

The First Trail Ultra in Kansas — Hills and a Few Rocks

by Eric Steele

In late October 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. 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. Four months later, the Kansas UltraRunners' Society (KUS) was born, and preparation for Kansas's first trail ultra (the Flat Rock 50 Km) began.

While I was crewing for Dave Horton during Trans Am '95 for a week through Kansas this summer, 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 Race Director" (August '95 *UR*) warned that you should expect to lose 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 our sheer joy over receiving more than twice their anticipated number of entries the first year!

The skies were partly cloudy and the forecast predicted upper 70s to low 80s with high humidity all day long as 24 runners from seven states stepped up to the starting

line at Elk City Reservoir, seven miles northwest of Independence, Kansas. Nine of the 24 starters had never completed an ultra before; on the other end of the spectrum, one of them — ultra legend Keith Pippin — had completed more than 100.

Thirty of the 31 miles of the Flat Rock course followed the Elk City Trail as it traversed extremely rugged, rocky terrain on the north side of the lake. Several race participants said afterwards that the course description of "very rocky with no long hills" was a bit of an understatement. Actually, after having been on the trail numerous times this past summer with Marc, Scott, Randy and ultravolunteer Warren Bushey, we coined the motto for this trail: "If you look up, you're going down!" All of us personally experienced this motto a few times! The motto 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. Behind these two ultra newcomers was a pack of runners made up of three veterans, Randy Ellis from Sapulpa, Oklahoma, Earl Blewett from Stillwater, Oklahoma, Donald Clark from St. Paul,

Valerie Stevenson



Mike Grace and Donald Clark negotiate one of many rocky sidehills at the Flat Rock 50 Km.

Minnesota, and two more 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 five-km. One could not help but wonder how long their intense sub ten-minutes 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 turnaround 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.

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. Dave Noltensmeyer from Paola, Kansas, showed up three minutes later with Duane Frichtl from Urbana, Illinois, coming in just a minute later.

By the time we were nearing the four-and-a-half-hour cut-off at the turnaround point, all runners had been accounted for but two — veteran Rosemary Marston from St. Joseph, Missouri, and B. J. Clark from Garden Plain, Kansas. They arrived with just a little under two minutes to spare. 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 respect for their diligent effort to make the turnaround in time (and for fear I might get stoned to death by one of the aid-station volunteers).

Aid station number five (17.9 miles) saw Rosales coming in at 3:07 on autopilot. He had opened up a one-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 indicated it was time to get serious.

The long stretch between aid stations five and six (5.5 miles) proved to be crucial. By the time Rosales reached aid station six (23.4 miles) in 4:05, he had opened up a 19-minute lead on the second-place spot, which was now occupied by the female leader,

Ritchie. Blewett and Ellis arrived two minutes later, with Earl mumbling something about the woman that had just blown by him a few minutes ago. Next in was Richardson in just under 4:30, although he was beginning to cramp in his quads. He diligently pushed on, but the 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 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 a bit worse for the experience. However, Dennis was not to be denied! Off he hammered.

Less than one hour later Rosales crossed the finish line in 5:43:52 as the winner. Lisa Ritchie shortened Rosales' lead by nearly another two minutes and finished in 5:57:15 to become the women's champion. Blewett and Ellis ran across the finish line in unison, tying for third.

Hand-crafted and engraved pieces of flat limestone rock shaped like the state of Kansas were given to all finishers, as well as larger slabs of rock for the overall and masters champions. Meals were prepared by The Stone Soup Kitchen, and complimentary post-race massage was provided by Marti Hepler and Paul "Iron Lungs" Myshka. They and all the rest of the volunteers were terrific.

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 50 Km questionnaire and an SASE in all race participants' packets. Twenty-four of the 26 participants who picked up their packets responded; on

average they gave the event an overall rating of 4.7 on a scale of 1 to 5.

What they liked most were the people who organized, staffed, and participated in the event, and the scenic trail. What they liked least was the long stretch (5.5 miles) between aid stations two and three (and five and six), and that there was no hose or showers close to the finish.

We will definitely be adding an extra aid station 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 (five miles from the finish area) for runners who would like a shower.

