

# Feud Runnin'

by John Farrow

*I don't want no feudin' now, y'hear? Jus' runnin'!*

And with that admonition, race director David Hatfield, a descendant of the famous feud clan, sent us on our way into them thar hills. That was easy enough. I had no desire to get mixed up in America's most notorious and longest-running feud. He also said not to mess with any pigs along the route. That one took a while to understand, not that I have a penchant for messing with pigs anyway.

It was the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Hatfield-McCoy Reunion Marathon and it followed a loop through the hills of southeastern Kentucky and West Virginia complete with historic markers detailing significant events in the Hatfield-McCoy feud. After a flat first mile along the main highway, we turned off onto a narrow, windy road and began a steady climb up Blackberry Mountain that would not peak until mile 7.

The road swerved this way and that, the grade constantly increasing. Any minute I expected moonshiners to come careening around a curve with the sheriff in hot pursuit. We passed the Freewill Baptist Church, the Primitive Baptist Church, the Old Regular Baptist Church as well as its New Reform version. Yes, we were among God-fearing people in those steep hills.

The rain began around mile 4, not hard but a steady, cold mountain rain that continued for the next six miles. On a particularly steep slope we passed the site of the Randolph McCoy cabin. Old Ran'l was the leader of the Kentucky McCoy's and had married his cousin, Sarah. They produced 15 children, including 9 sons.

The Hatfields had attacked the cabin, killing a son and a daughter in retaliation for McCoy raids to capture Hatfields in West Virginia. Across the way is the cemetery where many of the McCoy's are buried.

After mercifully topping out, we contended with rain-slick pavement on the equally steep descent and were quickly at the site of the Hog Trial. It seems that a McCoy had accused a Hatfield of stealing one of his pigs and there had been a trial at the home of the Justice of the Peace. However, the JP was a Hatfield and decided in favor of his kin. The main witness was related to both families but testified in favor of the Hatfields. He met with an untimely death a few months later.

Some say that was the beginning of the feud. Others say it actually began earlier. Devil Anse Hatfield -- no, his mother didn't give him that name, he earned it -- was a Confederate sympathizer and had led a militia unit called the Logan Wildcats that patrolled the area during and after the Civil War. The Wildcats learned that Harmon McCoy was back home after service in the Union army and paid him a visit. Harmon also met an untimely death.

Or maybe it began when a Hatfield boy romanced and impregnated one of Randolph McCoy's daughters, or a dispute over timber rights, or maybe it was the Election Day Fight in 1882, or maybe . . . . Probably no one event sparked the feud, but nevertheless back and forth it went, tit for tat.

Our route finally leveled out and we followed Blackberry Creek towards West Virginia for several miles as train whistles reverberated through the hills. Soon we were at the site of the Pawpaw Tree Incident.

Ellison Hatfield had been knifed and shot in the Election Day Fight. He was grievously wounded and Devil Anse took him and three of the McCoy brothers prisoner with him back to West Virginia.

Sarah McCoy soon rode to the Hatfield compound to plead for her sons' lives. Devil Anse told her, "Whether Ellison lives or dies, I promise to bring them back to Kentucky alive."

Ellison Hatfield died. Devil Anse and his remaining sons brought the McCoy brothers back to Kentucky and tied them to pawpaw trees. Then

they shot them. Devil Anse had kept his word to bring the boys back to Kentucky alive.

Just past the scene of the Pawpaw Tree Incident, we veered down a narrow lane, across a bridge over the Tug River and into Matewan, West Virginia, a small mining town whose brick buildings date from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was not only a Hatfield stronghold where Ellison had died, but was the scene of violent conflicts between mine workers and coal operators in the 1920s.

The half-marathon ended in Matewan but the marathon doubled back over the bridge and north along the Tug River. At mile 18, it turned onto the rough, narrow and aptly named "Country Road" for a few more miles. Was this what John Denver was singing about? He must not have been running them at the time.

Soon the Country Road became a cart path and crossed the Tug on a swinging bridge for another mile or so before crossing again into Kentucky for the final stretch to the finish.

The race ended and thankfully so had the infamous feud. The actual fighting had been over for more than 100 years and the families now have an annual softball game and reunion festival. But Reo Hatfield and Bo McCoy wanted something else. They drafted a document that proclaims the families "do hereby and formally declare an official end to all hostilities, implied, inferred and real, between the families, now and forevermore." On June 14, 2003, descendants of Devil Anse Hatfield and Randolph McCoy signed a formal peace treaty in Pikeville, Kentucky.

Reo said that after September 11<sup>th</sup> he wanted to make an official statement of peace between the two families to show that if the most deep-seated family feud in America could be mended, so can this nation and others unite to protect peace and freedom throughout the world. The governors of West Virginia and Kentucky also issued official proclamations declaring June 14<sup>th</sup> as Hatfield-McCoy Reconciliation Day.

Now if my quads could just reconcile

themselves to the punishing treatment they got running up and down them thar hills . . . .□

*ARR News*, July 2003  
Albuquerque Road Runners Club