

2008 Holiday Lake 50K++----- Year of Great Weather

February 16, 2008

By David Horton

This was the 13th Annual Holiday Lake 50K++. The ++ is from the fact that the first loop is a little longer than 15.55 miles and so is the second. The first three years of the race had more paved roads than the present course. A new trail was added and much of the paved road was taken out of the course after the third year. The new trail course was longer. Most estimates placed the course somewhere between 33 and 34 miles. Another new trail has been added in the last few years to the park, the Carter-Taylor Trail. After this year, the Holliday Lake State Park folks said that we could not use a piece of an old trail from the state park to the Holiday Lake 4H Center. Therefore, starting next year, we will change the course trying to add more trail in the course and maybe even having just a 50K course and no ++.

Last year, race morning brought 12 degree temperatures. This made the stream crossings very interesting. The year before it snowed all day and the trails were VERY muddy and slick. This year, the temperature was 30 at the start and topped out at about 55 degrees. There was a little mud but probably the least we have ever had.

Of the four ultras we have in the central Virginia area, this one is the easiest to direct. The 4H Center has it all. There is cheap, Spartan lodging, showers and parking available at the start/finish area. The folks there are extremely nice and are very easy to work with. They have a full-time staff and prepared great meals on both Friday dinner and Saturday lunch. Holiday Lake 50K is the first race in the Lynchburg Ultra Series and the Beast Series, newly developed by Clark Zealand and me for this year. This partnership guarantees that we will have a good number of runners at Holiday Lake. Many experienced trail runners don't like the relatively flat and fast course, preferring tougher single track courses. There is only 2,000 feet of elevation gain. The next race in the Beast, the Terrapin Mountain Marathon, has over 7,000 feet of gain and the event after that, Promise Land 50K also has over 7,000 feet of elevation gain.

However, because Holiday Lake is thought to be the easiest ultra that we have, there were a lot of first time ultra runners. I love to see runners compete in and finish their first ultra. Look on our website and read some of the stories. They are great and mimic those feelings of accomplishment we had when we finished that first big one.

This was the first ultra in probably more than 10 years, that the replacement drink for all of our ultras was not Conquest. After many years of producing Conquest, Dr. Gary Buffington decided to stop making it. As a result, one of our sponsors for the Beast Series, Clif Shot furnished the drink. They also supplied each runner with one shot and package of bloks. Patagonia is also the sponsor of the LUS and Beast Series and gave us a good deal on shirts. Each sub-12-hour finisher received a long-sleeved Capilene three shirt. The top award winners also received an embroidered plush sweatshirt. Frank Villa, a local optometrist, has been a loyal sponsor for many years. He has also run many of our races and this year was no different. Frank finished 7 hours and 16 minutes talking the whole way. He told me after the race that he had been averaging a little less than 10 miles per week!

There were also special awards given to the top Liberty University and Virginia Tech students as well. There were over 15 Tech and 9 LU students participating. I think it is

great seeing so many college students trying ultras. We need young blood to replace us oldies but goldies one of these days.

Last year, we started 241 runners, this year we started 257, our biggest starting field ever. However, we had 239 finish last year but only 234 finishers this year. I am not sure why we had a higher dropout rate this year, especially since the weather was so good.

There were five male runners that I really thought had a chance to win. My first pick was Bradley Mongold (Falling Waters, WV). Last year at Holiday Lake, Bradley chased Pete Breckenridge all day finishing within 5 minutes of Pete for a very impressive 2nd place finish. I had heard that Mongold had been training very hard, and was out for the win! Jonathan Basham (Allentown, PA) had won last year's Promise Land and is always highly competitive. Clark Zealand had been living in Canada, and recently moved back into the Lynchburg area in the summer of 2007. Clark was a three-time winner of Holiday Lake and WAS very fast, but he has not raced competitively in two years. Drew Ponder, a 2007 graduate of Liberty University had run on the cross-country team at LU for the past three years with the famous McDougal brothers, Josh being the 2007 NCAA cross country champion. Training with speed like that can't hurt you. Drew had also run Holiday Lake and Promise Land before he started running track at LU. The final runner who looked to have a chance to win was Brian Schmidt (Leesburg, VA). Brian had finished third at the 2007 MMTR 50 Miler.

The women's field also looked to have five runners who had a chance to win as well.

