

DEXTERITY AND DETERMINATION

by Kimberly Spielman

FlatRock, Kansas' first trail ultra, is a special treasure tucked away in the oak/hickory forest of southeastern Kansas. The trail's abrasive terrain and myriad rock formations are a stark contrast to the gentle rolling hills and boundless horizon that characterizes much of Kansas.

The 50-km course is out and back along the Elk River Hiking Trail—the very trail a Boy Scout once warned was NOT a trail someone could run on. Eric Steele, race director and mastermind behind the event, thought differently when organizing the first FlatRock 16 years ago.

The volunteer brigade of family and friends, great food, race mottos, rocking music, a plethora of finish line noises, and the crackles of a skillfully crafted campfire all create the ambiance that makes FlatRock a great fall celebration.

But don't let the name fool you. There is little flat to the course (unless falling flat on your face counts). There are, however, plenty of rocks—walls of rocks, sharp rocks, hidden rocks, rocks to climb, rock crevasses to jump and yes, even some flat rocks. Navigating over, around and under these rocks requires the FlatRock Double D—dexterity and determination.

Runners from 16 states and Canada have successfully mastered the FlatRock Double D

at least once. But finishing times reveal some merit to the Boy Scout's warning. Only two percent of the 524 finishers have completed the course under five hours. The true rock stars are the women who have historically been outnumbered five to one.

Runners get a real taste of the rocky trail and probably a few cobwebs within the first two miles. This unforgiving portion of the course climbs high above the shores of Elk City Reservoir to the top of a limestone bluff with a spectacular view of the lake—a view that is best taken in standing still. The race motto, "If you look up, you're going down," cannot be taken lightly.

The first and last seven miles are the most technical, or more poignantly, the section that is most likely to chew up some runners' flesh. Beyond seven miles there are a few segments where calculated, courageous runners can test their FlatRock skills and attempt to make up lost time.

Blue blazes on the trees and rocks guide runners from one aid station to the next under tree canopies, along more limestone bluffs and through prairie grasses and river bottoms. After 20 miles, the strategy of gleeful abandonment begins to waver and is replaced with the knowledge that every rock has it out for you.

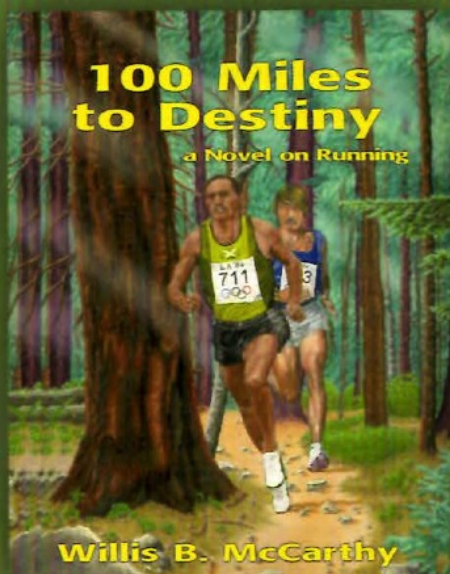
But then, the thrilling sound of music from the hard-rockin' last aid station carries through the trees and delivers enough motivation to maneuver towards the next sound bite. A siren, followed by a speaker announcing the end for each lucky runner, can be heard on top of a rock-strewn ridge with less than two miles to go.

The test in dexterity and determination is finally complete with a high five to a mangled stage prop hand, a handshake with the race director and a personal promise to never try that again.

But wait—ten consecutive 50-km finishes earns a runner the distinctive honor of being knighted into the FlatRock Hall of Pain. Only six men and one woman have been knighted so far. A personalized surname, embroidered race number, and lifetime free entry into the FlatRock are all part of the reward. It just might be worth running toward. ■

FLATROCK 50K INDEPENDENCE, KANSAS SEPTEMBER 25 | ▲ 3,4

1. Brad Bishop, 24, MO	4:49:35
2. Matthew Becker, 36	5:00:50
3. Paul Schoenlaub, 51, MO	5:17:28
4. Andy Emerson, 41, MO	5:35:18
5. Anthony Lounsbury, 31, MO	5:42:45
6. Vincent Spencer, 30	5:47:36
7. Aaron Norman, 29, MO	5:48:02
8. Scott Hill, 31	5:48:22
9. Troy Williams, 41	5:54:38
10. Steve Siegele, 49	6:06:17
11. Ricardo Alvarez, 35	6:06:55
12. Chuck Lewis, 46, OK	6:13:43
13. Ryan Kelly, 29, MO	6:14:54
14. Richard Smith, 52, OK	6:26:43
15. Eric Massanari, 42	6:31:06
16. James Mercer, 41, MO	6:37:54
17. Adam Monaghan, 27	6:40:59
18. Kimberly Spielman, 35	6:41:42
19. Randy Phelps, 49	6:46:02
20. Steve Tanio, 49, OK	6:58:40
21. Michael Williams, 48	7:07:08
22. Tammy Winn, 41, OK	7:08:23
23. Andy Bowman, 47	7:09:22
24. Dennis Haig, 50	7:13:07
25. Jeff Wells, 52, MO	7:18:09
26. Brett Huizenga, 27, NE	7:18:11
27. Anne Wheeler, 23	7:27:30
28. Micah Nelson, 26, MO	7:41:19
Jeff Ward, 29, MO	7:41:19
30. Erica Carper, 37	7:45:05
31. Jeneen Lovelace, 30, OK	7:45:53
32. Erin Miller, 33	7:50:03
33. Geoffrey Clark, 39	7:53:05
34. Kenneth Williams, 56	8:23:16
35. John Romano, 46, NE	8:26:18
36. Steven Breeding, 60	8:55:19
37. Long Vu, 61, OK	8:55:22
38. Christina Ison, 28	8:55:58
39. Jim Perry, 61, OK	9:52:10
40. Ken Childress, 51, OK	11:04:47



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