

8th Annual Holiday Lake 50K

"The Mudfest" by David Horton

Running an ultra is always hard. But, some are harder than others! Directing an ultra is always hard. But some are harder to direct than others! With the Farmer's Almanac and the local and national weather service calling for a major winter storm ... I had to make decisions just like many runners had to make. With runners coming from 15 states, there was really no decision for me to make ... the race would go on! Although many runners made the decision to stay at home, we had 161 runners (of the 185 registered) brave the elements and begin the 2003 Holiday Lake 50K.

The major reason for holding a 50K at Holiday Lake in February is having a relatively easy 50K early in the season (and it's the only consistent date available). Also, there is cheap lodging (bunkhouse/cabin style quarters @ \$10 per night), hot showers, delicious pre- and post-race meals ALL at the start/finish of the Holiday Lake 50K. This is an excellent event for first timers and we had several running their first ultra this year. I have also been able to motivate, talk and even pressure several students from my running class at LU into participating in this event. There were 9 runners who are or have been in my running classes and all 9 finished this year! (Must be the teacher!)

The women's field appeared to be the toughest we have ever had at the Holiday Lake ... and it certainly turned out that way. Bethany Hunter (Lynchburg, VA) won last year and was also the 2001 and 2002 LUS champion. However, she had won the Uwharrie 40 Miler the previous weekend and broke Anne Riddle's course record to boot. Annette Bednosky (Boone, NC) had also run Uwharrie, finishing 21 minutes behind Hunter. The question was if these two would be recovered?

To make the field even more competitive was Connie Gardner (Medina, OH) who has been one to the hottest runners in the country this last year. Laura Nelson (Waynesboro, VA) a three-time winner of the JFK 50 Miler and one of only three women to ever break 7 hours at JFK, was also entered. Michele Burr (Gaithersburg, MD) was looking in top form as well.

The men's field was not as competitive as the women's. It was going to be difficult for any one to compete with Clark Zealand (Lynchburg, VA). Zealand was the 2001 and 2002 LUS champion and two-time winner of Holiday Lake 50K. But, the field was good. Derrick Carr (Fredericksburg, VA) has been running very well in the last year. Tom Nielson (Annandale, VA) a west coast legend, was in the Lynchburg area for his first try at one of our races.

Byron Backer (Greenville, SC) was a last minute entrant, coming in on Friday night. Backer won the Uwharrie 40 Miler the weekend before, holding off Mike Morton and Eric Clifton. The same question applied to his capabilities as did for Hunter and Bednosky ... had he recovered enough? One last runner who figured to compete for the win was Josh Zealand, Clark's youngest brother. Josh had been training with Clark and wanted to check out his level of fitness against the big brother! Clark's other two brothers, Mike and Matt, were also entered in the race ... 4 Zealands!

As expected, Clark took the lead from the start with his brother, Josh, at his side. They stayed together through aid station 4 (12.1 miles). Just before the turnaround, Clark pulled away with a one-minute lead. Going in the opposite direction for the second loop, reaching aid station 4 again (19.3), Josh had hit the wall and died. The race for first was over as Clark cruised in finishing in 4:02, running the first loop in 1:56 and the second loop in 2:06 for his 3rd Holiday Lake victory. Second place was a little more competitive. Carr dogged Backer for a long time, finally catching him and passing him between 25-28 miles, holding Backer off to beat him by one minute (4:27:32 vs. 4:28:33).

All five women (Gardner, Nelson, Burr, Bednosky and Hunter) stayed bunched together through 6.3 miles with only four minutes separating the first from the last. By 9.0 miles, Gardner had a one-minute lead over Nelson, and 5 minutes over Bednosky, Hunter and Burr. By 12.1 miles, Gardner and Nelson were still separated by only one minute with the other three starting to drop back.

Gardner's lead increased to 3 minutes by the end of the first loop and stayed between 3-4 minutes, pulling away a little more after the last aid station, winning in a time of 4:46:22, just 4 minutes over Hunter's course record in 2002. Nelson finished strong in 4:50:52 for second place. Burr had a fine time of 5:01:55 to take third. Bednosky held off Hunter for fourth place in a time of 5:09:13 and 5:10:22 respectively. Gardner and Nelson both finished in the top 10 overall.

Just imagine how interesting this race would have been if Backer, Bednosky and Hunter had not raced the previous weekend?

The women's masters (40-49) was Sophie Speidel (Charlottesville, VA) in 5:38:26 and grand masters (50 & over) went to Debbie Miller (Louisville, KY) in 6:13:19. The men's masters was Derrick Carr with a time of 4:27:32, grand masters, Frank Probst (Burke, VA) in 5:10:03 and super masters (60 & over) was Malcolm Gillis (Huntsville, AL – race director of the Rocket City Marathon) in 6:22:18. Gillis, age 69, finished in a tie with one of my students, Sonia Rodriguez, age 19, running in her first ultra.

Our youngest runner, Caleb Trittipoe, finished his first ultra in a time of 6:22:18. His mother, Rebekah Trittipoe, completed the race with her son ... a very special moment for her!

Frank Villa, one of our race sponsors, used his mega mileage training (37 ½ miles total for the year to date), to complete the race in 6:54. How does he do it?

Mike Hayslett became the first staff member of the Holiday Lake 4-H Center to attempt the race. Mike finished one loop and now has an idea of what it takes to finish the whole race ... just ask him!!!!

John Price (Virginia Beach, VA) also completed his 8th Holiday Lake 50K. He is the only one to have entered and finished all 8 races. Price has also completed 17 of 20 MMTR 50 Milers.

Our previous heavyweight division, "the Clydesdale," now has a new name. Under the direction of Neal "Push-Ups" Bryant, it has been changed to "the Fat Boy" Division, and will continue the name throughout the LUS. It includes anyone weighing 200 pounds or more (without shoes or shirt). Michael Priddy (Alexandria, VA) won this coveted award with a time of 5:58:13, coming in 44th overall.

Those who came the furthest to run the Holiday Lake were Richard Owens, from Wales, England and Mark Konodi from Seattle, WA.

This year was extremely difficult for crews and especially aid station workers who braved the wet and cold conditions ... they certainly earned their pay! Pay??!?!?!?? We have great volunteers. We could not hold the races we do, with the quality we expect, without them! THANK YOU!

Many people ask... What is the most stressful thing about being a race director? There are lots of things ... you cannot even imagine. Yet ... I enjoy it. It's very rewarding! But, to answer the question ... Awards. What to do? Trophies are not a problem, but when you try to find something you know the runners will use and appreciate (shirts), therein lies the problem. You can't wait till the last minute to order special items. It is very difficult to predict the number of runners that will participate and how many of each size, etc. On the very last date I could order the Patagonia finisher's shirts, I only had about 50 runners registered. So, how many do I order? The same with meal preparations ... how many do we cook for? That's why I try to encourage people to enter early, to mark their sizes, fill out their applications completely. That's how you can help me as well as make these races more enjoyable for everyone involved!

See you at the Promise Land in April and the MMTR in October!