

Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Boone, Gastonia residents win Grandfather Mountain Marathon

GRANDFATHER MOUNTAIN, N.C. — If one thing can be said for running coach Caleb Masland, he teaches by example.

Masland, 36, of Boone, N.C., was the first-place finisher in the 50th annual Grandfather Mountain Marathon, held Saturday, July 8, as part of the 62nd Grandfather Mountain Highland Games.

With a time of 2:53.14, Masland completed the 26.2-mile race from Appalachian State University's Kidd Brewer Stadium in Boone to MacRae Meadows at the base of Grandfather Mountain — an elevation climb of 1,267 feet.

At about the 15.5-mile mark, though, he started having doubts.

"It was just so humid today, and humidity really gets me," Masland said. "I stopped for a few minutes ... and I was ready to throw in the towel, but I decided to keep going, and it was just one foot in front of the other today."

Fortunately, the owner and operator of Coach Caleb, an online running school, had some motivation waiting for him on the Blue Ridge Parkway.

"My wife and kids, I knew they were waiting for me at the Parkway," Masland said. "Also, I coach runners for a living, and I know they really look up to me to never give in, so I decided to keep going."

Masland said it felt even more special to finish first in the 50th anniversary of the marathon.

"I really love this race," he said. "It has a special place in my heart. Even when it's really hard, I love it, and I guarantee I'll be back next year."

This marks Masland's third time running — and his third time winning, having taken first in 2014 and 2015.

Following Masland was Matt Longworth, 36, of Wadesboro, N.C., with a time of 3:07.06 and Caleb Critcher, 33, of Deep Gap, N.C., with a time of 3:09.10.

“I did the Marine Corps (Marathon), and that was tough because it was in the heat, but with this hill... it’s got to be the hardest one I’ve ever done,” said Longworth, who, when not competing, is training to become a home inspector.

The 50th Grandfather marathon was Critcher’s first, and it won’t be the App State control shop staffer’s last.

“It was pretty rough out there ... but I was on the podium, which was one of my goals, so I’m real excited about that,” he said. “I’ll definitely do it again.”

The finish line was no stranger to Suzanne Hutchins, 37, of Gastonia, N.C. Hutchins, who works as a nurse, was the first female finisher with a time of 3:13.45 and was last year’s first-place female finisher, as well.

This was her fifth time running the Grandfather Mountain Marathon, a race that keeps calling her back due to the nature of the course — literally.

“It’s the course,” she said. “I enjoy the nature and beauty of it, but it was hard. It was a very hard and warm day.”

Hutchins was followed by Mary Michaels, 33, of Moody, Ala., with a time of 3:25.13, and Danielle Soroka-Jones, 43, of Salisbury, N.C., with a time of 3:42.59.

Michaels has only been running marathons since May 2016 and was elated to finish second.

“I started running late, but it’s never too late to start,” said Michaels, who works as a veterinarian technician. “Running is my hobby, but animals are my passion.”

Soroka-Jones, a real estate appraiser, was also happy to place.

“It was a beautiful course,” she said, “and a wonderful experience.”

According to race director Jim Deni, 376 people signed to race the 50th Grandfather Mountain Marathon.

“That’s a great number for a marathon,” he said, “and we’re ranked within the top 25 marathons in the country. This is such a special event, to have a marathon as part of a highland games for 50 years consecutively. You know, we never had to cancel it. Even with bad weather, we’d sometimes got to the meadows, and there wasn’t a tent standing, but we still finished.”

For more information about the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games, visit www.gmhg.org, or call (828) 733-1333.

The not-for-profit Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation strives to inspire conservation of the natural world by helping guests explore, understand and value the wonders of Grandfather Mountain. For more information, call (800) 468-7325, or visit www.grandfather.com to plan a trip.

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ATTACHMENTS:

070817_GFM_gmhg_marathon_masland_SS: Caleb Masland, of Boone, N.C., finishes first in the Grandfather Mountain Marathon, held July 8 as part of the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games, with a time of 2:53.14. Now in its 50th year, the 26.2-mile race stretches from Appalachian State University's Kidd Brewer Stadium in Boone to MacRae Meadows at the base of Grandfather Mountain, boasting an elevation climb of 1,267 feet. Photo by Skip Sickler | Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation

070817_GFM_gmhg_marathon_longworth_SS: Matt Longworth, of Wadesboro, N.C., finishes the Grandfather Mountain Marathon with a time of 3:07.06. The marathon, now in its 50th year, was held Saturday, July 8, as part of the 62nd annual Grandfather Mountain Highland Games. Photo by Skip Sickler | Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation

070817_GFM_gmhg_marathon_critcher_SS: Caleb Critcher, of Deep Gap, N.C., completes the Grandfather Mountain Marathon with a time of 3:09.10. The marathon, now in its 50th year, was held Saturday, July 8, as part of the 62nd annual Grandfather Mountain Highland Games. Photo by Skip Sickler | Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation

070817_GFM_gmhg_marathon_hutchins_SS: Suzanne Hutchins, of Gastonia, N.C., was the first female finisher in the Grandfather Mountain Marathon with a time of 3:13.45. Hutchins was last year's first-place female finisher, as well. The marathon, now in its 50th year, was held Saturday, July 8, as part of the 62nd annual Grandfather Mountain Highland Games. Photo by Skip Sickler | Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation

070817_GFM_gmhg_marathon_michaels_SS: Mary Michaels, of Moody, Ala., was the second female finisher in the Grandfather Mountain Marathon with a time of 3:25.13. The marathon, now in its 50th year, was held Saturday, July 8, as part of the 62nd annual Grandfather Mountain Highland Games. Photo by Skip Sickler | Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation

070817_GFM_gmhg_marathon_soroka-jones_SS: Danielle Soroka-Jones, of Salisbury, N.C., was the third female finisher in the Grandfather Mountain Marathon with a time of 3:42.59.

The marathon, now in its 50th year, was held Saturday, July 8, as part of the 62nd annual Grandfather Mountain Highland Games. Photo by Skip Sickler | Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation