



WHAT THE HELL JUST HAPPENED?

BY CAROL JOHNSON

This grueling rock has been around for five years and this was my third time running it. I knew what I was getting myself into as I toed the line race morning and said a prayer for the FlatRock virgins. It is a very technical course with zero “flat rocks,” a few creek crossings, and one knee-deep river crossing on a typical year.

This year was not going to be typical.

Race morning started with a lightning delay. We were getting waves of downpours with thunder and lightning, and apparently it was going to continue like this for the entirety of the race. At this point, I began to pray for the FlatRock veterans, too.



AT

6:48 a.m. we were cleared to start and only 30 crazy souls showed up and set out knowing they were going to be wet and cold for the next several hours. The race director is generous with a 24-hour finish cutoff, giving you an idea of technical difficulty even in the most ideal running conditions.

The first 50k was on-and-off thunder and lightning with buckets of rain. Creek crossings were becoming river crossings and the river crossing was becoming some awful mythical creature that tried to eat runners.

On a normal year, you get this wonderful photo-op near a waterfall called "the bowl." This year, it was flooded before the race even started and because of the rushing water, runners were re-routed downstream a bit. The bad thing about re-routing is the trail doesn't follow, so we were bush-whacking down a slippery and

ABOVE: Carol Johnson (author) and Barbie Stephen used the buddy system throughout the 100k course. [© Kristi Mayo/Mile 90 Photography]

LEFT: Randy Butler sizes up another water crossing. [© Rick Mayo/Mile 90 Photography]



muddy hill, crossing rushing water, and then attempting to climb back up an even muddier and slicker hill.

I was fortunate enough to tackle this crazy adventure with a dear friend, Barbie Stephen. We helped each other up and down physical and mental hills and held hands across the ever-growing water crossings. As the race continued, the RD had ropes put out on course—but even with the ropes, the rising waters caused many runners to call it a day.

As we turned around for the last 15 miles, night fell and I muttered: “Only dummies would attempt the water crossings at night.” Soon we were those dummies as we foolishly pushed forward. And this set a new water crossing standard: If it doesn’t involve a rope and fearing for your life, is it really a water crossing?

As the race went on, the temperature dropped, the water rose, and legs began to get tired. The ropes were literal lifelines as runners were having their feet swept out from underneath them. First-place female Mindy Coolman even reported being briefly swept away, but was able to grab onto a tree after ping-ponging along the rocky bottom.

In the end, 12 people made it to the finish line; the remainder of the field wisely dropped.

All day, Barbie and I only had positive things to say, although we did take turns crying when our blood sugar would get low and the F-bomb became a regular invective hurled at the water crossings. As we jogged into the finish in the dark we finally could relax and laugh about all the times we thought about dropping but didn’t want to bring the other one down by airing the idea. I have never run an entire race with another person but I know for a fact that I would not have been able to do what we did if I had run with anyone else.

Are we tough? Are we stupid? Yes and yes, but all I know is I can’t wait to do it all again next year! 🏃

FlatRock

Independence, KS // April 29

🏃 4,5* // 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	David Box, 41, KS	12:06:20
2	Justin Walker, 37, OK	12:29:41
3	Aaron Norman, 35, MO	15:31:37
4	Mindy Coolman, 35, NE	16:56:42
5	Chad Wooderson, 42, MO	18:03:50
6	Carol Johnson, 30, KS	19:09:58
7	Barbie Stephen, 33, KS	19:09:58
8	Randy Butler, 50, OK	21:29:12
9	Steven Schiavoni, 31, CA	21:31:20
10	Jesse Morgan, 34, KS	21:58:09
11	Michael Mora, 41, KS	21:58:09
12	Robert Hall, 60, KS	22:24:22

*See page 64 for key

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