

PRAIRIE SPIRIT TRAIL

MY OWN PRIVATE EPIC

by Gary Dudney

The first running of the Prairie Spirit Trail 100 Mile and 50 Mile race in 2013 ran headlong into an epic snowstorm that forced the closing of the course 24 hours into the 100-mile event, so there was a lot of buzz about what 2014 would bring. Would a clean running of the race create as much of an epic adventure as the snowstorm had wrought?

Eric Steele, founder of Epic Ultras, the company putting on the race, had certainly promised an epic experience. A barrage of emails, including an 18-page information booklet and attached brochure from the Prairie Spirit Trail State Park where the race was to be staged, exuded enthusiasm, mentioned that the organizers were "super excited" and implored us to "in all ways, Be Epic."

I wondered how well a flat as a pancake, straight as an arrow, out-and-back rails-to-trails course in rural Eastern Kansas was going to rise to the hype. But in short, it did!

The pre-race meal of roast beef, chicken breasts, scalloped potatoes and rice pilaf kicked things into gear with Honorary Guest Speaker David Horton crowning the evening. Horton, as they say, is a hoot. He energetically dispenses advice based on a resume of endurance accomplishments that are preposterously drop-dead awesome.

Horton runs down a list of 20 hard won lessons from his years on the trail, such as, "This too shall pass," "Run don't think" and "It never always gets worse." But paramount is his assertion that the experiences he has gathered through his endurance sports are more precious than gold. Everyone is inspired, on fire to get out on the course and be pit bulls. The 64-year-old Horton is at the start the next morning bike helmet in hand, ready to ride up and down the trail all day encouraging the runners, dispensing advice, cutting through any gloom and doom a tired runner might feel. He rides by me on this flattest of all courses and yells, "How about those hills?"

The trail, managed by the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism is a little over 50 miles, stretching from Ottawa in the north,

running through Garnett, and ending in Iola in the south. The 50-mile turns around in Garnett and the 100-mile goes the distance to Iola and then returns to Ottawa. The terms "flat" and "straight" hardly do it justice. The whole trail follows an abandoned rail line dating back to 1867. The land in eastern Kansas rolls slightly, but the train bed doesn't. Where the land sinks, the path has been built up and when the land rises, the path comes back to even with the landscape. The surface is smooth, crushed limestone, virtually free of ruts and faults, with some asphalt through the small towns.

The nature of the trail dictated that every stride one took for the entire 100 miles was exactly like the stride before and the stride to come, and therein lay the unique challenge of Prairie Spirit. Not 10 miles had gone by before I had tired the muscles I was using ceaselessly, blown away my race plan by going out way too fast and hit the panic button, realizing that if I didn't work out a run-walk strategy soon, I would be totally spent by the 30-mile mark. Accustomed to letting a hilly trail dictate my pace and effort, and used to having my mind diverted by an ever shifting panorama of mountains, alpine valleys, redwood forests and twisting canyons, I had to forget everything I knew about running a hundred miles and construct a new system. Plus I had to zen out on the straight and endless tunnel I saw before me where a runner three miles ahead was still in view. During one of Horton's flybys, I remarked how tough I was finding the relentless, unbroken running. "You just have to accept it," he said.

Accept it I did, and ended up working out a pace that landed me much higher on the finishers' list than I'd been in a 100-mile race for years. That was epic, as was the raw experience of a trail that demanded such special strategizing.

Rural Kansas also offered a subtle but very profound beauty if you were open to her charms. Sunset over grazing cattle, rolls of hay, empty dirt roads leading to the horizon, tall grass bent over in waves across a field, brown streams meander-

ing below wooden bridges, a tangle of stark tree branches, a robin, a meadowlark, a bobcat, farmyards, corrugated outbuildings, a massive tractor, three big dogs barking through a fence and the tall grain silos on the edge of the small towns. In Garnett, a glimpse of main street with its old-fashioned brick facades and a stately courthouse. It reminded me of my grandmother in her nineties telling me, "If you want to live a good life, move to a small town." Totally epic...

