

Eric Steele finishes the Inaugural Angel Fire 50 Mile Race in Angel Fire, New Mexico, placing 4th Overall in 11:49:39. Photo : Polly Choate

## Athlete Spotlight

# ERIC STEELE

Interview & Intro BY STEVE BORN



It's been awhile since we've featured someone who is both athlete and race director. However, we figured it was time to do a combination athlete/race director "spotlight" article when Eric Steele emailed us regarding support for his upcoming race, the FlatRock 50/25K's. He wrote, "We were one of the first races Steve Born called to sponsor at least ten years ago. I am also an ultrarunner and exclusively use Hammer Nutrition products. So, of course, I preach the gospel of Hammer Nutrition everywhere I go!"

I remember our initial correspondences quite vividly, because not only was I trying to procure sponsorship of Eric's race, but we also had an in-depth talk about his fueling program after his Badwater Ultramarathon finish in 2000.

In Eric's words, "I'm a diehard Hammer Nutrition user/supporter and have been ever since you spent a couple of hours on the phone with me back in 2001 coaching me on what went wrong (and most importantly how to fix it) at Badwater in my 2000 finish."

One of the best things about being involved in the events sponsorship faction of Hammer Nutrition is that, in spite of the fact that we sponsor over 2,400 events annually, we get to know the race directors pretty well, with many of them becoming good friends. With that said, I caught up with my longtime friend, Eric Steele . . .

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**EN: Let's start with your ultrarunning career. When did you get started and are you still competing?**

**ERIC:** I've been running since 1992 (ultras since 1994). It all started as somewhat of an "agreement to get fit" with myself and another individual. I went out the door to run that day and never looked back. As most runners experience over a long running career, some years I was way more focused than others. But, when you have that drive, that passion for running, there is no substitute, and if I tended to drift too far away, the passion (and focus training facilitates) has always pulled me back in. It's certainly an addiction, although a very positive one in this case, but an addiction nonetheless. The past two years competing have been truly phenomenal and magical. I attribute a large part of this to Hammer Nutrition's education and massively stepping up my use of Hammer Nutrition fuels and supplements. I am looking forward to many more years participating in one capacity or another in this sport.

**EN: What are some of the highlights of your running career?**

**ERIC:** There are so many races that have brought such amazing, positive experiences into my life; it's hard to just talk about a few. That said, some of my proudest accomplishments are Badwater (which I finished in 2000 and then continued on to summit Mt. Whitney, as the race was originally intended); Leadville in 1999—two attempts, third time was a charm; completing 108 miles in a 24-hour track race in Dallas in 1998; and most recently, at the Angel Fire 50 Mile Endurance Race. I had an experience while running the last few miles that reminded me of my true love, commitment, and above all, appreciation for this sport and my ability to continue to run and compete.

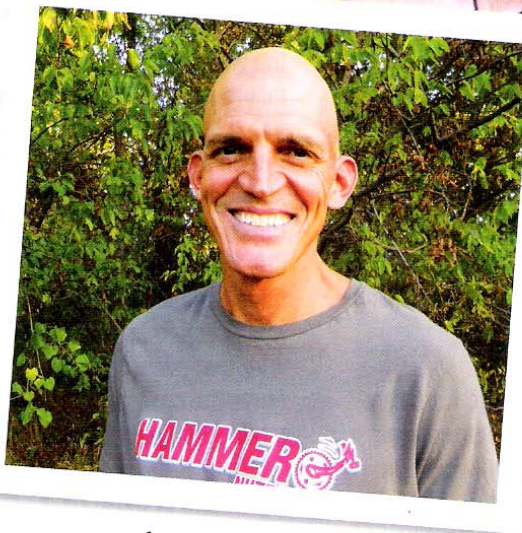
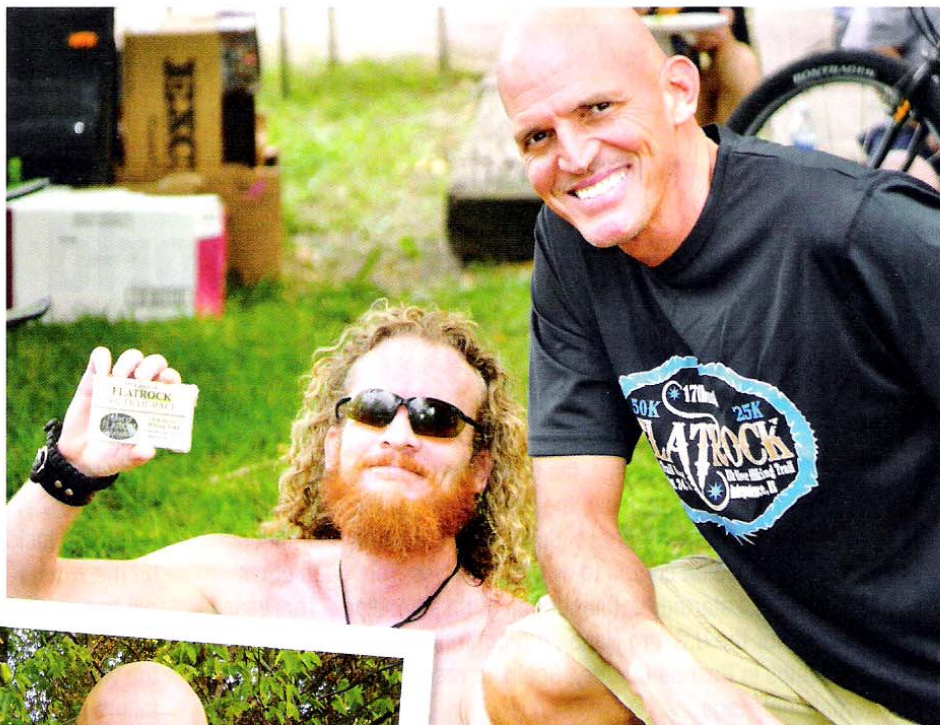
**EN: How have Hammer Nutrition products helped you?**