Scott Demaree adds:

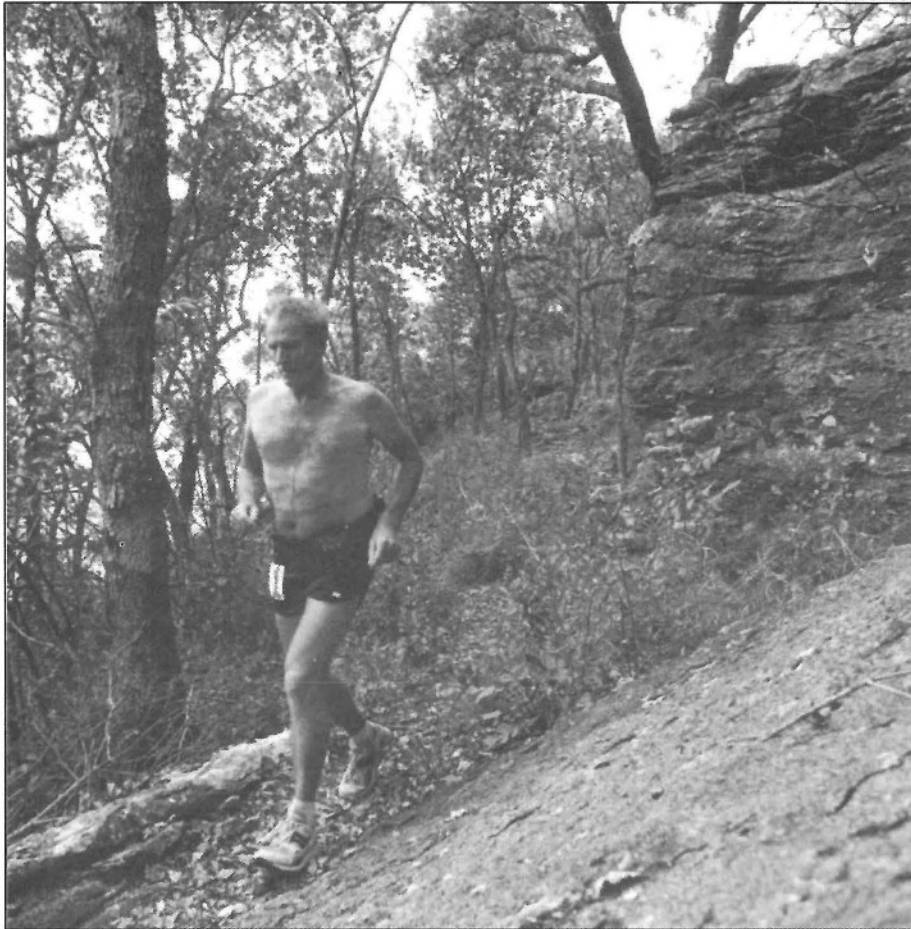
The one most responsible for making Flat Rock the best ultra I've ever seen is Race Director Eric Steele. We are lucky to have someone like Eric in our sport.

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

Valerie Stevenson



Lisa Ritchie and Dennis Haig cruise along a section of real fine trail.



Keith Pippin came up from Arizona to try out the Kansas trails.

a climb and descent 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 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 a longer race than 50 kilometers.

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.

Flat Rock 50 Km

Independence, Kan. Sept. 30, 1995
Trails, out and back

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|----------------------|----------|
| 1. Felipe Rosales,24 | 5:43:52! |
| 2. Lisa Ritchie,39 | 5:57:15! |
| 3. Randy Ellis,43,OK | 6:11:25 |

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| 4. Earl Blewett,31,OK | 6:11:25 |
| 5. Bob Marston,44,MO | 6:35:37 |
| 6. Dennis Haig,35 | 6:38:21 |
| 7. Dave Noltensmeyer,47 | 6:51:00 |
| 8. Dale Channel,55 | 7:01:45 |
| 9. Robert Risser,55,MO | 7:07:44 |
| 10. Duane Frichtl,38,IL | 7:27:40 |
| 11. Mindy Wilson,28,MO | 7:29:00 |
| 12. Curt Babb,42,MO | 7:30:02 |
| 13. Jeffrey Skibbe,47,IL | 7:34:59 |
| 14. Keith Pippin,55,AZ | 7:56:07 |
| 15. Wes Monteith,44,TX | 8:13:07 |
| 16. Phil Clugston,47 | 8:41:43 |
| 17. Donald Clark,44,MN | 8:44:36 |
| 18. David Dinkel,46 | 9:10:34 |
| 19. Rosemary Marston,47,MO | 9:25:29 |
| 20. B. J. Clark,40 | 9:36:01 |
| 24 starters | ! = course record |

