

## 2005 Hellgate 100K – December 10, 2005

### *“Ice Year”*

*by David Horton*

The first year of Hellgate in 2003, saw anywhere from 6-12 inches of snow and solid ice at all the early aid stations. In 2004, the weather was good and there was no snow. We thought that the weather couldn't be worse than it was in 2003, but 2005 was the worst yet! This year, we received 3-4 inches of snow early in the week and 1 inch of ice the night before the race. The ENTIRE course was covered in ice and snow this year. Those who bought yaktraks and put screws in their shoes were very wise.

Of the four races that I direct in the Lynchburg area, the Hellgate 100K is my favorite. I think it is a great course and has many unique features (even without the snow and ice!). The 12:01 a.m. start makes everyone run the same amount of darkness and allows most runners to finish before sunset. With only 9 aid stations in 62+ miles, runners have to be more self-reliant. Most runners compete in Hellgate as if it were a 100 miler; eating more solid food and pacing for a long tough effort. Successful completion of Hellgate gives a runner the feeling of satisfaction comparable to completing a 100 miler, very tough, but very rewarding!

Camp Bethel is a perfect setting for a pre-race banquet and finishing locale. The folks at the camp are extremely friendly, helpful and I really think enjoy having us there. The lodge with a fireplace, showers and bunks, supply everything needed for a good ultra. Because of the length and difficulty of the race, we had breakfast prepared for the runners at Jennings Creek (Aid Station 5 – 27.6 miles), complete with scrambled eggs, bacon and sausage. The first runners reached this station just after 5:00 a.m. with the last runners arriving around 8:30 a.m. We had lunch prepared at Bearwallow Gap (Aid Station 7 – 42.5 miles) which consisted of hamburgers, hotdogs and soup. We also had soup and hot chocolate at most other aid stations. Most of the runners took advantage of the REAL food at these aid stations. The aid stations are manned mostly by Liberty University students that I had conned into helping with the race. Male and female. Many of them are my students...or were once my students! Trying to cook and serve the runners, as well as keeping warm was a major challenge for these college students, but they seemed to love it!

We have two cut-offs in Hellgate ... one at Headforemost Mountain (21.9 miles) and the other is at Bearwallow (42.5 miles). Runners must arrive at these aid stations by 6:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to be allowed to continue. Even with the bad weather, cut cut-offs were not extended. In 2004, we had 86 starters. This year, we stayed at 99 runners (race limit...100 runners) up to the last two weeks before the race. Because of the predicted weather, time of year, sickness or whatever, we only started 80 runners.

The first third of the race (to Headforemost Mtn. – 21.9 miles), is the most difficult section with over 5,500 feet of elevation gain. Eric Grossman (Emory, VA) and Serge Arbona (Baltimore, MD) checked into aid station 4 at 4:07 a.m. When Sean Andrish set the course record (11:22) in 2004, he arrived at this point at 4:06 a.m. These two runners stayed together through aid station 6 (Little Cove Mountain – 34.5 miles). The section from aid station 6 to Bearwallow Gap (42.5 miles) has the worst footing of any section on the course. By aid station 7, Arbona had increased his lead by 30 minutes on Grossman and was only a few minutes off record pace. From here to the finish, Arbona continued to expand his lead ... and became the second runner to break 12 hours finishing in an outstanding time of 11:41:01. Considering the trail conditions this year and the dry conditions in 2004, I consider Arbona's time equivalent to Andrish's 2004 course record.

Corey Handelsman (Fort Collins, CO) overtook Grossman just before aid station 9 and went on to finish in second place with a time of 13:21:40 ... over 1 hour and 40 minutes behind Arbona. Grossman took third in 13:38:47. Jerry Turk (Guilford, CT) almost caught Grossman, but settled for 4th place (13:38:52), but running his best time and position, having finished all three years of Hellgate in 7th, 10th and 4th respectively. Neal Jamison (Roanoke, VA) took 6th place with a time of 13:48:26, running his best time in three Hellgate finishes as well, setting a PR by almost 2 hours. I had seeded Neal 54th, but I sure was wrong!

