

**Promise Land 50K**  
**5 Years and Counting**  
*By David Horton*

It just seems like just the other day we were planning for the first Promise Land 50K and now it has been held for 5 years and it has been thoroughly an enjoyable race to direct! I look forward to many more years of the PL 50K. Of the four ultras we hold in the Lynchburg area, the Promise Land is by far the prettiest. Spring and the flood of green foliage explodes this time of year at the lower elevations, but it can still be winter at the higher elevations, with only buds present on the trees, indicating that spring is coming. The streams are rushing in Cornelius Creek with pools of sparkling clear water. The killing climb from 23-26 miles is offset by the spectacular cascade of water at Apple Orchard Falls halfway up the hill. The Falls has to be one of the best on the East Coast. With it being the second race in the Lynchburg Ultra Series (LUS), a large field of anywhere between 160-180 runners show up every year to try and complete the course within the 10-hour time limit.

Weather can have a profound impact on ultras and I thought that this year would prove to be the case. On Thursday, the weather was hot. On Friday, the weather was hot and in the late afternoon and into the night, a very heavy rain came and stayed. Throughout the night, it rained off and on. However on race day, the temperatures were great and there was NO rain except for a very few sprinkles.

One of the major decisions for a race director is to determine when to mark the course. The closer to race day that you mark the course, the lesser chance you have of someone tampering with the markers. I usually mark my races on the Wednesday before race day. The problem with this is getting the help I need. Then, on race day, I re-check as much of the course markings as possible, especially the more confusing sections. We only had one major problem with the race this year. From Aid Station (AS) 2 to 3, someone had torn down ALL of the streamers for 1 to 2 miles! This is one of the most remote sections of the course and one that I never thought that might be sabotaged, but it was! However, I don't think that it had any impact on the outcome of the race, but you never know.

This year's race had a very strong men and women's field. Heading the men's field was Scott Jurek (Seattle, WA) Ultra runner of the Year for 2003 & 2004, had come east to run in the PL 50K where he placed 2nd in 2002. Brian Dayton (Cardiff by the Sea, CA) also made a very long trip to test his fitness level. Mark Lundblad (Asheville, NC) was 2nd at the Holiday Lake 50K in February and came at the urging of his wife (Anne Riddle Lundblad). The women's field also looked very strong with Anne Riddle, the 2003 women's champion and course record holder, Catherine Phillips (Lynchburg, VA) who has only run three ultras, but won them all, and Annette Bednosky (Jefferson, NC) who has been running great this year and had battled Riddle in several races in the past few months. These three men and women are some of the best runners in the nation. It was promising to be a good race!

At 5:20 a.m., the national anthem was sung by Bednosky, David Short (an LU student running the race), and David's brother, Dan. They sang it beautifully. I think every race should have someone singing our anthem before the start.

As expected, Jurek, Dayton, and Lundblad jumped to the front from the very start. They were joined by Alex Kahl (New Brunswick, NJ) through AS 3 (11.9 miles).

By AS 4 (16.1 miles), Dayton had forged a 2-minute lead over Jurek and Lundblad with Kahl 3 minutes behind. Jurek and Lundblad closed the gap to 1 minute by AS 6 (23.9 miles), with Kahl dropping back to 6 minutes behind the lead.

As I waited at Sunset Fields (AS 7 – 26.7 miles), Jurek appeared first with Dayton one stride behind ... the race was on ... and Lundblad was only 2 minutes back. At the last AS (29.1 miles) Jurek and Dayton were still together with Lundblad 3 minutes back. Dayton pushed it from there in and crossed the finish line 56 seconds ahead of Jurek, in a time of 4:57:57 with Jurek finishing at 4:58:53. Lundblad took 3rd with a

time of 5:03:22. Kahl took 4th in 5:16:11 with Derrick Carr (Fredericksburg, VA) taking fifth in 5:23:52. Derrick was celebrating his 22nd anniversary with his wonderful wife, Jane, running with #83, having been married on April 23, 1983.

Phillips was sick and unable to run. Riddle-Lundblad took the lead from the start with Bednosky giving chase. The difference in time between the two at the aid stations was: 0, 3, 4, 1, 2, 1, 6, 5, and 3 minutes at the finish with Riddle-Lundblad never relinquishing the lead to Bednosky. Riddle-Lundblad's winning time of 5:29:54, was 6 minutes slower than her course record. These two ladies will have many battles in the future. They also finished 6th and 7th overall!

An interesting side note: 34 ladies started and 34 ladies finished; only four runners dropped out and they were all men. Who is the stronger sex?

Lew McGrath (Triadelphia, WV) and Susan Baehre (Triangle, VA) took the masters titles. Larry Creveling (Sigel, PA) and Barbara Isom (Silver Spring, MD) took the grand masters title and William Keane (Winston-Salem, NC) took the super masters title. The Fastest Fat Boy went to Neal (Rosie) Bryant (Appomattox, VA). Best Blood went to Danny McDonnell (Fallston, MD) who punctured his calf and had blood spurting out.

One of the best human interest stories was Mark Justh (Brooklyn, NY) finishing in 7:25:21. He was recovering from cancer treatment and surgery and this was a race that he saw listed in a magazine as he was in the hospital recovering.

As part of a course requirement in my running class, 8 students were running this race. Only one didn't finish and that was because he was sick. Joe Gahagan finished 23rd overall and Crystal Pruitt the 7th female finisher, finished with a time of 6:46:07. I love seeing young people run ultras. Sub-10 hour finishers received Patagonia running shorts. Age group winners and the top finishers also received Montrail bags.

The highlight of the weekend is always the big cook out at the finish, free to all runners and their crews. Hamburgers (and yes, even veggie burgers) and hot dogs were cooked to perfection by my wife, Nancy ... and lots of other goodies! Special thanks go out to our sponsors: Frank Villa, Conquest, Montrail, and Patagonia. Without their very generous help, we could not put on the quality event we aspire to conduct.

The Promise Land 50K is a very special race, perhaps the "BEST" 50K in the nation (at least that's my opinion!). Come and join us on April 22, 2006 for the 6th Annual Promise Land 50K.

PLEASE NOTE: The last race in the LUS is the MMTR 50 Miler. The 23rd running of this event will be on October 15, 2005. The field is limited to 300 runners and will fill up quickly, perhaps as early as September 1.