

## **Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation**

P.O. Box 129, Linville, N.C. 28646

Contact: Frank Ruggiero & Linda Horn | (828) 733-2013 | frank@grandfather.com

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Beech Mountain resident Michael Holland wins ‘The Bear’**

*High winds shorten race for first time in 22-year history*

GRANDFATHER MOUNTAIN, N.C.—The 61<sup>st</sup> annual Grandfather Mountain Highland Games opened with a footrace that was shorter than your average Bear.

The Bear, a grueling, typically five-mile hill climb that kicks off the annual Grandfather Mountain Highland Games, returned Thursday, July 7, but under slightly different circumstances.

Although Michael Holland of Beech Mountain, N.C., finished first, it was the wind that had the fastest time. With gusts of up to 66 mph recorded at the Mile High Swinging Bridge — and, according to Grandfather Mountain staff, up to 74 mph in the top parking lot, where the race typically finishes — The Bear was shortened by .4 miles as a safety precaution.

Instead, it concluded at Grandfather’s Black Rock Parking Area, still with a majestic view of the surrounding North Carolina High Country.

This marks the first time in The Bear’s 22-year history that the race has been shortened due to inclement weather, but the bulk of the race’s 800 runners seemed unfazed.

That includes Holland, who completed the race in just 29:20.8. Holland, 19, has been competing in The Bear since 2009 and said this win has been a long time coming. Despite the shortened distance, he confirmed it was still a tough race.

“I had to change up the game plan a little,” he said of the slightly abbreviated course.

Holland ran cross-country at Watauga High School in Boone and is now a member of the running club at Clemson University, where he attends school.

But his motivation sits closer to home.

“Most importantly, I have got to thank Beech Mountain,” he said. “It’s truly a family up there — so many people when you run down the road to wave and see, from the public works team to the police officers, (recreation) department and especially the fire department. I thank them so much. This race is totally for them, without a doubt.”

Tanner Cook, 22, of Abingdon, Va., won second place, finishing with a time of 30:25.0, and third place finisher Edwin Schlichter, 33, from Huntersville, N.C., finished in 31:10.1.

It was time of joy for Amanda Sorrow, 2016's first female finisher, with a time of 38:06.1. Sorrow, 35, of Banner Elk, N.C., has been running The Bear on and off since 1999. She has placed second and third in her class before at the uphill footrace, but this is her first time taking first.

"I just like the race," Sorrow said. "It's local, you know, and I like the challenge and the scenery — it's so pretty."

Second place in female finishers went to Valerie Matena, 30, of Charlotte, N.C., who completed the race with a time of 38:29.3, and third went to Robyn Land, 45, of Lewisville, N.C., with a time of 39:17.2.

According to race coordinator Jim Deni, the pool of runners numbered more than 800, representing 19 states, including Hawaii, with an age range of 9 to 79.

"So, this was huge," he said. "We have people that travel from all over to get here."

That includes William and Emily Garrison of Huntsville, Ala., who donned wedding-themed running attire to celebrate their honeymoon.

"We realized this is the first vacation we had since we got married, so why not make it our honeymoon?" William Garrison said. "It's just a great race and a really unique course. It's very challenging, but the view from the top makes it all worth it."

Even it that top is a little breezy.

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#### ATTACHMENTS:

070716\_GFM\_The\_Bear\_Michael\_Holland\_1\_SS: Beech Mountain's Michael Holland, far right, nears the finish line of The Bear footrace at Grandfather Mountain. Holland took first place in the grueling climb with a time of 29:20.8. Photo by Skip Sickler | Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation

070716\_GFM\_The\_Bear\_Amanda\_Sorrow\_SS: Amanda Sorrow of Banner Elk was the first female finisher of The Bear footrace at Grandfather Mountain. Sorrow, a Bear veteran, completed the challenge with a time of 38:06.1. Photo by Skip Sickler | Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation

070716\_GFM\_The\_Bear\_honeymooners\_SS: William and Emily Garrison of Huntsville, Ala., donned wedding-themed running attire to celebrate their honeymoon with The Bear at

Grandfather Mountain, part of the 61<sup>st</sup> annual Grandfather Mountain Highland Games.  
Photo by Skip Sickler | Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation