THE NAVAJO NATION

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LCR Half Marathon and 10K trail run challenges runners from across the country

Top, Vice President Nez takes a selfie with the crowd running behind him. Above, He nears the Little Colorado River Gorge Half Marathon turnaround point.

LITTLE COLORADO RIVER GORGE, Ariz.-The windy conditions and rocky terrain didn't deter runners from turning out in droves for the 3rd Annual Little Colorado River Gorge Half Marathon and 10K trail runs on Feb. 11.

The LCR, as the tribal park is known, is the gateway to the Grand Canyon.

The gateway to the South Rim of the Grand Canyon is in the center of the most picturesque landscapes on the Navajo Nation. Gray Mountain to the immediate south, Echo Cliffs, Wildcat Peak and Navajo Mountain to the north, Grand Canyon to the west and the Hopi Mesas to the east.

The first event of the 2017 Navajo Parks Race Series brought out more than 200 participants who traversed the rocky course that meandered near the roadway and edge of the gorge, as the coppery flow of the Little Colorado River snaked through the canyon below.

Yanabah Begay, a 12-year-old Navajo girl who impressed the ultrarunners of the Chuska 150 last year at age 11, was one of the many runners participating.

Tom Riggenbach, executive director of Navajo Youth Empowerment Services and race director of the LCR trail runs, said Begay was one of the toughest kids out there today.

"Last year, during the Running for a Stronger and Healthier Navajo Nation, Yanabah kind of accidently ran a 32-mile run," Riggenbach said while introducing her to the runners.

Navajo Nation Vice President Jonathan Nez participated and ran the half marathon for the third year in a row.
He encouraged runners before the start of the race and thanked two Navajo Code Talkers for being in attendance, John Kinsel and Peter McDonald, distinguished heroes from World War II.

"Our Navajo Code Talkers are a symbol of strength and resilience for our Dine'. For those of you who begin to feel tired and burned out from the race, remember these two gentlemen here. Our Navajo Code Talkers persevered through some hard times in their service," he said.

Speaking in Navajo, Vice President Nez said the Navajo Code Talkers must be remembered because they protected Navajo language and the traditional way of life, concepts that are absent today.

"Let's return these teachings to our grandchildren," he said.

Runners listened intently and some stretched while the vice president spoke. Organizers made last minute preparations for the start of the race.

"On behalf of President Russell Begaye and myself, we welcome you to the 2017 Navajo Parks Race Series. Our administration has taken health and wellness to the next level throughout the Navajo Nation," Vice President Nez said. "We've been encouraging our citizens to get out there and live an active lifestyle."

Navajo YES, in coordination with Office of the President and Vice President, Division of Natural Resources, Navajo Parks and Recreation Department, Department of Resource Enforcement, and other tribal departments hosted the event.

Two members of the Begaye-Nez cabinet participated in the run. Bidtah Becker, executive director of the Division of Natural Resources, ran the 10K. Crystal Deschinny, executive director of Division of Economic Development, ran the half marathon.

Information: navajoyes.org