

## Holiday Lake 50 K

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The Holiday Lake 50 K is held near the Federal Landmark located in Appomattox, VA. The Appomattox Court House is the site where the American Civil War was finally and formally ended. It is difficult to imagine what that day was like, and my wife and I both agreed, that we are thankful for the National Park system we have. Without them, history would be re written even more so than it is now. With them, we will always have the historical legacy of a significant event. As tax time nears, it is always good to remember the very useful things the Federal Government does with our tax money. The 50 K is also held very near Valentines Day, so after work on Wednesday, we headed towards the destination. We were leaving an ice/snow/rain forecast in Northern Virginia, and heading south. With the Internet accessibility, telecommuting is a very effective way to enjoy life and remain productive. We both had work to do, and it was a good way to get a head start on Valentines day/Holiday Lake 50 K. On Friday, we headed towards the start/finish area and enjoyed some beautiful Virginia countryside. After the pre race meal and instructions we headed to our evening destination. I was hoping the Super 8 would be adequate and would help us get some good rest. I was also hoping to see some other runners, and ask for a ride to the start in the morning.

After securing a ride from the motel with some good friends, I headed up to the room for final preparations. Getting a ride would allow my wife/crew to sleep in a little later. Hoping for a good night's rest is what prompted the stay in the motel, and not the glamorous bunkhouse I was privileged to lay awake all night in last year. The big problem was the recurring pain from hip bursitis. It had been bothering me quite a bit the past week, and as I lay in bed thinking about what tomorrow would bring, I had serious doubts whether or not I could do it. I knew that I would know in the first half mile, and tried not to worry about it. For the next few hours I would lay and pray. A little after 11:30 p.m. I heard a still small voice say, "It will be alright." The next I knew it was time to awake.

I connected with my ride and enjoyed a good time of conversation with Adam and Cadra, who were engaged with a wedding coming up in May. It was a really good conversation, about priorities in life and in the wedding, and I was blessed to be asked my perspective on things. Adam would be a front-runner, and told me he placed fourth at the Mountain Masochist held in November. He was hoping for a top ten finish, and I replied, "yeah, me too, except it will be in the bottom ten".

The start was timely and uneventful, except for a few latecomers who made it interesting. Moments before the start the race director, Dr. David Horton, called out the names, yet one more time. A faint, voice in the distance was heard. "I am coming." After the start I heard her say, "I don't know if I have the right shoes on or not, or the same color socks. I just threw on, what I could find, and I hope they match. I will know when the sun comes up." I had met her before, and she is a very funny person, and since she is also a very, much faster runner, that was all I would see of her. There are a few bottlenecks in this course, so my strategy for my hip is just walk up the hill to where it would bottle neck, to warm things up. As I cleared this and another bottleneck, I looked at my watch and it was 6:40 into the race, and I had covered 200 yards. I looked behind me, and I was fourth from the last. Not good. Very soon, I converged on a very strange sight. A woman heard me coming up from behind and she stopped and let me pass. She didn't have a bib number, and may have been a bandit, but she looked more like a scene from the Little House on the Prairie. She was running in a long dress, with some kind of

shoes, that weren't running shoes, and she was just beaming with a very bright smile. She let me pass, and it gave me pause to wonder.

The third bottleneck never materialized for at the long series of rickety steps after the bridge over the dam, very few people were there. Another bad sign. The good news is, that indeed, the still small voice, saying, "it'll be alright", was true and my hip felt pretty good. The weather was much warmer than last year and what was expected, and I felt myself overheating. I was in shorts, a long sleeve shirt, hat and gloves and the hat and gloves had to come off. I had missed a haircut, so I would be wild looking all day, but being low on the vain scale, it didn't matter. I dropped off my light and gloves (souvenir gloves from the Boston Marathon) at the first aid station and hoped I would remember to pick them up. I wouldn't, and I am bummed.

A fellow named Frank passed me, who said he had missed the start. Another bad sign. The location for the photographer for last years race was coming up, so I put my hat back on, and hoped to not look too bad, but he was nowhere in sight. Another bad sign of how far back I was. At the first major creek crossing, I put my hat on again, for it was where another photographer was set up last year. Still no sign of a photographer as I sloshed through. I tucked my hat behind me, only to meet the photographer as he was headed back to his car. "Anybody behind you?" Another bad sign. The big problem was that there are time cut off's, and I really didn't want to miss the cut off time, so I just kept moving. After the third aid station, the front-runner, Bradley Mongold was doubling back already. Another bad sign for me. A very good sign for him. One of the positive things about this run, is you get to see the front-runners.

