



# Trail-safe PROCEDURES

TRAIL SKILLS ARE JUST LIKE SURVIVAL SKILLS; RUNNING FORESTS, FOOTPATHS AND MOUNTAINS REQUIRES YOU LIVE ON YOUR WITS. THIS MONTH, **MATT MAYNARD** WHITTLES DOWN THE SKILLS YOU'LL NEED TO TOUGH OUT THE WILDEST TRAILS AROUND

Road running is to The Great British Bake Off, what trail running is to Bear Grylls: Born Survivor. In road running, all the ingredients are nicely laid out. The setting is safe and familiar. The recipe for your run is repeated. Timings are fixed. And your home is nicely pre-heated for your imminent return.

Trail running is different. Before you begin, it is quite unnecessary to wash your hands. With each episode the setting changes. Instead of just being a backdrop, the scenery is interactive. Technique is still key; but there's less marks for preparation, and far more for improvisation. And while undeniably everything has gone wrong if you're eating wild animals or drinking your own urine - the ability to tough it out and laugh at adversity is all part of the adventure.

So with a nod to the wild reality of off-road running, here's a behind-the-scenes-look at everything it takes to survive a big day out on the trails.

## TRAIL TECHNIQUES

Sure, your run around the park is a bona fide trail run. It's okay to linger here for a while on the grassy-verge of the sport, where you don't have to worry what is underfoot. But once you take the plunge, you'll realise that clever footwork is not only necessary for the more challenging stuff - but is one of the key elements that makes trail running more interesting. Here's the skills you'll want to add to your arsenal.

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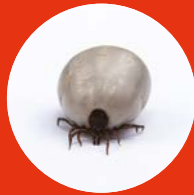
**Motoring through mud.**

Forget childhood cross-country and cold soggy feet. Running through the sloppy stuff is the bread-and-butter skill of seasoned trail runners. With the right shoes, attitude and chosen distance, you'll soon be wondering why you needed that forged note excuse from school P.E.

For those deep-winter mud fests, select shoes with pointy, soft, rubbery studs. Once you're out there, don't waste time mincing around muddy patches. Run straight through them. Keep arms out, hips nice and loose and knees slightly bent for balance. Even if you've splashed out on waterproof Gore-Tex treads, a little water and grit

**ANIMAL ATTACKS**

OK, so fending off angry bears is unlikely to happen in the Peak District. But there's still a few nasties out there to put you off your stride.



**Ticks.** These nasty critters sometimes carry disease and can lie in wait in woodland, moors and long grass from April to October. Check yourself after runs (they especially love intimate warm places). Be sure to remove the entire body and head with tweezers. If you develop a rash see your doctor.



**Wild boar.** These animals are making a come back across the UK and are helping regenerate woodland. Don't mess though with Pumba and his tusks, though, especially if he has piglets in tow.



**Cattle.** It is easy to surprise livestock when running, so be attentive with each new field. Always avoid getting between a cow and her calf.

will still find its way in. Don't waste time emptying it out. Continual running and the constant flexing of your foot should keep it warm even when the temperature is in single digits or below. If you are a sensitive type, you might find gloved-socks help with any skin irritation.

**Sidestepping on slopes.**

Every year the world-famous Cooper's Hill Cheese Rolling competition sees dozens of lunatics kart-wheel down the steepest hill in the land as they chase after a 70mph Double Gloucester. The first trail-runner to the bottom gets to keep the 4kg fromage.

Maintaining control of your centre of gravity on the 1:2 slope is vital. Competitors who finish on their feet (rather than their face) employ a well-practiced side-stepping

**TECHNIQUE WILDCARDS**

The standard trail running techniques will equip you for most British summer time excursions. Sometimes, however, the terrain gets so wild in certain sections that is not runnable at all. Then it's time to pull a technique wildcard straight from the survival handbook.



