

**2006 Holiday Lake 50K++**  
**The Snow Year**  
*by David Horton*

February 11, 2006 was the date of the 11th annual Holiday Lake (HL) 50K++. There had never been snow in the previous years of the H.L. 50K. This year was different. The forecast earlier in the week had predicted no snow until Saturday night and Sunday. Runners woke to rain which turned into snow within the first hour of the race. We had marked the course with white streamers, which was a mistake with the snow this year.

The best thing about HL is the location and amenities available at the HL 4H Educational Center. The staff prepared great pre and post race meals. Inexpensive lodging and showers were also available with runners not having to ever leave the facilities once arriving at the center.

One of our customs is to have one of the runners sing the national anthem before the start of the race. This year J. R. Ankney (Crozet, VA) beautifully sang the anthem to a rousing applause of the other runners. The 6:30 am start guarantees that the runners will run for 15 to 20 minutes in the dark. With the rain and snow that time was prolonged this year.

Aaron Schwartzbard (Reston, VA) was on hand to try and win the HL race for the third year in a row. No other runner has ever won the HL race three years in a row. With the withdrawal of Eric Grossman (Emory, VA), it appeared that Aaron would most likely cruise to his third straight victory.

The women's race appeared to be a three way duel and that is exactly what happened. Jenn Shelton (Virginia Beach, VA) only 22 years old, had proven to be a young lady on the fast track to the elite status in ultrarunning. Bethany Patterson (Richmond, VA) was a previous winner of HL and multiple other ultra wins. Francesca Conte (Charlottesville, VA) was also a previous winner of HL and many other races across the country.

The starting field of 195 runners was the largest ever. It included 50 local runners, the most we've ever had from our area. The field also included six runners who are presently Liberty University students and 14 Liberty University graduates. Michael Stratton (Virginia Tech student) has been running our ultras for several years. He was able to recruit 8 other VA Tech students to run the 2006 HL.

As expected, Aaron took the lead from the start. However, he was not alone. Billy Barnett (Virginia Beach, VA) had shown flashes of brilliance in other ultras and joined Aaron in leading the way. By AS 4 (12.1 miles) the twosome had broken contact with all of the other runners. They basically stayed together through the first loop and into the start of the second loop. The toughest section of the course is from the turnaround back to AS 4. Much of this section is uphill and is definitely "Horton" miles.

Barnett forged a 2 minute lead by AS 4 (19.2 miles) on the second loop. Schwartzbard stayed 2 minutes behind until the last AS (27.8 miles). Barnett continued on to the finish, winning in a time of 4:05:41 with Aaron finishing in 4:09:16, a little over 3 and ½ minutes back. It was over 13 minutes before another runner finished, Steven Baker (a Hokie) in a time of 4:22:56.

Francesca Conte took the lead in the women's race from the start. Frannie arrived at AS 2 (6.3 miles) at 7:22 with Shelton one minute behind and Patterson 3 minutes behind. Shelton passed Conte between AS 4 and the turnaround. At the halfway point, Shelton's time was 2:11, right on

record pace. Conte was 2 minutes behind and Patterson was 8 minutes behind.

With the snow getting heavier and the trail getting muddier, slicker, and much slower, the women's record looked safe. WRONG!!!!!!!!!!!!

At the halfway point Shelton was in 12th place overall. In the second loop Shelton moved through the field chasing the women's course record. By the end of the race Shelton crossed the finish line in 5th place overall in a COURSE RECORD time of 4:27:50!! This broke Cat Phillips' course record of 4:34:39 by almost 7 minutes on a day not conducive to running fast. Conte finished second in 4:41:46, a time fast enough to win every other HL but one. Frannie's time put her in 8th place overall. Patterson took 3rd in 4:57:45.

The Master's title was taken by Fred Gaston (Wilton, CT) 6th overall, in a time of 4:31:16. The women's Master's title was taken by local runner Rebekah Trittipoe in 5:46:31. The Men's Grand Master's title went to Bernard Lirola (New York, NY) in a time of 5:49:01. The female Grand Master's title went to Beth Howell (Blacksburg, VA) in a time of 6:12:46. The male Super Master's title went to local runner Bob Hartless, finishing his first ultra in 6:22:33.

The Fastest Fat Boy award went to Brian Mayer (a Hokie) for the second year in a row. Kevin Townsend (Lebanon, VA) took home the Best Blood Award. He fell and cut his knee and had much of his lower leg covered and caked in blood!

What does the future of ultrarunning hold? It used to be an old man's sport. Not anymore. The average age of the top 10 was just over 26 years. We had runners as young as 16 (Heather House) and as old as 62 (Bob Hartless and Bill Gribbin) finish the race. Forty-five of the 178 finishers (25%) were under the age of 30.

One of the features of the race that everyone enjoyed was the aid stations. Most of the aid stations workers were manned Liberty University students. They were very helpful, loud, and encouraging to all of the runners. There were all kinds of food available at the aid stations, anything from soups and burgers to hot coffee. This was one day where it might have been harder (colder) for the workers than for the runners. I know that I got very cold standing at the finish line for over 4 and ½ hours.

A great deal of thanks for the race goes to our volunteers and sponsors (Montrail, Patagonia, Conquest, and Frank Villa.) Charlie Hesse and Kim Graham were of tremendous assistance. They were there early and stayed late to be of assistance.

The second race in the Lynchburg Ultra Series will be the Promise Land 50K on April 22, 2006. The 12th annual HL 50K will be held on February 10, 2007. See you at the races.