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FLAT ROCK 50K '95

Kansas' First Trail Ultra

Elk City Reservoir
September 30, 1995

by Eric J. Steele

In late November of '94 I phoned Scott Demaree with the idea of organizing and promoting ultramarathons in Kansas and the surrounding states and possibly forming an organization dedicated to ultrarunning — at all levels (beginners through veterans). The line went dead for nearly 30 seconds before Scott replied in an unsure voice, "Yes, that is a possibility." He has since told me that, at the time, he was thinking, "What kind of ignorant, overtrained fool is this guy, anyway!" However, being the dedicated ultrarunner Scott is, he could not pass up the opportunity to help give birth and build an organization dedicated to the sport of ultrarunning — for this I will be eternally grateful. Shortly thereafter, I contacted Marc "little bro" Friesen and Randy "elfman" Albrecht, whose assets Scott and I felt would be invaluable to such an undertaking, as well. Four months later, the KANSAS ULTRARUNNERS' SOCIETY (KUS) was born and preparation for Kansas first trail ultra — the Flat Rock 50K, began.

While crewing for Dave Horton during Trans Am '95 this past summer for a week through Kansas, Dave told me we would be lucky to get twelve entrants the first year at Flat Rock. We received 28 paid entries. Not to discredit what Dave had said, I must point out Jesse Riley agreed with him, and Gary Cantrell's first part of *Advice to the Beginning R.D.* (August '95 UR) mentioned planning on losing money the first couple of years due to not enough entrants to cover fixed

overhead costs associated with putting on a race. Given my utmost respect for the three gentlemen just mentioned, we set our sights on taking care of however few runners entered our race — even if it was a dozen or less. One might only imagine a beginning RD and staffs' sheer joy over receiving more than twice their anticipated number of entries the first year.

The following words can only attempt to describe the camaraderie, community and group pooling of individual efforts (not to mention the extremely rugged trail) that made Flat Rock a cornerstone for the competitors by which they shall judge many future ultras.

Twenty-four runners from seven different states (Arizona, Illinois, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Oklahoma and Texas) stepped up to the starting line at the first annual Kansas UltraRunners' Society Flat Rock 50K, held at Elk City Reservoir -- seven miles northwest of Independence, Kansas, on September 30, 1995. Twenty men and four women took off at 8:00 am under partly cloudy skies with a forecast predicting upper 70s to low 80s with high humidity all day long. What a day for an ultra! Nine of the 24 starters had never completed an ultra before and one of them (ultralegend -- Keith Pippin) had completed more than 100.

The Flat Rock covered 30 of its 31 miles on extremely rugged, rocky terrain on the Elk City Trail that runs on the north side of the lake. Several race participants felt the course description of "very rocky with no long hills" was a bit of an understatement. Mike Grace from St. Joseph, Missouri, who unfortunately had to drop out of the race early due to the

severity of the course, sent me this course description a few days after the event to forewarn runners next year:

"The course is a path over rocks. Approximately 75% of your footfalls will be on jagged rocks. Approximately 25% is runnable trail. Accurately measured. blah, blah, blah . . . You get the idea."

Additionally, Wes Monteith from Pasadena, Texas, was overheard at the post race chili party and awards ceremony dubbing this course as "*the trail run from hell!*" Seriously, Wes, it must have been your shoes -- you know the ones specially designed for trail running that left your feet blistered rags by the turn around point (15.4 miles)! Ahh . . . blisters! One of the finer joys of our sport!

After having been on the trail numerous times this past summer with Marc, Scott, Randy and ultravolunteer Warren "purple flirp" Bushey, preparing for the race, we coined the motto for this trail: "*If you look up, you're going down!*" All of us whole heartedly agreed with this motto many different times as one of us sat digging embedded rock from underneath our knee and/or elbow caps. I will spare you the details about brushing spider webs out of our teeth. Our motto for the trail was boldly proclaimed in a "*Buyer Beware*" spirit to all race participants at the pre-race briefing and right before the start.

Ric Lind from Chanute, Kansas, jumped out to an early lead, with Bill Richardson from Perry, Oklahoma, following closely behind. By the first aid station (3.6 miles), novice ultrarunners Lind and Richardson had opened up over a three minute lead on the next pack of

runners made up of three veterans, Randy Ellis from Sapulpa, Oklahoma, Earl Blewett from Stillwater, Oklahoma, Donald Clark from St. Paul, Minnesota, and two newbies, Lisa Ritchie and Dennis Haig, both from Wichita, Kansas. Following closely behind was our youngest runner, newbie Felipe Rosales, also from Wichita.

