

**CORRECTION: This version corrects an earlier version that incorrectly states Doria Kosmala's finishing time.**

**Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Boone resident Andrew Vandenberg wins 'The Bear'**

GRANDFATHER MOUNTAIN, N.C. — Boone resident Andrew Vandenberg emerged victorious Thursday at the The Bear, a grueling five-mile hill climb that kicked off the 60<sup>th</sup> annual Grandfather Mountain Highland Games.

Vandenberg, 21, credited consistent training and excellent race-day weather for his winning time of 31 minutes, 27.4 seconds.

"It felt really hard," said Vandenberg, who has participated in the race seven or eight times. "I was just breathing hard the whole entire time. It's just that kind of race."

Second place finisher Evan Gates, 24, of Durham, completed the race in 32 minutes, 12.1 seconds, while third place went to Mike Mitchell, 31, of Mint Hill, with a time of 33 minutes, 18.3 seconds.

In a surprise shakeup, race officials disqualified the first female finisher for running illegally in another registrant's number.

First place honors were awarded instead to Alisha Edmiston, 34, of Drexel, who completed the course in 40 minutes, 59.5 seconds. Edmiston, an ultramarathoner and regular participant in The Bear, was the second female finisher the two previous years.

Doria Kosmala, 19, a former Watauga High School standout who now runs for UNC-Chapel Hill, earned second place with a time of **41 minutes, 53.9 seconds**. Allison Pastorek, 38, of Jonesborough, Tenn., a noted distance runner, won third place with a time of 42 minutes, 40.4 seconds.

A whipping wind along the course and at the finish line kept times slower than in 2014, and no new course records were set.

The men's record remains at 30:34.35, set in 2005 by Ian Conner of Columbus, Ohio. Mary Ballinger holds the women's record time of 34:41.9, a mark she set last year.

Race coordinator Jim Deni said 802 runners representing 28 states gathered at the starting line in Linville to start the ascent to the Mile High Swinging Bridge, an elevation gain of 1,568 feet.

Deni said the race, now in its 21<sup>st</sup> year, filled to capacity in about 20 minutes, and another 400 hopefuls joined a waiting list.

“It’s just been an awesome day, and it’s really become a community event,” Deni said. “The whole goal of this is to promote wellness and fitness, and it’s become a social event, too. There’s no better place to do this than Grandfather Mountain.”

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ATTACHMENTS:

Bear1: Andrew Vandenberg of Boone eyes the finish line Thursday at Grandfather Mountain during the 21<sup>st</sup> running of The Bear, a race that kicks off the 60<sup>th</sup> annual Grandfather Mountain Highland Games. Skip Sickler | Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation.

Bear2: Alisha Edmiston of Drexel makes a final push for the finish line Thursday in The Bear race, finishing in a time of 40 minutes, 59.5 seconds. Edmiston was crowned the champion after race officials disqualified the first female finisher. Skip Sickler | Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation.