

HIGH COUNTRY RUNNING

A dead outlaw and a 1928 ultramarathon like no other

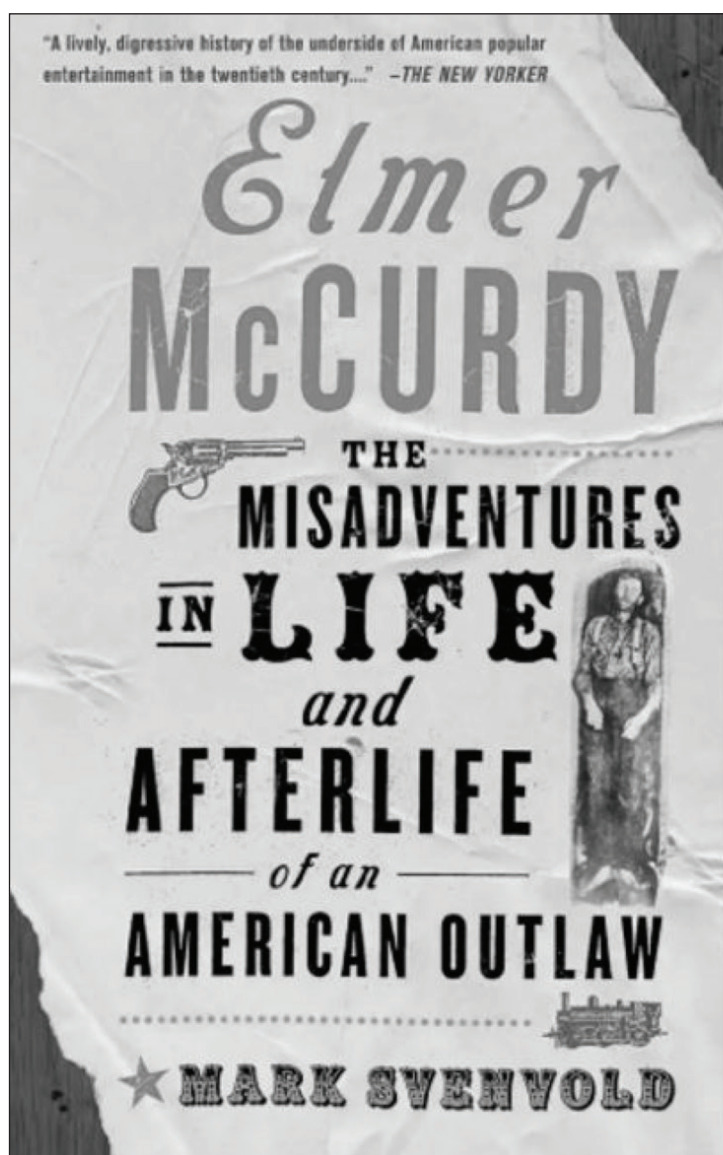
BY NEIL WEINTRAUB
Special to the Daily Sun

Ten years ago in this column, I wrote about my decades-long obsession with C.C. Pyle's Route 66 Transcontinental Los Angeles to New York Foot Race (3,422 miles) that passed through Flagstaff on March 17 and 18, 1928. The 55 of 199 runners who finished averaged 40 miles a day, or basically 84 consecutive ultramarathons.

My latest intrigue with the race occurred on the morning of this past March 21 where I talked about it at the historic Hubbell Trading Post in Winslow. In the talk, I dove into the curious case of the "Dead Outlaw" featured in the race's accompanying carnival.

According to Geoff Williams in his outstanding book "C.C. Pyle's Amazing Foot Race, The True Story of the 1928 Coast-To-Coast Run Across America" (2007), he writes: "The runners called the corpse Oscar, but his name had once been Elmer McCurdy, a 31-year-old luckless bandit."

Reaching what reporters called the race's "inglorious climax," the runners arrived in Madison Square Garden on May 26, 1928. Geoff Williams notes that the Newark Evening News described the runners as "emaciated scarecrows, unshaven, un-



shorn, caricatures," their tortured appearance probably similar to McCurdy's slowly decomposing corpse.

McCurdy's story is well-documented in Mark Svenvold's book "Elmer McCurdy, the Misadventures in Life and Afterlife of an American Outlaw" (2002). McCurdy always bungled robberies, including his finale in 1911 when he held up the wrong train and had lit-

tle money to show for it. Oklahoma sheriff's deputies tracked him down and killed McCurdy in a shootout. When no one claimed McCurdy's body, the undertaker in Pawhuska, Oklahoma, embalmed it and began charging admission for visitors to view the "Oklahoma Outlaw."

