

HOLIDAY LAKE 50K: The BEST First Ultra Race

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by David Horton

The 2013 Holiday Lake 50K (HL) is the first ultra in the Lynchburg Ultra Series (LUS) and the Beast Series. The Series is directed by Clark Zealand and me and consists of six overall events: three 50K's, a 50 miler, a 100 miler, and a 100K. In its 18th year, HL is most definitely the easiest of the six races, resulting in more first-time ultra runners than any of our other series races.

I think it is the best race for a first time ultra runner for a variety of reasons:

1. There is a pretty generous time limit of 8 hours . . . 327 of 335 starters finished under the 8-hour time limit this year.
2. There is about 4 miles between each aid station in the 16-mile loop course.
3. We run the first loop clockwise and the second loop counterclockwise. Therefore you get to see each runner ahead of or behind you and see how they are doing.
4. The course has very good footing and there is about 1,000 feet of elevation gain on each loop.
5. The start/finish is at the same place, along with lodging and showers, as well as the pre- and post-race meals. EVERYTHING is very convenient.
6. There is a lot of variety in each loop, from road to single-track trails.
7. You also get to have one good stream crossing each lap.
8. The weather is usually good . . . this year it was about 24 degrees at the start and around 50 at the finish.
9. We have GREAT Patagonia stretch Capilene long-sleeved shirts for each sub 8-hour finisher. We have had Patagonia finisher awards for many years.
10. Because it is a GREAT first ultra race, and the first race in the LUS/Beast, there is a good mixture of veterans and rookies.

Local runner Frank (the TANK) Gonzalez has become the top ultra man in the area and has raced well in other races in the east. Local runner Sam Dangc has been pushing Gonzalez in training runs and was intent on showing that he could compete as well. Brad Hinton (Stephens City, VA) had a good showing at many ultras in 2012. Keith Lavasseur (Glen Burnie, MD) ran HL very well in 2012. Matt Urbanski (Seattle, WA) and his wife, Julie, were using the HL race as a training run for their Continental Divide Trail hike this summer. They are runners who hike (not the other way around) and have already hiked the Appalachian Trail and Pacific Crest Trail.

Stephanie Manny (Virginia Beach, VA) was the top returning female runner from 2012, having finished in 3rd place last year with a fine time of 4:32. Holly Bugin (New Kent, VA) has recently entered the ultra field and won the UROC 50K last September.

By the second aid station (8 miles), the men's leader was Steve Slaby (Virginia Beach, VA) and just behind him was local runner Anthony Nogel, with a pack of 10 runners close

behind. I had seeded Slaby 13th and had forgotten he was a fast marathoner. His first ultra was Hellgate 100K in 2006 where he took 2nd place. I had underestimated his ability.

At the turnaround (16 miles), Slaby had taken command of the race by pulling away from the pack. Dangc, Urbanski, Levasseur, and Gonzalez were 6 minutes behind. Slaby maintained that lead throughout the rest of the race, winning with a time of 3:45:18. Urbanski began pulling away from Gonzalez with 8 miles to go finishing in 2nd place in 3:51:12, with Gonzalez taking 3rd in 3:54:17. This was disappointing to Gonzalez until I pointed out that he had just set a 5-minute PR on the HL course. Dangc took 4th in his best ultra finish ever with time of 3:57:16. The top 4 men ran a sub 4-hour race. Levasseur came in 5th in 4:02:14.

As expected, Manny and Bugin took the women's lead from the start, with Bugin leading in the first lap but never by more than one or two minutes over Manny. They checked in together at the 20 and 24 mile aid stations. From there in, Bugin put the hammer down and took the victory in 4:23:04 breaking the course record by less than one minute. Manny took 2nd in 4:29:10, knocking 3 minutes off her time from 2012. Emily Warner (Richmond, VA) finished 3rd in a fine time of 4:34:05. Kaylyn Peck (Lutherville, MD) took 4th in 4:39:15. After nearly dropping out at the turnaround, Kelly Devine (Alexandria, VA) took 5th in 4:40:46.

Troy Siemers (Staunton, VA) and Stephanie Wilson (Herndon, VA) were the Master's winners in 4:21:46 and 5:13:33 respectively. Grand Masters' winners were Donnie Chapman (Clarksdale, MD) and Martha Wright (Richmond, VA) in 4:43:54 and 5:42:48 respectively. Dana Beyeler (Russell, PA) and Debbie Trainer (Henrico, VA) were the Super Masters winners in 4:38:41 and 5:55:36 respectively.

Holiday Lake is and has been and will continue to be a very popular first-timers race. There is always a large group of Liberty University and Virginia Tech runners here every year. Spread the word to your friends to consider entering the ultra world at the 2014 Holiday Lake 50K.

We tried something a little different this year for our post-race meal. Instead of the camp providing lunch, we had a potluck meal provided by the runners themselves with the understanding that if you didn't bring something, you didn't eat. I didn't get a chance to see how much actual food items were brought in, but we did have LOTS of desserts left over. Please let me know your thoughts on this. If we do this again (depending on your input), we will definitely need more "food" and less desserts.