

FIND YOUR FEET ULTRA TRAIL AUSTRALIA GUIDEBOOK

A guidebook for all distance trail runners

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INTRODUCTION

This Ultra Trail Australia (UTA) Guidebook has been produced to allow athletes of most abilities a safe pathway of preparation to their chosen event in May. Whilst it targets the Ultra Trail Australia, it is also suitable as a training support for athletes striving towards other trail running adventures & races.

This UTA Guidebook is a summary of my personal coaching methodologies with a focus on sustainable, long term health & training successes. You will see that I stray from the typical mish-mash weeks containing everything from long runs to jogging, cross training, high-speed intervals & strength training. I also no longer believe in a straight-line approach to race day where every week continually builds on the last, always expecting more and more of yourself. My experience as both a coach, athlete and most importantly as a *person* is that this continual pushing of the body, where recovery is seen as something you apply when the body starts niggling, leads to unfulfilled potential, life dissatisfaction, fatigue and often an injury in the last 3 to 6 weeks before race day.

FACT: In 2016, the most common injuries prior to UTA were overuse soft tissue injuries sustained 3-6 weeks prior to race day. The most common injuries were Achilles tendonitis and ITB Syndrome.

My focus is on helping you to 'find your feet'. I am interested in *you*. Entering events such as these is about starting on a journey that will require patience and hopefully a very, very long term approach. I hope that the success of your performance is measured by the health and adventures you have along this six-month journey, the spontaneity you create within this training structure, and the 'what next?' you ask yourself in the weeks after race day. Notice how my measure of success is not the finishing time nor crossing of the finish line? I have learnt through hard lessons that racing success does not make you a better or more successful person, but rather the journey and the 'self' you build along the way that does. Make this event a transition into a life of playful adventure, done so in a way that will be sustainable until some day a long, long way away!

The 3 Secrets to Success:

I believe that there are 3 key things that provide race day confidence to a distance trail runner:

- **Knowledge** – how well you know the course and what you are in for
- **Nutrition & hydration** – how well you understand and have practiced your fuelling strategies for race day (including problem solving when things get tough)
- **Consistency in training** – how successfully you executed consistent days and weeks of training to create a long, coherent period of preparation.

The Common Approaches:

I have found that adult athletes who feel they are underperforming often fall into three categories:

- **One-hit-wonder trainers** – The athletes who grab at their moments of spare time, rushing out the door for a run and moving by feel. Their training may be hard or easy, depending on the amount of time they have available. Large or fast bouts of exercise can be followed by numerous rest days until the next session can be squeezed in.



- **Error:** Inconsistent training loads place sudden bouts of shock & stress on the body. These athletes find it hard to produce consistent performances and often experience soft-tissue injuries.
- **Runners** - The athletes who love to run but prefer to 'just run'. Training is often at an even intensity which is neither hard nor easy.
 - **Error:** Leads to frequently running in the 'plod zone', limiting potential come race day. These athletes can feel frustrated when performance doesn't match their training volumes.
- **Harder is better** - The athletes pushing for rapid strength & speed improvements. Most sessions are conducted at higher intensities or larger volumes, with minimal thought given to rest or recovery periods unless niggles suggest otherwise. Gym sessions are tough, swims are tough, and runs are long and tough.
 - **Error:** Insufficient planned recovery makes this training strategy unsustainable over a longer period of time. These athletes frequently experience niggles.

If preparation is in the consistency, then any of these forms of training can limit you from reaching your true potential on race day.

WAVE TRAINING

Wave Training is my terminology for a training structure that ebbs and flows in intensity and volume. I construct training in 3 week cycles with periods focused on higher intensity and/or volume, followed by periods of rest, recovery and 'missions'. This occurs as follows:

- **Week 1:** A Moderate Week of quality-focused training. This week should feel 'doable' without stretching you too far. It is often similar to a week of training you have already achieved in previous hard weeks. They must also be doable amongst our busy modern lifestyles.
- **Week 2:** A Hard Week of quality-focused training that builds on what you have achieved in the prior Moderate Week. The focus of this week should be the hard training days. They should challenge you and pull you to a new level of performance & mental strength.
- **Week 3:** This week should contain approximately 4-5 days of recovery followed by a big 'Mission'. The recovery helps to repair body tissues damaged by training during the previous two quality weeks. When the body is fresh and reenergized you can run stronger, freer and further in your weekend mission. This only helps to build confidence and paint an accurate picture of how your preparation is progressing. Fatigue no longer masks your performance in these 'missions'.

TRAINING TERMINOLOGY

Intensity (Weeks 1 & 2)

The focus of these weeks is quality training on your Hard Days. Week 1 should be hard but achievable. Week 2 should feel challenging but rewarding. In both Week 1 & 2 you will see day-to-day ebbs and flows in the training:

- **Rest Days** – No formal *planned training*
 - Rest days are a time to unwind & recover. But they do not need to involve sitting on the couch batting away your responsibilities. It simply means that we remove the 'shoulds' and try to fill the day with activities that refresh us and allow us to catch up or involve ourselves in 'life'. Kick a soccer ball with the kids, attend a yoga class, read a book, catch up on the bills, sleep in... there are endless opportunities and you will find that the time will fly when you are having fun.
- **Easy Days** – Prepare the body to train
 - These days are not 'training', but rather help you to mentally and physically prepare for the upcoming training days. Try to be flexible on these days and choose activities that help your body & mind recover and reenergize. Non weight bearing activities are excellent forms of recovery on Easy Days.
- **Moderate Days** – Volume building, lower intensity days
 - These training days help to build time on your legs. The focus is normally steady, aerobic runs but could be swapped to cross-training. On these days you should be training at an intensity which still allows comfortable conversation *most of the time*. This is a good day for getting out on the trails and loving life!
- **Hard Days** – The focus is high quality and/or high volume running



- The focus on hard days' changes depending on what phase of the preparation you are in. Early on in the training cycles, the focus is on tempo running, longer intervals and longer runs. Once our base fitness builds, the focus shifts to hill efforts, hilly tempo runs and hillier long runs.

CLASSIC HARD DAY SESSIONS	
TEMPO RUNS	The concept behind tempo runs is to sustain an 'uncomfortably-comfortable' period of running to build up your aerobic fitness. For example, if the session suggests running a 20-minute tempo, after a warm up you should aim to complete 20 minutes of strong running where you can <i>just</i> hold a conversation with a friend. If you had to keep going for longer you could <i>but only for a short period of time</i> . Cool down afterwards.
LONG RUNS	For most long runs, these should be relatively comfortable <i>most of the time</i> . What makes them hard on your body is the number of steps you are taking. You should be able to hold a conversation with a friend <i>most of the time</i> although you may find yourself huffing & puffing up a few hills. If you need a greater challenge, try adding in harder hills by running every uphill at a stronger effort. Long runs are also a great time to practice your trail skills.
HILL INTERVALS	The focus of hill intervals is to build strength, stamina and mental toughness. There is no set rule for how hard to push on each effort but we aim to still run the last hill strongly, albeit with some challenge. The recovery in between should be easy and usually involves rolling back to the bottom of the hill whilst practicing your downhill technique. Ensure you complete a good warm up and short cool down before & after the intervals.
TIME-TRIALS	Sometimes it is nice to have a sense of how we are progressing. Try to prioritize the time-trials, practicing all your race day strategies including your pre-race nutrition, warm ups and cool downs. During the time-trial, push as hard as you feel comfortable.
UPHILL 'N' DOWNHILL SESSIONS	Uphill 'n' Downhill Sessions help your body adjust from uphill running to downhill running. You will also learn to run with lactic acid in the system. These sessions are very similar to Hill Intervals but require you to run stronger (as per race day) back down the hill after a rest. Once again, pace yourself and try to still be running strongly (albeit with a challenge) in the final efforts.

Rest Weeks (Week 3)

Rest weeks are critical for the recuperation of the body. We can only generate strength and improvements when the micro-muscle damage created from training is allowed to heal. I structure this recovery phase into the 4-5 days leading up to a mission. This removes so much



risk in your training. By factoring in this recovery, you remove the risk of taking thousands of steps on damaged body tissues. This significantly reduces the risk of overuse injuries & excessive fatigue which often occur following long runs. Furthermore, the prolonged rest week allows us to substantially increase the volume of the mission each 3-week cycle without negatively affecting health and your ability to perform in the quality training sessions. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, after a rest you should be eagerly awaiting these missions, jumping out of your skin and excelling throughout. From now on, you will enter a mission well prepared and secure in the knowledge that the upcoming big effort will build confidence without risking setting you back in your training. Here are my tips on recovering before the mission:

- Leave rest weeks relatively free & flexible.
- Ask yourself every day, *'what do I need to do today to ensure I am jumping out of my skin for the weekend's Mission?'*
- Only include light jogging and other cross-training activities that leave you feeling fully refreshed after the previous training weeks.
- Try to include extra sleep & rest during this period to optimize your recovery.

Missions

I believe that the secret to standing confidently on a start line comes from the accomplishment of successful 'Missions'. A Mission is a long, adventurous 'run' conducted every third week of the training cycle. During this 'run' you can trial everything, from how you carry your mandatory gear through to the nutrition, hydration, blister prevention, shoe choices and race day strategies you employ. As you have rested in the lead up to the mission, fatigue no longer masks your performance or the success of your strategies, especially your nutrition & emotional resilience. Here are some additional tips for your missions:

- As the missions only come around every 3 weeks, they should become a highlight of each training cycle. Spice it up by trying to go somewhere new – explore!
- Plan ahead so they are fun and take you somewhere new & exciting. On the day, practice everything. Carry most of your mandatory gear. Practice your fueling & hydration strategy. Experiment with how to stay relaxed & upbeat when the going gets tougher.
- Aim to achieve a minimum 80% relaxed running & 20% walking. Walk more if you need to.
- If possible, add in lots of hills and some stairs.
- Think about whether you need to include night trail running practice.

