Trail and Ultra Running: The Growth of a Sport, Culture and Community

Survey Report

www.trailultraproject.com

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UcLan

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1. Introduction

Summary

Despite the astonishing growth of trail and ultra running over the last decade, there has been little serious academic work in mapping and understanding the sport. This survey is part of a larger project that seeks to address this very clear gap.

The findings in the survey are detailed and varied. They give insights into not just who runners are and what they do, but also the wider culture and structure of the sport itself.

Gender is a high-profile issue in the sport, especially around the status of elite female athletes and the often-low participation rates of women in longer distance ultras. A survey cannot answer all of these concerns, but it can challenge some assumptions. It was welcome that women topped the list of most inspiring athletes — Courtney Dauwalter in N. America and Jasmin Paris in the UK — and that female athletes in general were just as likely to be picked as men. A clear signal to brands and sponsors that female athletes are 'worth' just as much as their male counterparts.

At a grassroots level, the survey also sheds light on the experience and motivation of female runners. Women, it seems, are more likely to value the social aspects of running, the importance of dedicated training, and ideas of self-care (e.g., running as an escape from work/family pressures). Women train as often as men, with a similar weekly average mileage, and race just as often. Crucially, women are also just as likely to have run distances in the 100k+ range. This raises profound questions. If women are able to train and race as often as men — and have similar experience running very long distances — why do we often see much lower female participation rates in races above the 100k mark?

Unsurprisingly the survey highlights a lack of diversity in other areas. Runners are overwhelmingly White, economically privileged and well-educated. Yet this mirrors a similar lack of diversity in the wider outdoor world (from hiking to climbing). It is not a problem specific to the sport itself.

However, the organised nature of the sport means that events and races provide a supported format for participation (from marked courses to safety teams and advice on skills and equipment). The sport therefore has the potential to play a key role in introducing underrepresented groups to the outdoors.

As this survey shows, positive mental health, the experience of nature, and time alone are the three principal reasons why trail and ultra runners participate in the sport. If anything, this just reconfirms the moral significance of making the sport accessible to everyone.

As a culture, the survey highlights how the sport appeals to two distinct groups. Those solely from an endurance running/cycling background, and another group characterised by their involvement in multisport mountain activity. Trail and ultra running is perhaps unique in the way that it brings together these two sporting traditions.

There are a wealth of additional findings in the survey. Everything from training routines, to media consumption, and the experiences of those who give their time through volunteering (which is a majority of all runners). Taken together, this data is a valuable glimpse into a sport that continues to grow and change.

Thank you to all those who gave their time in either completing or advising on the survey.

Dr Carl Morris — Project Director.

1. Introduction

Fun Facts

Top Three Inspiring Athletes (North America)

1. Courtney Dauwalter   (14.7%)
2. Kílian Jornet   (9.8%)
3. Jim Walmsley   (7.5%)

Top Three Inspiring Athletes (Britain)

1. Jasmin Paris   (9.2%)
2. Kílian Jornet   (8.4%)
3. Damian Hall   (8.2%)

Top Three Races/Routes (North America)

1. UTMB   (15.7%)
2. Western States   (14.7%)
3. Hardrock 100   (9.0%)

Top Three Races/Routes (Britain)

1. Spine Race   (10.3%)
2. Bob Graham Round   (9.8%)
3. UTMB   (9.8%)

Top Three Media Resources (North America)

1. iRunFar   (17.6%)
2. Trail Runner   (7.2%)
3. Freetrail   (5.2%)

Top Three Media Resources (Britain)

1. Run to the Hills   (10.1%)
2. Runners World   (9.0%)
3. Trail Running   (8.5%)

A Typical Trail & Ultra Runner

Runs between 3-4 times per week

Has a weekly training mileage of around 50km

Owns five pairs of running shoes

Races four times per year

21% have run 100 miles or more

47% started running in the last ten years

16.8% are vegetarian or vegan

65.6% have volunteered at a race

2. Understanding the Data

This report contains the collated data from a survey questionnaire on the sport of trail and ultra running. The survey ran for a period of six months, between April and September 2022.

The duration of the survey broadly covered the primary racing season. This helped to ensure that responses were drawn from across year, to better reflect the annual rise and fall in prominence of specific athletes, races, events etc.

In total there were **1019 respondents** to the survey.

Of these respondents, 379 were American, 536 British, and 36 Canadian. There were 68 responses from another twenty eight different nationalities (full list in the Appendix).

All respondents indicated that they are involved in running as a leisure activity. They were invited to complete the survey through advertisements in trail and ultra running media, including social media, podcasts, magazines, and websites.

The data is presented in the form of six key areas:

- Demographic Detail
- Community
- Activity
- Meaning and Identity
- Skills and Cross Sports
- Volunteering

These are early and initial findings. Detailed analysis of the data (including correlative and regressive statistical methodologies) will be applied over the coming months by the project team to develop a richer set of modelled data.

To make these findings as transparent and as useful as possible, a selection of crosstab data is presented in the Appendix. This breaks the data down by gender and other notable features.

There are many ways that this crosstab data can be organised and it is not possible to include all these permutations in one report. Reasonable requests for additional data can be made directly to the project team. Please visit the website for further information: www.trailultraproject.com.

3. Demographic Detail

3. Demographic Detail

Age, Gender, Sexuality, Family and Education

How old are you?

	%
Less than 18 yrs	0.3
18-24 yrs	1.3
25-34 yrs	14.7
35-44 yrs	34.4
45-54 yrs	30.0
55-64 yrs	14.8
64+ yrs	4.5
Total	100.0

Do you have children?

	%
Yes	65.0
No	35.0
Total	100.0

Which gender do you identify as?

	%
Male	59.2
Female	40.0
Non-binary/Third Gender	0.9
Total	100.0

Is your gender identity the same as the sex you were assigned at birth?

	%
Yes	99.2
No	0.8
Total	100.0

What is your level of education?

	%
Up to High School/Secondary School (or equivalent)	17.9
Undergraduate Bachelor's Degree (or equivalent)	38.5
Postgraduate degree (or equivalent)	43.5
Total	100.0

Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?

	%
Straight/Heterosexual	94.6
Gay/Lesbian	1.7
Bisexual	3.7
Total	100.0

3. Demographic Detail

Ethnicity, Income and Religion

How would you best describe your ethnicity?

	%
White	95.4
Hispanic/Latino/Spanish Origin	1.8
South Asian	0.2
Chinese	0.2
Filipino	0.3
Vietnamese	0.1
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups	1.4
American Indian (Cherokee)	0.2
Pacific Islander	0.2
Greek Cypriot	0.1
Total	100.0

What is your level of household income?

	%
Less than $10,000	1.4
$10,000 - $19,999	3.3
$20,000 - $29,999	7.5
$30,000 - $39,999	7.2
$40,000 - $49,999	8.3
$50,000 - $59,999	8.5
$60,000 - $69,999	8.7
$70,000 - $79,999	8.1
$80,000 - $89,999	7.1
$90,000 - $99,999	4.6
$100,000 - $149,999	18.9
More than $150,000	16.5
Total	100.0

What is your religion (if any)?

	%
Not religious	57.1
Spiritual, not religious	15.2
Christian	24.9
Buddhist	0.8
Jewish	1.4
Other	0.5
Total	100.0

2. The Data and Observations

Demographic Detail — Key Observations

As with the outdoor pursuit world in general, trail and ultra running lacks racial and ethnic diversity . Gender diversity is more balanced, although there are fewer women than men.

The sport is very White. Minority ethnic groups have very low representation and are often entirely absent from the survey findings. This reflects the general underrepresentation of minority ethnic groups in the outdoor world. For example, in 2019 only 1% of visitors to English national parks were from a minority ethnic background. In the U.S., a 2010 study by the National Park Service found that only 7% of visitors identified as Hispanic and only 1% as African American.

Gender diversity is more balanced, with an approximate 60/40% male/female split (0.9% of runners identify as either non-binary or third gender). These figures are comparable to related sports and outdoor pursuit activities. For example, in the U.S., the gender split for high school track and field sports is 55/45, for rock climbing it is 60/40. It should be noted that for trail and ultra running this gender split is not always reflected in race participation (see Section 5).

The sport generally possesses some features of socio-economic privilege. Income levels are marginally higher than national averages, education levels are much higher.

Median household income is in the $70,000-$79,000 range and is comparable to the general population for both the U.S. and UK (in 2022, U.S. median household income was $71,000). However, trail and ultra runners are marginally more likely to fall into higher income brackets. 35.4% possess a household income of more than $100,000. This compares to 30.7% earning above this threshold in the wider U.S. population.

Most strikingly, 82% of respondents are degree educated. This vastly exceeds the education level of the general population (which in both the U.S. and UK typically falls somewhere in the 30-40% range). An exceptionally large number of respondents are educated to postgraduate level (43.5% compared to 13.1% in the wider U.S. population).

A large number of trail and ultra runners are middle-aged. This potentially raises questions about the visibility/accessibility of the sport for younger athletes and longevity amongst older athletes.

64.4% of trail and ultra runners are aged between 35 and 54 years-old (for comparison, this age group constitutes 38.3% of the wider U.S. population).

In contrast, only 1.3% of respondents were aged between 18-24, suggesting that the sport has limited appeal amongst young adults. This compares unfavourably with many other related sports. In the UK, for example, 21% of regular climbers are in the 18-24 age bracket.

4. Community

4. Community

Socialisation

How important are the social aspects of running with and meeting other people? (1 = not important, 5 = very important)

	All	Male	Female
	%	%	%
1	17.2	16.7	11.5
2	21.1	22.6	20.6
3	28.9	30.1	29.0
4	20.7	20.7	23.1
5	12.1	10.0	15.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

How often do you run with other people?

	All	Male	Female
	%	%	%
Never	14.5	17.8	8.6
Occasionally	32.7	35.1	27.9
Maybe once or twice a month	17.4	17.6	18.2
Every week	35.4	29.5	45.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Are you a member of a running club?

	All	Male	Female
	%	%	%
Yes	48.4	45.8	54.4
No	51.6	54.2	45.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

4. Community

Professionalisation

What do you think about cash prizes for race winners?

	%
I think a large cash prize is a good thing. It can make races more competitive and push standards overall.	16.8
I think a small or modest cash prize can be a good incentive to boost competition.	39.9
Races should not have a cash prize.	9.4
None of the above.	33.9
Total	100.0

What do you think about elite runners receiving sponsorship and/or a salary from commercial companies?

	%
It is good that some elite runners receive a salary. It allows them to develop the sport and push the competitive boundaries of running.	69.8
Sponsorship is positive in moderation (e.g., free gear, travel expenses, a small stipend).	14.4
Running should be an amateur sport. I am opposed to salaries and sponsorship for elite runners.	1.5
Not sure or none of the above.	14.3
Total	100.0

4. Community

Media

On a scale of 1-5, how inspiring or useful do you find the following types of media about running? (1 = not inspiring/useful, 5 = very inspiring/useful)?

Free videos and films (e.g., YouTube).

	%
1	15.6
2	7.0
3	17.9
4	28.6
5	31.0
Total	100.0

Paid magazine subscriptions.

	%
1	47.4
2	21.2
3	17.4
4	9.9
5	4.1
Total	100.0

Paid-for videos and films.

	%
1	49.9
2	20.1
3	17.6
4	8.0
5	4.4
Total	100.0

Websites about running (inc. free magazine content)

	%
1	15.2
2	11.0
3	26.8
4	27.9
5	19.1
Total	100.0

Books about running

	%
1	17.8
2	7.7
3	22.0
4	27.0
5	25.6
Total	100.0

Podcasts

	%
1	25.4
2	11.7
3	17.4
4	20.1
5	25.4
Total	100.0

4. Community

Media – British Respondents Only

Can you name any websites, magazines, podcasts or video channels about running that you read/listen/watch regularly?

	Number of responses	%
Run to the Hills (Podcast)	98	10.1
Runners World (Magazine/Podcast)	87	9.0
Trail Running (Magazine)	82	8.5
Bad Boy Running (Podcast/Website)	30	3.1
The Running Channel (YouTube)	29	3.0
iRunFar (Website)	28	2.9
Trail Runner Nation (Podcast/Website)	28	2.9
TalkUltra (Podcast)	24	2.5
Women's Running (Magazine)	21	2.2
British Ultra Running Podcast	19	2.0
Koopcast (Podcast/Website)	18	1.9
Trail Runner (Magazine)	17	1.8
Wild Ginger Runner (Podcast/YouTube)	16	1.6
Billy Yang (Media Personality/Podcast/YouTube)	15	1.5
Ginger Runner (Podcast/YouTube)	15	1.5
Ben Parkes (Media Personality/YouTube/Website)	14	1.4
Marathon Talk (Podcast)	11	1.1
Running Commentary (Podcast)	11	1.1
Ultra Running Magazine	11	1.1
Rich Roll (Media Personality/Podcast)	10	1.0
Salomon TV (YouTube)	10	1.0
Trail and Error (Podcast/Website)	10	1.0
Young Hearts, Run Free (Podcast)	10	1.0
The Fellrunner (Magazine)	9	0.9
Flora Beverley (Media Personality/YouTube/Website)	8	0.8
Run4Adventure (YouTube)	8	0.8
RunPod (Podcast)	8	0.8
Ultra Magazine	8	0.8
Others	315	32.5
Total	970	100.0

4. Community

Media – North American Respondents Only

Can you name any websites, magazines, podcasts
or video channels about running that you read/
listen/watch regularly?

	Number of responses	%
iRunFar (Website)	128	17.6
Trail Runner (Magazine)	52	7.2
Freetrail (Website/Podcast/YouTube)	38	5.2
Trail Runner Nation (Podcast/Website)	33	4.5
Ultra Running Magazine	31	4.3
Runners World (Magazine/Podcast)	27	3.7
Lets Run (Website/Podcast)	22	3.0
Outside+ (Website/Multimedia)	19	2.6
Some Work, All Play (Podcast/Website)	19	2.6
Billy Yang (Media Personality/Podcast/YouTube)	18	2.5
Koopcast (Podcast/Website)	18	2.5
Ginger Runner (Podcast/YouTube)	16	2.2
Singletrack Podcast	13	1.8
Ultra Runner Podcast	13	1.8
Adventure Jogger (Podcast/Website)	12	1.7
Salomon TV (YouTube)	12	1.7
10 Junk Miles Podcast	11	1.5
Rich Roll (Media Personality/Podcast)	10	1.4
Trail Running (Magazine)	10	1.4
Strength Running (Podcast/Website)	8	1.1
Trail Society (Podcast)	8	1.1
Fastest Known Time (Podcast/Website)	7	1.0
Ultra Runner Magazine	7	1.0
Others	195	26.8
Total	727	100.0

Inspiring Athletes — British Respondents Only

Can you name any athletes
that you find inspiring?

	Number of responses	%
Jasmin Paris	109	9.2
Kílian Jornet	100	8.4
Damian Hall	97	8.2
Courtney Dauwalter	72	6.1
Nicky Spinks	63	5.3
John Kelly	55	4.6
Eliud Kipchoge	45	3.8
Sabrina Vergee	39	3.3
Beth Pascall	33	2.8
Scott Jurek	27	2.3
Jim Walmsley	24	2.0
Joss Naylor	20	1.7
Eilish McColgan	16	1.3
Mo Farah	15	1.3
Sophie Power	14	1.2
Dean Karnazes	13	1.1
Paula Radcliffe	13	1.1
Dan Lawson	12	1.0
Camille Herron	11	0.9
Carla Molinaro	10	0.8
Debbie Martin-Consani	10	0.8
Finlay Wild	10	0.8
Anton Krupicka	9	0.8
Ricky Lightfoot	9	0.8
Eoin Keith	8	0.7
Rich Roll	8	0.7
Sally McRae	8	0.7
Anna Troup	7	0.6
David Goggins	7	0.6
François D'Haene	6	0.5
Hillary Allen	6	0.5
Karl Meltzer	6	0.5
Paul Tierney	6	0.5
Tom Evans	6	0.5
Others	293	24.7
Total	1187	100.0

Gender of athletes chosen.

(Responses from men)

	%
Male Athletes	69.9
Female Athletes	30.1
Total	100.0

Gender of athletes chosen.

(Responses from women)

	%
Male Athletes	35.6
Female Athletes	64.4
Total	100.0

Nationality of athletes chosen.

	%
North American	27.0
British	57.4
International	15.7
Total	100.0

4. Community

Inspiring Athletes — North American Respondents Only

Can you name any athletes
that you find inspiring?

	Number of responses	%
Courtney Dauwalter	131	14.7
Kílian Jornet	87	9.8
Jim Walmsley	67	7.5
Dylan Bowman	21	2.4
Camille Herron	20	2.2
Anton Krupicka	19	2.1
Eliud Kipchoge	17	1.9
Sally McRae	17	1.9
Tommy Rivs	17	1.9
Harvey Lewis	15	1.7
François D'Haene	14	1.6
Scott Jurek	14	1.6
Mike Wardian	13	1.5
Clare Gallagher	12	1.3
Maggie Guterl	12	1.3
John Kelly	11	1.2
Molly Seidel	10	1.1
Dean Karnazes	9	1.0
Hillary Allen	8	0.9
Zach Miller	8	0.9
David Goggins	7	0.8
Joan Samuelson	7	0.8
Ann Trason	6	0.7
Catra Corbett	6	0.7
Coree Woltering	6	0.7
Damian Hall	6	0.7
Emelie Forsberg	6	0.7
Jeff Browning	6	0.7
Magda Boulet	6	0.7
Megan Roche	6	0.7
Tim Tollefson	6	0.7
Gary Robbins	5	0.6
Jacky Hunt-Broersma	5	0.6
Sabrina Stanley	5	0.6
Others	284	31.9
Total	889	100.0

Gender of athletes
chosen.

(Male respondents)

	%
Male Athletes	69.1
Female Athletes	30.9
Total	100.0

Gender of athletes
chosen.

(Female respondents)

	%
Male Athletes	38.6
Female Athletes	61.4
Total	100.0

Nationality of
athletes chosen.

	%
North American	81.1
British	2.7
International	16.2
Total	100.0

4. Community

Inspiring Races — British Respondents Only

Can you name any races/routes
that you find inspiring?

	Number of responses	%
Spine Race	127	10.3
Bob Graham Round	121	9.8
Ultra Trail Mont Blanc	121	9.8
Western States	108	8.7
Barkley Marathons	76	6.1
Dragon's Back	68	5.5
World Marathon Majors	61	4.9
Lakeland 50/100	36	2.9
Hardrock 100	34	2.7
Paddy Buckley Round	33	2.7
Marathon des Sables	28	2.3
Ramsay's Round	23	1.9
West Highland Way	19	1.5
Arc of Attrition	16	1.3
Cape Wrath Ultra	16	1.3
Comrades Marathon	15	1.2
Badwater	13	1.1
Leadville Trail 100	13	1.1
Parkrun	13	1.1
Pennine Way	12	1.0
South Downs Way 100	12	1.0
Backyard Ultra	11	0.9
Hardmoors 110	11	0.9
Wainwrights	10	0.8
Yorkshire Three Peaks	9	0.7
Coast to Coast (UK)	8	0.6
The Highland Fling	8	0.6
Tor des Géants	7	0.6
Land's End to John o'Groats (LEJOG)	6	0.5
Race to the Kings	6	0.5
Race to the Stones	6	0.5
Ring of Steall	6	0.5
Others	184	14.9
Total	1237	100.0

Country of races/
routes chosen.

	%
North American	22.1
British	55.1
International	22.8
Total	100.0

4. Community

Inspiring Races — North American Respondents Only

Can you name any races/routes
that you find inspiring?

	No. of responses	%
Ultra Trail Mont Blanc	149	15.7
Western States Endurance Run	139	14.7
Hardrock 100	85	9.0
Barkley Marathons	67	7.1
Leadville Trail 100	51	5.4
World Marathon Majors	38	4.0
Rim to Rim to Rim	34	3.6
Badwater Ultramarathon	20	2.1
Cocodona 250	15	1.6
Moab 240	14	1.5
Backyard Ultra	13	1.4
Pikes Peak	13	1.4
Dipsea Race	12	1.3
Bob Graham Round	11	1.2
Appalachian Trail	8	0.8
Javelina Jundred	8	0.8
The Rut	8	0.8
Angeles Crest 100	7	0.7
Black Canyon Ultras	7	0.7
Broken Arrow Skyrace	6	0.6
JFK 50	6	0.6
Mount Marathon	6	0.6
Pacific Crest Trail	6	0.6
John Muir Trail	6	0.6
Wonderland Trail	6	0.6
Parkrun	6	0.6
Manitou Incline	5	0.5
Tahoe Rim Trail 100	5	0.5
Vermont 50	5	0.5
Wasatch 100	5	0.5
Dragon's Back	5	0.5
Paddy Buckley Round	5	0.5
Comrades Marathon	5	0.5
Others	172	18.1
Total	948	100.0

Country of races/
routes chosen.

	%
North American	71.1
British	5.1
International	23.8
Total	100.0

4. Community

Consumption

For your old kit, have you ever repaired and reused?

	%
Yes	43.4
No	56.6
Total	100.0

For your old kit, have you ever donated it to a charity shop or other runners?

	%
Yes	50.0
No	50.0
Total	100.0

Thinking of the last piece of equipment/kit that you purchased:

	%
This was an essential purchase that I needed.	65.8
It was something that I wanted, but could perhaps have done without.	34.2
Total	100.0

For your old kit, have you ever sold it online?

	%
Yes	14.0
No	86.0
Total	100.0

If presented with an option such as Trees not Tees at a race registration, would you choose this over receiving a race t-shirt?

	%
All the time - I don't need any more race t-shirts.	32.6
Sometimes - it would depend on the race.	59.3
Never - I like my race t-shirts.	8.1
Total	100.0

How many pairs of running shoes do you have?

	%
0-1	2.3
2-3	32.8
4-6	37.1
More than 6	27.7
Total	100.0

4. Community

Travel and Health

Have you raced in your
local area (within 50 miles)?

	%
No	15.2
Yes	84.8
Total	100.0

Have you raced in other parts of
your country (more than 50 miles
away)?

	%
No	20.0
Yes	80.0
Total	100.0

Have you raced in another
country?

	%
No	71.0
Yes	29.0
Total	100.0

Overall how would you rate
your mental health?

	%
Excellent	31.7
Somewhat good	42.1
Average	19.4
Somewhat poor	5.6
Poor	1.2
Total	100.0

Do you follow any of these
diets (select one)?

	%
Vegetarian	10.5
Vegan	6.3
Paleo	1.8
Mainly plant based	14.7
None of these	66.7
Total	100.0

4. Community

Community — Key Observations

The sport has both solitary and social appeal. However, women place more importance on the social aspects of running and are also much more likely to run regularly with others.

Overall 38.3% of runners think that the social aspects of running are unimportant, while 32.8% think they are important.

Women place more emphasis on the social aspects of running than men (38.9% important or very important for women, 30.7% for men). This includes running with other people every week (45.3% for women, 29.5% for men). Women are also more likely to be a member of a running club (54.4% women, 45.8% men).

Trail and ultra runners are more likely to consume media that does not require payment. The media market for the sport is also saturated with a vast range of 'free' media products. This raises questions about the monetisation and sustainability of a commercial media market.

Free videos and films (e.g., YouTube) are the most popular type of media (59.9% state that they are important or very important). Paid-for films are the least popular (70% unimportant or very unimportant). Books are the only paid-for media that has a positive degree of net popularity (52.6% important/very important).

In the UK, the Run to the Hills podcast is the most popular media product (10.1% of all UK responses). In North America, iRunFar is the most popular (17.6%). Both are 'free' at the point of access for consumers. They were also the only products to receive more than 10% of responses.

Overall, British respondents selected an incredible 343 different media products, North American respondents selected 218. The

vast majority of these were 'free' podcast and YouTube channels. This suggests a healthy and competitive grassroots media ecosphere, but perhaps at the expense of more commercial and resourced content.

Recognition of elite female athletes reflects the gender split of the sport — roughly 60% men to 40% women. Respondents are also more likely to be inspired by an athlete of their own gender. Given the sizeable market of female runners, this should reconfirm the importance of equity for the sponsorship and promotion of elite female athletes.

Female athletes topped the list of inspiring athletes. In the UK, Jasmin Paris (9.2% of all responses). Courtney Dauwalter received the most from North American respondents (14.7%), but was overall also considered the most inspirational athlete by *all* respondents (9.8%, followed by Kilian Jornet with 9%).

Respondents are more likely to be inspired by an athlete of their own gender. In the UK, 69.9% of male and 64.4% of female respondents chose respectively a male or female athlete. In North America, it was 69.1% and 61.4% .

To some extent, British and North American trail and ultra running communities overlap to form a globalised English-language sporting culture. This includes shared media, athletes, and other cultural touchstones. North America has a dominant position in this culture.

27% of UK respondents chose an inspiring athlete from the U.S., while only 2.7% of North American respondents selected an athlete from the UK.

22.1% of UK respondents chose an inspiring race or route in North America, while only 5.1%

4. Community

of North Americans selected a race/route from the UK.

Seven races/routes were in the top twenty for *both* British and North American respondents. These were: UTMB, Western States, Barkley Marathons, Hardrock, the Bob Graham Round, Leadville, and the World Marathon Majors.

Ten media products were listed in the top twenty for *both* British and North American respondents. These were: Runners World, iRunFar, Trail Runner Magazine, Trail Running Magazine, Trail Runner Nation, Koopcast, Rich Roll Podcast, Billy Yang Podcast, Ultra Running Magazine, Ginger Runner.

Despite the rise in FKT (Fastest Known Time) culture, respondents are still more likely to be inspired by high profile international races.

The Spine Race is the most inspiring race or route for UK respondents (10.3%). North American respondents are most inspired by Ultra Tour de Mont Blanc (15.7%).

Four non-race routes were in the top twenty for British respondents: the three classic British rounds (Bob Graham, Paddy Buckley and Ramsay's) and the Pennine Way.

Three non-race routes were in the top twenty for North American respondents: Rim to Rim to Rim, the Appalachian Trail, and the Bob Graham Round.

29% of respondents have themselves at some point raced internationally.

Environmental concerns and challenging a throwaway culture are moderately important for trail and ultra runners.

50% of runners have donated old kit, 43.4% have repaired and reused. 32.1% of respondents have neither repaired nor donated old or damaged kit.

91.9% of respondents would either choose or consider choosing an option like Trees Not Tees at race registration.

The median number of pairs of running shoes owned by respondents is between 4-6.

Trail and ultra runners typically report excellent mental health and are twice as likely to follow an 'alternative' diet (e.g., vegan, paleo etc.) compared to the general population.

73.8% of runners report excellent or good mental health. By comparison, a 2017 study from the Mental Health Foundation found that only 13% of UK adults report high levels of positive mental health.

33.3% of respondents follow an alternative diet: vegan (6.3%), vegetarian (10.5%), paleo (1.8%), mainly plant-based (14.7%). This is approximately twice the number who follow these diets in the general population of the UK and U.S.

5. Activity

5. Activity

Longevity and Training

How old were you when you started running?

	%
Less than 18 yrs	22.0
18-24 yrs	12.8
25-34 yrs	25.0
35-44 yrs	22.4
45-54 yrs	13.6
55+ yrs	4.1
Total	100.0

How long have you been running?

	%
Less than 2 yrs	6.3
2-5 yrs	18.1
5-10 yrs	22.6
10-15 yrs	16.0
More than 15 yrs	37.0
Total	100.0

How often do you run?

	All %	Male %	Female %
Every day	6.6	7.2	5.6
5-6 times per week	40.6	38.8	42.4
3-4 times per week	46.9	48	45.6
1-2 times per week	5.2	5.4	5.4
Occasionally	0.7	0.5	1.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

What is your normal/average training mileage per week?

	%
Up to 20km	7.3
21-40km	30.4
41-60km	33.0
61-80km	20.3
81-120km	8.1
More than 120km	1.0
Total	100.0

Which of these statements best describes running in your weekly routine?

	All %	Male %	Female %
I occasionally fit running in, but it is not a priority.	1.0	1.1	1.1
I do my best to go running, but there are other more important priorities.	18.8	20.6	15.4
I try very hard to ensure that I get out running, even if this means moving other priorities around.	59.9	59.4	60.3
Running is the most important part of my daily/weekly routine.	20.2	18.9	23.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

5. Activity

Racing

Have you competed in any of the following types of races?	Yes	No
	%	**%**
Track Race	19.8	80.2
Sky Race	8.6	91.4
Road Race	83.7	16.3
Ultra Race	71.4	28.6
Trail Race	91.4	8.6
Fell Race*	29.3	70.7

*British respondents only

What is the farthest you have ever run?	**All**	**Male**	**Female**
	%	**%**	**%**
Up to 10km	2.2	1.4	2.7
Half Marathon (approx. 21km)	10.7	10.3	11.8
Marathon (approx. 42km)	14.0	14.1	13.7
50km	21.8	21.2	21.2
80km / 50 miles	16.4	15.2	18.5
100km	13.9	15.8	13.1
160km / 100 miles	11.2	11.4	10.7
More than 100 miles	9.8	10.5	8.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

How often do you race?	**All**	**Male**	**Female**
	%	**%**	**%**
Most weeks	2.2	3.1	1.3
Once or twice a month	14.5	13.8	16.4
Every two months or so	19.3	17.6	22.0
3-5 times per year	34.8	35.3	33.0
1-2 times per year	25.6	26.4	24.1
Never	3.6	3.8	3.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

5. Activity

Activity — Key Observations

Trail and ultra runners demonstrate high levels of commitment to training, based on levels of mileage, frequency, and the value placed on the importance of training.

Median weekly training mileage is 41-60km, over the course of 3-4 runs. 59.9% of runners make an attempt to prioritise running over other commitments in their weekly routine.

Weekly training is higher on average than amongst runners in other running disciplines. A 2020 survey study of over 2,000 runners and triathletes (85% of whom were based in the U.S.) found that average weekly mileage was 32km.

On *average*, gender disparities in training are not overly significant. Women run *slightly* more often than men and are *slightly* more likely to prioritise running as part of their weekly routine.

48% of women run at least five times per week, compared to 46% of men. 83.4% of women prioritise running over other aspects of their weekly routine, compared to 78.3% of men.

Runners with exceptional levels of training commitment are *slightly* more likely to be men. This group is also more likely to have higher levels of postgraduate education and a higher household income.

22.9% of trail and ultra runners demonstrate *exceptionally* high levels of motivation and training. This refers to those runners who have all three of the following features: running at least 5 times per week, more than 60km per week, and usually prioritising running over other commitments (see the Appendix).

61.4% of these runners with exceptional levels of training commitment are men, only 38.6% are women.

50.3% of these runners have a household income in excess of $100,000 and 55.6% have a post-graduate degree.

Commitment to training is likely based on the *capacity* to train (e.g., time, flexibility, and money) rather than 'just' personal willpower.

The typical exceptionally committed runner is aged 40-45, with a household income exceeding $100,000 and a postgraduate degree. If training commitment were simply a matter of personal psychology, then it is unlikely that there would be such a strong correlation between these specific social characteristics and training.

The lifestyle and motivation of these runners requires further study, but unsurprisingly these results do indicate that socio-economic privilege can play a role. Those working in a professional capacity often have the flexibility of a non-standard working pattern.

6. Meaning and Identity

6. Meaning and Identity

Running Identity

How strongly do you identify with the following? (%)
(1 = not strongly, 5 = very strongly)

	1	2	3	4	5
Trail Running	4.6	1.1	6.7	23.5	64.2
Ultra Running	15.7	9.2	18.1	23.4	33.7
Track Running	76.7	15.4	4.5	1.9	1.5
Sky Running	74.6	8.6	9.4	4.3	3.0
Road Running	18.3	24.4	26.1	20.1	11.1
Mountain Running	41.1	12.9	16.9	14.1	15.0

How strongly do you identify with Trail Running? (%)

		1	2	3	4	5
How strongly do you identify with Ultra Running? (%)	1	4.1	0.4	2.2	2.7	6.3
	2	0.0	0.2	1.0	3.6	4.4
	3	0.1	0.3	1.4	5.2	11.1
	4	0.0	0.2	1.4	7.8	14.0
	5	0.4	0.0	0.8	4.1	28.4

Strong identification with Trail running & **low identification** with Ultra Running

Strong identification with Trail running & **strong identification** with Ultra Running

How strongly do you identify with Trail Running? (%)

		1	2	3	4	5
How strongly do you identify with Fell/Hill Running? (%)	1	4.3	0.9	3.7	5.8	15.3
	2	0.2	0.4	0.9	6.9	7.6
	3	0.2	0.0	1.1	5.8	14.0
	4	0.0	0.0	0.4	3.7	14.0
	5	0.0	0.2	0.6	2.8	11.2

Percentage of total British respondents only

Strong identification with Trail running & **low identification** with Fell/Hill running

Strong identification with Trail running & **strong identification** with Fell/Hill running

6. Meaning and Identity

Reasons for Running

How important are the following reasons of running for you?
(1 = not important, 5 = very important)

I like the structure and discipline of regular training.

	All	Male	Female
	%	**%**	**%**
1	11.2	12.0	10.2
2	13.8	14.9	12.3
3	26.3	27.5	24.4
4	25.5	25.0	26.3
5	23.1	20.7	26.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

I am motivated by the competitive aspects of running (e.g., races, Strava segments, personal bests).

	All	Male	Female
	%	**%**	**%**
1	19.5	17.9	21.7
2	23.0	23.4	22.5
3	25.9	24.5	28.2
4	20.4	22.1	18.0
5	11.1	12.1	9.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Running can be a spiritual or inner experience that connects to deep personal feelings and values.

	All	Male	Female
	%	**%**	**%**
1	17.0	18.5	14.7
2	17.0	14.5	20.6
3	20.5	20.3	20.9
4	20.6	21.2	19.8
5	24.9	25.5	23.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

6. Meaning and Identity

Running provides me with a connection to nature and wild landscapes.

	All	Male	Female
	%	%	%
1	1.3	1.3	1.3
2	3.5	3.4	3.5
3	10.6	12.5	7.8
4	23.6	25.9	20.1
5	61.1	56.9	67.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Running is important for my mental health and helps me to feel more positive in life.

	All	Male	Female
	%	%	%
1	1.5	2.0	0.8
2	2.8	3.8	1.3
3	5.0	6.0	3.5
4	22.4	25.4	18.0
5	68.3	62.9	76.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

I like to run by myself and have time alone with my thoughts and feelings.

	All	Male	Female
	%	%	%
1	2.9	2.7	3.2
2	4.6	4.5	4.8
3	18.2	17.0	19.8
4	30.5	32.1	28.2
5	43.8	43.7	44.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

6. Meaning and Identity

Running is important to me for weight loss.

	All	Male	Female
	%	%	%
1	31.0	30.6	31.6
2	22.3	21.6	23.3
3	23.1	21.2	26.0
4	13.1	14.9	10.5
5	10.5	11.8	8.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Running is a way for me to escape from the pressures of work, family etc.

	All	Male	Female
	%	%	%
1	6.9	8.5	4.6
2	10.1	10.3	9.7
3	19.5	20.1	18.5
4	27.4	29.7	23.9
5	36.2	31.3	43.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

I like the social aspects of running with and meeting other people.

	All	Male	Female
	%	%	%
1	17.2	16.7	11.5
2	21.1	22.6	20.6
3	28.9	30.1	29.0
4	20.7	20.7	23.1
5	12.1	10.0	15.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

I like to use running to push to the edge of my physical and mental limitations.

	All	Male	Female
	%	%	%
1	5.4	3.8	7.8
2	9.2	10.3	7.5
3	22.3	22.8	21.4
4	28.6	31.7	24.1
5	34.5	31.3	39.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

6. Meaning and Identity

Reasons for Running — Gender Differences

Expressed as the combined percentage of those that strongly or very strongly identify with a particular reason for running.

	Male	Female	Difference
	%	**%**	**%**
Running is important to me for weight loss.	26.7	19.1	**+ 7.6**
I am motivated by the competitive aspects of running (e.g., races, Strava segments, personal bests).	34.2	27.7	**+ 6.5**
I like to run by myself and have time alone with my thoughts and feelings.	75.8	72.2	**+ 3.6**
Running can be a spiritual or inner experience that connects to deep personal feelings and values.	46.7	43.7	**+ 3.0**
I like to use running to push to the edge of my physical and mental limitations.	63.0	63.2	**+ 0.2**
Running provides me with a connection to nature and wild landscapes.	82.8	87.4	**+ 4.6**
Running is important for my mental health and helps me to feel more positive in life.	88.3	94.4	**+ 6.1**
Running is a way for me to escape from the pressures of work, family etc.	61.0	67.3	**+ 6.3**
I like the structure and discipline of regular training.	45.7	53.1	**+ 7.4**
I like the social aspects of running with and meeting other people.	30.7	38.9	**+ 8.2**

Net positive for **male** respondents

Net positive for **female** respondents

6. Meaning and Identity

Reasons for Running — By Age

Expressed as the combined percentage of an age group that strongly or very strongly identifies with a particular reason for running.
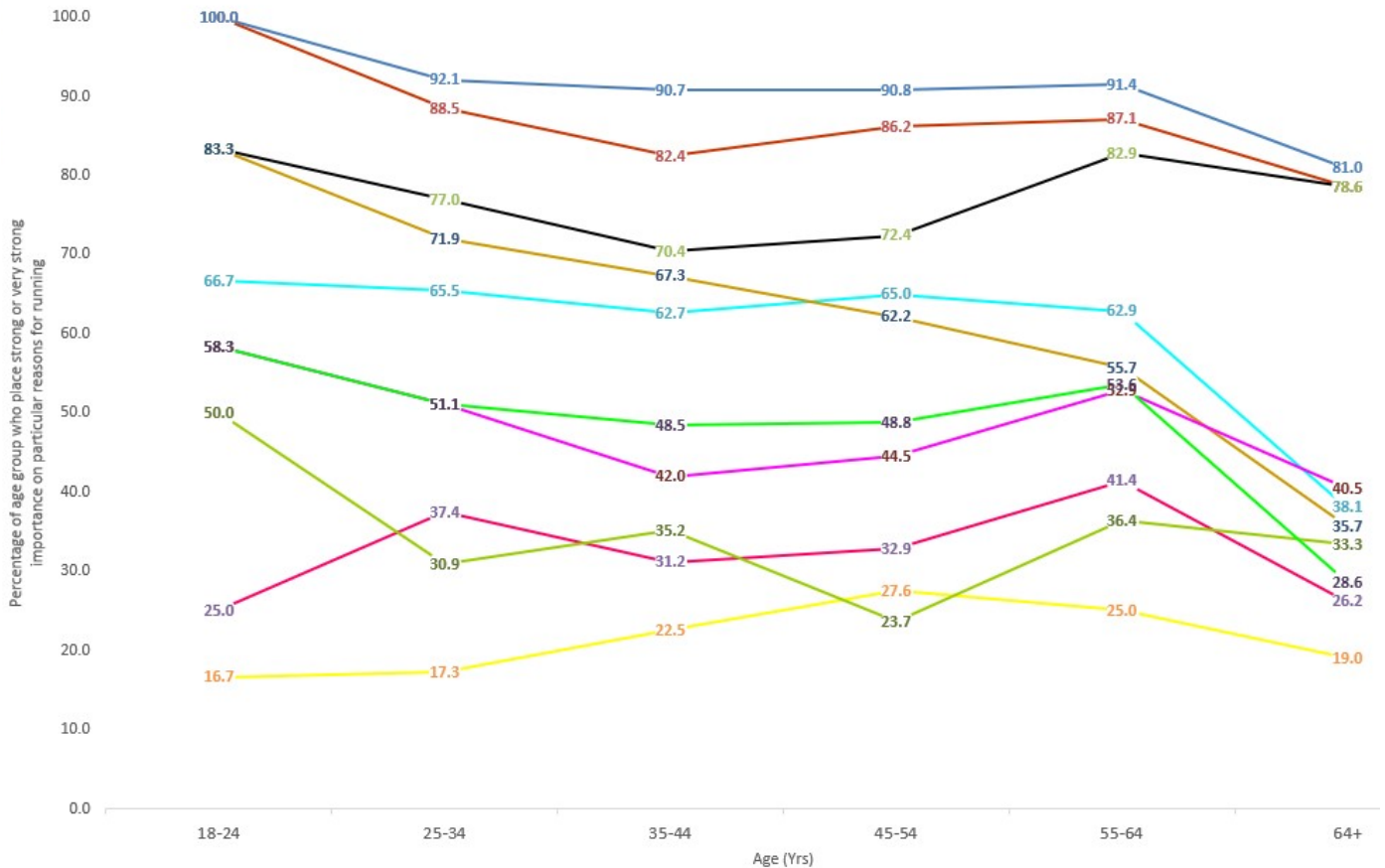
- Running provides me with a connection to nature and wild landscapes.
- I like to run by myself and have time alone with my thoughts and feelings.
- Running is important for my mental health and helps me to feel more positive in life.
- I like the social aspects of running with and meeting other people.
- Running is a way for me to escape from the pressures of work, family etc.
- Running is important to me for weight loss.
- I like to use running to push to the edge of my physical and mental limitations.
- Running can be a spiritual or inner experience that connects to deep personal feelings and values.
- I am motivated by the competitive aspects of running (e.g., races, Strava segments, personal bests).
- I like the structure and discipline of regular training.

6. Meaning and Identity

Meaning & Identity — Key Observations

While a high number of respondents have at some point completed a road race, only low numbers identified positively with road running.

83.7% of runners have participated in a road race (see Section 5), but only 31.1% identify strongly or very strongly with road running.

There is a positive correlation between trail running and ultra running, suggesting a cohesive sport rather than two distinct running disciplines. However, while *almost all ultra runners* identify strongly with trail running, there are a substantial minority of trail runners who do not identify with ultra running.

As would be expected from a survey of trail and ultra runners, identification with these types of running is very positive (87.7% strong or very strongly for trail running, 57.1% for ultra running). 54.3% of runners identify strongly or very strongly with *both* trail and ultra running.

However, 17% identify strongly/very strongly with trail running but <u>do not</u> have a similar positive identification with ultra running. Conversely, of those who identify strongly with ultra running, 95.0% of these respondents identify strongly with trail running.

Inner thoughts, feelings and experiences are the most important motivation for trail and ultra runners. External or social aspects of running (including competition) are the least important.

90.0% of respondents find mental health an important/very important reason for running, followed by experiencing nature (84.7%) and spending time alone (73.8%). Weight loss is the least important motivation for running (23.6% important/very important), followed by competition (31.5%) and the social aspects of running (32.8%).

There are some minor differences relating to running motivation for men and women. Men place *slightly* more emphasis on the performance and competitive aspects of running. Women place *slightly* more emphasis on the social and self-care aspects of running.

There were six categories of running motivation that had a statistically significant difference between men and women (i.e., a net difference of more than 5%).

Men were slightly more likely to find weight loss (+7.6% compared to women) and competition (+6.5%) important or very important. Women placed slightly more emphasis on socialising (+8.2% compared to men), structured training (+7.4%), running as an escape (+6.3%), and mental health (+6.1%)

Men and women equally valued using running to have time alone in nature and to push their physical and mental limits.

Strong motivations for running decline with age. Younger runners express stronger emotions in almost every category.

The only categories with any increase from the youngest age group through to the oldest were sociability (25.0% to 26.1%) and weight loss (16.7% to 19.%).

The largest decreases in motivation were in pushing personal limits (83.3% to 35.7%), structured training (58.3% to 28.6%), and valuing running as a way to escape pressures at home and work (66.7% to 38.1%).

7. Skills and Cross Sports

7. Skills and Cross Sports

Skills

Thinking about your outdoor skills (e.g., navigation, moving on technical terrain etc), please select the statement that best describes your abilities:

	%
I feel confident in my outdoor skills - I have a great deal of experience and/or training.	30.9
I have adequate outdoor skills, but there is definite room for improvement.	58.8
My outdoor skills are fairly basic and/or I lack experience.	10.3
Total	100.0

Do you do supplementary training (e.g., strength, flexibility, yoga)?

