

Promise Land “Not Your Average 50K Race”

April 27, 2002

By David Horton

The motto of the race “Not your Average 50K Race” lived up to its billing in 2002. In 2001 Mike Sandlin, George Wortley & I designed what we thought might be the most challenging & beautiful 50K race in the east. 148 runners showed up & 145 finished in 2001 & raved about the difficulty (7,400 elevation gain) & the beauty of the course.

This year was an even more spectacular year in that we had 208 starters & 205 finishers. Why such an increase? With the P.L. being the 2nd race in the Lynchburg Ultra Series (L.U.S.) & being selected to be a part of the Montrail Ultra Cup & such a great year in 2001, there had to be an increase for 2002.

The quality of runners was unbelievable. This was probably the best field ever in a trail race in Virginia & maybe the entire east coast in both the men and women’s field. The top six seeded runners all had won numerous ultras: Clark Zealand, Scott Jurek, William Emerson, Dink Taylor, DeWayne Satterfield, & Hal Koerner. Will Harlan entered late Friday night and made the field even tougher. The top six seeded women had all won ultras as well: Anne Riddle, Krissy Moehl, Bethany Hunter, Francesca Conte, Kathy Youngren, & Laura Nelson. Of these 13 runners entered, any one of them had a good chance of winning the race.

Weekend festivities began with a pre-race pasta meal at the nearby Sedalia Center. Numbers, packets, & goodies were issued to each runner at this time. The race sponsors (Montrail, Patagonia, Cliff Bar, Conquest, Frank Villa Optometry, & Ultimate Direction) donated over \$3,000 in prizes that were awarded in drawings. With the beautiful pre-race shirts given out to entrants, Patagonia shirts to finishers, free post-race meal, & many awards given out in drawings, runners received their moneys’ worth from their entry fees. Deb Pero, who also ran the race, designed the starter & finisher’s shirts.

The start/finish is located at the Promise Land Youth Camp. It is an idyllic setting at the foot of the biggest mountains in Central Virginia, the Blue Ridge Mountains. The camp has ample areas for tents & camping with showers and restrooms available. There was also a bunkhouse & trailer that runners could stay in. The majority of the runners took advantage of this and stayed at the start/finish area for the 5:30 A.M. start.

The P.L. 50K is a course that goes from 1300 feet at the start/finish to 4005 feet at Apple Orchard Mountain down to 1100 feet at the White Tail Trail on the other side of the mountain (we call it the dark side), back up to 3500 and back down to 1300 at the end. The course takes you from spring to winter to spring to winter and finally back to spring. The highest elevation had very little greenery and few leaves and the lower elevations were a sea of green.

The weather for the race turned out to be perfect, around 40 degrees at the start and a high of 55 degrees, Cresting the 1st big climb brought the runners a view of a full moon in one direction and a red sun rising in the opposite direction.

As expected a large group of runners were bunched up fairly close through the 1st aid station (2.6 miles). Shortly thereafter, Hal Koerner put the hammer down and took the lead. I saw Hal around 4 miles into the race and he was flying! By aid station 2 (8.6 miles) Hal had a 2-minute lead over Zealand and Mike Wortley (Dr. George Wortley’s son). Seven other runners were within 3 minutes of Wortley & Zealand.

By Sunset Fields (11.9 miles) Clark had caught Hal and they were running together. Jurek had moved up to 3rd, only 3 minutes behind Clark & Hal. Seven other runners remained within 5 minutes of Jurek. Zealand & Koerner remained together until the Colon Hollow aid station (19.3 miles). Jurek was now 5 minutes back with Emerson, Taylor, Satterfield, & Harlan four minutes behind him.

Zealand put on a move at this point & had a lead of 3 minutes by the Cornelius Creek aid station (23.9 miles). Jurek had fallen 10 minutes behind Zealand with Emerson, Harlan, & Taylor closing to only two minutes behind Jurek.