**RIVER CROSSING.**

Planning to cross any river more than ankle deep is not advisable. If you have to cross, face upstream so you can see any object flowing towards you. Running poles can help balance, but never use a rope which could entangle and trap you. If in a group, stronger members can cross facing upstream and others cross immediately downstream whilst protected in their wake. Heavy rain can swell rivers within minutes or hours, depending on the size of the catchment area. Glacier-fed rivers are often highest in the afternoon or evening when melt water is at its peak. After a few hours in both instances, river flow often reduces significantly.



**GLISSADING IN SNOW.**

Mountaineers can seem like serious types. But high on the slopes they will often sit down in the soft afternoon snow and bum-slide back down to the valley. Glissading saves a lot of energy, and is also rather fun. To get sliding, simply sit down with your legs in front, then dig your heels in to control the speed of descent. Mountaineers also use an ice axe to help control their speed. Trail runners should use the technique cautiously, and always ensure the run-off is clear of boulders and cliffs. Waterproof trousers help with both sliding, and preventing frozen butt cheeks.



**BUSHWHACKING.**

If you're a runner who won't stop for views because it will affect your average pace - then bushwhacking is not for you. To be frank, wading through thick undergrowth or clambering over boulders is understandably not most people's idea of running. But if you do find yourself off-route, or need to forge down a public footpath that a landowner has left to ruin - then you might need to whack some bushes. Before getting stuck in, ensure you know where you are going by cross-referencing against GPS and/or up-to-date maps. Removing clothing can actually help ease passage through clawing brambles. Don't break branches; nor let them slap back in the face of your partner.



**NATURE'S SURVIVAL FOOD**

Almost everyone can identify a blackberry. They are free, delicious and an instant hit of energy. Conveniently they often grow in hedgerows right by the side of the trail. Learn to identify elderberries, raspberries and wild raspberries and then add them to your mid-run nutrition plan. If unsure, best not pop it in your mouth.

technique. Toes are pointed at 45 degrees to the descent, and quick stuttering steps are made directly downhill. Maintain your weight in balance over your feet. Each step corrects any imbalance created by the last. When cornering left, lead with your left leg (and vice versa), so your chest always faces downhill. Practice first on the stairs at home, before advancing to expert cheese level.

**Hopscotch through rocks.**

Whoever said running is just about putting one foot in front of the other had never tackled any 'technical' trails. If you run in the mountains or along single-track in the forest, you move your feet through an obstacle course of nature's making.



**MOUNTAIN SURVIVAL TIPS**

**Find north.** If you are facing the sun, north is roughly speaking to your left at sunrise, behind you at midday and to your right at sunset  
**Know the weather.** Rain and wind generally come from the west in the UK. In mountainous areas, check detailed forecasts before your run at [mwis.org.uk](http://mwis.org.uk)  
**Chill factor.** Air temperature decreases by 0.6-1°C every 100m you ascend  
**Prepare for an accident.** Regardless of the time of your run, always pack a headtorch, extra clothes, a survival bag and material to staunch blood

Rather than looking directly beneath you, try looking a few steps ahead. (Your brain will do an amazing job in memorising the information received.) Keeping your head up gives you more warning of obstacles before you arrive, as well as allowing you to enjoy the view. After hopping through rocks, stretch out those hips with some turned-out-feet squats, and lunges such as the 'open lizard' yoga move.



**DOES A TRAIL RUNNER S\*\*T IN THE WOODS?**

Only as a last resort. Find a spot well away from the footpath, then use the heel of your shoe to kick a six-inch deep trench in the ground. If you're caught short you are unlikely to have toilet roll. Most broad deciduous leaves will do the job. Refill the hole, then cover it with a rock to stop an animal digging it up

**Scuttling across sand.**

Not all sand is made equally. Whether you're jogging in the Sahara or on a jolly at Skegness - always be on the lookout for the firm stuff. On beaches, the most compact and (least tiring) ground for running is often the hard-packed wet sand on the water's edge. Take shorter steps when running on sand to save energy. Sand is more invasive than mud and grit, and will cut like glass between your toes if not shaken out. The best way to banish it is with dedicated running gaiters. Fit them properly, otherwise sand will get trapped inside.