Lind and Richardson reached the second aid station (7.4 miles) in approximately 72 minutes. Both men were bathed in sweat and gasping for air as if running a 5K. One could not help but wonder how long their intense sub ten-minute per mile pace would continue. Meanwhile, a very controlled and steady breathing Rosales had pulled into third place, only a minute behind the leaders. Ritchie and Haig, both looking extremely determined, had pulled into fourth and fifth place, four minutes behind Rosales.

The third aid station (12.9 miles) saw Richardson and Rosales coming in together in two hours. Both runners looked strong as they pushed each other through the aid station and on to the turn around point. Lind had fallen behind by about a minute and was beginning to show signs of fatigue, while Haig and Ritchie cruised in eight minutes later still looking like they were driven by some powerful force of nature! *The UltraGods were present!*

Richardson and Rosales both reached the turnaround point (15.4 miles) in two and one half hours. Lind, who came in 15 minutes later, decided to call it a day, due to safety concerns. Haig, Ritchie, Blewett, and Ellis all arrived eight minutes later, while veteran Bob Marston from St Joseph, Missouri, had crept up to only seven minutes further behind. Newbie Dave Noltensmeyer from Paola, Kansas, showed up three minutes later with Duane Frichtl (also running his first ultra) from Urbana, Illinois, coming in just a minute later.

One of our two oldest competitors, Dale Channel from Rossville, Kansas, also a newbie, came strolling in next in a time of 3:10. Just a couple minutes behind Dale was novice Wes Monteith who, at this point, was learning a dear lesson in the fact that trail shoes aren't necessarily made for trail running, or maybe I should say rock-skipping, eh Wes? Two minutes behind Wes were novices Curt "wildman" Babb, from Granby, Missouri, and Jefferey Skibbe, from Champaign, Illinois, -- these guys were both just having too much fun for such a hellish trail, maybe they would like a fifty mile option added next year!

Three minutes later our second

female competitor, newbie Mindy Wilson, from St. Joseph, Missouri, arrived, followed a minute later by veteran Bob Risser, from Cameron, Missouri. Just a minute later, newbie Phil Clugston, from Cherokee, Kansas, whose manners were impeccable, arrived. Five minutes later, our other oldest competitor, Keith Pippin from Sun Lakes, Arizona, strolled in chit-chatting about the beauty of the course. Ten minutes later, novice David Dinkel, from Olathe, Kansas, cruised in. David was followed six minutes later by Donald Clark, who had still not lost his ear-to-ear grin from the previous night before. A little over three and one-half hours had expired since the start.

By the time we were nearing the four hour and thirty minute cut-off at the turn around point, all runners had been accounted for but two -- veteran Rosemary "elrod" Marston from St. Joseph, Missouri, and newbie BJ Clark from Garden Plain, Kansas. With just a little under two minutes to spare, BJ and Rosemary reached the turn around point. The first question both ladies reluctantly asked was if they had to be out of the aid station by four and one-half hours. I felt like toying with them and telling them "yes," but opted to hold back my twisted sense of humor out of total respect for the ladies' diligent effort to make the turn around cutoff in time (and for fear I might get stoned to death by one of the aid station volunteers). So far, the trail had claimed three of the twenty-four starters. All nine newbies had made the turn around point in the four and one half hour cutoff and were on their way home. *The UltraGods were stirring!*

Aid station number five (17.9 miles) saw Rosales coming in at 3:07 on autopilot. Rosales had opened up a minute lead on Richardson, who was now beginning to grapple with the monsters in his head -- fatigue had set in. Meanwhile, Blewett and Ellis had passed overall female leader, Ritchie, and arrived in 3:28. Lisa was just a minute behind, however, and came through the aid station with a look on her face that gave new meaning to the term "man with a mission" -- how about "woman on a warpath!"

The long stretch between aid stations five and six (5.5 miles) proved to be the melting ground of the race, for all competitors mettle was truly fired and tested here. By the time Rosales reached aid station six (23.4 miles) in 4:05, he had opened up a nineteen minute lead on the second place spot, which was now occupied by the overall female leader, Ritchie. Blewett and Ellis arrived two minutes later, with Earl mumbling something about the strong looking woman that had just blown by him

a few minutes ago. Meanwhile, Richardson was beginning to cramp in his quads and came in just under 4:30. In true ultra-spirit, Richardson diligently pushed on. However, the quad cramps became quite severe and Bill had to drop from the race. Like a true ultra-competitor, Bill told me the course had "kicked his ass." but now he knew what to prepare for and he would definitely be back next year.

