

The Eternal Flame Keeps Burning at Flat Rock

by: Eric Steele R.D.

Every once in a great while, one gets to experience a miracle in life. Yeah sure, I know, miracles abound all of the time. That's what the spiritual experts say. I'm talking about a miracle in the sense of something that probably can't happen, or won't occur, no matter how much praying, meditating, or conjuring one does. Well, this year at Flat Rock, one occurred. Yes, with less than two minutes remaining until our 10 hour cut-off for the 50-km, when the fire was nearly out and the ashes began gently stirring in the cool afternoon breeze, when the proverbial "Pastor E" was about to get up and begin his eulogy of a "Flat Rock faithful," when out of the smoldering fire, a blue flame doth appeared; a blue flame to remind us all that even though sometimes we can't see the light or feel its heat and warmth, that it is always there, under the ashes, burning ever so warm for the few who are faithful enough to maintain their vigil.

Thirty-nine runners from nine different states toed the line for the eighth annual Flat Rock 50 and 25-km races. The day started with sunny skies that would last throughout the day and send temperatures into the low 80s. After last year's 50-km course record of sub 4:50, we were all anxious to see who would be vying for the men's Flat Rock crown, not to mention how many of the returning female champs might show up to do battle.

Evidently, once you break five hours on the 50-km course you have proven your ultra mettle, as none of our three sub-five hour finishers decided to re-engage with "The Rock." Either that, or they decided once was hellish enough, or maybe it was just too much value for their money and they felt like they were taking us for a ride. Regardless, the brave souls who showed up to participate were, as always, treated to the best hospitality in the ultra community and one of the most challenging 50-km courses in the U.S.

Twenty-five runners started the 50-km and saw Jess McNeely, Paul Schoenlaub (the returning men's masters champion) and Dave Wakefield jump out to an early

lead, which would last until the turnaround, when Wakefield bonked badly due to going out too quickly. A few hours later, McNeely crossed the finish line in a winning time of 5:07:34, with Schoenlaub close on his tail in a time of 5:12:06, to place second overall and score his second consecutive masters title. Mark Crisman maintained his position in third, finishing in a time of 5:50:19, while Mindy Wilson cruised in at 5:55:17 to snag her second women's crown.

Nearly all participants had found their way home, were cleaned up and well on their way to indulging in copious amounts of chili. All except for Dinkel—David Dinkel, our first KUS member and the most devoted among the "Flat Rock faithful." As the clock dwindled down to less than 30 minutes remaining before the cut-off and Dave had yet to be spotted on the nearly one-mile stretch of road leading off of the trail to the finish line, doubt began to creep in as to whether he would make it. Sure, two years earlier Dave had come rolling in with less than 20 minutes to spare; however, now there were only about 20 minutes left and he was nowhere to be seen.

I reminded myself that an ultrarunning master was accompanying Dave and that every fiber of strength Dave had would be skillfully pulled to the surface by this master and manifest itself in Dave's eighth consecutive finish of this event. If it was meant to be at all, with these two then so it would be. After all, I too had been in this same ultra master's care a little over three years earlier and was graciously guided to my first completion of the Leadville Trail 100 Mile after two previously failed attempts. I also reminded myself that ultras have taught and shown me more about the power of faith than literally anything else in life. At that moment I saw several of our members, including a couple KUS co-founders, walking down the road to meet Dave and the master, Scott Demaree. They intuitively knew the pair was close to home and emphatically sought to help pull them in.

Well, time was nearly out; in another five minutes it would be fully expired and time to torch the funeral pyre in remembrance of a dearly departed Flat Rock faithful, David Dinkel. However, for those who are unaware, Dave's nickname is "the Blue Flame," which might burn low, but burns very hot. Dave's flame never went out; he never quit. With less than three minutes to go he rounded the last turn on the gravel road and headed towards the finisher's tent. Dave crossed the finish line with a little over a minute to spare and looked into my eyes in a way that can only be described as, "I know I scared you, myself and everyone else, but I made it—we made it—number eight in the bag—thank God!" Yes, our own "blue flame" was still glowing and even though it was weak, was smiling, as he knew he had just finished his eighth consecutive Flat Rock 50 Km and was only two more away from eminent Flat Rock glory. See ya'll next year on September 27, 2003, for "round nine" of pure, unadulterated ultra fun, KUSstyle!

Flat Rock 50 Km

Independence, Missouri

September 28

Trails

1. Jess McNeely, 33	5:07:34
2. Paul Schoenlaub, 43, MO	5:12:06
3. Mark Crisman, 38	5:50:19
4. Mindy Wilson, 35, MO	5:55:17
5. David Wakefield, 27	6:04:58
6. John McAllister, 47	6:20:00
7. Dennis Haig, 42	6:52:14
8. Theresa Wheeler, 35	7:11:50
9. Stacy Harding, 29	7:19:47
10. Karl Glick, 48	7:20:34
11. Mark Brozek, 45	7:38:45
12. Jeffrey Skibbe, 54, IL	7:47:33
13. Steve Lower, 51	7:48:19
14. Roy Schneider, 36, NE	7:49:44
15. Wes Monteith, 51, TX	8:12:51
16. Jim Perry, OK	8:22:17
17. David Noltensmeyer, 53, CO	8:34:58
18. Mark Meers, 51, MO	8:40:01
19. Angela Negrate-Smith, 36, OK	8:40:53
20. Thomas Lasater, 45	8:48:52
Bradley Youngblood, 38, TX	8:48:52
22. Hiram Byrd, 54, AR	9:24:50
23. David Dinkel, 53	9:58:43