In 1916, two brothers who claimed kinship with McCurdy took possession of the body, but in reality, they owned

the Great Patterson Carnival, and thus McCurdy's illustrious afterlife began, finding a brief place in C.C. Pyle's race. Williams notes, "He was also Pyle's favorite staff member, because the Oklahoma outlaw never complained of his billing and accommodations or asked for money."

The body traveled with carnivals and crime museum shows into the 1960s, chang-

ing hands several times. The last owners eventually sold the barely recognizable, mummified corpse, and it was forgotten, painted bright orange and left hanging as a prop in the "Laff-in-the-Dark" ride at the Pike — a Long Beach, California, amusement park.

Oddly enough, during a "Six Million Dollar Man" episode filmed at the Pike, a stagehand moving what he thought was a wax mannequin,

accidentally tugged on McCurdy's hanging body, causing the arm to fall off and revealing a bone. When the forensic examiner discovered it was McCurdy, the body was finally laid to rest in Oklahoma, underneath a 2-foot layer of cement, ensuring he'd never go on tour again.

Fast forward to last year, when the critically acclaimed seven-time Tony Award nominated Broadway show "Dead Outlaw," revived Elmer McCurdy's story. Unfortunately for the show, its 78-day run from April 12 to June 28 was shorter than C.C. Pyle's lively 3,422 mile, 84-day race!

Pyle Carnival Arrives Today; Racers Tomorrow

The Pyle carnival company arrives in this city today according to the announcement made earlier in the week.

The official car of the marathon crew was here last blazing the way for the company to this city they will show at the Bazel

for the marathon racers when they arrive here Monday night.

The racers come from Flagstaff to Two Guns today and spend the night at that point near Canyon Diablo, coming to this city Monday and remaining over night, leaving Tuesday morning for Holbrook, their next stop.

There yet is interest in the race on the part of the local people but much of it subsided when it was learned that the local runner, Quomawahu, was out of the race.

Winslow Daily Mail:
Sunday, March 18th, 1928

Elmer McCurdy Goes Home To Boot Hill



Buried 66 Years Late

OUTLAW, Okla. (AP) — Elmer McCurdy, a small-time desperado gunned down by sheriff's deputies in 1911 after he robbed the wrong train, finally was laid to rest Friday in that ill-fated town.

McCurdy was laid to history until several months ago, when his embalmed corpse turned up in a California amusement park where it was thought to be a wax dummy. While an arm fell off, revealing a bone, the corpse was turned over to authorities who identified it and returned it to Oklahoma.

A black, glass-sided hearse driven by two white horses took McCurdy's body from a funeral home in Guthrie, about 20 miles north of Oklahoma City, to the western cemetery where he was laid to rest among several other Old West outlaws, including Bill Danton and Little Dick West.

Two wagons and five men on foot made up the funeral procession as it crept through the streets of Guthrie, the territorial and federal flags flying, toward the

Lakeland Ledger: April 23rd, 1977

AND TWO WHITE HORSES TO PULL ME ALONG
Old-time Oklahoma outlaw Elmer McCurdy's body is taken to the grave after 66 years.

COURTESY

Young Professionals of Flagstaff

The Arizona Daily Sun is seeking nominees to be recognized in its annual Young Professionals of Flagstaff special section.

We're looking for people who have demonstrated leadership, initiative and dedication to growth in their careers and communities.

Please email Zak Meier at zmeier@azdailysun.com or call (928) 320-4476.

Nominations due by **May 14**

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NEIL WEINTRAUB IS THE DIRECTOR OF NORTHERN ARIZONA TRAIL RUNNERS ASSOCIATION, LLC AND IS CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF SATURDAY GROUP RUNS AND VOLUNTARILY DIRECTING BOTH THE JACKIE WEINTRAUB MEMORIAL SOULSTICE MOUNTAIN TRAIL RUN AND BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS OF FLAGSTAFF DAVE MCKAY MEMORIAL HALF MARATHON AND 5K. RACHEL SMITH IS A MOM OF TWO AMAZING DAUGHTERS, A PROFESSIONAL RUNNER AND THE COORDINATING EDITOR OF THIS COLUMN. SHE WOULD LOVE FOR YOU TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE COLUMN AND SHARE YOUR RUNNING-RELATED STORY BY EMAILING HER AT RACHSCHNEID18@GMAIL.COM.

Please join us for a celebration of the life of long-time Flagstaff family doctor,

CARL SHRADER

(1931 - 2025)

Memorial
Saturday, May 2, 2 - 5pm
Coconino High School, Theater
2801 Izabel St.
Flagstaff, AZ 86004

AND/OR

Walk in the Park
Sunday, May 3, 10am
Buffalo Park, Entrance
2400 N. Gemini Rd.
Flagstaff, AZ 86004