

THE MIGHTY DEERSTALKER

Saturday 20th March 2010 . The Tweed Valley, Scottish Borders



Your training schedule:

There are two things to consider when tackling the Mighty Deerstalker, according to adventure event veteran Gary Vallance – the terrain is 'severe', and you'll be running in the dark. "It's not unusual to see runners on all fours trying to scramble up, or slide down some of the slopes," Vallance says. "It really is 'up hill and down dale', so while steady-state road training on the flat won't do you any harm, it's far from the most effective way forward." In fact, he says you'll need a combination of power to force you up the ascents (bringing in your gluteal muscles and calves more than a conventional city run), stronger quads to cope with the downhill, and solid overall core and upper body conditioning to cope with the challenges. "You'll also be running the second loop in the dark, so including plenty of torchlit trail runs into your training, especially over uneven ground, will give you an obvious advantage." With the 8-week program below, try to incorporate hills wherever possible – going up and down – to replicate the terrain of the Mighty Deerstalker.

CROSS-TRAINING (CT): Cross-training activities allow you to give your joints and running muscles a break, while still working on your cardio. When the schedule calls for CT, do a cross-training activity (e.g. biking or stair machine) at moderate effort for 60 minutes.

TEMPO RUN: Tempo runs help you develop your anaerobic threshold, which is critical for fast 10K racing, and uphill efforts. Start your run with 5 to 10 minutes of easy running, then continue with 15 to 20 minutes of running near your 10K pace (but not at race pace), and finish with 5 to 10 minutes of cooling down. If you're not sure what your 10K pace is, run at a pace that feels 'comfortably hard'.

INTERVAL WORKOUTS (IW): After a warm-up, run 400 meters (one lap around most tracks) hard, and then recover by jogging or walking 400 meters. So when the schedule says, 4 x 400, that would be four hard 400s, with a 400 m recovery in between.

REST: Rest is critical to your recovery and injury prevention efforts, so don't ignore rest days. Your muscles build and repair themselves during your rest days. So if you run every day, you won't see much improvement. Fridays are a good day for rest because you'll have just done your speed workout on Thursday and the next day is your longest run of the week.

SATURDAY LONG RUNS: After you warm up, run at a comfortable pace for the designated mileage. If most of your runs are on the road and you're not sure how far you run, you can determine the mileage by using sites such as MapMyRun.com.

SUNDAYS: This is an active recovery day. Your run should be at an easy (EZ), comfortable pace, which helps loosen up your muscles.

Find the balance

Trail races are equal parts strength and speed. So as you build up to the big race, incorporate longer, slower runs as well as shorter, faster runs into your program.

LONG RUN: Develop endurance and leg strength by shifting your weekly long run from roads to trails. Don't feel discouraged if you're running slower than you do on the roads; that's just the nature of trails.

SPEEDWORK: A good trail runner has two forms of speed: leg speed and trail speed. Alternate the following two types of speed-training sessions every week as you prepare for your trail race:

1. **'LEG SPEED'** is that flat-out turnover of your legs, and it's best developed on the road or running track, not the trail. You'll increase stride efficiency, sense of pace and anaerobic threshold by doing a weekly set of 6 to 8 x 400 meters or 3 to 4 x 800 meters at slightly faster than race pace. If the track just isn't your bag, try doing some hill work. Start with 4 to 6 repeats of a 200- to 400-metre hill, eventually working up to 8 or 10.

2. **'TRAIL SPEED'** is the ability to run at race pace over varying terrain. This is best accomplished with a 30- to 45-minute fartlek run on a trail that's not too rugged. (The term fartlek, or 'speed play', was coined by the Swedes to describe speedwork on trails.)

Make it fun. Sprint from tree to tree. Run fast up a hill and jog the backside, or vice versa. There are no rules to fartlek workouts, only that one must push hard playfully. You'll work hard, but it won't feel like it. And you'll learn a lot about trail running in the process.

Cross-Training

Developing your quads and glutes through weight training and cycling (either on a stationary bike or mountain bike) will give you more power when running uphill and more strength late in the race. Also, you'll strengthen the ligaments and muscles around your knee, protecting it from torque-related injuries or sprains.

WEIGHTS: Doing sets of squats, hamstring curls, quadriceps extensions and calf raises will help you the most. If your gym has a stair machine/elliptical trainer, use it - it perfectly imitates the leg movement of uphill running by isolating the glutes and upper leg muscles.

CYCLING: Mimic the running motion by standing up in the saddle when climbing hills. Mountain biking is also a great way to scout out new trails, as you're able to stay out longer with less effort.

Techniques

As you train, think about staying light on your feet. Run as if on eggshells. Also, resist the tendency to favour one leg over the other. A lot of runners start using one leg as the 'plant' leg to land heavily on and the other as the 'drive' or 'push-off' leg. Each leg should do these actions interchangeably. Some other tactics to remember:

DOWNHILLS: Run on the balls of your feet, not on your heels. This means less pounding, more speed and greater control.

