

FLAT ROCK 50 K TRAIL RUN

September 30, 1995

When I entered the Elk City Lake Park and saw the warning sign "SLIDE AREA" I knew I wasn't in Kansas anymore.

The first trail ultra in Kansas, hosted by The Kansas Ultrarunners' Society, Eric Steele R.D., was quite a success. Yes, I'd do it again.

The People

The race attracted 24 starters from Kansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Texas, Illinois, Minnesota and Arizona. A number of the top Kansas ultrarunners are noticeably absent from the race results, as they were volunteers. I was happy to find Randy Ellis from Sapulpa, OK at the race. The last 50 Km ultra I ran, back in April, we ran the last half together. Randy was coming off a good finish in Leadville this year. The other Okie runner, from Perry, not 20 miles from my home in Stillwater, was Bill Richardson, a speedster (3rd overall in the Perry 5km a week before, Eric Steele placing 5th) The runners ranged from gentleman with multiple Badwater finishes to quite a number of ultra novices.

The Course

The race followed extensively marked trails around Elk City Lake, through (mostly up and over) a series of interesting limestone rock formations, cliffs and canyons. There are some wonderful views of the Lake, I wouldn't have believed there was such so much water in Kansas (nor rock for that matter). As advertised, the race was a true trail ultra, almost entirely on very rocky trails. The trails, designated part of the National Recreation Trail System, were rated "Rugged" by the Park Service. I have other words to describe them. The Race Motto was "If you look up, you're going down". When Eric announced the time cutoff at the 15 mile turnaround would be 4 and a half hours I thought he was kidding. There was a 10 hour limit. I (or Randy) have never been over 5 hours for 50 km. Boy did I have a surprise coming. Note in the ad it says "no long hills". There weren't any long ones but there were sure a lot of short ones.

The Race

At the start, one of the two short bits of road, one runner was busy doing accelerations, I suppose to warm-up. This gentleman, who will remain nameless, sprinted off into the distance at the start. Randy and I agreed that he'd either kick our butts or we'd find his body somewhere along the trail. The trail was beautiful. It runs up and down ridges, through small canyons, endlessly rising and falling through an oak/hickory forest. I carried a disposable camera on the first 15 miles and recorded some of the scenery.

By the way, if you did look up you fell down. I had half a dozen bad falls, Randy about the same. I also tried to remove some of that bedrock from the trail with my toes. My big toes are nail-less, to my relief, but I did manage to rip off the nail on my second largest toe. Early in the race I stopped

to tighten my shoes. The jumping from rock to rock, landing on the balls of the feet were beginning to take their toll. We walked up and down all the gradients.

The first aid station indicated how the race would go. It didn't show up! We kept running and running and finally appeared. Our pace was over 11 minutes/mile. O.K., maybe in the first 3 miles of big city marathon I go that slow but all alone on a trail? I don't have the self-discipline to hold back that much. It was a very tough course. Randy said this trail was even rockier than Lake Texoma and the pace we were running was the same he made during a 100 mile race at Huntsville. The 80 F and high humidity weren't much help. The aid stations were well supplied, and the many volunteers were very cheerful and helpful or it would have been hell. Remember the fellow running accels? he quit at 15 miles.

As the course took it's toll on the front-runners, the 3 Okies held 1st, 3rd and 4th place. Bill succumbed at 22 miles but Randy and I held on for 3rd overall. Randy got 1st masters male. We took 6:11:25 to cover the distance. The winner was Felipe Rosales, 24, of Wichita, KS and second place BJ Clark (f), 40, of Garden Plain, KS. I believe she was 5:57. We'd been catching her at aid stations and led her for a while. She left us at 26 miles and must have run like the wind. I'm afraid I don't have the remaining results. There were 20 finishers of 24 starters.

After a massage, during which I proposed marriage and fell asleep, I curled up in sleeping bag in the shade. I felt somewhat awful. How about the 4:30 cutoff? Two runners came through at 4:28. They both finished, the last at 9:23. I don't know how people could stay out there and keep going so long. They got big rounds of applause when they finished.

Final Plug

This race was a well organized, classy affair and the KUS should be proud. If you're looking for a tough trail ultra this is the one.