





My Heart At Heartland

BY MELISSA BLAND

CASSODAY, KS
// MAY 1

 **2,2 // 50 MILES,**
50K

Elevation: 50 miles
– 2,500 feet | 50k
– 1,500

The course is an out-and-back on backcountry gravel roads with less than one mile of paved surface. Much of the course meanders through open range with views of the Flint Hills tallgrass prairie. This is a great course for a first-timer to take on the 50-mile or 50k distance, with a challenging but not technical course, and generous 15-hour cutoff (both races).

Torrey Wilson (left) and Tyler Scheidt take on a long ribbon of the Heartland course.

 JOHN KNEPPER / MILE 90
PHOTOGRAPHY



“When we learn to become resilient, we learn how to embrace the beautifully broad spectrum of the human experience.”

– Jaeda Dewalt

This quote has been something I have continued to repeat to myself over the last several weeks, and I think it applies to all facets of life.

When I signed up for the Heartland 50 after being told about the beauty of the Kansas Flint Hills, I had lofty, but attainable goals to run the course in about nine hours.

But plans change.

On April 11, I was assaulted, which left me with a spiral fracture up my right ring finger. A few days following the assault, I had surgery to place temporary pins in my hand to assist with healing and minimize permanent damage. I was no longer confident in my ability to finish this race physically or mentally. I was scared to be in my head for 50 miles.

Is there any place more beautiful than the Kansas Flint Hills? Maybe, but it would be a close contest. The race start was a crisp morning, but the cool air was very welcomed with the heat we knew we were going to encounter later in the day. The starting line is always a jittery feeling for me at any race but also one of my favorite spots, because you get to come

together with long lost ultrarunning friends.

The race was off and the first eight miles to the first aid station were perfection. An easier portion of the course, we got to watch the sunrise over the Flint Hills. I knew instantly that I had this. I bypassed the first aid station bathroom because there was a line and had a big regret over that decision. I carried that with me for about 12 more miles until I inevitably had no choice but to take an off-course bathroom break. The moral to that story is: I should have waited in line.

The section of course between aid stations one and two is very hilly. I loved this portion, and this kind of course is what I live for. The sun was coming out and it was heating



up. I knew my hand was starting to feel very tight and worked to keep it as elevated as possible, and to keep taking in fluids as I ran. I knew I was toward the front of the pack and feeling great with so much adrenaline running through me. I went straight into the port-o-potty at aid station two, but I could not take care of all the business, as I could hear people waiting outside (hence the pit stop a few miles down the road).

The trip from aid station two to the turnaround is a long stretch and probably mentally the roughest. The heat was beating down, and I was really beginning to have pain in my arm and hand. I spent some of the miles with fellow racer, Justin. With the distraction of conversation and getting to know him, we kept a great pace. I was also right on target for my nine-hour goal time and that was keeping my engine going.

ABOVE: Melissa Bland (author) takes in the impact of 50 miles at the finish line. RICK MAYO / MILE 90 PHOTOGRAPHY

OPPOSITE: Jeff Grabbe (left) and Jason Flores (right) early in the 50-mile race. JOHN KNEPPER / MILE 90 PHOTOGRAPHY

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RIGHT: Stephen Foster (near) chases Marc Friesen early in the 50-mile race.

 JOHN KNEPPER / MILE 90 PHOTOGRAPHY

OPPOSITE: Tiffany Clements (left) and John Scott celebrate their finish in the 50K.

 JOHN KNEPPER / MILE 90 PHOTOGRAPHY



I rolled into the turnaround at 4.5 hours, and the moment I stopped running, the pain hit me like a Mack Truck. It was also the first time I noticed that my hand and entire arm were swollen. I really thought that

was the end of the line for me. The tears were flowing, and I was devastated. Luckily, I had an amazing crew chief who was going to get me back out there. We elevated, iced and massaged my arm for an hour.

I was just sitting and watching my goal time tick further and further away and that was hard, especially when the rest of my body was feeling great. All I could think was, "I can do this! I can do hard things!" One of my closest friends, Rachel, came into the turnaround and I knew it was my time to head back out. With her company, I could overcome the pain and get to that finish line. Mentally, I needed a win, and being able to finish was a big win.

While heading inbound with a strong headwind, we couldn't look up, and running downhill felt like running uphill. We were headed back on the hardest stretch and running into a brick wall. I am pretty sure everyone lost and gained a little something while overcoming that stretch of the course. I came rocketing into aid station four, only 16 miles left, and no more crew access until the end. Our crew chief asked if I needed anything. I grabbed chips and said, "I am at the point of no return, let's get this done." I had to get right back out of the aid station as quickly as possible.

The last 16 miles of this race were spent solo and fully in my head. I thought about all that life was throwing at me and knew I was going to

make it. I was in a lot of pain, but would find myself lost in the beauty of the course and truly, how lucky I was to be there taking it all in. I ran out of water about four miles from the finish and couldn't get my bladder open one-handed at the water drop, so it was a thirsty ending to the race, but one I had worked toward all day.

