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Local Runner Places 4th in Inaugural Cumberland Trail 50k Ultramarathon Race

CARYVILLE, TN, OCTOBER 23, 2009 - Local ultramarathon runner Tony Branum finished 4th out of 20 starters with a time of 6 hours and 48 minutes in the area's first-ever ultramarathon, the Cumberland Trail 50k, held on October 10, 2009. The 31-mile trail race, was won in impressive 5:26 by Byron Backer, 45, of Greenville, South Carolina. Women's winner Dreama Campbell, 37, of Chattanooga finished in 6th place with a time of 7:12. Only one runner dropped from the course, due to previously-existing injury.

The race is an ultramarathon, a category of race distances longer than the 26.2-mile marathon distance. The steep climbs, remoteness, and tough footing of this course are features that are valued and actively sought by ultramarathon runners for the personal challenge. All runners had to qualify for the race with recent race experience at this distance or longer. Runners started at Cove Lake State Park in the dark at 6:00 a.m. with headlamps to light the way. They joined the Cumberland Trail on Butter-and-Eggs Road, took the Cumberland Trail west under I-40, up 3100-ft Cross Mountain, ran west to Greens Branch Creek where the course diverted uphill to run on the nearby mine road to Horseshoe Ridge. Runners returned on the same course to the finish at Cove Lake State Park.

While many ultramarathons have emergency personnel at a few key aid stations along the course, LaFollette Search and Rescue went above and beyond to provide staff at all five aid stations along the course. This high degree of support, along with that of the race volunteers, Cove Lake State Park staff, Cumberland Trail State Park staff, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency personnel, and the Cumberland Trail Conference made the race a solid success.

Runners travelled from as far away as St. Louis, Missouri, and Newnan, Georgia, for the chance to try this course. Proceeds from race entries benefit the Cumberland Trail Conference, but business from the visiting runners and race purchases also benefit the local economy. The race is expected to grow in size next year.

Highlights of the race were the early colors and an elk that accompanied many of the runners at the turnaround. Runner comments include: "Awesome experience. It was all I was expecting and then some," "The course was fabulous and made me wonder why I don't carry a camera to capture the beauty of some of these courses. We all enjoyed the elk, the waterfalls, the steps, the rocks," "Thanks for a great race. I really enjoyed the trail and the scenery. The elk was a real bonus! It was a challenging course and it took me a while to finish. But, I felt like I had accomplished something when it was over," "I had a ball," "Course was nice but hard. Hopefully you can make this race an annual thing in this area," "Excellent course markings, aid stations, start/finish area at Cove Lake State Park. Challenging and fun course. Rock gardens, mountain laurel, lots of water and mud to run through, deep forest, big mountain climb to highest point on the Cumberland Trail, grassy and fast trail on the ridge, thick fog...excellent race in every way."

Full results located under "Cumberland Trail 50k" at <http://www.ktc.org/Results.html>

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