

HIGH Stream Crossings: 2018 Promise Land 50K by Dr. David Horton

There is a theme for every race and this year for Promise Land (PL) it was the HIGH stream crossings. On Monday and Tuesday of race week, there was a huge rain event. When we marked the race course on Wednesday, I was SO concerned that I stopped and prayed for the two ladies helping me, Chelsie Viar and Donna Elder, who had gone a different route to mark. LUCKILY, they made it across all the stream crossings safely but not without trepidation. I even considered putting in a rope for safety, although I DID NOT.

The Promise Land 50K is the third race in the Lynchburg Ultra Series and the Beast Series. This attracts a lot of runners. MANY runners, including myself, say this is the BEST 50K on the east coast, and you would think I would have to turn away runners . . . but I don't. More than 72 percent of the runners who entered came from Virginia. It was 2009 since we had less finishers than this year. There are just so MANY ultra races now. I think that is a good thing. You don't have to travel very far to find an ultra race.

Runners from over 20 states showed up on Friday night for the traditional pizza and desert blast along with a roaring bonfire. I buy 100 pizzas and the runners bring deserts, many of them homemade. After a pre-race briefing, runners gather around a huge bonfire and talk into the night. Most of the runners, over 70 percent, camp out in the big field at the Promise Land Youth Camp. On the sign entering the camp, it says Home Of The Promise Land 50K. That is VERY nice.

In the 2017 Promise Land 50K, I had seeded Brian Rusiecki (S. Deerfield, MA) first and Michael Owen (Pomeroy, OH) second. Owen won and Rusiecki was second. Owen missed the course record by less than 5 minutes and was coming to the 2018 PL gunning for the course record. I seeded Owen first and Rusiecki second this year, and you can guess how it turned out! Nicholas DiPirro (Charlottesville, VA) was seeded third. The bad news for Owen but good news for the other runners, he got the flu 3 weeks before the race and had limited training leading up to the race day.

In the ladies division, Amy Rusiecki (Brian's wife) was seeded first having come off victories at Terrapin Mountain and Holiday Lake 50K's earlier in the spring. Cassie Smith (Kitchener, Ontario Canada) is a talented runner who was seeded second. Shannon Howell (Simpsonville, SC) was third at Terrapin and Holiday Lake so you can guess what she was seeded at PL! Sheila Vibert (Arlington, VA) had raced VERY well at PL in 2017 and was seeded fourth.

As expected, Rusiecki checked into AS 2 (8.6 miles) at 6:53 with DiPirro one minute back and Owen three minutes back. It stayed this way through 16 miles. At Colon Hollow (mile 19.3), Rusiecki and DiPirro both checked in at 8:15 a.m. with Owen falling back to a six-minute gap. Most runners say this is where the race starts. It looked like a 2-man race for the win.

However, checking back into Cornelius Creek the second time (23.9 miles) DiPirro DROPPED from the race due to severe migraine headaches.

Rusiecki took it on to finish for the win with a FINE time of 4:38:34, the 7th fastest time EVER run on the PL course. Owen took second in 4:56:55 despite battling the flu. Chris Roberts (Washington, DC) took 3rd in his highest finish at PL in 5:08:15.

Amy Rusiecki also took the lead right away, just like her husband. Amy checked into the AS 2 at 7:09 with Cassie Smith two minutes back and Shannon Howell another minute back. From that point on, Amy's lead grew to 4, 7, 8, 12 minutes in the next several aid stations. Amy finished in 5:46:24, winning ALL three 50K's in Virginia in the spring of 2018. Will she continue that with a victory at Grindstone 100 or the MMTR 50 Miler?

Vibert came on strong at the end to take second place in 5:59:03 for the second year in a row. I wonder if she can get second place in 2019? As expected, Howell took third place in 6:00:52, finishing third place in all three Virginia ultras this spring! Can you get third at the MMTR 50 Miler or Grindstone 100?

John Anderson (Crozet, VA) took 4th place for the Masters title in 5:18:16. Ian Schouten (Lititz, PA) took 5th place and the Grand Masters title in 5:25:14. In the Super Masters (50-59) John Peabody (Wakefield, RI) finished in 7:34:30. The Ultra Masters winner (70 and over), Gary Knipling (Mason Neck, VA) took the title in 8:38:52.

In the ladies division, Kathleen Cusick (Catonsville, MD) took the title in 6:25:34. In the Grand Master's, (50-59) Sophie Spiedel took the title in 6:43:00. This is the fastest time EVER for a female in the 50 and over category. GREAT job Sophie! The Super Masters title (60 and over) went to Janice Heltibridle (Maurertown, VA) in a time of 8:38:52.

All sub 10-hour finishers were awarded Patagonia running shorts. The top 10 males and females also received a Patagonia Messenger bag. The entry shirts were technical and designed by Helen MacDermott.

What does the future hold for the BEST 50K in the EAST? More memories made over 15,000 feet of elevation change in the Blue Ridge Mountains at the advent of spring. 2019 race date: April 27.

Will you be there?