Bethany Patterson (Richmond, VA), won Holiday Lake in 2007 with the 4th fastest time ever recorded by a female. Francesca Conte (Charlottesville, VA) was a previous winner of Holiday Lake and many other ultras across the United States. Kristin Eddy (Herndon, VA) had placed second 3 years earlier with the third fastest time ever recorded at Holiday Lake. Justine Morrison (Washington, DC) had also won a number of ultras. Amy Sproston (Washington, DC) was a very fast runner who had also won a number of ultras. There were many other fast men and women as well in the field, the deepest field that we have ever had at Holiday Lake.

As expected, Mongold took it out fast but was not able to lose the field for a while. You could tell that he was intent on running very fast from the start. At aid station 4 (12.1 miles), Mongold had a 3-minute lead on Ponder, 4 on Zealand, and 5 on Basham. On the second loop at aid station 4, Mongold's lead over Ponder was still only 4 minutes. However, it became apparent that it was down to a 2 man race at this point. From there on in, Mongold continued to increase his lead over Ponder and everyone else. He finished very strong in at time of 3:44:23, the second fastest time ever recorded on the course. Ponder continued on to finish his third ultra ever in 3:56:40, and he is only 22 years of age. Ultra-runners be on the lookout for this new kid on the block as he has plans to continue racing ultras. Mongold's next big race is Way Too Cool, where he hopes to finish in the top three, thus earning a bid to the Western States 100 Miler. Mongold is one VERY tough runner.

Taking third place was Adam Cassedy (Beverly, WV). Adam was tied for 8th place at the halfway point running the first loop in 2:02 and the second loop in 2:06. Mongold's splits were 1:49 and 1:55. Christopher Clarke (Blacksburg, VA) took 4th in 4:08:48. Basham took 5th in 4:09:53.

The master's winners were Derrick Carr (Fredericksburg, VA) and Donna Elder (Forest, VA) with times of 4:25:49 and 5:12:29 respectively. The grand masters winners were Keith Straw (Malvern, PA) and Rebekah Trittipoe (Forest, VA) with times of 4:47:52 and

5:48:38 respectively. The men's super masters winner was Craig Tufts (Middleburg, VA) with a time of 6:07:47.

Twenty five percent of the finishers were females. Years ago the percentage of females finishing our events was about 12 to 15 percent. This is good news as more ladies are running ultras. There were 34 runners over 50 years of age. However, only 15 percent of these were females. It must be harder for females to continue doing ultras.

There was a slight surprise in the ladies race. Looking very trim, slim, and fast, Justine Morrison took the lead from the start and NEVER relinquished it all day. Justine finished in 4:28:53. This is the second fastest time ever, second only to Jenn Shelton's course record of just over 1 minute faster. The question was who was going to get second, third and so on. Through the halfway point, there were 5 ladies within 5 minutes from overall positions 34-40. Patterson was in at the turnaround 8:46, Sproston at 8:48, Heather Fisher (Blacksburg, VA), Melissa Mast (Royersford, PA) at 8:49, and Jennifer Flint (Berwyn, PA) at 8:51.

Through 22.3 miles, there were still 4 ladies within three minutes of each other, Mast leading the way, with Sproston, Fisher, and Flint following very close behind. By 27.8 miles, Sproston had increased her lead to 4 minutes over Mast and 5 over Fisher. Sproston held off Fisher to take a distant second to Morrison, finishing in 4:44:23 with Fisher just over 3 minutes behind in at time of 4:47:39. Fisher is only 22 years old and this was her first ultra. I think we'll see a lot of this young lady in the ultra running circuit. The 12th place female finished in 5:12:25. This time would win many 50K's across the country. I challenge anyone to let me know of any 50K with a deeper field of women!! And, HL is closer to a 55K than a 50K. Oh, what happened to Kristen Eddy? She was 3.5 months pregnant and just took it easy finishing in a leisurely 5:33.

We present an award for the Fastest Fat Boy (greater than 200 pounds) and the Best Blood. Fastest Fat Boy was John Farmer (Richmond, VA) and Best Blood went to Adam Schmidt (Cincinnati, OH). Adam jumped across one guardrail but not cleanly; his knee took the brunt of a good hit. Jerry Anderson (Greenville, TN) really had the harder fall. After the last aid station, Jerry fell and really hurt his wrist bad. He crossed the finish line holding his arm in obvious pain. I had a doctor look at it and you could tell that it was fractured. At a hospital, it was later determined that he had a Smith Fracture and would have to have surgery and pins put in. I am sorry for you Jerry.

Amy Albu (Lexington, VA) finished the Holiday Lake 50K and was awarded an engraved clock for her 10 years of running a LONG 50K.

What does the future hold for Holiday Lake 50K??? A new course or at least some changes for 2009. The date for next year will probably be February 21.