

LAST MINUTE PIVOT

BY LEIA ANDERSON AND COLEEN SHAW-VOEKS, RDS





**TALE OF TWO TRAILS
LENEXA, KS //**
JULY 15

 **3,4' // 100K,
40 MILES**

Elevation gain:
2,200 feet | 40-mile
3,200 feet | 100k

The race traverses through Shawnee Mission Park in Johnson County, Kansas.

There are some very smooth and runnable sections and some very technical sections. Runners should be prepared for roots and rocks and some rolling hills. The trails run primarily through tree canopies, but there are a few very exposed areas throughout each loop. This year's event was shortened from a 20-mile loop to a 10-mile loop due to storm damage.

Runners launch into the 40-mile and 100k races.

 JOHN KNEPPER /
MILE 90 PHOTOGRAPHY



Morlie Wang on a powerline section
early in the 40-mile race.
📷 KRISTI MAYO / MILE 90 PHOTOGRAPHY



Race directing trail events comes with different challenges in different areas of the country. In the Kansas City area, one of the biggest challenges we face are trail closures.

We have clay-based soil and many high-traffic trail systems, which means when the trails get wet, the land managers close them to prevent damage. Choosing dates for races involves a fingers-crossed mentality where you pick what should theoretically be the driest times of the year. It also means having backup plans—including completely different courses to divert to if needed.

The evening before the race, we—the Team Sparkle Productions RDs—were prepared for Tale of Two Trails 100k, 40, 20 and 10-mile races to start at 6 a.m. A 20-mile loop of singletrack was marked, aid station gear was laid out in piles, emails had been sent and

the rental truck was about to be loaded.

Around 4:30 p.m., the “slight chance of rain” turned into a massive, Midwestern summer storm. The sky turned black and winds topping 89 mph downed trees and knocked out power all over the city. We started talking immediately with the land managers to see what things looked like, only to find that the trails weren’t just soaked, but trees were down all over, and many spots were completely impassable.

At 7 p.m., we made it to the park and split up, marking a 10-mile backup course. Fortunately, Shawnee Mission Park, where the race is held,



ABOVE: Race Directors Coleen Shaw-Voeks (left) and Leia Anderson (right) had to pivot the night before the race to map out and mark a new 10-mile course.

📷 JOHN KNEPPER / MILE 90 PHOTOGRAPHY

RIGHT: Patrick Burkett climbs a powerline section on the backup course in the 100k.

📷 KRISTI MAYO / MILE 90 PHOTOGRAPHY

has fire roads, a cross-country course and bridle trails that can be pieced together as a backup course and quickly mapped out. Unfortunately, we didn't know we'd need it until 12 hours before race check-in, so there was a quick pivot in order to make this work.

The originally planned 20-mile loops on single track became 10-mile loops on gravel, grass, bridle trail and some pavement; and three aid stations became one "mega aid station." The amazing trail steward used a chainsaw to remove trees off of the new course just before the first runner made it through.

A mega aid station meant we had a huge, very experienced and incredible group of volunteers who made this race so fun and helpful as runners came through. By a

show of hands, nearly a third of the runners who started the race left home that morning without power, and we ended up loaning out the event's generator to folks throughout the next week. Weeks later, the entire city was still cleaning up debris.

While it wasn't the race course we planned, the trail community once again showed up with joy and enthusiasm. It's going to be one of those races where people will mention they ran it "the year of the storm." It's also a great reminder that you can plan a perfect course, but the community is what makes a race so special. ▲