The ladies race was expected to be even closer than the men's race. Justine Morrison (Washington, DC) checked into aid station 3 (Camping Gap – 13.1 miles) at 2:33 a.m. Kerry Arsenault (Guilford, CT) checked in at 2:40, with course record holder and local runner, Cat Phillips, checking in at 2:43. By aid station 4 (21.9 miles) Arsenault had taken the lead arriving there at 4:42 a.m. in 6th place overall. Phillips was only 3 minutes back and Jenn Shelton (Virginia Beach, VA) had moved up to 3rd place, 8 minutes behind Arsenault. Morrison had dropped back to 4th place ... 18 minutes behind the lead. By aid station 5 (27.6 miles), Phillips had taken the lead with Arsenault 6 minutes back, Shelton 10 minutes behind and Morrison 12 minutes back. At aid station 6 (34.5 miles), Morrison had moved back up to 2nd and the order was Phillips, Morrison, Shelton and Arsenault all within 7 minutes of each other, and in 8th, 9th, 10th and 11th place overall. By aid station 7 (42.5 miles), Morrison had re-taken the lead with Phillips 5 minutes back, Shelton 22 minutes behind, and Arsenault 25 minutes back. What a race!

Morrison continued to run very fast from there to the finish, completing the race in 13:39:11 (5th overall). This time was second only to Phillips' course record of 13:15 in 2003. This was a great victory against a very strong field. Phillips took 2nd in 14:37:15; Shelton was 3rd in 14:42:04 with Arsenault coming in 4th in 14:51:02.

The first place male and female winners this year (Arbona and Morrison), were awarded an embroidered down jacket made by Patagonia. But a major surprise ... Betsy Magee of Extremeworkout.com, awarded them with a free, expense paid trip to run in the 2006 Verbier Ultra Run in Switzerland in July. What a great prize from a very gracious lady, Betsy Magee. Thank you Betsy! If you are looking for a very special race in a beautiful place, check out her website. She has also graciously allowed my wife and me to make this trip as well!

Jeff Wilbur (Charlottesville, VA) took the masters title and Dan Lehmann (Helvetia, WV) took the grand masters title. The top 10 men and top 5 women, as well as the age-group winners received an R.5 Patagonia top. All others sub-12 hour finishers received Patagonia mid-weight zip-T tops. Jeff Garstecki (Boiling Springs, PA) won "Best Blood," and Jeff Haas (Waukesha, WI) won the "Fastest Fat Boy" awards. These two runners received a neon-green embroidered hooded sweatshirt. Sophie Speidel (Charlottesville, VA) was 5th woman and female master's winner.

There were 10 runners who have completed all three Hellgate 100K's: Kevin Bligan, Darrin Dunham, Jeff Garstecki, Ryan Henry, Neal Jamison, Michael Stratton, Paul Ralyea, Aaron Swartzbard, Rebekah Trittipoe, and Jerry Turk. I wonder what these 10 runners will be doing on Dec. 9, 2006?

There were 8 runners who completed the Horton Slam: the LUS, plus Hellgate: Byron Backer, Wes Fenton, Jay Finkle, Jeff Garstecki, Corey Handlesman, Justine Morrison, Michael Stratton and Kevin Townsend. They received a embroidered hydration system.

I owe a big debt of gratitude to Kevin Budd and Scott Brockmier. They cleaned up the course on Saturday after the runners went through each section... THANK YOU! That certainly saved me an incredible amount of post-race work. There are certainly many stories that come from a race such as Hellgate that I can't possibly tell you about in this article. But, please look at our website ([extremoultrarunning.com](http://extremoultrarunning.com)) to read some of them. To see over 500 photos taken by professional photographer, Will Ramos, check out his website at [waramos.com/home.php](http://waramos.com/home.php). Some of these photos really capture the essence of the event.

Shall we take bets on what the Hellgate 2006 race will hold? Will the weather be nice? Will there be ice and snow? Only God knows what's in store for us next year! That's the thrill!!!!!! If you have an idea about an appropriate quote for next year's shirt ... let me know. I hope you will consider being a part of a very special ... usually unforgettable event next year ... Hellgate 100K.