

## **Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Blowing Rock man sets new course record for ‘The Bear’**

GRANDFATHER MOUNTAIN, N.C.—Most guests to Grandfather Mountain take their time ascending the mountain.

Not Johnny Crain.

The 25-year-old Blowing Rock, N.C., resident set a new course record for The Bear, a grueling, five-mile hill climb that pits approximately 800 runners against the steep switchbacks of Grandfather Mountain, climbing 1,568 feet from the town of Linville, N.C., to the mountain summit.

Crain’s time of 30:18.4 beat the previous record of 30:34.35, set by Ian Connor in 2005. The annual race serves as a kick-off for the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games, held in MacRae Meadows at the base of Grandfather Mountain.

“Coming through the halfway point during the Highland Games, that was really a big motivator,” said Crain, who runs with ZAP Fitness in Blowing Rock. Originally from Dunlap, Ill., Crain relocated to the High Country to train full-time.

2017 marked his first Bear, and he’s fairly certain it won’t be his last.

“It feels good,” he said. “Just the challenge of it. I just raced two days ago in Atlanta ... and I was going to end my season, and I was like, ‘Why don’t I do just one more extremely hard effort?’ So, I thought, ‘You know what, I want to do that race.’ It sounded way better about 35 minutes ago than it does right now, but it was good. It feels good to come out here.”

Anthony Famiglietti, 38, of Mooresville, N.C., finished second with a time of 32:22. For him, The Bear was something of a homecoming.

“I grew up in New York ... but trained at Appalachian State University in 1996,” he said. “My first two formative years of college, I spent here. Coach Mike Curcio and Coach John Weaver developed me into a world-class runner. I became an Olympic runner (steeplechase, 2004 and 2008), right here in these mountains, thanks to them. It was an honor to come back and have them offer me to wear the App State jersey again, some 20 years later.”

Third place went to Evan Gates, 26, of Durham, N.C., with a time of 32:35.7. Gates described the run as “a fun challenge to do in the summer, especially when the weather is good like today.”

Amanda Lopiccolo, 34, of Boone, was the first woman to cross the finish line with a time of 38:45.4. The race was her first Bear, also serving as something of a welcome to the High Country, as she and her family moved from Cary, N.C., to Boone only three weeks ago.

For all she’d heard about the race, though, the course lived up to her expectations.

“It’s brutal,” Lopiccolo said. “It’s everything they said it would be — and more. But it’s also rewarding.”

To her, The Bear represented a new challenge.

“Runners are a little twisted in what they find enjoyable, and this was a challenge,” she said. “I’d never done a race like it, and coming through the Highland Games was really cool. The energy was really awesome.”

Second place in female finishers went to Allison Wordsdale, 22, from Boone, with a time of 41:19.9. For her, finishing second wasn’t the only cause for celebration. She and her friends ran The Bear for her best friend’s 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.

“I didn’t think I would do this well,” she said. “It feels pretty sweet. I feel very accomplished.”

Third place in female finishers went to Sophia Ritter, 15, from Boone, with a time of 41:42.

“I don’t remember having anybody younger than 15 (finish in the top),” race organizer Jim Deni said. “Our age range this year, if I remember my stats, is 6 to 75.”

This was also Ritter’s first time running The Bear, although she runs cross country and track at Watauga High School.

“It was a fun challenge,” she said. “It’s unlike any other race I’ve run, with the elevation gain ... but beautiful, and I had a good time.”

For more information about the Highland Games, visit [www.gmhg.org](http://www.gmhg.org), or call (828) 733-1333. For lodging and travel information, contact the High Country Host visitor center at (800) 438-7500 or [highcountryhost.com](http://highcountryhost.com).

*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](http://www.grandfather.com) to plan a trip.*

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ATTACHMENTS:

070617\_GFM\_gmhg\_bear\_crain\_SS: Blowing Rock's Johnny Crain set a new course record for The Bear, a grueling, five-mile hill climb that ascends 1,568 feet from the town of Linville to the summit of Grandfather Mountain. Crain's record of 30:18.4 beat the previous record of 30:34.35, set by Ian Connor in 2005. Photo by Skip Sickler | Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation

070617\_GFM\_gmhg\_bear\_famiglietti\_SS: Anthony Famiglietti, 38, of Mooresville, N.C., finished second in The Bear with a time of 32:22. Photo by Skip Sickler | Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation

070617\_GFM\_gmhg\_bear\_gates\_SS: Evan Gates, 26, of Durham, N.C., finished The Bear with a time of 32:35.7. Photo by Skip Sickler | Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation

070617\_GFM\_gmhg\_bear\_lopiccolo\_SS: Amanda Lopiccolo, 34, of Boone, was the first-place female finisher of The Bear, with a time of 38:45.4. Photo by Skip Sickler | Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation

070617\_GFM\_gmhg\_bear\_wordsdale\_SS: Allison Wordsdale, 22, from Boone, was the second-place female finisher of The Bear, with a time of 41:19.9. Photo by Skip Sickler | Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation

070617\_GFM\_gmhg\_bear\_ritter\_SS: Sophia Ritter, 15, of Boone, was the third-place female finisher of The Bear, with a time of 41:42. Photo by Skip Sickler | Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation