

**Sixth Edition**  
**2006 Promise Land 50K**  
**“The Year of the Rain”**

*by: David Horton*

The spring of 2006 had been very dry. We were experiencing drought conditions and forest fires had occurred very near the race course. When we marked the course on Wednesday, three days before the race, we did not get our feet wet and there was NO mud on the course. This all changed on race day.

The weather forecast for the weekend was for rain and thunderstorms...and that plus lightning came through...about thirty minutes into the race the sky lit up with lightning, thunder, and the hardest rain that we have ever had in a local ultra.

In December, we had the Hellgate 100K in a foot of ice and snow. There has been only one day in Lynchburg in 2006 that it snowed all day, February 11, the day of Holiday Lake. I have run two 50K's this year, Mountain Mist where it was unseasonably hot and Bel Monte where it snowed about 6 inches on race day. I hate to even think about what the November 4 MMTR 50 Miler race day will bring!!

The race headquarters is out in the country at the Promise Land Youth Camp between Bedford and Big Island, VA. The majority of runners camp out in tents, trucks, and a bunkhouse at the camp. After downing 55 large pizzas on Friday night we celebrated around a big camp fire. We had a record number of starters and finishers at the 2006 HL 50K and a record number of starters at the 2006 PL 50K. I have no doubt that the entry limit of 300 runners at the MMTR and 100 runners at Hellgate will be reached.

There were many first timers running the PL 50K with one of them being Jeanne Craig of Bedford, VA. Jeanne sang the national anthem before we started. It was a very special moment hearing her beautiful voice in the few minutes before the race started. It gave me chill bumps and I think many others as well. There were 36 finishers from our area, a testament to the size of our ultrarunning community in the Lynchburg area.

Eric Grossman (Emory, VA) was the favorite. He had won the race in 2004 and had been running very well in 2006. Billy Barnett (Virginia Beach, VA) had won the HL 50K in February. Nick Whited (Richlands, VA) had placed 2nd to Grossman at the 2006 Bel Monte and had been training with Grossman. Local favorite Jonathan Basham (JB) had been training very hard with intentions of possibly winning the PL 50K and later this summer setting a speed record on the Colorado Trail.

Mike Mason (Alexandria, VA) had been running very strong as evidenced by his 2nd place finish overall in a three day stage race in Arkansas. Derrick Carr (Fredericksburg, VA) always races well at the PL 50K.

From the start to AS 1 (11.9 miles) and from there at 26 miles (both sections on the east side of the mountains) to the finish we call the Light side of the mountain. From 11.9 miles (Sunset Fields and the loop to the west side of the mountains) and back to Sunset Fields at 26 miles we call the Dark side. The race is determined on the Dark side.

At 11.9 miles Grossman arrived at 7:35 with JB 2 minutes back and Barnett 4 minutes back.

Whited had been sick all week and dropped back early. Grossman increased his lead over JB to 4, 6, 9, and 14 minutes at the next 4 aid stations finishing in a fine time of 4:52:51 for his 2nd PL 50K victory. JB claimed his highest finish ever timing 5:07:10 for 2nd place. Mason edged out Carr for 3rd place with their times being 5:20:00 and 5:20:25. Running stronger the 2nd half of the race, 21 year old Brent Carson (Mechanicsville, VA) took 5th in 5:22:06. Carson's first ultra was the HL 50K in February of 2006 where he had placed 4th overall.

The favorite in the women's race was Jenn Shelton (Virginia Beach, VA). Jenn has been the fastest female on the east coast in recent times. She set a course record at the 2006 HL 50K course in very wet, muddy, snowy, slow conditions. Her time was faster at HL than what Anne Riddle Lundblad, Annette Bednosky, Cat Phillips, and Bethany Patterson had run on that course. She is fast, very fast.

There were other runners looked to give Shelton a fight. Bethany Patterson (Richmond, VA) who had placed 2nd at Bull Run two weeks earlier; Kerry Arsenault (Guilford, CT) who had run great at the 2005 Hellgate 100K; and Crystal Pruitt a student at Liberty University.

By Sunset Fields (11.9 miles) Shelton had a 3 minute lead on Arsenault, and a 6 minute lead over Antoinette Lucas (Harrisonburg, VA). Shelton's lead was 4 minutes over Arsenault at Cornelius Creek. The lead stayed this way all the way to the finish with Shelton finishing in 5:43:19 and Arsenault finishing just over 4 minutes back in 5:47:54. Pruitt arrived at Cornelius Creek the second time (23.9 miles) at 9:54, in third place, 17 minutes behind Shelton. Pruitt cut that margin to just over 8 minutes by the finish, completing the course in 5:51:40. She went from 30th overall to 18th at the finish. Patterson took 4th in 6:06:35 and Jennifer Belt (Blacksburg, VA) took 5th in 6:24:20.

The master's winners were Carr and Arsenault. The grand masters winners were Herman Richards (Stockton, VA) in a time of 6:04:52, and Nancy Ferris (Goode, VA) with a time of 7:29:48. The super master's winner was David Grider (Greensboro, NC) in 7:32:02.

One of the highlights of the PL 50K is the cookout at the finish. My wife cooks burgers and hotdogs for all of the runners and their crews as everyone shares in the joy of completing a very special ultra.

The 7th annual Promise Land 50K will be held on April 28, 2007. I hope to see many of you at our next local ultra, the MMTR 50 Miler on November 4, 2006.

I also want to thank all our workers who stood out there in the pouring rain and yet still served the runners with a smile. Special thanks also go to our sponsors: Montrail, Frank Villa, Conquest, and Patagonia. Runners who finished this course with 15,000 feet of elevation change went home with some hard earned Patagonia running shorts.