RETURNING TO ULTRA

BY KELLY TABARA

The Prairie Spirit 50 Mile was the race I picked for my return to ultrarunning. It came 21 months after I suffered a traumatic brain injury that caused blurry vision, dizziness, severe headaches and chronic fatigue. To me it felt like a defining moment of miles, the determination of whether or not I could be a whole person again and run long.

Running for me is like the way I exist. It's not just that I like to run. I need to run to feel alive! As though without it I am invisible, lifeless.

In July 2012, I took a summersaulting fall down a flight of stairs, dragged behind my Great Dane after becoming caught in her leash. I spent the next year in therapy and on medications trying to heal. The pain and headaches were so intense I spent days at a time in bed. Sometimes just walking a few yards required help. I stuttered and had trouble remembering things. Yet, all I could think about was how to get better so I could run.

After a year, my doctor told my physical therapist to get me on the treadmill and see if I could run. It was a sign of progress, a sign of hope. Maybe, just maybe, I could get myself back to running.

The progress was slow. I counted minutes instead of miles because it sounded like more. I used to say it was like running a marathon one inch at a time. One day in the hospital while I had a break between therapies I saw a little sign. It read, "Even miracles take a little time." The

PRAIRIE SPIRIT TRAIL | OTTAWA, KANSAS | MARCH 29 | ▲ 1,2

100 miles | 50 miles | Elevation gain/loss: Flat | Both courses are out-and-backs on a flat rails-to-trails course, primarily on crushed limestone gravel, with small sections of asphalt when the trail passes through small towns. The trail is wide enough in most sections to comfortably run three abreast.

100 MILES

1. John Cash, 40, MO	15:10:13	18. Michele Ricketts, 33, IN	22:58:40	36. Tim Ulrich, 41, WI	25:39:05	54. Carl Cleveland, 47	27:25:12
2. David Clark, 43, CO	18:05:09	19. James Donahue, 52, IL	23:01:58	37. Chris Smith, 56, OH	25:39:06	55. Kurt Egli, 51, OK	27:34:55
3. Neil Quach, 41, CA	18:53:17	Adena Schutzberg, 50, MA	23:01:58	38. Arnold Begay, 51, OK	25:49:25	56. Ken Saveth, 54, OK	27:36:46
4. Paul Schoenlaub, 54, MO	19:11:56	21. Bob Murphy, 55, NE	23:21:42	39. Tara Homburg, 42, MO	25:52:24	57. Jason Romero, 44, CO	27:57:24
5. Joseph Kilianski, 25, TX	20:36:49	22. Shane Naugher, 42, MO	23:22:00	40. Cody Cunningham, 27, MO	26:03:41	58. Roman Broyles, 43, OK	28:25:05
6. Nathan Ferraro, 24, OK	20:44:46	23. Mark Barnhart, 24, IN	23:37:10	41. Isabelle Ulfing, 33, TX	26:05:22	Kathy Hoover, 53, OK	28:25:05
7. Michael Scoggins, 33, OK	20:54:57	24. Zach Adams, 36	23:39:12	42. Elizabeth Gonzalez, 37, TX	26:09:28	60. Necat Havlioglu, 50, MO	28:38:18
8. Farhad Zarif, 44	21:06:34	25. Chris Cantwell, 50, AR	23:46:08	43. Brian Smith, 50	26:14:03	61. Charlotte Lindley, 62, OK	28:38:50
9. Andrew Tracey, 53, NE	21:09:25	26. Elden Galano, 56	23:51:18	44. Betty Holder, 55, GA	26:25:18	62. Dennis Crosby, 67, OK	28:38:52
10. Jason Overbaugh, 39, GA	21:25:21	27. Jessica Lemere, 39, WI	23:53:05	45. Jeff Elbert, 45, OK	26:28:10	63. Wayne Nelson, 47, MN	28:45:28
11. Tralaine Benefiel, 41	21:29:04	28. Gary Dudney, 61, CA	24:14:47	Amelia Elbert, 43, OK	26:28:10	64. Rick Bothwell, 52, MN	28:45:31
12. John Taylor, 52, MN	21:39:34	29. Gia Madole, 33, OK	24:35:52	47. Cynthia Mitchum, 50, AR	26:40:45	65. Lydia Hyatt, 23, CO	28:50:21
13. Andrew Servaes, 42	21:48:39	30. Michele McGrew, 35, OK	24:39:55	48. Chris Hasselback, 42, CO	26:43:31	66. Trevor James, 37, MO	29:01:13
14. Darrin Johnson, 46	22:15:40	Bill Ford, 51, OK	24:39:55	49. Tony Clark, 36	27:08:37	67. Amanda Blocker, 34, AR	29:28:28
John Knowles, 48	22:15:40	32. Earl Blewett, 49, OK	24:44:30	Adele Jordan, 31	27:08:37	68. Ron Ruhs, 46, NE	29:28:49
16. Shannon Hampton, 41, AR	22:33:56	33. Jono Becker, 39, OK	24:55:59	51. Steve Baker, 44	27:12:27	Bill Colbert, 44, IA	29:28:49
17. David Newman, 53, AR	22:33:58	34. Charity Larson, 38, CO	25:17:32	Jacob Evans, 28, TX	27:12:27		
		35. William Sprouse, 44	25:26:52	53. Thomas Skinner, 67, GA	27:19:50		



