

2015 Oak Openings Stampede 50K, 25K, and 5K Trail Races

Sunday, September 13, 2015

Oak Openings Metropark

Swanton, Ohio

The sixth version of the Oak Openings Stampede took place on a beautiful, sunny morning with cool temperatures and fine single-track trail-running through forests and fields at the Toledo Metroparks largest park. There were four events: 50K single runner ultramarathon, 50K two-person relay, 25K single person run, and a 5K run/walk. After a miserable week of high temperatures and tropical humidity, the running gods smiled down on northwest Ohio and brought relief. The morning air on race day was crisp and dry with temperatures in the upper 40's that rose to the upper 60's/low 70's range. The runners enjoyed this perfect weather and many fast times and PR's were recorded. Best of all, the bees that had been a chronic problem in past years races and caused many painful memories were not an issue this year. The race director re-routed the course around one of the spots where bees had been a problem and also fogged the entire course while he was marking it. He's still a little delirious from inhaling all those fumes...

In the 50K single runner ultra, 34 runners completed two laps of the Scout trail that circumnavigates the entire Oak Openings Park and offers runners a great variety of terrain from hardwood and evergreen forests to wetter lowlands and tall-grass prairies (who needs rock bands to keep up your motivation and interest during a long race when you can run through such beauty and diversity?) Twenty-one year old Cain Leathers (is that not the best ultrarunner name ever?) showed the older dogs how to bark and finished first overall in a time of 3:50:20. Second and third were taken by Eddie Keaveny and Josh Mooney in 3:57:15 and 4:11:16, respectively. First place in the men's Masters category was earned by Tom Silva in 4:23:45 who also was fourth overall. In the women's contest, course records were set by the Overall and Masters winners. Alexe Parker was the first female overall and seventh in the event with a time of 4:38:19. Not far behind her was the 50K female winner from the past two years, Natalee Gooden-Burkard, who managed to stay on course the whole race and ran a 4:41:29 which was about 23 minutes better than her effort last year. The female Masters winner was Ivy Hunter who actually avoided all the poison ivy on the course and finished in 4:53:11.

A new event was tried this year – the 50K two person relay. Two teams signed up: Anne Ruch and John Andrew (AJ Racing team) in the male/female category and Bill Burns and John Huber (Burning Hubber) in the male/male division. The former team ran a combined 4:46:09 and the latter finished in 4:32:01 which of course earned them both first place in their divisions and course records!

The 25K race included a much larger field of 153 runners and saw very fast times. For the men, Jonathan Dewitt (1:32:48; second place overall) took the early lead, but was eventually tracked down by the overall winner Jake Kasperski (1:31:23). Jake's time was just short of Matt Folk's 2012 25K record of 1:30:09. This year, Matt had it going early but finished in third place (1:35:30). Apparently, he developed stomach troubles from over-carbolading on Lucky Charms the night before. He had to step off the trail and take a squat behind a tree and was freaked out when a hungry-looking squirrel kept running between his legs, jumping up and down. I guess Matt forgot that squirrels like nuts...

The 25K men's Masters champ was Robert Slater with an outstanding time of 1:37:37 for fifth place overall followed by Steve Hart in 1:43:49. Robert, who won the 25K Masters division last year, knocked off over five minutes from last year's time. I guess he never heard that runners are supposed to get slower with age.

In the women's 25K race, Mary Dressel (2:03:01) was the overall female winner and 22nd finisher overall. Not far behind her was the second place female finisher, Andria Barlage (2:09:00; 29th overall). The female Masters winner was Jennifer Puster who busted her tail to finish in 2:11:32 and 33rd overall.

The 5K fun run/walk saw a field of 66 runners/walkers navigate parts of the blue, red, and bike trails. Jonathan Riffle finished first in 18:12. Steve Oxer was right behind him and the first male Masters in 18:21. The first female was Maija Taylor in 22:12 and Tami Ramsay followed up as the first female Masters in 27:27.

After their events, runners enjoyed lots of pancakes, homemade soup, and other treats in the Buehner Center or alongside Mallard Lake in the sunshine. The Overall and Masters winners in the 50K and 25K races received laser-engraved wood plaques from Fine Lines Laser Engraving in Wauseon, Ohio and gifts from Second Sole running store in Levis Commons. Age group award winners were given ceramic campfire mugs (great for soups and ice cream!) Finally finishers in all the events received a homemade wood medal and lots of great memories.

Many, many thanks to all those who volunteered and supported the race: Matt Folk and Second Sole for awards and race-day set-up and support, Erin O'Connell for finding all those volunteers and doing everything on race day, all the many volunteers (around 40) at aid stations and elsewhere, Tonda Koszycki and the members of the Josina Lott community for handing out medals and cooking all the pancakes, Mary and Cy Steinhauser for race-timing for like 9 hours, John Andrew for helping mark the courses, take down the 5K course, and set up aid stations in the morning, his wife Lori for helping with timing and clean-up, Joan Mathews for tons of work setting up inside the Buehner Center, outside at the finish, and clean-up at the end, Anne Ruch for making soup, helping make the medals, and lots of other tasks, and Ed O'Reilly and the Toledo Roadrunners for race equipment. If I failed to mention anyone, I apologize and thank you.

Mark your calendars. The seventh version of the Oak Openings Stampede will be September 18th. See you there!