**ERIC:** I can sincerely state that Hammer Nutrition products have made a significant difference in my life, in

general and especially in my running performance. I have added many additional products over the past couple of years—Energy Surge, Premium Insurance Caps, Race Caps Supreme, Mito Caps, Tissue Rejuvenator, Chromemate, Boron, and more—trying them out and realizing that each one is as good as the next. I joke with my girlfriend all of the time that I need a shirt that reads "Body by Hammer," as I use several of the Hammer Nutrition products (Perpetuem, Hammer Whey, Hammer Bars, and Recoverite) as a meal replacement when an alternate healthy choice is not available.

**EN: Awesome! Now, let's talk about your role as a race director, in particular your race, the FlatRock 50, which we hear nothing but praise for.**

**ERIC:** I was the original founder of the Kansas Ultrarunners Society (KUS) in 1995. Our very first event was the FlatRock 50K (Kansas' first and oldest trail ultra) in September of 1995. In the



Above: Eric and 50K competitor Jim Phillips from Springfield, MO, (with his finisher's award) after finishing the 17th Annual FlatRock 50K. Photo : Greg Highberger. Left: Eric prepares for a 2012 event. Photo : Polly Choate

late '90s and on into the new millennium I directed several other 24/48 hour KUS events, along with helping to launch and provide major support for the first 100-mile ultra in Kansas, The Heartland 100, in 2000-2005.

Due to management disagreements, in 2005 I pulled FlatRock from the KUS venue of races, and we have been on our own ever since. This will be the 18th anniversary for FlatRock, and we have been SOLD OUT for nearly a month now, the first time we have ever sold out our event! (NOTE: Race entry for 2013 will open on October 1, 2012.)

**EN: I've heard that while FlatRock is a really fun, scenic race, it's also pretty darn hard. Why is that?**

**ERIC:** I think what I wrote on our website says it pretty well: "Extreme concentration is required when running FlatRock, as you will take very few steps where there will not be some potential obstacle. Most of these will be in the form of rocks. You will very quickly learn why the race motto here at "the Rock" is "If you look up . . . you are going down!" Buyer beware, please. While the trail does not have any long hills, there

is an estimated total elevation gain and loss of approximately 3,000 feet for the 50K. Most of these hills are very steep and rocky and are not runnable, unless you can run trails like a mountain goat, due to the treacherous footing. So, please remember to take your time and enjoy the scenery safely, while stopped or moving slowly and cautiously."

Another example of the difficulty of this race came from a competitor who said, "Wow! Now I know why those runners from Arkansas were so mad at you last year! That's the most challenging race I've ever run, and I've run off and on for 31 years."

**EN: Among many other things, what makes this race special?**

**ERIC:** We will be awarding buckles for the first time this year to all 50K finishers. We have received a lot of positive feedback about this change. Again this year, we'll keep with our tradition of a pre- AND post-race meal, awesome shirts, and a "Twilight

Zone" atmosphere that you can't find at other races. We will also be "knighting" another runner into the FlatRock "Hall of Pain." To receive this honor, a participant must complete ten consecutive 50Ks at FlatRock.

Then, later in the evening, we have a campfire for anyone who would like to join us. It's a great time to relax, get to know other participants and the awesome volunteers, and tell a lie or two about your running career! Runners and volunteers truly have an experience at this race that is unforgettable, which is why so many return year after year.

**EN: Aside from continuing your personal running career, what else have you got in the works?**

**ERIC:** I am in the process of launching several other ultras here in Kansas in 2013 and an ultra-race management company called Epic Ultras, along with offering coaching/educational services for newbies and veterans alike. Needless to say, I would like to discuss my continued and ever-expanding partnership with Hammer Nutrition as I expose and

educate many new runners and veterans alike in the upcoming years to my beloved sport of ultrarunning.

**EN: Eric, for now, just know that you can count on our support for your new races, as well as your coaching/education services. It'll not only be a lot of fun to help out, it'll definitely be a "win-win" situation for all.**

**We have been sponsoring FlatRock for a long, long time, it's been an honor to be a part of this great race all these years, and we look forward to many more years of supporting it!**

**ERIC:** Thank you so much! I am looking forward to a long and continuing relationship with Hammer Nutrition, truly an endurance athlete's best friend!  
**HN**

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