

Dragon's Back:

THE RACE THAT BREATHES FIRE

April 9, Catawba, Virginia

Race #1 of 3, The All Sport/East Coasters
Virginia Championship Mountain Bike Series

By Kyle S. Inman

Day Phone: 703.774.9200

Evening: 703.981.1034/Facsimile:703.982.TRAIL

Ken Gonsalves of Massachusetts outran dragon's fire (literally) and the entire field to snare the first event of 1995's All Sport/East Coasters Virginia Championship Mountain Bike Series — the Trek Dragon's Back mountain bike race near Roanoke, Virginia.

Desert dry woods and warm air generally mix for ideal racing conditions. It's also a recipe for raging forest fires, which snaked their way accross route 311 and onto the Dragon's Back prior to race day's end Sunday, April 9 — and are still burning there and in two other Craig county locations as of this writing.

But before the fire lit up the mountain, Ken took advantage of Chris Scott's (Schwinn) pinch to blaze away uncontested to the finish in 2:21:01. Mark Smith came in 1:13 later. Scott, who was obviously the pace setter on the first of Dragon's back two, 1500-foot singletrack climbs, dropped back to 4th, losing by 4 minutes.

The women were paced by vet worlds bronze medalist Carol Waters (Merlin), who competed a hat trick of Dragon's back victories with a time of 2:58:16, chased by Michele Lepard at 4:59.

This year's race, reknowned for its relentless climb, rock gardens, and harrowing, switchbacked Turkey Trail decent, featured Southwestern Virginia's largest mountain bike field ever: 254 racers. Competitors drove in from North Carolina, Maryland, DC, and West Virginia to a gorgeous, secluded area of the Jefferson National Forest.

Unexpected heat, 20 % humidity and no rain in over a month made for Arizonan dust bowl conditions. The 95-strong sport field suffered the most, with many sporting bandanna face screens, giving the field an appearance of marauding outlaws. Although once the four mile fire road dust-cloud ride was behind them, the singletrack climb up Deer Trail gulch took riders far above the dust and onto the back of the dragon itself.

And just as awards and the customary meal were completed, the forest service evacuated the area. Seems the dragon was attacking, and as a result, the woods were on fire.

Expert Men

1 - Ken Gonsalves	2:21:01
2 - Mark Smith	@ 1:13
3 - Paul Bell	@ 2:23
4 - Chris Scott (Schwinn)	@ 4:01
5 - Thomas Jenkins (Breezer)	@ 7:15

Expert Women

1 - Carol Waters (Merlin)	2:58:16
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2 - Michele Lepard	@ 4:59
Veteran Men (35 and older)	
1 - Fred Witwer	1:39:32
2 - Greg Coron	@ 5:25
3 - Bob Wright (East Coasters)	@ 7:07
4 - Greg Reed	@ 9:27
5 - Robby Robinson	@ 12:19
Sport Men	
1 - Michael Carpenter	1:37:10
2 - Greg Hall	@ :10
3 - Brian Bond (Blacksburg)	@ 3:36
4 - Andy Heathcote	@ 4:07
5 - Scott Huddleston	@ 4:10
Sport Women	
1 - Sheila Eaheart	2:13:46
2 - Diana Kurtzman	@ :25
3 - Beneline Peters	@ 10:06
4 - Colleen Doody	@ 31:21
5 - Lee Ligon	@ 48:08
Beginner Men	
1 - John Skinner	
2) Matt Franko	
3) Mark Stevens	
4) Ryan Ketchum	
5) Scott Walters	
Beginner Women	
1) Amanda West	
2) Mary Price	
First Timers	
1) Jason McClarty	
2) Stuart Dunberger	
3)James Lovell	
4) Jwoie Knox	
5) Jerrey Switza	
First Timer Women	