

SNOW Year TWO: 2014 Holiday Lake 50K—19th Year, Feb. 15, 2014

By David Horton

We had not had a real snow all winter in the Lynchburg area. In fact, our average annual snowfall is 17 inches, which was about our total for the last three winters. On Wednesday and Thursday of race week, we received about a foot of snow. I did not tell the runners, but it was Thursday of race week that I knew for sure we would hold the race. The director of the 4H Educational Center where we start, have our pre- and post-race, and finish, emailed me on Wednesday and said they usually lose power with big snowfalls and we could not hold the race if they lost power. I found out on Thursday that the power was on, and so the race was ON! We had 380 runners registered and 314 were able to make it to the race and start. After having to cancel the Grindstone 100 in 2013, I REALLY did not want to have to shorten the Beast Series by canceling the first race in 2014.

There was still probably 10 inches of snow in the shady places on race day. Because of this, I lengthened the time limit from 8 hours to 9 hours. In 2010, we had about 8 inches of snow. That year, about 90 percent of the runners finished under the time limit. This year, about 90 percent of the runners finished under the time limit. Because of rain in the first five hours of the race and the warm temperatures (around 37 degrees), the whole trail was a big icy slush pool. Some called it SNUD, a combination of snow and mud. Whatever, I think it was the TOUGHEST conditions for the race in 19 years. The HL 50K is USUALLY the easiest of our spring 50Ks. As a result of this, MANY runners attempt this for their first ultra . . . maybe 2014 wasn't a good time to do HL. But, we still had over 50 first-time ultra runners in the race. Four of the top nine finishers were FIRST time ultra runners. These four runners had an average age of 20.5 years!!!

Keith Levasseur (Columbia, MD) was our top returning runner. Virginia Tech runners Graham Peck (Baltimore, MD) and Guy Love (Blacksburg, VA) had been running very strong and headed up a large contingent of Hokies. Clark Zealand (Lynchburg, VA) was making his return to ultra racing after a four-year absence due to a variety of injuries.

Holly Bugin (New Kent, VA) was the reigning champ and course record-holder. She CLAIMED she was just running to FINISH because she had just had a baby three months earlier. Also, in the field was Jennie Belt (Richmond, VA) a previous winner of HL. Local ladies Alexis Thomas and Jamie Swyers had intentions of finishing in the top of the field.

Early on, no one really wanted to take the lead and be the one breaking through the snow first. By the second and third aid stations, Graham Peck (who is also a mid-2:20s marathoner) had taken the lead with Ryan Paavola (Richmond, VA) following pretty close in second place. By the turnaround, Peck had built a 6-minute lead over Paavola. Throughout the rest of the race, he extended his lead finishing in 4:31:05 with Paavola coming in second in 4:51:05. Peck's time may not sound good, but it is VERY good considering the conditions. (In the 2010 snow year, Matt Woods won in 4:30. Wood's course record is 3:28.) Love took third in a time of 5:11:13. A Liberty University student Brandon Taylor, running in his first ultra, took 4th in 5:13:30. Zealand took 5th in his comeback race with a time of 5:14:42. Zealand was

also the top Masters runner. Six of the top 12 finishers are presently Virginia Tech students or graduates. I wonder what they are doing at Blacksburg to turn out so many EXCELLENT ultra runners???

The ladies race was VERY tight and several runners had thoughts of the win. Through the first aid station in the second loop, mile 21, the top 11 ladies were within 10 minutes of each other. They were headed up by Beth Frye (Boone, NC) and Elizabeth Minnick (Abingdon, VA) who were running together. Before the next aid station, Bugin passed the two front runners and continued to extend her lead taking the victory for her second straight win finishing in 5:54:17, 1.5 hours slower than her winning time of 2013. Local runner Thomas overtook Frye and Minnick (moving from 9th place at 21 miles) after the last aid station to finish in 2nd place in a strong finish of 6:03:21. Minnick took 3rd and Frye took 4th in 6:04:35 and 6:05:10. Belt took 5th in 6:08:53. Frye was also the female Masters winner.

John Robinson (Roanoke, VA) and Sophie Speidel (Charlottesville, VA) were the Grand Masters winners in 5:43:11 and 6:19:34 respectively. Dana Beyeler (Russell, PA) was the Super Masters winner in 6:22:05.

Patagonia was the title sponsor. Everyone who finished under nine hours received their choice from two different silk weight shirts for finishing. Patagonia backpacks were also awarded to the top ten men and women as well as age group winners.

Although a great race overall . . . a very tragic thing happened during the race. Amy Albu (Palmyra, VA), a very good runner having finished Hellgate 100K for the fifth time back in December, finishing third female overall, slipped and fell around mile seven. She heard a pop and knew immediately she had broken her leg. Shortly thereafter, Dr. Mike Dunlop (an emergency ER doctor in Lynchburg) came upon her. He splinted her leg, and then he and about 10 other runners carried her almost a mile to the nearest aid station. One of my students, who was working the aid station, drove her to the camp where Dr. George Wortley, our race medical doctor, examined her and immediately sent her to the hospital.

Amy was taken to the UVA Medical Center, where she is a nurse. X-rays showed she had broken her tibia, fibula, and a bone in her ankle. She had surgery on Sunday and was released on Tuesday. She's doing well but also has two young children at home. Please pray for Amy's quick recovery, successful healing, and return to running. It spoke volumes for the running community knowing that runners took time out of the race, sacrificing their times, to take care of her. Thank you to all involved!

The 20th running of Holiday Lake is scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 14, 2015. Hopefully, 2015 will not be SNOW YEAR 3.