

Wapack Trail Race

September 6, 2009

Race day was marked by sunny skies, very low humidity, temperature in the 60s, dry trail conditions, and nice cooling breezes along the course - all-around perfect conditions for running and taking in the views from atop the peaks of Barrett, New Ipswich, Pratt, and Watatic Mountains. A record 87 finishers enjoyed as beautiful a day as one could ever hope for. The trails were in great shape due to the extraordinary efforts of the Friends of the Wapack who cleaned up the extensive damage that occurred during the devastating ice storm of December 2008.

Taking first place in a time of 2:24:10 was 27-year old Brandon Newbould of Dover, NH, a newcomer to trail running. His inexperience with trail running and his lack of familiarity with the Wapack Trail course didn't stop him from clocking the fifth fastest time ever recorded in the race since it began in 1992, and coming in only 2:54 off the course record set by Dave Herr, 44, of Canaan, VT in 2002. The others in the top five are Dave Dunham (1992), Ben Nephew (2001), and Leigh Schmitt (2002), so Brandon is in fine company, and is likely to be a leading trail runner in the coming years. Dave Herr was right behind Brandon nearly the entire race but fell back to finish in 2:27:25 for second place overall and the first finisher in the 40-49 age group. The 30-39 age group was led by Brian Rusiecki, 30, who finished third in 2:35:21. Veteran trail runner and ultra runner Peter Gargarin, 65, of Sunderland, MA, led the 60-69 age group with a strong 21st place in 3:24:10.

On the women's side, Amy Lane, 30, of Westfield, MA, in her first Wapack, finished a strong effort in 3:23:45. Grace Jensen was first in the 40-49 age group in 3:52:47, narrowly edging out Tammy Godin of North Grafton, MA who finished in 3:52:53. In the 50-59 age group, Jeanne Christie, of Windham, ME, was first in 4:15:31.

Special note needs to be made of the performance of Rob Higley, 55, of Amherst, MA who finished fourth overall, in 2:43:20! A special note was also made last year when Rob finished in 2:50:36 and so now we have clear evidence that his biological clock is running backwards. Rob was the first 50-59 year old in the Boston Marathon of 2004 with a time of 2:51:24 and he continues to put out outstanding performances.

There was one drop out due to a twisted ankle, and two strong runners took routes less traveled. Scott Livingston (husband of the holder of the Wapack's course record for women, but also a very accomplished runner in his own right!) climbed up and went straight over Mt. Watatic instead of turning right at the top. By the time he realized his mistake, he was at the base of the mountain and had to retrace the very steep power line trail. When he got to the course at the top of Mt. Watatic again, he went down to the turnaround and then ran back up Mt. Watatic once more! He was in fifth place when he got lost, but he finished in 14th place.

Scott's wife, Deb Livingston, is just two weeks away from giving birth to their second child, so she (probably reluctantly) decided to watch their son Shepard so that Scott could run. Bob Sharkey, who would be expected to finish near the top 10, inexplicably (well, he IS over 50) ran right over some chalk lines instead of turning a corner and ending up adding several miles to the 17.5 mile race course and turning his race into a training run. Most confused by this was Bob's super-loyal dog Sheeba, who seemed quite concerned to see so many runners finish ahead of his usually speedy master. They were finally reunited in just under 5 hours and Sheeba was noticeably smiling.