuming he WILL learn from this as other runners should as well.

Dipirro made a late move to take second place in 4:57:58. He ran the last mile in 4:59. Ryder took third in 4:59:29. Van Acker took fourth in 5 hours FLAT. Saft took 5th in 5:08:08.

As expected, Patterson took the early lead in the women's race, ahead of Schubert by 3 minutes at the first time to Sunset Fields (11.9 miles). Her lead grew to 7 minutes over Schubert by the second time to the Cornelius Creek AS (23.9 miles). Patterson finished strong taking the victory in 5:26:22, the second fastest time EVER but just 2.5 minutes slower than Ann Riddle's record time from the 2003 PL. Her

slower pace in the early stages of the race doomed the course record attempt even though she finished very fast. I think the course record at PL will be hers sooner or later.

Taking second was Jackie Merritt. I had seeded her 79th in the ladies division. I had not realized she was Jackie Palmer previously who is VERY fast. She overtook Schubert after the last aid station to take second place in 5:45:22. Schubert took third place in 5:46:49.

The master's winners were John Anderson (Crozet, VA) and Michelle McLellan in 5:14:30 and 6:22:03 respectively. John Robinson (Roanoke, VA) and Martha Wright (Richmond, VA) were the grand master's winners in 5:39:12 and 7:20:42 respectively. The super master's winners were Mark Willis and Dru Sexton (Roanoke, VA) in 7:19:5 and 8:00:19 respectively. For the first time ever, we had an ultra-senior division (70 and over) at PL. The winner was Gene Potter. Potter is 71 years old and won the division in 8:48:33. He also has the distinction of finishing ALL 16 PL 50Ks.

Five runners finished the PL 50K for the tenth time: Alissa Springman, Rick Gray, Rick Croutharmel, Mike Dunlop, and Abran Moore. They each received a monogrammed Nike Dri-Fit shirt for this achievement.

If you don't think that Promise Land is a GREAT race, ask anyone who has run it. I don't know of ANY other 50K in the nation that even compares!

Come and join us on April 29, 2017 for the 17th running of the BEST 50K in the East!!