

BATTLE OF THE TITANS – EMPEROR’S CHALLENGE 2007

Canada’s two top mountain runners fought it out on the slopes of Roman Mountain in the 9th annual Emperor’s Challenge. Nanaimo resident Steve Osaduik is Canada’s top marathoner and is training for the Beijing Olympics. Kris Swanson of Victoria, who started his running career while living in Tumbler Ridge, had won the men’s event for the preceding eight years, one of the enduring feats in Canadian mountain-running history.

In an epic battle that was truly worthy of the “toughest and most beautiful half marathon in the world”, both runners broke Swanson’s 1 hr 34 min record by minutes. They were close up the notorious Mathews Gully, then Swanson led by a couple of meters over the summit. On the downhill he had to stop to attend to shoelace difficulties and lost thirty seconds. Osaduik leaped into the lead but Swanson reeled him in and had established a lead at km 11. Osaduik steadily caught up on the 450 foot climb to km 13, and blazed ahead with five kilometers to go.

Steve Osaduik thus became the first runner to break the 1½ hour barrier, cruising in strongly in 1-28:45, with Swanson following in 1-30:37. Both runners praised the race and the organizers afterwards. Swanson was gracious in defeat, and credited Osaduik for a superbly run race. Osaduik acknowledged that this was the first time he had ever had to walk in a race, and said this was the premier running event he had ever come across, and undoubtedly the toughest and most spectacular. Both runners said they hoped to be back in 2008.

With the 2006 winner in the women’s race, Jen Legault, unable to start the race due to a running injury, the women’s field was wide open. Penny Thompson, the gifted runner from Grande Prairie, toyed with the opposition and set a course record for the new route of 1-59:28, followed by Rena McLeod and two-time winner Marlene Corcoran.

A record field of 262 competitors took part (plus 19 in the kids’ races) in relatively good weather conditions, with alternating sun, cloud, mist, occasional rain, and mysterious views of the great mountain scenery. Athletes, some of whom came from as far afield as the USA, Australia, England, South Africa and Denmark, gained and lost 2850 feet on the tortuous course. Three athletes gained their coveted “in perpetuity” bibs for having completed five Emperor’s Challenges: Dennis Straussfogel, Lorraine Harrison and Sara Kolkea. An innovation this year was in the medals categories: seven athletes received gold medals for finishing in under two hours, 101 silver medals were given to those finishing in 2-3 hours, while the remaining finishers in under five hours received bronze medals.

Not totally unexpectedly, the finest Tumbler Ridge performances came from the outstanding crop of young athletes who have trained so hard this year: twelve year old Laura Sharman was the first Tumbler Ridge runner to cross the finishing line in 2-25, closely followed by Carina Helm. Just behind was ten year old Tyler Schlieff, the youngest male competitor in the history of the race. At the other end of the age spectrum was 82 year old Art Nolan of Watson Lake, who finished the race well within the prescribed five hour time limit in 4-47, a truly amazing performance.

The Emperor’s Challenge was recently featured in a prominent British running magazine, as the first-choice event in North America to come and run in. It takes a spirited small community to put on an event of this magnitude and caliber, and the Emperor’s Challenge Organizing Committee and the Wolverine Nordic and Mountain Society thank the sponsors, the fifty volunteers, and all the other supporters of the race for their outstanding efforts.



Canada's top marathoner, Steve Osaduk, crests the summit of Roman Mountain during the Emperor's Challenge. Osaduk set a blistering course record of 1 hour 28:45. Photo credit: Garry Holmlund



Race Director Doug Foerster congratulates the oldest competitor in the race, 82 year old Art Nolan of Watson Lake, on his outstanding 4 hour 47 minutes finish in the gruelling event. Photo Credit: Shawna Booker



A happy runner: Patsy Antle is jubilant after finishing her eighth Emperor's Challenge. Photo credit: Kevin Sharman



Steve Osaduik, the new Emperor's Challenge champion. Photo credit: Kevin Sharman