



Experience Counts

BY KRISTI MAYO

In a state known for its wide-open prairies and mind-numbing miles of wheat fields, the FlatRock 101K course presents itself as a Kansas anomaly. The 15-mile single-track trail is situated at the edge of the Chautauqua Hills and Osage Cuestas region of southeastern Kansas, traversing a landscape formed hundreds of millions of years ago by the rise and fall of an ancient sea. A journey along this trail takes runners between sheer, towering walls of limestone, under teetering overhangs, down through narrow cracks, across a rock “punchbowl” and around random boulders.

This unique setting is also the home of the FlatRock 50K trail race, Kansas’s oldest ultra. That event, which will be run for the 21st time this September, has long been respected as a challenging stop on the Midwestern ultra circuit. In 2013, Race Director Eric Steele upped the ante by adding the spring FlatRock 101K to his portfolio of Epic Ultras events. With double the distance, participants in the FlatRock 101K get to do two out-and-backs on the 15-mile trail. For most participants, the final leg is run in the dark—among the rocks, centipedes and copperheads—and, due to the degree of difficulty, runners are given a full 24 hours to finish.

The third edition of this race suggested that experience counts on the FlatRock course. Overall winner Aaron Norman of Oak Grove, Missouri, had previous success in the 50k with six finishes and a win in 2013. He approached the 101k with respect for the course and a “do nothing stupid” attitude, worrying more about posting a sub-15-hour 100k qualifying time for the upcoming Ouray 100 than a place on the podium. But as temperatures climbed from the mid 50s to 75 degrees during the afternoon, even the qualifying time became a concern.

“I had a real rough patch from about mile 30 to 42,” said Norman. “I was overheating and had to walk a lot.”

Norman borrowed a hat from his wife and wore it stuffed full of ice. Gradually he found himself moving again, and the tight front group in the men’s race had begun to break apart. Heading into the final 15-mile stretch, Norman was just six minutes off the lead. “This is where I started entertaining thoughts of actually racing,” recalled Norman. “Dave [Box] was having stomach issues and when I caught him with 11 miles to go, it was on. Full race mode.” Norman had plenty left in the tank as he cruised to a come-from-behind win.

In the women’s race, Mindy Coolman—who set a course record in the 50k race in 2013—maintained a steady pace to pull away from a competitive field of frontrunners and break the course record for the 100k by one hour and 21 minutes.

“This course is extremely deceptive, as it has no long, steep climbs,” remarked Coolman. “But between the constant rolling hills and the extremely technical terrain, it has humbled many runners—myself included. With this in the back of my mind, I started out very conservatively and ran a smart race, which enabled me to finish feeling strong and relatively fresh. I told myself from the start that it didn’t matter what anyone else was doing out there, but to simply run my own race and stick to my plan. It paid off in the end.”



LEFT: First-place Aaron Norman high-fives The Hand with his daughter at the finish line. [📷 Kristi Mayo/Mile 90 Photography]

BELOW, TOP: Zach Adams takes advantage of a water feature on the course. [📷 Rick Mayo/Mile 90 Photography]

BELOW, BOTTOM: Nicholas Onaca climbs the "Devil's Buttock." [📷 Rick Mayo/Mile 90 Photography]



FlatRock 101

Independence, KS // April 25

🏃 3,3* // 101k

Elevation gain: Approximately 6,000 feet | This is an out-and-back course run twice on the Elk River Hiking Trail winding through limestone bluffs, rock formations and beautiful vistas. The trail is mostly single-track and very rocky with no long hills.

1	Aaron Norman, 33, MO	12:41:02	3	Kyle Shults, 32, KS	13:44:44	15	Dave Meeth, 51, KS	17:25:31	27	Nicholas Onaca, 52, TX	21:47:27
2	David Box, 39, KS	13:23:55	4	Mindy Coolman, 33, IA	13:54:22	16	Carol Johnson, 28, KS	17:26:29	28	Debra Norman, 55, MO	21:48:22
			5	Dan Routhieux, 48, KS	14:09:45	17	Krystle Dalke, 32, KS	17:41:30	29	Ryan Schwatken, 39, KS	23:13:45
			6	Paul Schoenlaub, 55, MO	14:18:36	18	Marianna Inslee, 49, CO	17:51:28	30	Tom Rogers, 43, MO	23:29:16
			7	Zach Adams, 37, KS	14:44:26	19	Ken Schramm, 51, MO	17:55:55	31	Joseph Galloway, 58, IA	23:31:12
			8	Candi Paulin, 34, KS	15:15:46	20	Dennis Haig, 55, KS	18:35:34	32	Carson Galloway, 24, IA	23:31:31
			9	Craig Duhn, 39, IA	15:55:50	21	Genevieve Spivey, 38, KS	19:00:25			
			10	Jeffrey Kail, 34, KS	16:44:17	22	Michael Mora, 39, KS	20:15:03			
			11	David Brimhall, 36, MO	16:44:18	23	Polly Choate, 43, OK	20:53:10			
			12	Shaylene Caffey, 30, MO	16:47:58	24	Paul Endacott, 50, KS	21:26:40			
			13	Matthew Hall, 26, KS	17:01:35	25	Brian Smith, 51, KS	21:32:30			
			14	Jonathan Shelley, 28, KS	17:09:06	26	Henry Yount, 54, KS	21:44:09			

*See page 30 for key