FURTHER TIPS

- **Duration not Distance** - In these planners, training volumes are measured by duration not distance. Time is a greater measure of training as it allows us to account for additional or incidental exercise such as strength training, cross-training or actively commuting to work. Furthermore, a 20km run on hilly trails is a very different training load to a 20km run on the road!
- **More is not better** - Athletes of all abilities can follow this plan as the loads are measured in time. For example, a quicker athlete may complete 12km in the course of a 60min run whilst a slower athlete may only complete 8km. But you have still completed a 60min *load* of training. I don't believe slower athletes need to think about going further simply because they fear being out there longer on race day. More than this training load could lead to unnecessary injuries or overtraining symptoms, especially given that we all lead busy modern lifestyles that are less conducive to recovery.
- **Quality not quantity** - Do not solely measure your training by volume, but also by the quality & intensity of training. For example, a really hard week is not just a bigger volume week. In fact, it may be a lower volume week but with tougher quality training sessions or altitude gains in your runs.
- **Cross-training** - Reserve your quality training days for your running, unless you are returning from injury or using that form of cross-training for a specific purpose.
- **Stay strong** - It is important to always be developing & building upon your strength. Make sure you utilize professionals to assist you with this. Frequent shorter strength sessions are more achievable and often more effective than infrequent, longer strength sessions.
- **Don't over race** - Trying to complete too many races can impact the consistency of your training due to the recovery required. Adding one or two less important events into this planner can help to practice your race day strategies and build confidence. However, allow 1-week recovery for every 10km you race at absolute maximal intensity. That is, a marathon at full effort will require approximately 4 weeks to be back at full training.
- **Stop Early** – If you feel the onset of niggle or sickness, pause your training. Take some extra rest and seek advice. If you have only taken a short break, ignore skipped sessions and just jump back onto the planner on the correct day. If you have been out for longer than 3-4 weeks, return to aerobic base training. Consolidate your base before you begin adding in harder hill or interval sessions again.

ADDING RACES

Races can add huge value to your preparation as they can provide a gauge of where you are at and how your racing strategies are working for you. However, they can also provide a disruption to the consistency of your training. Avoid over-racing. If you do choose to enter an event, here is how I would recommend adjusting these planners:

- In the 'Events' column of the planner, add any races or extra missions that you have planned – highlight these in yellow so they are obvious
- Plan a recovery week before the event – Treat this week like your normal week before a mission but err strongly on the side of recovery. Add some short 1min efforts (i.e. 6-8x1min Hard/Easy Efforts) a few days out from the race to help you sharpen up.



- After the race, allow adequate recovery - for every 10km you race at absolute maximal intensity you will require 1 week of recovery. That is, a hard 45km race will require approximately 4 weeks until you can be back at full training. If you participate in an event at a 'hard training effort' without pushing into the highly uncomfortable zone, allow ½ week recovery for every 10km. That is, a 21km race will require approximately 1 week of active and passive recovery before you embark on full training.
- Don't worry about any skipped periods of the planner that occur during your recovery time. When you are ready to start formal training, just continue on from the correct date.

MANDATORY GEAR

Having the right gear will really help your performance both in training and on race day. The first time I ran the Overland Track 85km Race I was 19 years old. The day was somewhat soggy and I felt cold right from the start. I used an old day pack that a friend helped me modify to carry water bottles and the pack bounced all day against the skin on my back, water sloshing endlessly like a form of water torture. By the end of the event I had large, welted abrasions across my back. To say I felt miserable was an understatement. I now never underestimate the virtues of a good vest pack and hydration system.

There will also soon come a time when race day will be WET. Potentially VERY WET! Having gear that can keep you warm and somewhat dry could become the difference between finishing and not finishing. Do not skimp on your rain jacket and thermals as you may be running a very long way in these!

Finally, train and race in the right shoes. The UTA course has varied terrain but a lot of smoother trails too. For a dry UTA course I select trail shoes with *some* grip. However, if the trails are significantly soggy from continued rainfall prior to race day, I would be opting for a high grip. The amount of cushioning you choose will depend on what you are used to running in and how far your race day distance is.

Find Your Feet can provide plenty of guidance on your mandatory gear. We have: Mandatory Gear Guides to download; comprehensive Race Day Collections in our online shop; and staff who are eager trail runners themselves. **We also provide free express shipping on all orders over \$100, and 20% off your first order with Find Your Feet.** All this can be located at www.findyourfeet.com.au

If you have any further concerns about your training or race day gear, please don't hesitate to call us on 1300 584 023. You can also email us at info@findyourfeet.com.au or text us on 0405 149 646.

