

Rough Racing



Bryan Gilkerson / DN-R

Darrell Haslacker, 36, of Penn Laird, runs through the woods at the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum on Thursday to build up his endurance for the Peak Death Race. The annual event, held in Pittsfield, Vt., is billed as the "world's most challenging endurance race."

Taking On The Reaper

Penn Laird Man To Run In Grueling Race To Raise Money For Cancer

By **BRYAN GILKERSON**
Daily News-Record

HARRISONBURG — In one of the most famous scenes of the 1957 Swedish film "The Seventh Seal," an aged knight challenges Death to a game of chess for his life.

One Valley man will soon be participating in his own macabre challenge against the Grim Reaper, in the 2014 Peak Death Race in the woods of central Vermont.

Darrell Haslacker, 36, of Penn Laird, is amazingly calm about his participation in a race organized by a company whose website is www.youmaydie.com.

"I've done a bunch of endurance races for the past two years. This seemed like the year" to try the infamous event, Haslacker said.

The Death Race, held annually since 2005 in the small town of Pittsfield, Vt., is billed as the "world's most challenging endurance race."

Unlike other endurance obstacle

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■ Darrell Haslacker, talking about competing in the Peak Death Race

competitions, such as the Tough Mudder and Spartan races — organized by the same parent company as the Death Race — this event takes place over several days with little advance knowledge of what obstacles may be encountered by the contestants.

The route changes from year to year. No course map is provided, and the list of challenges to be completed in the 40-mile course is kept a secret.

Indeed, even the beginning of the race is uncertain, as the Peak Races website lists the start date for this year as "June 27th (ish)."

"The mental part is going to be the toughest part," Haslacker said, referring to the competition's open-ended nature.

"Physically, I think I can do it," he said, but added that not knowing where the finish line is or how many challenges he'll have to face could take its toll.

"Just like life, the Death Race is designed to push and aggravate people to such a point that even the most stoic eventually fail," said race co-founder Joe De Sena in a press release.

Referencing last year's race, "The fact that people endured for 70 hours to see what they are made of, is just remarkable and awe-inspiring," De Sena concluded.

It is estimated that only 10 percent of those who begin the Death Race actually finish.

While no one has yet gone to the Great Beyond on the course, the

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Darrell Haslacker dons a weighted training vest to help him prepare for the grueling obstacle race that he will endure in Vermont at the end of the month to raise money for breast cancer research.

Motivated By Ill Friend

Race

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physical and mental challenges that participants must face are brutal.

In past Death Races, competitors have been asked to chop wood for two hours, move a truckload of manure by hand, retrieve a bicycle chain from a bag sunk in a river, build a fire and recite a list of U.S. presidents after climbing a 2,000-foot mountain — miss one, and you climb back down to try again.

This is in addition to the normal endurance race fare of crawling through muddy fields under barbed wire, climbing over walls and leaping over fire pits.

Haslacker has been training for the event by running five or six miles a day with a weighted vest, as well as completing 100 sets each of pushups, sit-ups and burpees — an exercise technique where one squats with their hands on the ground, thrust out their feet into a classic pushup position, bring their feet back and then jump up.

In addition, Haslacker said his job as a carpenter helps him stay in shape as he's "hauling lumber all the time."

While some may question his sanity in participating in this competition, Haslacker is also attempting to raise money for breast cancer care and research.

After speaking with a local friend who had been diagnosed with the disease, Haslacker decided to change his reasons for attempting the Death Race.

"I was just doing it for myself. ... But it seemed like I should do it for more," he said.

After receiving help from Butch's Home Improvements of Woodbridge, which covered his registration fees, Haslacker has raised nearly \$1,700 on the fundraising website www.youcaring.com for the Breast Cancer Clinic at the Sentara RMH Funkhouser Women's Center.

"Each time I begin to feel tired, weak, or in pain, I will think of those fighting to conquer breast cancer," Haslacker said on the fundraising site.