

EVERYTHING YOU **LOVE** ABOUT TRAIL RUNNING

# TRAIL

ISSUE  
★ 25 ★

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COVER BENNIE ROUX, WONDERBOOM N.R. (p36)  
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# One month, 15km

Until you have your own coach, take your running up a notch with **COACH NEVILLE'S** beginner plan.

**Y**ou can run. Now what? It's time to apply some method to the madness of frolicking on the trails. Using a basic training plan will help you get faster, build endurance, and prevent injuries.

Joining the ranks of trail runners in South Africa is like being a kid with the key for your favourite sweet store. But instead of toffee apples and candy floss, as a trail runner you can enjoy our mountains, savannah, forests, deserts, and amazing coastline.

Hardcore trail runners will tell roadies that trail running is not for sissies. But don't let this scare you off: you don't have to be a superhero to start running trails, and once you do this, a new world awaits.

As with any new endeavour, there will be new terminology and new skills to be learned and mastered, and this is part of the fun. Having the correct gear is a lot more important than with road running, but there is no need to rush out and blow your budget at this stage. It is always worth chatting to friends who already do trail running about gear beforehand.

For the purposes of this article we are presuming that not only are you new to trail running, but possibly also new to running, though able to do a 5km parkrun comfortably. And how do you start? With the first step of course!

While you may have heard of extreme trail races such as the Otter African Trail Run or Skyrun 100km, there are many trail races of around 10km near you which are ideal as the next step. They are more of a challenge than parkrun in terms of an increase in distance, and the route becoming more technical.

## Tick-tock, trail time

Dump your stopwatch. Just kidding. Time has less meaning on trails than for our stopwatch-obsessed roadie brethren. Trail terrain varies, making it difficult to predict finish times.

You should allow for more time on a trail than on the road for any given distance. Although you will be interested in your overall finish time, don't worry about your pace, as you may end up trying to push too hard on difficult sections of the route.

A rule of thumb is that your pace on a trail may be around 1min/km slower than when running on the road. This means that if you normally run a 10km road race at 6min/km in an hour, you may find yourself doing a 10km trail race in around 70 minutes at 7min/km. But this is just a rough estimate as it depends on the trail and the difference in pace can often be larger.

## Where and how to train

Most trail runners, even elite trail runners, train on the road in the week and trails on the weekend, so don't worry if you don't have access to trails in the week.

As a newcomer to trail running, the two important sessions each week are your long runs and hill sessions.

Later when you become stronger and fitter, you can add a third session with some form of speed work. The long run would be done on a trail on a weekend while the hill session can be done on the road in the week. But if you do have access to a steep and safe hill on a trail, then try using that.

A skill that is frequently used on trails, even by elite runners, is power-walking up steep climbs.

This is a skill best learned at a trail clinic ([trailclinics.co.za](http://trailclinics.co.za), see page 65)



Coach Neville outlining his training method at the 2016 Gauteng Trail Clinic.

PHOTO HELOISE HUNTER/TRAIL MAGAZINE

under supervision, but during your long runs you can already get used to walking on the steep climbs.

Power-walking conserves energy and minimises damage to your legs, enabling you to run further.

You will do hill repeats on the sample programme as hill running has several benefits: it improves your hill running, improves your running speed as it improves your cardiovascular ability, and strengthen your legs, which helps to fight fatigue in the late stages of a hard run.

The hill repeats will be at running speed, but on the weekend long runs try find some very steep hills where power-walking is necessary.

## Pace yourself

Perhaps the hardest concept to come to terms with is your running pace when training.

On the road, we can use a person's recent best 5km or 10km time to work out what their different training speeds should be using the **VDOT** system developed by the great coach **Jack Daniels**.

For instance, a runner who can run 10km in 60 minutes would have the following training speeds: Easy pace for long runs and recovery runs at 7:30 min/km; steady pace runs (marathon pace) at 6:31 min/km; tempo runs at 6:10 min/km.

This system can still be used for the road runs done during the week, but not when you run on a trail. This is because the gradient and terrain fluctuate wildly on a trail with steep climbs and drops.

## Perceived effort

A better way of monitoring your effort is to use perceived effort of which the breathing test forms a key component.

Using perceived effort, you will constantly tune into your body and monitor it not by a stopwatch, but by your breathing, energy levels and by how your legs feel. Doing this will enable you to pace yourself better on training runs and trail races.

I use five levels of breathing for my runners, which correspond to different running speeds. The levels are:

- **Easy pace** for recovery runs and long runs = able to talk comfortable while running
- **Steady pace** runs on shorter distances = audible breathing, but still able to talk comfortably
- **Tempo pace** for higher intensity short runs = hard breathing, but can say a few words

fitness of the runner. You will be breathing hard up the hills, but running very slowly down again to recover. This could best be described as comfortably hard.

## Putting it all together

A sample programme is shown in the table. You'll be running four to five days a week on a two-week cycle. After four weeks, you can comfortably tackle a trail run of 12-15km.

|           | WEEK 1                                                                                                                                                                   | WEEK 2                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Monday    | Rest                                                                                                                                                                     | Rest                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Tuesday   | <b>Hill session.</b> After a slow 2km warm-up jog and some stretching, run 4-8 one-minute hills. Run strongly up and jog slowly down to recover. Slow 2km warm-down jog. | <b>Hill session.</b> After a slow 2km warm-up jog and some stretching, run 4-6 reps of a 300m hill. Run strongly up and jog slowly down to recover. Slow 2km warm-down jog. |
| Wednesday | Rest                                                                                                                                                                     | Rest                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Thursday  | 5km to 8km easy jog                                                                                                                                                      | 5km to 8km steady pace                                                                                                                                                      |
| Friday    | Rest                                                                                                                                                                     | Rest                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Saturday  | <b>Long run</b> of one hour at slow, easy pace, with walks. Try do this on a trail with some hills.                                                                      | <b>Long run</b> of 90 minutes at slow, easy pace, with walks. Try do this on a trail with some hills.                                                                       |
| Sunday    | 5km easy pace on road or trail (or rest if tired).                                                                                                                       | 5km easy pace on road or trail (or rest if tired).                                                                                                                          |

- **VO2 max interval pace** = hard breathing, can say a word or two, but not talk
- **Speed** (short sprints) = very hard breathing, can't say a word

On this sample programme, you will use three of these training speeds.

- The weekend long runs will be done at an easy pace allowing you to talk comfortably. There will be short periods on climbs where you can let your breathing effort increase.
- The easy pace runs in the week will also be at this effort.
- Every second week, a steady pace run of between 5km and 8km in which you have audible breathing, but can talk comfortably.
- A hill session which will be either at tempo or VO2 max effort, depending on the

**Enter the world of trail running following the tips in this article, and although you may still suffer humdrum Mondays to Fridays, you will have magical weekends on the trails to look forward to.** 🏃

**NEVILLE BEETON**  
Midrand-based coach for runners of all abilities.

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