

HIGH COUNTRY RUNNING

Introducing the new Soulstice Beale 30K race

BY NEIL WEINTRAUB

Special to the Daily Sun

This past weekend, I again found myself immersed in the stunning beauty of the Kaibab National Forest's historic Government Prairie. I was voluntarily leading the third annual Willow Bend Environmental Education Center's fundraising trip across the Kaibab National Forest's Beale Wagon Road with my pal, Eric Souders, and his two camels, Gamal and Rakuda.

As I stood at our tour's starting point along one of the best-preserved sections of the historic wagon ruts, I realized this will be the same scenic spot where in less than five months, on Oct. 11, the Soulstice Mountain Trail runners will tackle our new 30K (18-mile)



NEIL WEINTRAUB, COURTESY

Eric Souders leads camel riders across Government Prairie near the new Soulstice 30K course.

race route. This spot was exactly where, in 1857, Lt. Edward Beale, along with 50 men and 22 camels, surveyed and later constructed the United States' first federally funded wagon road through the Southwest.

While I originally had no plans to add a new race, Soulstice co-host Selena Lang-

ner let me know that many of her ultrarunning friends would register, so I thought, 'Why not?'

Soulstice's staple 10K and 11.2-mile courses are on relatively flat terrain. The new 30K route will have a challenging climb onto the slopes of the grass-covered Government Knolls. No matter which course

you choose, the spectacular 360-degree sweeping vistas of the San Francisco Peaks, Kendrick, Sitgreaves and Bill Williams Mountains will leave you breathless (as will the 7,400 feet altitude).

I would argue the highlight of being a part of any Soul-

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stice Mountain Trail Run is the magical postrace party at the Little Pup Ranch with Paul Webber's live music. Also new this year: participants are invited to camp the night before at the Ranch so they are set to go early in the morning. Last year, a dozen volunteers camped out and had a pre-race party around the campfire patio with the ghost of Lt. Beale and his camels.

The races are beautiful and challenging, the postrace party is a popular favorite but to top it all off ... it all benefits an incredible cause.

Soulstice, which is put on by Northern Arizona Trail Runners Association (NATRA LLC) volunteers, gives 100% of the proceeds to Big Brothers Big Sisters of Flagstaff (BBBSF) mentoring programs. BBBSF fosters one-to-one mentoring relationships, which ignite the power and promise of youth across northern Arizona. As a "Big" volunteer since I took over organizing the race in 2002, Soulstice's fundraising efforts that raise upwards of \$15,000 every year means the world to me.

All races cost \$80 — quite a value considering you get a \$30 value Sweatvac Performance dye-sublimated T-shirt, race poster, samples of Squirrel's Nut Butter, Super-

salve, one free \$10 Aspen Sports raffle ticket, free high-resolution photographs, food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic postrace beverages and barbecue, followed by free Fratelli pizza at the Pay N' Take later that day.

Soulstice has sold out every year since 2003. Only 50 spots remain for the Forest Service-permitted 200-runner field. To join the annual celebration of our running community, visit runsignup.com and search for Soulstice.

On running Soulstice, Flagstaff Olympian and a fellow "Big Sister" Rachel Smith says: "While I am fortunate to race around the world, one of my very favorite events to be a part of each year is right here in northern Arizona. Neil and his incredible crew always put on such a fun and memorable event, and the only reason I would miss Soulstice is if I was out of town."

NEIL WEINTRAUB COFOUNDED NORTHERN ARIZONA TRAIL RUNNERS ASSOCIATION IN OCTOBER 2001. THANKS TO HIS MANY FRIENDS, THE GROUP HAS MET FOR 1,181 CONSECUTIVE SATURDAYS WHETHER TO RUN, RACE, VOLUNTEER AT AID STATIONS OR HELP MAINTAIN TRAILS. VISIT NATRA.ORG TO LEARN MORE AND JOIN THE FREE GROUP RUNS.

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