Uphills: Shorten your stride, and keep your head up and chest forward. Run relaxed and try to find a rhythm that will take you up and over each hill with relative ease.

CORNERS: To a greater extent than on the roads, trails offer the chance to round a corner and 'hide'. Practice bursts of speed when turning corners. Competitors won't see you accelerate, and will experience a mental letdown when they see you've gapped them. Include this manoeuvre as a regular part of your fartlek workout.

STREAMS: There's no shortage of these in the Mighty Deerstalker - it's possible to cross a stream while barely wetting your feet. All you have to do is high-step across as quickly as possible, allowing your feet to touch down only for a fraction of a second. Try it. And don't be afraid to run right through a stream. Too many runners lose time by halting at the edge of a stream midrace.

Surface guide

SAND - Sand's never easy to run on, especially when it's loose. An experienced trail runner often flits down a sandy trail (as opposed to running in a straight line), always searching for the firmest footing. Typically you'll find the hardest-packed sand - and the fastest line - on the very edge of the trail.

MUD - For all-around annoyance, nothing beats running down a muddy trail. It's dirty, there's a greater chance of slipping, and mud tends to stick to your shoes, making them heavy. So look closely and react. Shiny mud is invariably wet and liable to suck you in. Mud with a dull appearance is usually firmer and faster to run on.

ROCKS - Step lively here, using a higher leg lift to avoid tripping. Concentrate hard and choose footing carefully to keep from twisting your ankle.

FOREST PATHS - Deceptively beautiful, forest paths are often covered with leaves that hide tripping hazards such as rocks, roots and holes. Wooded areas also tend to retain moisture, so trails can be slick. As with rocky paths, pay close attention to foot placement.

Race day tips

Wear trail shoes - They're light enough for racing, but offer the lateral support you need to keep your feet and ankles more stable. Also, a trail shoe has a heavier tread pattern than a road shoe, and offers a toe bumper to protect you from bruising. For the Mighty Deerstalker, Vallance recommends aggressive fell shoes such as the Walsh PB, Inov-8 Mudclaw or Adidas Swoop - something with real teeth...

Start slowly - In essence, a trail race is a whole crowd of people trying to squeeze onto one narrow track. Which may make you want to start out fast to get some room. Don't. This will only send you into oxygen debt and sap the energy you'll need later in the race - when everyone else is tiring.

Stay loose - As the race progresses, you'll find a rhythm. Imagine yourself as nimble and light-footed as Fred Astaire. In this relaxed state, you'll be less likely to fall and more apt to maintain speed.

BEGINNER 10K TRAIL RUNNING SCHEDULE

If you can run 3 miles comfortably and can run 4 to 5 days per week, this is for you.

WEEK	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
1	Rest	3 m run	CT	2.5 m run (race pace)	Rest	3 m run	30 min EZ
2	Rest	3 m run	CT	3 m run (race pace)	Rest	3.5 m run	35-40 min EZ
3	Rest	3.5 mi run	CT	3.5 m run (race pace)	Rest	4 m run	35-40 min EZ
4	Rest	4 m run	CT	3.5 m run (race pace)	Rest	4.5 m run	40-45 min EZ
5	Rest	3 m run	CT	4 m run (race pace)	Rest	5 m run	40-45 min EZ
6	Rest	3.5 m run	CT	3.5 m run (race pace)	Rest	6 m run	40-45 min EZ
7	Rest	4 m run	CT	4 m run (race pace)	Rest	7 m run	40-45 min EZ
8	Rest	3 m run	CT or Rest	3 m run	Rest	Rest	10K Race!

INTERMEDIATE 10K TRAIL RUNNING SCHEDULE

WEEK	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
1	CT or Rest	4 x 400 IW	3 m run	30 min tempo	Rest	4 m run	30 min EZ
2	CT or Rest	5 x 400 IW	3.5 m run	35 min tempo	Rest	5 m run	35 min EZ
3	CT or Rest	6 x 400 IW	3.5 m run	35 min tempo	Rest	6 m run	35 min EZ
4	CT or Rest	7 x 400 IW	4 m run	40 min tempo	Rest	6 m run	40 min EZ
5	CT or Rest	8 x 400 IW	4.5 m run	40 min tempo	Rest	7 m run	40 min EZ
6	CT or Rest	8 x 400 IW	4.5 m run	40 min tempo	Rest	7.5 m run	45 min EZ
7	CT or Rest	6 x 400 IW	4 m run	40 min tempo	Rest	8 m run	45 min EZ
8	CT or Rest	3 m run	40 min tempo run	3 m run	Rest	Rest	10K Race!