At the fourth aid station, I met up with Brenda and it was a very quick hand off, as I knew I was running behind. After the fourth aid station, there is a real scenic section of the run, and the rest of the front-runners came into view. I lost more time along here, as the polite thing to do is to step off the trail while they pass. I saw Adam, whom I had ridden to the race in the morning, who was in about 10<sup>th</sup> place, and then others and I would ask the Lord's blessing upon them as they passed. For some reason Dr. Horton was out checking the course in his pickup truck and he had to comment on my camouflage shirt I was wearing. I would hear lots of comments. One group labeled me the 'stealth runner', since I blended into the scenery so much. It was a helpful thing, for those moments of necessity to relieve oneself. The section between the fourth aid station and the turn around is problematic. It looks like you are close to the turn around, but it is deceiving. In addition, I had to keep getting off the trail, and according to my watch I was cutting it way too close. The constant flow of encouragement from those who had made the cutoff's was good, though I couldn't tell if they were telling the truth or not. Especially when they would say, "looking good" before they would say, "you will make it". An older woman asked if she could pass so I had to yet again pull over, and I never saw her again. Eventually the path along the lake turned into some civilization, and I made it to the turn around, with ten minutes to spare. After some refreshments I was able to shed some pounds in the bathroom, as my stomach had been talking to me for about ten miles. Now I was really behind, but I felt better. I was amazed to be seeing people, that I was ahead of, but they weren't yielding the trail, and it was hard to run, as they wouldn't pull over, except for the smiling lady who was running in her long dress.

Back to the aid station I had just come from, was my best portion of the run, and I was pushed from behind by a very friendly duo that was pleasantly chattering the entire time. Another quick hand off with my wife, and still fighting the clock, and being pushed by the friendly duo, I made it into the final cutoff and had made up twenty minutes. But I was

done. After the hand off with Brenda for more fluid and food, my hamstring began to cramp, and for the rest of the race, it was run till it cramped, limp/walk until it released, run then limp/walk, on and on and on. It is an emotional boost to pass runners, and I was able to boost many people's emotions on this stretch. I am not always appreciative of this calling of the Lord to serve as an encourager to others, but here I was, encouraging the very back of the pack that they could overcome and pass another runner.

I doubled up on my electrolyte pills, vitamins and food supplements, and braced for the final section. I was glad to be running a 'faith promise run', or I would probably quit. By faith I run, and ask my friends to support a mission, and this run's mission is the Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, in great need of resources for staff housing. A very nice fellow approached from behind, and with encouragement, I was able to start running again. I think the Lord sent him just in time. He was also from Northern Virginia, a special Ed teacher for autistic students, and he served as a real boost to get me to the end. As we ran along the trail bordering the Holiday Lake, we pleasantly chatted and it really helped pass the time. Eventually he asked if he could pass, and it seemed like we were close to the end. It is a little disorienting at the end, but we found our way up and out of the woods onto the hard road leading down to the finish. I saw many runners, who were already cleaned up, and leaving with the tell tale limp that only comes to the long distance runners. I looked at my watch and was glad to see I would finish under the time limit. Barely. I crossed 7 seven hours and twenty minutes after starting, and I was glad to be done. A big kiss from my wife, a finisher shirt, and then onto a bench to sit and see who was behind me. Not many. I think I was in the bottom ten. I wondered what it is like to be on the other end.

Onto the post race feast and festivities. I met up with Adam, who said he finished third. After many congratulations he headed home. One big problem for me is always my near upset stomach, and it is hard to eat. I was privileged to share the table with the winner, and his friends, and they treated me kindly, even if I was in the bottom ten. One of the things that draw me back to ultra marathons is that they are filled with the nicest people. There just doesn't exist an elitism that I have witnessed at shorter distances, and at marathons. Bottom ten finishers can sit and chat with top ten finishers and it's all good. Maybe one reason is that everyone who runs these things knows that at any moment a disaster can happen, and just getting to the end is an accomplishment, no matter the time frame. I listened intently and received good advice and input from the better runners, and with each one of these races, I learn a little more.

As my wife and I pulled out, I saw the smiling lady in her long dress emerge from the woods as she would also finish, not under the time limit, and possibly not an official runner, but she would finish.

Word: 1 Thessalonians 5: <sup>24</sup> The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

Scene of the day. The lady in the long dress running an ultra marathon.

Number: Bottom ten

Letter: H for Horton's Holiday Lake 50 K

Color: Blue of the bright blue sky

Prayer: Lord, thank you that you are faithful. You said, it would be all right, and it was.

