

Hellgate 2021: 19th Annual Reunion; Dec. 10; by Dr. David Horton FOGGATE

To me and MANY other runners, the second Saturday of December means a get-together of like-minded folks who want to compete in the Hellgate 100K, a very SPECIAL event. There are many things that runners like about this event. It is a unique event that brings together runners from over 25 states. The race is a point-to-point event that has more than 13,000 feet of elevation gain in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. By this time of the year, all the leaves have fallen and cover MANY rocks. Until the day before the race, we had very little rain this year and the leaves were over a foot deep in many places. This time of the year brings all types of weather such as ice, rain, cold, sleet, snow, and a new thing this year . . . THICK, THICK fog. Some years, it brings NICE weather like last year when a new men's and women's record was set. Just like the last several years, there was a strong men's and women's field. I did not see new men's and women's record being set this year.

The meeting place for the race is at Camp Bethel, a Christian based year-round camp directed by Barry Lenoir. He has been the director since we started the race in 2003. I asked him what event he likes best, and he said the Hellgate 100K. With that kind of support, we have a great thing going. They cook our pre-race pasta meal, and it was fantastic. At 10:45 PM we drive from the camp to the start at the Hellgate 100K trailhead which is about 25 miles away, and the runners race back to the finish at Camp Bethel hoping to beat the race time limit of 18 hours. In the last several years of the race, 90 percent of the starters finished under 18 hours. This year it was just 86 percent.

Leah Yingling of Utah was not back to defend her course record. Rachel Spaulding (Blacksburg, VA) took second last year and wanted to move up one position. Because of the fog and deep leaves, I told her I did not think she has any shot at the course record. However, I did tell her that I thought the race was hers to win and not do anything STUPID. There were three other ladies who had run the race last year who could give her competition. One was Alondra Moody (Andersonville, TN) who was going for her fifth finish. Shannon Howell (Simpsonville, SC) had run VERY well in a previous Hellgate and had raced well last summer at the Western States 100 Miler. And, Liz Derstine (Portland, OR) set the northbound speed record on the Appalachian Trail the summer of 2020..

The weather was hot at times and cold at other times and VERY windy. In fact one tree fell in front of Rachel Corrigan DURING the race nearly scarring her to death. Because of this, I thought the returning male winner and course record holder Michael Dubova (Charlottesville, VA) did not have a shot at his time from last year. Jordan Chang (Blacksburg, VA) broke course record last year. Unfortunately, Dubova ran even faster. A surprise late entrant, Mario Mendoza (Bend, OR) a noted west coast runner was present to give chase.

Chang took the lead right away through AS 1, 2, and 3. By AS 4 (Floyd's Field - 22.4 miles), Dubova caught up to Chang. He slowly built his lead AS by AS. The only question was, would he break his own course record. He was 2 minutes ahead of his 2020 time and finished at 10:14:38 breaking his time by a little less than 1.5 minutes. I guess there is ONE more big goal for 2022, breaking 10 hours at the 66.6 mile event for Dubova!!!

Spaulding took the lead by AS 2 (7.5 miles) and continued to increase her lead all day, right on course record time. By mile 22.4, Spaulding had one minute on the record pace. Slowly her lead on the record time grew to 2 minutes at the next AS and then to 7 minutes by mile 42.5 and 8 minutes at 49.5 miles. Now the question was, could she be the first LADY to break 12 hours and she DID, finishing in 11:59:06.

What would I like to see next year for the women? Yingling come back and see IF she can break 12 hours and beat Spaulding!!! I hope to see that.

Mendoza finally chased down Chang at the last AS, Day Creek- 56 miles. Mendoza went on to take second in 11:13:35 with Chang coming in third place in 11:21:49. What would I like to see next year for the men? Mendoza come back after learning the course this year, and he, Chang, and Duboba taking it out and see if one of the three can be the first man to go under 10 hours????

The Fabulous Five, the 5 runners who had completed all previous 18 Hellgates, came back again this year and completed number 19. Those runners are Aaron Schwartzbard, Jeffrey Garstecki, Jerry Turk, Ryan Henry, and Darrin Dunham. Will they come back and COMPLETE year 2022? I hope so.

The winners of the male and female masters was Luke Bollschweiler (Maryville, TN) and Alondra Moody. The winners of the grand masters was Robert Wehner (Hubertus, WI) and Sheryl Mawn (Lakewood, CO.

I was glad that we did not have to have a wave start this year like we did last year. We had a great pre-race meal, and my wife Nancy, and good friend Nancy Hesse, were responsible for the vegetarian soup, chili, sandwiches, and desserts for the post-race. A huge thank you to our fantastic AS workers who stayed up all night and into the next day to serve the runners. And thank you Reid Lanham (Muffy) who works the finish line recording the times, and Janice & Bob Heltibridle who sweep the entire course, following the last runner to the finish line. We have some of the best workers anywhere! WE do have a GREAT event!

What really tells the story of Hellgate is runners who finish the race like Emma Schmideler of Sheboygan, WI. She was a 20-year-old student in my running class this semester. Seeing the pictures of JOY on her face as she crossed the finish line was worth it all. She is now our youngest female finisher ever.

I hope to see many of you next year at Camp Bethel on December 10, 2022. Or I would like to see you at the Promise Land 50K on April 23, 2022 which shares part of the Hellgate course.