In a little under five hours (4:53), aid station number seven (27.2 miles) found Rosales sucking down oranges and dashing off on the final and toughest leg of the course. Ritchie had now become one with the trail and closed her gap on Rosales to fifteen minutes, while opening up her lead on Ellis and Blewett to over five minutes. Haig was now in fifth place and came through nearly twenty minutes later looking like he had already slain a few dragons. However, Dennis was not to be denied! Off he hammered. Amazingly, with only 3.8 miles left to go in the race, three of the top five competitors were newbies. *The UltraGods were rumbling!*

What a truly exhilarating feeling for newbie Rosales when, less than one hour later, he crossed the finish line in 5:43:52 as the overall mens champion and overall winner of the first annual Flat Rock 50K. Meanwhile, newbie Ritchie shortened Rosales' lead by nearly another two minutes and finished in 5:57:15 to become the overall women's champion. Lisa's stunning upset over the rest of the men's field is yet another example of womens incredible talent in ultra events. Blewett and Ellis ran across the finish line in unison, tying for third in 6:11:25. Randy Ellis was crowned the Men's Masters Champion.

Between the final aid station and the finish line, veteran Bob Marston had over taken newbie Haig to place fifth in a time of 6:35:37. Haig finished less than three minutes later in 6:38:21, virtually falling across the finish line, utterly exhausted. Veteran Rosemary Marston finished in 9:25:29 to be crowned the Female Masters Champion. A little over ten minutes later, newbie BJ Clark crossed the finish line in 9:36:01, thus making the ten hour course cutoff with time to spare. BJ was the ninth out of nine of our twenty finishers who had no ultra experience coming into this race. *The UltraGods were shining!*

Handcrafted and engraved pieces of flat limestone rock shaped like the state of Kansas (thanks "elfman") were given to all finishers, as well as larger slabs of rock for the overall and masters champi-

ons. Meals were prepared by The Stone Soup Kitchen (which has an "A" rating) under the supervision of Master Chef "purple flirp." Scrumptious loaves of bread that weighed a kilo each (now we're talking heavy fuel -- and to think someone once said "man could not live on bread alone." anyone who huffed some of this bread would beg to differ) were provided by Great Harvest Bread Company. Complimentary post-race massage was provided by Marti Hepler and Paul "ironlungs" Myshka.

The volunteers (Randy "elfman" Albrecht, Mike "keyman" Alkire, Bud and Delores Baker, Warren "purple flirp," Beverly, David and Patty Bushey, Scott Demaree, Chad "wicki" Flint, Ann and Marc "little bro" Friesen, Eugene Goff, Marilyn Lamm, Ray Prieba, Eric "pup" Sharpe, Jack, Virginia and Linda Steele, Valerie Stevenson and Bob Risser's wife) truly deserve a standing ovation. All were instrumental and, most importantly, indispensable elements of the Flat Rock's virgin success. *It's gotta be da' people!*

Additionally, the generous contributions of the sponsors (Army Corps of Engineers, Central Bank & Trust, Conquest Thirst Quencher, Club Fitness, Grand Rental Station, Great Harvest Bread Company, Independence Convention and Visitors Bureau, Kansas Trails Council, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Mail Marketing Group, Massage by Myshka, McDonald's, National Association For Management, Rubbermaid, Taco Tico, Total Homecare, Valley Offset Printing, Wesley Medical Center and Wichita Shirt & Cap) were an invaluable element of not only this year's Flat Rock, but of all future FR50s, as well.

The **Kansas UltraRunners' Society** is very committed to "quality" and "continuous improvement" in all of our events. This being the case, we included a Flat Rock 50K questionnaire and an SASE in all race participants' packets. All questions were on a scale of 1 to 5, with one being the lowest and five being the highest. All numbers were rounded to the nearest tenth. Twenty-four of the twenty-six participants who picked up their packets have responded and here are the results:

1. WAS THE COURSE
ADEQUATELY MARKED?
4.3

2. WAS THE COURSE
CHALLENGING FOR YOU?
4.7

3. WERE THE AID
STATIONS WELL STOCKED?
4.4

4. WAS THE TEN HOUR
TIME LIMIT SUFFICIENT?
4.9

5. HOW WERE THE ATTITUDES
OF THE VOLUNTEERS?
5.0

6. WERE THE VOLUNTEERS
HELPFUL?
5.0

7. HOW DO YOU LIKE
THE T-SHIRTS?
4.5

8. HOW DID YOU LIKE
THE MEALS?
4.5

9. WAS YOUR LODGING
OR CAMPSITE ADEQUATE?
4.5

10. DO YOU THINK THE RACE WAS A
GOOD VALUE FOR THE MONEY?
4.7

11. WOULD YOU RECOMMEND
THIS RACE TO A FRIEND?
4.7

OVERALL COURSE RATING:
4.7

12. WHAT DID PARTICIPANTS COL-
LECTIVELY LIKE MOST ABOUT THIS
EVENT?

1.) The people who organized, staffed and participated in the event. 2.) The scenic trail.