KRISTI MAYO / MILE 90 PHOTOGRAPHY

Erin Hazler and Christy Victor at the northern terminus of the Prairie Spirit Trail



KRISTI MAYO / MILE 90 PHOTOGRAPHY

Kelly Tabara (author of the race report) making her comeback to ultrarunning

Fairy Godmother.” That sign sits on my dresser now, so I can have that reminder every day while I live my miracle.

It took me almost 10 months from that day on the treadmill to get to the start at the Prairie Spirit 50 Mile – my 38th race of marathon distance or farther. It was exciting and nerve racking.

It helped to hear the pre-race talk by Dr. David Horton entitled “Lessons learned in 100,000 miles of running.” He had many inspiring words of wisdom and it was fun to meet him and talk race plan. At the start I asked him for a picture. He hugged me and said, “Finish!” Another hug from my husband Luke and I felt a calm confidence from him. Luke is someone who has watched me struggle for 21 months and is somehow okay sending me on a 50-mile journey because “He knows who he is married to.”

I planned to spend the day alone on the trail, no pacer, and a relaxed 15 minutes per mile pace – plenty of time to run easy and take frequent walk breaks. It was my first ultra back from my brain injury and the one that would tell me if I could still be an ultrarunner or not. To me it was all here, in these miles where the

answers would be. If I finish, I’m good. I will go on to do my first 100k and 100 miler this year. If I DNF, I’m done, no longer an ultrarunner. My ultrarunning friends tried to tell me not to put so much on the race, but that’s what it was for me. I needed to finish. I needed to know if I could do it on my own.

As I went through the day, I felt good and mentally strong. I felt so lucky to be running again. I struggled with nausea on and off throughout the race, but after my brain injury this was nothing. I came to the 25-mile mark 25 minutes ahead of my 50-mile PR pace. I knew I needed to slow down and be a little more patient or the last 10-15 miles would be brutal.

There were three aid stations on the out-and-back course and Luke and the kids saw me each time. Their crew support and endless cheers helped so much. Then the pain came in my legs the last 13-14 miles. I couldn’t believe how much it hurt. I cried. I prayed. It was during this time that I asked myself if it hurts less to walk. The answer was no, so I thought, “Let’s keep running and get this thing done!” Every step I told myself I was closer to the finish that I knew I could make it.

When I got back into town, I could see the lights of the finish about .60 miles away. It was a good feeling. I had done what I came to do. But it also reminded me of how tough it is to run 50 miles. I finished in 12:16:06 – my slowest time, but maybe the one that means the most to me.

Thinking of my races ahead, I questioned if I wanted to run farther than 50 miles. I wondered if I had made a mistake thinking this race was going to give me all kinds of answers.

The one thing I have learned from surviving a brain injury is: live for today. Make the decisions that I need to make today. Do my best with the day I am given. Don’t worry about tomorrow, my miles or the next race, but do the very best I can where I am. Run as much as I can when I can. Take the days where I don’t feel well and need to rest without being so hard on myself.