	%
Yes	50.0
No	12.4
I try, but not as regularly as I think I should.	37.7
Total	100.0

7. Skills and Cross Sports

Sporting Activity

Have you regularly participated in
any of these sports?

	Yes (% of respondents)
Cycling (road, indoor exercise bike, track)	45.1
Gravel/mountain biking	31.9
Skiing (i.e., downhill skiing)	24.7
Canoeing/kayaking/rafting	24.7
Rock climbing	22.9
Mountaineering/alpinism	19.3
Triathlon/duathlon	18.4
Cross country skiing	15.2
Paddle or surf boarding	14.0
Rowing (indoor or outdoor)	12.0
Orienteering	11.7
Obstacle course racing	9.7
Ski mountaineering	3.7

How many of these additional non-running sports have you
regularly participated in?

	%
None	22.0
One	20.1
Two	15.3
Three	12.9
Four	9.8
Five or More	19.9

7. Skills and Cross Sports

Skills and Cross Sports — Key Observations

There is a clear outdoor skills and experience gap for a majority of respondents.

Self-reported outdoor skills and experience are either lacking (10.3%) or are not sufficient (58.8%). This highlights the need for skills training and the careful management/growth of technical and dangerous events.

Supplementary training is seen as important, although half of all respondents struggle to make this a part of their training regime.

50% of respondents perform supplementary training (such as strength, yoga etc), but the other 50% either do not (12.4%) or struggle to make this a part of their routine (37.7%)

Cycling is the most common crossover sport with trail and ultra running.

45.1% have regularly participated in cycling, including 31.9% who have done gravel or mountain biking.

Almost one third of trail and ultra runners are multisport mountain enthusiasts — they have a wide and rounded sporting connection to the outdoor world.

33.6% of respondents have participated in at least three other outdoor sports, including mountain sports that typically require a high degree of technical expertise (e.g., skiing, climbing and mountaineering).

However, a larger number of respondents have a sporting background that is focused solely on athletics.

42.1% of respondents have only regularly participated in running and/or one other sport (usually cycling).

8. Volunteering

8. Volunteering

Participation

Have you ever volunteered at a running race or event?

	Number of responses	%
Yes	668	65.6
No	351	34.4
Total	1019	100.0

How often have you volunteered to help organise or staff a running event?

	Number of responses	%*
Once	129	19.3
Two to four times	237	35.5
Five or more occasions	302	45.2
Total	668	100.0

What type of events have you volunteered at?

	Number of responses	%*
A short event (less than 2 hours in duration)?	407	60.9
A medium event (between 2-5 hours in duration)?	320	47.9
A long event (between 5-12 hours in duration)?	257	38.5
A 12+ hour or multiday event?	166	24.9

* As a percentage of those who have volunteered at a race, NOT the total survey respondents.

8. Volunteering

Motivation

How important to you are the following reasons for volunteering (1 = not important, 5 = very important)?

To meet new people and be part of a community

	%*
1	5.1
2	13.7
3	29.8
4	31.3
5	20.0
Total	100.0

To have fun and a meaningful experience

	%*
1	1.8
2	8.7
3	26.2
4	36.6
5	26.7
Total	100.0

To help ensure that an important event can take place

	%*
1	3.1
2	4.4
3	20.4
4	35.6
5	36.4
Total	100.0

In order to get a free place at a future event

	%*
1	34.7
2	29.2
3	21.0
4	9.7
5	5.4
Total	100.0

Material incentives (e.g., a free pair of running shoes)

	%*
1	56.2
2	24.9
3	13.4
4	3.0
5	2.4
Total	100.0

* As a percentage of those who have volunteered at a race, NOT the total survey respondents.

8. Volunteering

Experience

Would you volunteer again?

	Number of responses	%*
Yes, it is always or usually a great experience	587	91.7
Yes, but only if I can guarantee a positive experience	49	7.7
No, overall my past experience of volunteering has not been good	4	0.6
Total	640	100.0

If you have had a bad experience of volunteering, select any statement that describes this experience.

	Number of responses	%*
The event was badly organised and my role was not clearly explained	48	7.2
The event organisers did not make me feel welcome or valued	35	5.2
Volunteering at the event was stressful and too much was expected from me	20	3.0
Volunteering was tiring or difficult	18	2.7
I had a bad experience with runners or other volunteers	13	1.9

* As a percentage of those who have volunteered at a race, NOT the total survey respondents.

8. Volunteering

Volunteering — Key Observations

Volunteering is an important part of activity and involvement in the sport. A majority of respondents regularly support events with their time.

65.6% of all respondents have volunteered at an event or race. Of these, almost half (45.2%) have volunteered more than five times.

Most volunteers are motivated by a desire to support the sport and actively engage with the community. Material incentives are largely unimportant.

The most important reason to volunteer is to ensure that an important event can take place (72% important or very important for all volunteers).

Motivations based around community (51.3%) and fun (63.3%) are a little less important, but still significant.

Incentives such as a free place at a future event (15.1%) or another material incentive, such as a free pair of shoes (5.4%) are not seen as important. Although these 'sweeteners' are no doubt appreciated by volunteers as a thank you, especially for commercial events.

Experiences of volunteering are very positive.

91.7% of volunteers are unambiguously happy to volunteer again at future events. Only 0.4% of previous volunteers would not do so again.

Of those who have had a poor experience of volunteering, this was largely attributed to poor event management (7.2%) and not being made to feel valued or welcome (5.3%).

9. Appendix

9. Appendix

Additional Data Sheets

The following data sheets can be accessed through the project website. Please visit www.trailultraproject.com/survey for more information.

1. Full Survey Responses — The full survey data without organisation etc.

2. Gender Crosstabs — Selected data provided with a gender crosstabulation.

3. U.S. Survey Responses — The full set of data from U.S. responses.

4. UK Survey Responses — The full set of data from UK responses.

5. Exceptionally Committed Runners — A modelled data selection of runners with three key characteristics. (i) 60+ average weekly mileage (ii) Runs 5+ times per week (iii) Prioritises running over other weekly commitments.

Using the Data

All of this data is open access and organisations/individuals are welcome to use it.

For acknowledgements, please either use a hyperlink to the project report or the following citation: Trail and Ultra Running Survey Report (2023), *Trail Ultra Project*, University of Central Lancashire.