VHSSA 50 Mile Run

Brownsville, Vt. Oct. 1, 1995
Hilly trails and jeep roads, 7,000' climb

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|-----------------------------|---------|
| 1. Jeff Hinte,40,MD | 7:15:29 |
| 2. Ralph Swenson,48 | 7:27:06 |
| 3. David Sawyer,50,MA | 7:36:56 |
| 4. Chris Haley,39,MA | 7:44:59 |
| 5. Bob Dion,40 | 7:51:59 |
| 6. Stephen Peckiconis,36,MA | 8:07:10 |
| 7. Gard Leighton,61,CA | 8:09:27 |
| 8. Bruce Marvonek,42,CT | 8:10:07 |
| 9. Gary Reilly,39,MD | 8:11:58 |
| 10. Michael Pare,46 | 8:29:59 |

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| 11. Robert Carosso,35,MA | 8:31:10 |
| 12. Steve Weyl,35,NJ | 8:38:30 |
| 13. Peter Flink,36,MA | 8:39:38 |
| 14. Tony Weisgram,52,CT | 8:41:41 |
| 15. Curt Pandiscio,34,CT | 8:42:30 |
| 16. Gary Freedman,35,MA | 8:46:27 |
| 17. Peter Moore,38 | 8:52:19 |
| 18. Seth Roberts,43,MA | 9:05:42 |
| 19. Doug Freese,50,NY | 9:08:20 |
| 20. Craig Schneider,39 | 9:19:53 |
| 21. Peter Rowlands,50 | 9:21:33 |
| 22. Gail Ierardi,29,MA | 9:39:45 |
| 23. Thomas Selke,28,NH | 9:44:35 |
| 24. Michael Lestz,49,CT | 9:45:59 |
| 25. Roger Martell,46,MA | 9:46:36 |
| 26. Sue Buckingham,31 | 9:58:30 |
| Sue Johnston,29 | 9:58:30 |
| 28. Ed Miville,48,NH | 10:01:55 |
| 29. Dan Wittemore,43,NH | 10:05:25 |
| 30. Phil Anderson,50,MD | 10:08:11 |
| 31. Don Villeneuve,55,NY | 10:08:44 |
| 32. Neil Slepian,41,NH | 10:13:59 |
| Kathleen Kelly,29,MA | 10:13:59 |
| 34. Ken Gulliver,31,MA | 10:25:48 |
| 35. Carole Briggs,34,CT | 10:28:06 |
| 36. David Clementson,34,MA | 10:31:36 |
| 37. Ray Zieblis,41 | 10:35:04 |
| 38. Kevin Harris,38,NJ | 10:42:52 |
| 39. Peter Devereaux,33,MA | 10:43:49 |
| Joseph Devereaux,30,MA | 10:43:49 |
| 41. Paul Davis,50,CT | 10:44:58 |
| 42. Larry Whiting,48,MD | 10:52:12 |
| 43. Gary Alexander,49,MA | 10:52:19 |
| 44. Stephen Trieschmann,46,MA | 10:55:24 |
| Bill Brown,42,MA | 10:55:24 |
| 46. Tom Merwin,44,NY | 10:59:10 |
| 47. Ed Buhrmaster,38,NY | 11:09:19 |
| 48. James Currier,55 | 11:09:47 |
| 49. Jean Boswell,51,MA | 11:10:30 |
| 50. Alcott Smith,56,NH | 11:14:49 |
| 51. Stanton Holloway,51,PA | 11:16:38 |
| 52. Jeff Washburn,45,MA | 11:24:32 |
| 53. Ted Chase,55 | 11:26:37 |
| 54. Jennifer Jordan,37,MA | 11:34:19 |
| 55. David Roemer,36,NY | 11:34:57 |
| 56. Sue Snyder,41,MA | 11:35:55 |
| 57. Terry Ulver,34 | 11:38:05 |
| Darrin Mackenzie,35 | 11:38:05 |
| 59. David Barker,56,CT | 11:58:24 |
| 60. Steve Coe,40,OH | 12:00:00 |
| 69 starters | |

The Vermont Handicapped Ski and Sports Association (VHSSA) 50 Mile Run and Mountain Bike Race has become a fun and important event for us. It is important as a fund-raiser, and also because it is athletes challenging themselves, just like our athletes in our adaptive sports programs.

The course was brand new this year with an increase in the amount of trails to about 85 percent of the course. Everyone who entered really enjoyed the new trail and the increase in difficulty. Vermont was in all its fall foliage glory. There were over 60 very generous landowners that gave us permission to use their property so that we could have such a beautiful course.

It was a wonderful day. We had 69 runners start and 60 finish, and 184 bikers start and 169 finish. It was a great day for first-time 50-mile runners. First woman Gail Ierardi, a first-timer, had a great day finishing in 9:39:45, and third-place overall David Sawyer at age 50 finished his first 50-miler