So, do I feel 100% healed from my injury? No, and I don’t think I ever will be the same. Do I still love running (and my Great Dane)? Absolutely. Are there several races on my calendar with “100” in the name? Yes. What will happen? I have no idea. But today I am running. [UR](#)

50 MILES

1. Ben Bartley, 30, IN	6:12:36	18. Greg Gray, 43, NE	9:45:05	37. Qiurong Ding, 32, MA	10:59:41	56. Cindy Schoenlaub, 53, MO	12:34:11
2. Jess McNeely, 44	7:18:05	19. Louis Niewald, 40, MO	9:45:06	38. Todd Enlow, 43, OK	11:03:04	57. John Longan, 47, OK	13:04:14
3. Brian Ortell, 47, IA	7:28:18	20. Rachel Gantenbein, 32, IA	9:53:33	39. Eric Shebesta, 47, MO	11:10:37	Jeff Duncan, 48	13:04:14
4. Shannon McFarland, 37, AR	7:52:41	21. Jim McClelland, 43, SD	9:57:11	40. Brittany Beutel, 39, OH	11:14:12	59. Erin Hazler, 38, IN	13:11:35
5. Rob Owens, 37, NE	7:55:53	22. Sarah Aldrich, 31, OH	9:59:14	41. Dave Renfro, 43, AR	11:15:30	60. Christy Victor, 43, IN	13:11:36
6. Kristen Weigand, 34, MO	8:12:28	23. John Weatherly, 34, NE	10:05:25	42. Michael Mora, 38	11:33:15	61. William Marshall, 61, TX	13:15:31
7. Alene Nitzky, 50, CO	8:25:03	24. Art Smith, 53, SD	10:05:35	43. Tom Rogers, 42, MO	11:35:04	62. Janet Marshall, 59, TX	13:15:47
8. John Coleman, 38	8:42:10	25. Scott Giddings, 45, NE	10:14:25	44. Jamie Plucker, 35, NE	11:43:28	63. Carol Hughes, 54, OK	13:25:15
9. Michael Carman, 50, MO	8:44:55	26. Krista Purcell, 34	10:15:39	45. Heather Rickerl, 37, CO	11:43:29	64. Mike Wise, 41, MO	13:56:20
10. Mindy Coolman, 32, IA	8:51:31	27. Paul Endacott, 49	10:19:37	46. Joshua Ruckman, 32, NE	11:43:29	65. Karen Riddle, 61, TX	14:02:23
11. Julia Nyiro, 20	8:52:02	28. Troy Wolford, 44, IA	10:22:57	47. Rachel Warne, 35, NE	11:43:30	66. Larry Kelley, 47, IA	14:10:50
12. Scott Willson, 49	8:53:22	29. Gary Fuerst, 62, MO	10:25:47	48. Cindy Kosmicki, 36, NE	11:44:45	67. Mechelle West, 50, TX	14:19:15
13. John Skretta, 45, NE	9:07:21	30. Nancy Bennett, 63, TX	10:29:50	49. Jennifer Eloge, 37, NE	11:44:45	68. Kim Savage, 42, OK	14:19:16
14. Jason Laidlaw, 35	9:09:48	31. Bryan Lawson, 33, IA	10:32:23	50. Jason Bement, 35, OK	11:47:27	69. Jared McCloe, 40	15:17:08
15. Andrew Orbals, 53	9:11:39	32. Tommy Ramirez, 48	10:34:22	51. Gary Born, 61, IA	11:47:50	70. Eric Rodda, 53, CO	17:23:54
16. John Oster, 49, CO	9:20:21	33. David Bennett, 53	10:44:42	52. Deb Taylor, 39	11:59:21	71. Ryan Schwatken, 38	17:28:43
17. Steve Wayant, 49, OK	9:36:39	34. Curtis Harmon, 44, NE	10:45:18	53. Jonathan Mast, 50	12:07:09	72. Doug Weaver, 50	20:56:34
		35. Arthur Sundry, 55, IL	10:45:41	54. Carol Jenkins, 52, NE	12:07:46	73. Breanna Waldrup, 29, TX	23:45:25
		36. Doug Colglazier, 38, MN	10:50:56	55. Kelly Tabara, 45, MN	12:16:06	Andrew Olsen, 29, TX	23:45:25