

Holiday Lake 2017: 22nd Year of Running Around the Lake by: Dr. David Horton

The early season race for many runners in this part of the country is the Holiday Lake 50K (HL). HL is a relatively flat ultra, just over 2200 feet of elevation gain, compared to the other ultras in the spring such as Terrapin Mountain, Dam 50K, and the Promise Land 50K. This is also a GREAT race for a first ultra. There were over 40 runners making their ultra debut at HL this year.

HL has so much to offer an ultra runner. There is a pasta pre-race meal, along with parking and sleeping areas at the start/finish, and usually good weather. However, about every fourth year, there is bad weather, consisting of snow, rain, sleet, or all of the above. This year, the weather was perfect, starting in the low 40s and later reaching the 50s, with no mud and very dry conditions.

This race also attracts a large contingent of ultra runners from Virginia Tech and Liberty University. There is probably a greater percentage of runners in their 20s than any other ultra in the country.

I have a new secretary this year, Ali Chambers. We were also initiating a new timing system using an iPad and Webscorer. Ali familiarized herself with the new system and it worked great.

This race also attracts a number of runners who plan on running the Lynchburg Ultra Series (LUS) and the Southwest VA Triple Crown of 50Ks. It is also the first race in the Beast Series. These series increase the number of runners who are attracted to HL.

Entry shirts were technical shirts designed by Helen MacDermott. The design was the prettiest design I have ever seen for an entry shirt. Finishers received a silk weight Patagonia shirt. Top 10 runners and age-group winners also received a Patagonia Refugio backpack. The male and female winners received a beautiful glass trophy produced by Bob Heltibridle of Valley Lasers.

The men's race started with a large group going out together. At the first aid station (mile 4), 16 runners checked in within one minute of each other. However, by AS 3 (mile 12), local runner Nick Reed had opened up a 3-minute lead on Matt Thompson (Crozet, VA). Reed added to his lead one minute at each of the next several aid stations until his lead was 6 minutes by 25 miles.

Reed finished in 3:48:28, winning his first ultra. Thompson finished in second place with a time of 3:54:25. Thompson also finished in second at the Hellgate 100K in December. Jordan Chang took third place in 3:58:43, the final runner under 4 hours.

The ladies' race looked like it would be very competitive and it was. Amy Rusiecki (South Deerfield, MA) was seeded first. Hannah Bright (Blacksburg, VA) was seeded second and was the first Hokie lady (Virginia Tech) who has turned into a top competitor in the last year. The Hokie guys have always been very good for several years. There were also three other Hokie ladies who were running their first ultra but looked to run very well Laura Sullivan, Ashley Hayes, and Jillian Everly.

Sure enough, many ladies went out fast and stayed very close. At AS 3, (12 miles), four ladies were within 3 minutes. Sullivan had the lead with Rusiecki one minute back and Bright and Hayes another 2 minutes back. At the end of the first loop, Sullivan had a lead of 3 minutes finishing in 2:09. The course record was 4:23, held by Bethany Patterson of Richmond, VA. With this being her first ultra, I thought Sullivan would slow down and miss the course record.

Boy, was I wrong. Her lead grew at every aid station: 3 minutes at the turnaround to 11 minutes by the end. She crushed the CR by running the second loop in 2:09, just like the first loop finishing in 4:18:41, a new CR and the fastest time run by a lady at HL in the 22-year history of the race. What will she do next? Bright took second place in 4:29:16 with Hayes finishing third in 4:31:26, a clean sweep by the Hokie ladies. Rusecki took 4th place in 4:35:03. Everly took 5th place making the Hokie ladies 1, 2, 3 and 5th. What are they feeding the ladies in Blacksburg?

The Masters winners were Jeremy Ramsey (Lynchburg, VA) and Annie Stanley (Richmond, VA) in 4:06:17 and 4:51:13 respectively. The winning Grand Masters were Bil Cullen (Midlothian, VA) and Rebekah Trittioe (Bedford, VA) in 4:44:28 and 5:40:54 respectively. The winning Super Grand Masters were Timothy Craft (Lynchburg, VA) and Mary Ellen Brown-Hutchinson in 5:32:56 (Front Royal, VA)

and 5:53:25 respectively.

Starting with a field of 228 runners with 222 finishers, and a new ladies course record, it made for a VERY successful event. What will 2018 bring? Hopefully lots more runners and more first-time ultra runners.