As I crossed the train tracks, with the finish line in sight, I had to fight back the tears that were trying to burst out of me. I did it. I really was not sure it was going to be possible. Lucky for me, I also had a cheering squad in sight to bring me in and the tears began to flow. I crossed the finish line and I have never breathed a bigger sigh of relief.

This course, the race directors, aid station volunteers, friends and family — none of them will ever truly understand the impact they had on my entire life that day, but all will be forever held close to my heart.

I will continue to run with my heart out on the Heartland course every spring. 

The mOUntainBACK 50

The scenery was beautiful, a perfect fall day among the vibrant fall foliage!
— Devon Yanko

One of my favorite weekends of the year!
— Michele Pendrak Bush

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Photo: Heather Weber



Heartland 50

Cassoday, KS // May 1

2,2' // 50 MILES, 50K

50 MILES

1	Stephen Foster, 51, MO	7:15:15
2	Mathue Johnson, 38, NC	8:12:25
3	Dawson Schmidt, 20, KS	8:31:41
4	Marc Friesen, 46, KS	8:43:09
5	Jaclyn Long, 39, KS	9:12:46
6	Jeff Reece, 36, KS	9:23:26
7	Tony Clark, 43, KS	9:35:10
8	Taylor Budd, 27, MO	10:06:53
9	Justin Phillips, 48, KS	10:06:53
10	Dink Sommer, 45, MO	10:10:53
11	Christie StClair, 47, MN	10:28:05
12	Robert Bowman, 58, MO	10:38:31
13	Scott Stith, 38, MO	10:45:40
14	Clay Dorman, 25, KS	10:45:54
15	Scott Hagerty, 52, KS	10:52:07
16	Ben Stanton, 42, KS	10:56:54
17	Arnold Begay, 58, OK	11:00:35
18	Steven Fitch, 38, KS	11:06:34
19	Steven Blanck, 49, KS	11:10:54
20	Melissa Bland, 33, MO	11:20:23
21	Christopher Foster, 29, MO	11:40:36
22	Rachel Baker, 42, MO	11:41:05
23	Jason Flores, 48, KS	12:07:06
24	Polly Launay, 40, IL	12:11:16
25	John Kevern, 40, KS	12:16:08
26	Blake Rather, 53, MO	12:26:58
27	Michael Draut, 61, KS	12:30:37
28	Josh Garrison, 45, MO	12:36:07
29	Jason Mullenbach, 48, MN	12:42:18
30	Sarah Russell, 34, MO	12:43:50
31	Anita Fromm, 49, CO	12:46:52
32	Linda Rust, 61, TX	12:46:57
33	Dennis Wilson, 63, NE	14:05:20
34	Greg Maynard, 50, MO	14:21:57

50K

1	Francie Hamer, 46, OK	5:21:39
2	Barbara Pinkerton, 45, OK	5:34:35
3	Amanda Lynch, 40, OK	5:42:24
4	Tim Pott, 58, MO	5:59:21
5	Anthony Schaner, 36, IA	6:15:42
6	Brennen Strohm, 24, IA	6:15:42
7	Keke Gibb, 34, KS	6:18:30
8	Tiffany Clements, 29, KS	6:20:46
9	John Scott, 40, KS	6:20:46
10	Shari Hicks, 48, KS	6:22:18
11	Derk Pinkerton, 39, OK	6:24:10
12	Chad Harper, 43, KS	6:25:13
13	Tyler Jimeno, 29, CO	6:26:10
14	Ryun Ladd, 22, KS	6:36:45
15	Ryan Gibb, 39, KS	6:37:10
16	Kathy Bratton, 60, OK	6:37:24
17	Luke Tuttle, 50, OH	6:38:58
18	Rob Beeler, 43, MO	6:56:18
19	Stephanie Lane, 51, MO	7:42:17
20	Donald Carley, 73, NE	7:46:37
21	Troy Pruett, 47, MO	7:50:29
22	Terry Rider, 66, KS	7:58:35
23	Brent Larson, 67, MN	8:12:24
24	Janice O'Grady, 72, CO	8:13:42
25	Jason Bement, 42, OK	8:20:49
26	John Crum, 48, KS	8:30:26
27	Penny Terwelp, 52, KS	8:37:07
28	Torrey Wilson, 30, NE	9:43:08
29	Tyler Scheidt, 23, NE	9:43:08
30	Doug Weaver, 57, KS	9:54:13
31	Haley Remsberg, 40, KS	11:00:52

*See page 46 for key



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Jackpot Ultra Running Festival

Congrats!

2021 USATF 100-Mile Road
National Championship podium finishers

1st Place Male and Female:
Zach Bitter (12:52) & Stefanie Flippin (14:35)

2nd Place Male and Female:
Jake Jackson (14:12) & Camille Herron (14:42)

3rd Place Male and Female:
Patrick Reagan (14:51) & Micah Morgan (14:44)

BET BIG RUN LONG