

2008 Tussey mOUntaiNBACK 50

Grossman blazes new course mark at USA 50 Mile Championships; Relay records also tumble

OCTOBER 11, 2008 - Back in its preferred October timeframe, the 2008 mOUntaiNBACK started with a slight shiver and glimmer of orange sky and wrapped up amidst sun and colorful foliage throughout the forest. A record field of ultrarunners and relay teams took part.

Making Ultra Tracks

Ultra division results were eventful indeed. Eric Grossman, 40, Emory, Va., followed up his second-place finish last year by blowing the longstanding course record right out of the water. Grossman's 5:48:34 lopped 5 full minutes off the seemingly untouchable mark posted by Chad Ricklefs in 2004. As Grossman had also crossed the masters age threshold since last year's race, he also set a new masters mark, so he went home with two National Championships purses and two bonuses. Asked whether he took the lead from the start, Grossman replied, "There were three of us together until around mile 12 (Zach Miller, Sean Andrish, and me)." Miller, 32, Ann Arbor, Mich., finished second in 6:07:13. Of the course, Miller said, "It was challenging. There are some brutal climbs, one particular one at mile 40. I'm pleased with both my finish and my time. Eric and I are good friends. We've been going back and forth for years now. I ran the North Country Trail 50 Miler three weeks ago and there wasn't much competition. Today the third, fourth, and fifth guys were not that far back. The only way you're going to run a good 50 is to have the competition." Rounding out the top three was Jason Bryant, 36, Elkin, N.C., finishing in 6:15:16.

Francesca Conte, Charlottesville, Va., took first in the women's open in 7:21:48. Because she was not a U.S. citizen, Conte was not eligible for the championships purse. Sarah Vanderelli, Latrobe, Pa., took first place masters honors in 7:45:19 and snapped up the first place open and masters championships purses. Two-time winner and local favorite Morgan Windram-Geddes, currently residing in Scotland, was back for her fourth run of this course and her first since giving birth to twins. Windram-Geddes came in third in 8:01 flat, shy of her course PR but clearly showing she's still a contender at the ripe old age of 26. Ninety runners registered for the ultramarathon, and 76 started the race. Of the 71 finishers, an equal number of men were on either side of the open/masters age range. Eleven women finished, three of them masters.

The 10th annual mOUntaiNBACK will host the 2009 USA 50 Mile Championships on October 3, 2009. Proximity in date to the 100K World Cup in 2008 and in past years has kept some top runners from getting here, but the Worlds shift to June in 2009 could heat up the competition for the 2009 mOUntaiNBACK. Registration opens this month [January].

Relay Wrangles and Records

On the relay circuit, the **Supra** category was abuzz this year, with a record 13 two-person teams taking up the challenge. The Cumberland Valley Athletic Club duo of Pete Breckinridge and Andy Mason plowed under their own Supra course record from last year by more than 6 minutes, posting a steaming 5:10:29 to take the men's open category with the 9th fastest time ever by a team. "We were moving along out there today," said Mason, 36. "I thought, 'Man, I almost I wish I was in a regular marathon today.'" Top women's open honors went to PSU Chickadees, Bianca Baier and Julie Stover, who ran a 7:39:46. The four teams in mixed open contention were led by Miserable X 2, Becky Green-Dixon and Luke Riley, in 6:27:55. The men's masters title went to Team Inside Track, Tim Schuler and Gregg Cauller, who also notched a new Supra master's course record in an impressive 5:40:55. Mixed masters glory went to Tortoise & Hare, Faye and Kev Hawn, who ripped 32 minutes off their 2007 time and set a new mixed masters mark of 7:50:16.

Twenty-six teams entered the **Tri/Quad** action, and the course was lit up with the performance of 3 Hawks 1 Hound, Track Cult, a men's open quartet who hammered out a 4:57:39 for the second fastest Tri-Quad finish ever and the second fastest circuit on record. (Will anyone ever take down that overall course mark (4:51:39) set by four Penn State Tri-Club members back in 2002?) The women's open title went to Salute Your Shorts, in 6:43:07. Mixed open honors went to Darn Near Dead, who we presume gave their all to post a 6:38:02. Men's masters first place went to the Hexadecimators, whose 5:20:42 slashed 65 minutes off the previous record. In their defense, the previous record holders, Hair Today Gone Tomorrow, trimmed 19 minutes off their previous record time. Mixed masters honors went to Erie Running Club, who logged a 9:16:39.

In the **Standard** (5 and 6 person) relay division, 36 teams took part. The lead men's open team was Boshank's Buds, who zipped off a 5:11:28. Women's open honors went to the Happy Valley Harriettes, in 7:21:57. Tops in the mixed open action was Luke and the Millenium Falcons, who dashed to a 5:46:34 finish. The first ever Standard women's masters team, Sole Sisters, clocked an 8:36:42.

Nine of the Standard teams formed by draft to compete against each other in what's become known as the Draft Challenge Relay. Teams are chosen draft style, so they include a diverse range of pace and ability. The three men's open DCR teams finished 3rd, 4th and 5th and within 3 minutes of each other; the six DCRs in the mixed open category took six of the first seven spots out of 22 and finished within a 25-minute span.

Twenty **Mega** teams covered the distance. Men's open honors went to Sofa King Fun, logging a 6:06:37. The women's open was won by Big Valley Broads in 7:43:01. First in the Mixed open division was Croptopus, whose eight agri-tentacles posted a 6:51:00. Men's masters honors went to The Old Men of the Mountains, an over-65 octet led by team captain George Etzweiler, 88. Their circuit was completed in 10:01:22, within 11 minutes of their 2007 time. The group's average age was almost 77, up from just under 73 last year, and Etzweiler covered not one but two segments this year, the challenging leg 4 and the mostly downhill leg 12.

Military Might

The race introduced a **Military** awards category last year. Top military honors went to the Green Machine, whose 6:03:14 sliced nearly 2 minutes off their own ROTC course record from last year. Military teams have participated in 7 of the 9 years of the race, including teams from Pennsylvania and Virginia.

Fiends for Footing the Forest Fifty

The distinction for most total miles logged in the ultra division belongs to Warren Renninger, Muncy Valley, Pa., who has completed six mOUntaiNBACKs, for 300 miles. Scott Ferrari, Patricia Klaus, Joe Shuta and Morgan Windram-Geddes have each completed four. On the relay side, top mileage honors goes to Marvin Hall, at 140, if you include his ultra effort in 2004. Hall also has the distinction of having done the race in every possible team size, from 2 to 8. Going strictly by relay mileage, Ken Davis gets the nod, at 123.6 miles over six runs, three of them Supras. Second in relay-only mileage is Vicki Gauntt, at 111.9 in eight runs of the course, including two Supras.

Proceeds support CVIM

Proceeds from the 2008 event supported Centre Volunteers in Medicine, which provides free medical care to qualifying residents of Centre County (visit www.cvim.net to learn more). Funds raised exceeded \$5,000. Sponsors of the 2008 race included the Central Pennsylvania Convention and Visitors Bureau, Steve Bodner and Tom Cali of RE/MAX Centre Realty, Appalachian Outdoors, The Bicycle Shop, Anthony G. DeBoef Esq., The Hartman Agency, McClarren Financial Advisors, Nittany Valley Running Club, The North Face, The Resident Experts, Restek Corporation, The Sign Stop, and Tussey Mountain Family Fun Center.

Upcoming Race Dates, including the USA 50 Mile Championships:

10th anniversary mOUntaiNBACK: October 3, 2009

11th annual mOUntaiNBACK: October 16, 2010