

3.1 of the “Checklist” Series:

FIT-4-PURPOSE – Event Specific Training Tips

Adding a few last-minute tweaks to condition your body for what’s to come.

First a reminder of the definition of **“running”** as it applies to the Kangarooie Base Camp Ultra Relay:

“The strategic application of diverse modes of terrestrial locomotion performed with purpose and poise.”

A flowery way of saying that; given the terrain and some of the gains in elevation, along with differing levels of energy & enthusiasm over 26 to 36 hours, you probably won’t be running per se, the whole time you are out on the trails.

Defining the definition:

“diverse modes of terrestrial locomotion”

There’s more than one way to repeatedly put one foot in front of the other: Walking, hiking, power hiking, trudging, jogging & running are just a few words that spring to mind.

“performed with purpose and poise.”

(a) The Purpose?

To leave Base Camp and then return to Base Camp via a predetermined route while aiming to maintain an overall average pace that does not exceed 10 min/km.

(b) With Poise?

Doing so with strong posture, a positive mindset and unwaning enthusiasm.

Now to the event specific training stuff

#1 - Surviving an encounter with the legendary, rarely (probably never) sighted, Princetown Panther.

I could suggest High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) or Fartlek Training programs that focus on improving your short burst maximum speed, but panthers are pretty quick. (And I’m tipping a bit more than a “fart”lek will be coming out!!) There’s no point doing strength training that improves your climbing ability ‘cause panthers are pretty good at climbing trees. The best advice I can give is: go out running with someone who is smaller and preferably slower than you.

Ok, ok. NOW, the serious stuff

How far you can run in any given outing is not going to change much in less than 3 weeks, but you can get your body accustomed to some of the demands of our event.

I want to start by using an excerpt from an article I read from Trail Runner Mag.: [“The Ultramarathon Survival Guide”, by David Roche.](#)

Ultras require strength - think husky, not whippet.

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Look at photos of runners descending a steep grade. You'll see quads that are flexed to their max, hips that are sinking down with each foot strike and calves that are tense from absorbing the impact. Strong, resilient muscles are better equipped to handle those impact forces, rather than breaking down or transferring them to bones and tendons.

Do push-ups and light leg strength, eat plenty of food and don't obsess about "race weight." Strong goes the distance.

For any endurance event you do need to be like the Husky. Moving with purpose, for a long time over a long distance. Conserving energy by not going too fast, and also by not going too slow and breaking the rhythm because it takes so much effort to get the sled up to speed again. The Goldilocks zone of purposeful terrestrial locomotion.

If you still have nagging doubts about being “race-ready” for our event, here's some tips to help you be physically Fit-4-Purpose for the Kangaroo Base Camp Ultra Relay.

Leading on from my last post:

Think about the next couple of weeks as a “maintenance” stage of your run training. Increasing your run specific training load at this stage of the game will put you at risk of an injury in a window of time that offers little opportunity for healing.

In the coming weeks focus less on distance but give more consideration to; how long you are moving, how often you are moving, and how you are moving.

Focus on developing your POISE & PURPOSE.

ALL-DAY PACE

If you haven't been doing so already, you really need to be honing your all-day pace and adding power-hiking to the mix.

For me, an all-day pace is where I'm moving with a moderate stride rate and with a shorter stride length than a 5k race pace. Think of the cadence you would use on a bicycle in a comfortable gear. Not spinning the pedals like crazy with no benefit and not pushing harder than you need to maintain propulsion.

Aim for a working pace where, if you were with another person, you could still hold a conversation albeit a bit staggered and breathy. You don't want to work the muscles harder than they need to because lactic acid along for the ride.

POSTURE / CORE

You should be able to maintain an upright posture. Posture is super important, because once the core goes, the rest follows. It's hard work for a body to stay comfortably upright if the weight of the head and shoulders isn't over the hips. Hence the performed with purpose and poise part of my definition.

Make sure you incorporate functional core exercise in the coming weeks. Think Pilates & Yoga. Do a little bit every day for the next 2 weeks and you'll see enough of an improvement.

The Number One core exercise I do is something I can do while driving. With the seat in an upright position I sit so my head is flush against the headrest and my shoulder blades are against the back of the seat, with a neutral spine. That's it. Just holding this position is working the correct muscles.

