

The Spirit of the Prairie

by Randy Albrecht R.D.

In adverse weather conditions a run in the prairie can be brutal. This year's race provided runners with a sample of all of the different types of fall weather in one 24-hour period. Conditions at the start were mild, with temperatures in the low 60s. By mid-morning runners were greeted by the ever-present Kansas winds as a cold front moved through rapidly. The front brought mostly light rain, although it was heavy at times. By early afternoon the storm had passed and the runners were greeted by a crystal clear sky and nearly no wind. With a full moon and not a cloud in the sky, the runners were able to experience the panoramic views of the tall grass prairie, a unique feature of the race. The peace and tranquility of the prairie was only occasionally broken by coyote serenades, who welcomed the runners to their home.

Too often we think of ultrarunning as an individual sport, pitting a runner against the course and whatever Mother Nature has in store for race day. Yet without a support team helping the runner, very few would ever finish a race. The individual runners' crew members and race volunteers make up a team whose sole mission is to help the runners get safely to the finish line. The importance of the team was clearly demonstrated at this year's event. Some early morning problems resulted in a mad scramble to get the first few aid stations set up. At Heartland, every aid station is manned by experienced ultrarunners. As ultrarunners we learn how to adapt and deal with adverse situations during a race. We are blessed at Kansas Ultrarunners' Society (KUS) to have a great team of volunteers, second to none. With everyone—including several runners' crews—pitching in to make the needed adjustments, the race went on with the runners only noticing some minor disorganization at the early morning aid stations.

Each aid station at Heartland tries to add at least one specialty item to its menu. This year's runners were treated to breakfast burritos, sloppy joes, lentil, potato, and broccoli and cheese soup, pancakes and bacon, homemade cookies, and of course the ever-famous prairie

power pellets. As the overnight temperatures dropped into the low 40s the importance of the support team was again demonstrated. As I greeted the runners at the finish line with the traditional ringing of the cowbells, I again witnessed the importance of the team, as several runners finished with various articles of clothing provided by aid station volunteers or other runners' crews.

Each year at the finish line it's interesting to listen to runners' comments. The beauty of the prairie is the most frequent topic, followed closely by "I could not believe how tough the race was." Yet when you ask the runner why the race was tougher than expected, few can provide a definitive reason. "The spirit of the prairie" was chosen as the race theme when we started four years ago. It may just be that the spirit of the prairie is what makes the race seem tougher than anticipated.

This year's race saw many fine performances. Mark Henderson took the lead at 30 miles and was never challenged, finishing in 18:41:03. Yen Nguyen won the women's race in 24:53:29. The 50-mile saw two course records. Phil Sheridan won in 7:23:29, despite being abandoned by his crew. Actually Stacy, his wife and KUS president, stepped in to help us get through the early morning problems, in true ultrarunning fashion. Molly Gibb was the women's winner in a course record time of 9:22:33, as she held off a late-charging Kelly Woodmansee.

While the perception is that the race is more difficult than anticipated, finisher's rates have historically been very high. Over the last four years 81 percent of the starters have finished the 100-mile and 97 percent have finished the 50-mile. Vincent Swendsen, Mark Henderson and Louise Mason have now finished all four of the Heartland 100s. This year's race featured several first time 100-milers as well, including Dennis Haig, the first Kansas finisher. Each year we strive to make the race better, so mark your calendars for the second weekend of October and experience first hand "the spirit of the prairie" at the 2004 Heartland ultras.

Heartland 100 Mile and 50 Mile

Cassoday, Kansas

October 11

Roads and trails

100 Miles

1. Mark Henderson, 43, TX	18:41:03
2. Dan Keefe, 38, OK	20:26:32
3. Matthew Watts, 47, CO	21:46:55
4. Brett Bassham, 43, TX	22:17:22
5. Dave Emerson, 44, TX	22:41:52
6. Rob Hills, 37, MO	22:44:56
Jan Ryerse, 58, MO	22:44:56
8. Mike Lipton, 38, VA	23:31:08
9. Bill Nictakis, 43, MO	23:54:59
10. Dennis Haig, 43	23:56:22
11. Peter Bennett, 28, TX	24:52:08
12. Yen Nguyen, 41, TX	24:53:29
13. Tony Bierman, 47, IL	24:55:52
John Buening, 48, IL	24:55:52
15. Rick Gastelum, 59, TX	25:24:50
16. Kevin McCormick, 44, TX	25:25:51
17. Dennis Drey, 52, NM	25:27:23
18. Richard Oswalt, 46	25:34:30
19. Trevor Strudley, 41, CA	25:36:43
20. Gary Henry, 47	25:59:11
21. Rex Friend, 51, OK	26:12:16
22. Vincent Swendsen, 41, NJ	26:12:36
Robert Wargo, 45, PA	26:12:36
24. Jeff Heasley, 36, CO	26:45:24
25. Louise Mason, 50, IL	26:47:32
26. David Hughes, 57, IN	26:47:52
27. Hans-Dieter Weisshaar, 63	26:59:01
28. Steve Lower, 52	27:22:29
29. Bob Rayburn, 48, CO	27:44:51
30. Sherman Hodges, 68, IL	28:15:17
Richard Maloof, 42, IN	28:15:17
32. Jim Perry, 54, OK	28:20:43
33. Long Vu, 54, OK	28:39:26
34. Jamie Menard, 44, CO	28:50:07

43 starters

50 Miles

1. Phil Sheridan, 46	7:23:29
2. Jamie Boese, 44, CO	7:47:07
3. Greg Martens, 45	9:07:31
4. Molly Gibb, 42, CO	9:22:33
5. Kelly Woodmansee, 34, TX	9:24:17
6. Scott Olmer, 31, CO	9:26:17
7. Harvey Bauer, 46	9:28:19
8. Patty Giebel, 57, CA	9:40:53
9. Bill Gomboc, 53, OK	9:41:10
10. Mark Giebel, 57, CA	9:48:22
Joe Nowakowski, 50, CA	9:48:22
12. Karen Culp, 42, VA	10:18:38
13. Willie Lambert, 41	10:28:18
14. Tony Mathison, 45, TX	10:59:02
15. Anne Watts, 48, CO	11:08:01
16. Dan Brenden, 51, AZ	12:26:28
17. Cyndie Merten, 47, OR	12:31:58
18. Jim Johnson, 43	12:44:32
19. Victoria Wargo, 45, PA	15:11:10
20. James Ewing, 48, IL	15:41:40

21 starters