

A person is running away from the camera on a gravel path that leads into the distance. The path is flanked by tall, golden-brown grasses. In the background, there are rolling hills under a warm, orange-hued sky, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall scene is peaceful and evocative of a long-distance run in nature.

MAKING A COMEBACK *on the* PRAIRIE

BY KRISTI MAYO



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The day began in the dark, in the middle of a paved county road, on the outskirts of the tiny railroad town of Cassoday, KS. After a quick countdown and the command, "Go," the field of 59 runners shuttled away under a bright field of stars, turned onto a gravel road and introduced themselves to the rolling, wide-open Flint Hills landscape – the largest remaining tract of the ecologically threatened temperate grasslands.

Like the tallgrass prairie, the Heartland 100 had also been in danger of being wiped out. Despite its status as a classic Midwestern race, competition with the glut of new races on the fall race calendar forced the

cancellation of the Heartland 100 in 2015.

"There was discussion of modifying the course, moving the 100-mile to the spring with the 50-mile or just canceling the race," said 2016 race Director Elden Galano. "I couldn't let the race end. It was my first 100-mile race – really, my favorite race. I decided to take over the RD duties. I really tried to get the word out that the race was back on. We had a lot of positive response to that."

In addition to Galano's promotional push, the Kansas Ultrarunners' Society introduced the Heartland Challenge. Runners who completed the Heartland 50 in the spring and the Heartland 100 in the fall would earn a special Heartland Challenge buckle.

The Flint Hills welcomed back the runners with sunny skies, mild temperatures and relatively (for the open prairie) light winds. The course, which consists almost entirely of backcountry roads, varies from

almost-dirt, to double-track with a gravel base, to chunky, ankle-turning gravel. As the miles wear on, runners obsessively shift from the right-hand tire track to the left, and then back again; the other side always looks smoother until you're running on it. The rolling terrain provides unending vistas – one can take in miles of open grassland with swaths of brown, gold and green broken only by the occasional cow, power line and scraggly lone tree. (Lone Tree, in fact, is the name of the 50-mile aid station where runners turn around and start their journey home again.)

The frontrunners of that journey included Nick Seymour of Yukon, OK, who took advantage of the ideal weather and clicked off 8- to 9-minute miles early on, opened up a sizable lead and finished with the fifth-best time in the race's history. Scott Hill took the special "First Kansan" award, finishing second overall. Kodi Panzer also ran wire to wire in

the women's race and held third place overall for a good portion of the course, before dropping back to fourth behind sandals-shod Jason Yuhasz.

Galano said the aid station volunteers were instrumental in ensuring the success of the event's comeback. "I think the fact that so many people were happy at the end and ready to come back and run again was a very satisfying feeling," he said. 

Heartland

Cassoday, KS // October 8

 2,2* // 100 Miles

Elevation gain: 6,000 feet | A 50-mile out-and-back course on backcountry gravel roads with less than one mile of paved surface for the 100-mile race. Much of the course meanders through open range with stunning views of the vast expanse of the Flint Hills tallgrass prairie.

1	Nick Seymour, 35, OK	16:37:01
2	Scott Hill, 37, KS	18:21:16
3	Jason Yuhasz, 39, KS	18:54:22
4	Kodi Panzer, 35, KS	19:42:07
5	Gerardo Ramirez, 44, TX	19:52:26
6	Hans Van Zanten, 42, KS	20:53:54
7	Alex Francisco, 26, MO	21:26:23
8	Rickety Cricket, 50, CO	22:38:36
9	Amanda Lynch, 35, OK	23:11:54
10	Sam Brien, 32, MO	23:15:13
11	Elliot Denholm, 43, TX	23:26:36
12	Adam Monaghan, 33, KS	23:28:21
13	Steven Sjolund, 65, MN	23:40:37
14	Mark Berry, 57, LA	23:41:58
15	Michael Belt, 53, MO	23:52:01
16	Russell Bennett, 44, OK	24:32:10
17	Melissa Melton, 45, MO	25:34:13
18	Nathan Chandler, 40, NE	25:45:53
19	Alissa Sebastian, 46, MO	26:04:25
20	Donald Groom, 52, KS	26:11:23
21	Dennis Haig, 56, KS	26:18:14
22	Beiyl Zheng, 52, UT	26:19:46
23	Greg Gray, 46, NE	26:22:52
24	Regan Stoops, 36, IA	26:40:33
25	Dennis Wilson, 58, NE	26:56:38
26	Nicholas Shelton, 38, CO	27:16:59
27	Kathy Hoover, 56, OK	27:34:18
28	Heather Cotten, 42, KS	27:58:12
29	Quynhanh Nguyen, 37, KS	28:02:06
30	Jeffrey Bryant, 38, OK	28:02:36
31	Aubrey Callahan, 34, TX	28:32:56
32	Arnold Begay, 53, OK	28:32:58
33	Dennis Cannell, 58, MO	28:36:45
34	Adele Jordan, 34, KS	28:56:32
35	Allyson Geschwentner, 23, MO	28:57:21
36	Kristy Clark, 35, KS	29:00:00
37	Tamara Begay, 21, NM	29:01:41
38	Jennifer Clinchard, 48, NE	29:08:04
39	Rene Villalobos, 57, TX	29:09:16
40	Steve Blanck, 44, KS	29:21:35
41	Lorraine Coder, 32, KS	29:31:40
42	Vincent Swendsen, 54, NC	29:31:42
43	Daniel Wilson, 58, UT	29:37:22
44	Bruce Rowe, 29, KS	29:40:10
45	Robert Hall, 59, KS	29:41:36
46	Brandy Holey, 37, MO	29:41:37
47	Joseph Galloway, 59, IA	29:50:29
48	Carson Galloway, 26, IA	29:50:33

*See page 58 for key

OPPOSITE: Nick Seymour covers ground quick to take an early lead.  Kristi Mayo/Mile 90 Photography]

BELOW: Alex Francisco provides scale for the Flint Hills.  Kristi Mayo/Mile 90 Photography]