13. WHAT DID PARTICIPANTS COL-
LECTIVELY LIKE LEAST ABOUT THIS
EVENT?

1.) The long stretch between aid stations two & three and five & six (5.5 miles). 2.) No hose or showers close to the finish.

We will definitely be adding an aid station (on the long stretch, 5.5 miles) to the course next year. We will also make arrangements to have a hose wash-off available at the finish area along with shuttle service to the State Park (5 miles from finish area) for runners who would like a shower.

Well, that's a wrap. Always

remember: "*Faith moves mountains, but bring your pick and shovel.*" See ya' next year!

Scott Demaree Adds:

I'm not sure I can compare and contrast the Flat Rock 50K with any other race I've attended, but I will try. First, you should know that I have completed 72 ultramarathons and 41 marathons. I have also been at dozens of these length races as a helper/observer.

Most ultras are put on by runners, and that certainly was the case here. But most runners who put on races don't have or apply the skills needed to pull it off in the way Flat Rock was done. I speak from direct experience here as I have attempted to organize ultras in the past. I helped make this thing happen, but I am not patting myself on the back. The one most responsible for making Flat Rock the best ultra I've ever seen is race director Eric Steele. We are lucky to have someone like Eric in our sport, and I believe he is here to stay.

I need to say a few words about the course. This is by far and away the most difficult trail I have ever been on. Not from a climb and decent standpoint, but in sheer hazardous footing per square yard, it has no peer. I will qualify that by saying I haven't run any of the rugged trail races in the eastern U.S., but they could *not* possibly be more treacherous. Yet in a field of runners nearly half of which had never raced on trails, we had no serious injuries. Lots of minor scrapes were brought on by the temptation to peek at the unique scenery and forgetting the admonition: "*If you look up, you're going down!*" Even walking while admiring the view invites a painful and close up encounter with the trail itself. Our runners rightfully chose safety over speed, many heeding our advice to stop completely if they wanted to see the sights. So the finishing times are more representative of 50 miles than 50K.

Finally, despite being on the receiving end of one of Ann Trason's overall wins, I continue to be amazed by the toughness of the women. Three of the four women who started our race were running their first ultra. *All* of them finished, and Lisa Ritchie might have come close to winning outright, had she not briefly lost the trail near the turnaround.

KUS is committed to keeping the same high quality and friendly atmosphere as major features of this race as it grows. To help insure this we anticipate capping the race entries at about 125.

FLAT ROCK 50K
Elk City Reservoir, KS
September 30, 1995

PLACE	NAME	TIME	AGE	S	CITY	ST
1	ROSALES, FELIPE	5:43:52!	24	M	WICHITA	KS
2	<u>RITCHIE, LISA</u>	5:57:15!	39	F	WICHITA	KS
3	ELLIS, RANDY	6:11:25	43	M	SAPULPA	OK
3	BLEWETT, EARL	6:11:25	31	M	STILLWATER	OK
5	MARSTON, BOB	6:35:37	44	M	ST. JOSEPH	MO
6	HAIG, DENNIS	6:38:21	35	M	WICHITA	KS
7	NOLTENSMeyer, DAVE	6:51:00	47	M	PAOLA	KS
8	CHANNEL, DALE	7:01:45	55	M	ROSSVILLE	KS
9	RISSER, ROBERT	7:07:44	55	M	CAMERON	MO
10	FRICHTL, DUANE	7:27:40	38	M	URBANA	IL
11	<u>WILSON, MINDY</u>	7:29:00	28	F	ST. JOSEPH	MO
12	BABB, CURT	7:30:02	42	M	GRANBY	MO
13	SKIBBE, JEFFREY	7:34:59	47	M	CHAMPAIGN	IL
14	PIPPIN, KEITH	7:56:07	55	M	SUN LAKES	AZ
15	MONTEITH, WES	8:13:07	44	M	PASADENA	TX
16	CLUGSTON, PHIL	8:41:43	47	M	CHEROKEE	KS
17	CLARK, DONALD	8:44:36	44	M	ST. PAUL	MN
18	DINKEL, DAVID	9:10:34	46	M	OLATHE	KS
19	<u>MARSTON, ROSEMARY</u>	9:25:29	47	F	ST. JOSEPH	MO
20	<u>CLARK, BJ</u>	9:36:01	40	F	GARDEN PLAIN	KS
	GRACE, MIKE	DNF	38	M	ST. JOSEPH	MO
	LIND, RIC	DNF	32	M	CHANUTE	KS
	MCKIBBIN, VERYL	DNF	48	M	WINFIELD	KS
	RICHARDSON, BILL	DNF	35	M	PERRY	OK

! = COURSE RECORD
 underline = female finishers
 DNF = did not finish