The race course then climbs 2000 feet in 2.8 miles going by Apple Orchard Water Falls & climbing over 100 steep

steps around the falls.

Zealand did this 2.8-mile section in 43 minutes! However, his lead grew to 6 minutes over Koerner and decreased to 8 minutes on Jurek. Clark finished in an amazing time of 4:30:43, knocking over 37 minutes off his 2001 time. Jurek passed Koerner to take second with Emerson, Harlan, Taylor, and Satterfield to follow, all breaking 5 hours. These times were unbelievable fast, especially for a very difficult course.

Anne Riddle took the early lead in the women's field. By 8.6 miles Riddle had a 3-minute lead over Krissy Moehl, Kavara Vaughn (running her 1st ultra), and Laura Nelson. By 11.9 miles Moehl had caught Riddle & Nelson was only 2 minutes back. Moehl took control from that point, increasing her lead to a very convincing win in a super fast time of 5:27:36! Only 2 runners ran faster than her time in 2001. With her win at the 2001 MMTR 50 Miler and many other victories since, Krissy has established herself as one of the top ultra runners in the U.S. Zealand has done the same winning all three races in the L.U.S. in 2001 and the first two in 2002.

Riddle finished just under 10 minutes later with Nelson coming in third and Francesca Conte fourth and Vaughn taking 5th in her ultra debut. Six women bettered Janice Anderson's winning 2001 time & 8 males bettered Zealand's 2001 winning time.

David Drach & Susan Baehre took the master's awards (40-49 years). Steve Pero & Vickie Midkiff took the grand master's awards (50-59) & John Deeter took the super masters award. The best blood award went to Julie McGhee who took a pretty nasty fall. The Clydesdale award (190 Lbs and up) went to Jim Morrison of Ontario Canada.

Two other local runners had very interesting stories. Jay DeLancey ran the 2001 P.L. 50K in 7:48. In August of 2001, Jay had double by-pass heart surgery. He ran the 2002 P.L. 50K in 7:15! J.T. Witt ran the 2001 P.L. 50K in 6:30. In October, 4 days before the MMTR 50 Miler, J.T. fractured two thoracic vertebrae in a tumbling & gymnastics class. A back specialist told him he might not ever run again and if he did, he probably would not be able to run ultras again. This year he ran the P.L. 50K in 5:45, a time bettered by only 3 runners in 2001! So much for injuries & surgeries; you can possibly come back stronger, J.T. & Jay did.

We were greatly aided in the P.L. 50K by the work of my secretary, Liz Wilcox-Suarez. Liz had all the information computerized and recorded the runners' names & times as they finished. After the race, Liz e-mailed the results to Gary Trittipoe & David Blaikie. By Saturday night the results were posted on <http://www.extremeultrarunning.com> and <http://www.ultramarathonworld.com> for the world to see.

All runners who finished under 10 hours received a beautiful silk-weight shirt made by Patagonia. The top 10 males & top 5 females & other award winners also received a Patagonia Zip-T shirt as well. Zealand & Moehl also received a half-mass bag made by Patagonia for being the overall winners.

I teach a running class at L.U. One of their requirements for the class is to run a race & help with a race. Six of my 20 students ran and completed the race and four helped with the race. Another aid station crew was also made up of L.U. students. We had a total of 33 local runners who completed the race.

Runners were greeted and treated to a picnic lunch at the finish. My wife (Nancy) bought all the food and was assisted in cooking and serving the food by many other folks. Thanks honey! Thanks Ladies!

Next race up in the L.U.S: 20th MMTR 50 Miler on Oct 19th. We are planning for a very special race for this year's anniversary. The 3rd annual P.L. 50K will be on April 26, 2003. With this being the 20th year of the MMTR and it being the last race in the L.U.S. & the Montrail Ultra Cup, we expect a large field. We may have to limit the field. So, stay tuned, visit our website (<http://www.extremeultrarunning.com>), & enter early.