Another event specific benefit of this driving position provides is that you are becoming accustomed to scanning with your eyes while holding good posture. Scanning the road, from the distance to the bonnet on repeat. The head isn't rigid, it still moves with your eyes as you have the occasional glance at the mirrors and at the scenery. It doesn't take long for this to become second nature and is a great way to avoid tunnel vision or zoning out when driving. It will also be a good skill to apply during the event, especially at night when the intuitive thing to do is to point the headlamp at the ground. Looking down like that while running will result in a literal pain in the neck. Your eyes are more than capable of looking down while the head is upright. It just needs to become second nature.

CALIBRATE YOUR FEET

Foot placement.

Have a look at your current stride rate and stride length. What's good for you? Here's a little test. Find some lush grass. Take your shoes off and go for a jog. Without the cushioning effect of shoes your feet will naturally land in a position that is comfortable (i.e. no heel strike). You will still use your heels during the running process, it's just that they are not designed to be the first thing to hit the ground. Your feet should land under your hips, under your centre of gravity, which is the most efficient place for the feet to land in order to maintain good posture. Turns out this is also the foot position that results in the best energy return from the spring like function of the tendons in your drive train.

NB: This is not about learning to run bare foot. The last thing you want to do is to start running barefoot if all your training to date has been in shoes. Your achilles and fascia will hate you for it. It is more a lesson about foot placement as it applies to endurance running. Training the whole body, from head-to-toe, to work efficiently & harmoniously as you move with purpose & poise.

GET OFF ROAD

Also related to foot calibration.

This event is predominately off road. To be exact it will take you through paddocks and bush trails that have been forged by cattle. There will be sections that are pockmarked with hoof prints. Sections with exposed tree roots. Sections that are squishy and sections that may be wet. Be sure to train accordingly. Focus less on getting into a rhythm and start to embrace the less predictable terrain you have available.

Not everyone has access to bush trails but that doesn't stop you mixing it up. If your training arena is suburbia, picture a puppy that has been let off the lead and be that puppy. Get off the well-trodden or formed path. Choose grass over concrete. Step on & off the edge of the gutters. Zig-zag between trees and dodge the branches.

This event also has hills so, if you have the choice between a hill or the flat, choose hills.

STAGGERED TRAINING

For our event you will need to move with purpose, rest and then do it again within a short turnaround. Might as well incorporate this into your training.

On a longer run, deliberately mix up your modes of terrestrial locomotion. Alternate between your "all-day" pace and power-hiking and a casual stroll. Why the casual stroll? Because this is teaching your muscles how to get back into running mode after a period of (active) rest.

The "timer" I use when training like this is using visual audio cues to signal the change of mode. Visual cues include any manner of things that you pass on your training run. (e.g. passing a certain number of trees/reflector posts/driveways before switching modes or reaching the next crest etc). The audio cue is the change of song if I'm listening to music.

You also need to be thinking about getting out & about more than once per day. For example, if you normally go for a 6 km training run, thinking about doing a 3 km in the AM, and a 3 km in the PM. Or you could do 3 x 2km runs during the day.

BUT, don't forget to stretch before each transition from an extended period of rest and ease into your all-day pace.

DYNAMIC STRETCHING & FULL Range of Movement (ROM) Exercise.

Start including some dynamic stretching and functional exercise training in your schedule (e.g. body weight exercise, yoga, pilates) with a focus on strict form and full range of movement.

Find full body movements that you can perform without pain, and repeat.

If nothing else, start doing some single leg exercises like lunges or sumo style squats (wide squat followed by lifting a knee above waist height). Preferably do these on a soft surface like carpet, without shoes. Taking your shoes off while doing these movements will get the small muscles and tendons in and around your ankles and knees doing what they do best – adapting to uneven base on the fly.

As with the running, stagger this type of training during the day to get used to the move, rest, move cycle. 50 squats is 50 squats whether you do them all in one go or 5 sets of 10 at different times of the day. My go to thing is to do a mini set of body weight exercises every time an ad comes on the TV, or every half hour if I'm stuck in front of the computer.

AGAIN, don't forget to stretch before each transition from an extended period of rest and ease in to the first few reps

REST

Don't underestimate the benefits of rest.

If you are all exercised out then maybe read some articles or watch some videos/docos about how to survive endurance events. There's plenty of opinions out there regarding this topic beside mine.

If you have a strong urge to rest and do nothing, then do exactly that. Think about putting the device down or turning off the TV and sitting with your own thoughts.

Why? Segue to.....

Be Comfortable with Boredom

One thing you need to focus on in the coming weeks is conditioning your mind to be comfortable with your own thoughts without external distraction.

If you don't train and prepare your brain for this aspect of endurance performance, then 3 am Sunday morning is going to make you hit the wall harder than any hill ever could.

Stay safe, Stay Well and Happy Training!

Ash.