

HIT THE SPRING TRAILS

Reinvigorate your running by doing it in the bush. It's amazing what a change of scenery and terrain can do for your fitness.

Ask any avid trail runner about their sport and you'll see their eyes mist over as they tell you about the fresh air, spectacular scenery, the thrill of being surrounded by nature and the ever-changing physical challenge of mixed terrain. If the increase in trail running events is anything to go by, then trail running's popularity is definitely on the rise.

So what exactly is trail running? It's about leaving the bitumen behind and hitting the trails that meander through forests, parklands, valleys and up and down mountains. It's not about hacking your way through virgin forest, nor running 100km up and down mountains (not unless you want to), but following hiking or walking tracks and fire trails and maybe short stretches of bitumen in between trails.

However, with event calendars jammed with trail running events such as the North Face 100, it's easy to think that the trails are for serious ultra-runners only. Just like road running, trail running can be as easy or as difficult as you like. Non-technical trails are easy to navigate, smooth and clutter free, while technical trails are rocky and criss-crossed with roots and may include some scrambles and big drops.

Australian Adventure Runner Richard Bowles, who has clocked thousands of kilometres on some of the world's most exciting trails, says that trail running can be anything from your local park trail that is maintained by the local government, right through to rugged trails that cover mountaintops and every combination in between.

"If you enjoy the outdoors, meaning trees and wildlife, then it's as simple as finding somewhere close by where you can

do that. If you already run then the transition is easy, in fact you might even think that your running becomes easier as you get lost in nature," he says.

TACKLING THE TRAILS

"The key to having a good run on trails is to relax, go with the flow and don't fight the mountain or whatever kind of natural terrain you are running through," explains Trail Run Mag editor and owner of Tour de Trails, Chris Ord.

"Trail running involves whole body muscle movement as you're twisting and turning, changing direction constantly, ducking a tree branch, pushing off a rock, taking a big step then a little one, then changing pace, climbing and then descending," he says.

While it's important to enjoy the view, you should always keep an eye out for obstacles such as tree roots, branches and loose rocks underfoot. Take smaller steps and stay light and nimble on your feet, as though you are dancing over the terrain, Ord says.

"By taking smaller steps it will actually make you more agile, less prone to tripping over and faster overall," he adds. Resisting the tendency to favour one leg over the other when springing from side to side or going up and down larger steps will help create muscle balance.

HOW TO TACKLE TRAIL CONDITIONS

- **Forest paths:** Pay close attention to foot placement as leaves can hide tripping hazards such as rocks, roots and holes, and this terrain may also be slick from moisture.
- **Mud:** Avoid shiny mud to prevent slipping and lugging around heavy mud laden shoes.
- **Rocky terrain:** Step lively using a higher leg lift to avoid tripping and choose your footing carefully.
- **Sand:** Always search for the firmest footing; hardest-packed sand – often someone else's footprint – or the very edge of the trail is best.

TRAIL TECHNIQUES

- **Downhills:** Run on the balls of your feet, not on your heels, which equals less pounding and more speed and greater control.
- **Uphills:** Shorten your stride, and keep your head up and chest forward. Relax and find a rhythm that will take you up and over each hill with relative ease, power walking uphill to conserve energy.
- **Corners:** Turn your core before you actually get into the corner and look ahead on the trail where you want to go.
- **Streams:** High-step across as quickly as possible, allowing your feet to touch down





only for a fraction of a second to keep feet dry-ish.

WHERE TO RUN

For a chance to connect with others in the trail running community, try the monthly Sydney Trail Run Series, organized by Big Run Events (bigrunevents.com.au) or The Salomon Trail Running Series, which have four events a year within an hour drive from Melbourne (rapidascent.com.au/salomontrailrunning).

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Just like many of us head out on road trips or fly interstate in search of the best waves to surf, different cycle routes or hiking trails, there are some cool trail running destinations you can tag onto your next holiday.

Ord himself has started hosting multi-day all-inclusive luxe trail-running holidays in the Victorian high country and the Great Ocean Walk, with plans to eventually include Patagonia, Bhutan and the Cook Islands (tourdetrails.com). The trips are open to any runner, and you can expect to run between 10-30km per day for four to six days.

GOING IT ALONE? HIT THE ROAD AT SOME OF THESE AUSTRALIAN DESTINATIONS

NSW – The Blue Mountains are not just

for hikers: the trails offer something for everyone. Try the 14km return run that tracks Furber Steps to Ruined Castle and Golden Stairs, or have a crack at running a part of the famed Six Foot Track from Katoomba to Jenolan Caves (bluemts.com.au). South of Sydney, the Royal National Park's Coast Track (27.4km) has some technical sections and a mix of beach, cliff top, groomed trails and some boardwalks (nationalparks.nsw.gov.au).

VIC – From the specifically graded trails of the mini mountain trail running mecca of Mt Buller (run.mtbuller.com.au) to the famous windswept paths and single-tracks of the Great Ocean Walk (greatoceanwalk.info), for a small state, Victoria packs a mighty punch.

TAS – Run the spectacular Freycinet peninsula along the Mt Graham Circuit, Wineglass Bay and Promise Bay or the shorter Hazards Circuit. Cradle Mountain National Park also has some stunning tracks (www.parks.tas.gov.au)

ACT – Canberra's surrounding bushland is a spider's web of single-track trails and dirt roads. Try those around Black Mountain and the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve (tidbinbilla.com.au). Namadgi National Park, in the Territory's southwest, is wide open and wild. Try the shorter Granite Tors track (7km), Settlers track (9km), or dip into part of the 680km Australian Alpine Walking Track, which departs from here (tams.act.gov.au).

QLD – Brimming with trail options from the Barron Gorge loop in the tropical far north to the trails of the Gold Coast's hinterland and the Granite Belt further west, Queensland's 32km coastal Thorsborne trail on Hinchinbrook Island is also a must try (nprsr.qld.gov.au).

NT – The 223km Larapinta Trail that traverses the West MacDonnell Ranges out of Alice Springs features big landscapes and impressive views. There's access along the trail so you can run parts of the track or organise a pick up further along (larapintatrail.com.au).

WA – The Cape to Cape offers 135km of single-track along spectacular coastal cliffs, caves, headlands and forest scenery. There are easy sections, with multiple access points allowing smaller shorter runs, while some of the wilder parts are rugged (capetocapetrack.com.au).

SA – The Adelaide Hills are literally riddled with trails that pass top attractions like Waterfall Gully, Mount Lofty Botanic Gardens, Mount Lofty Summit and Cleland Wildlife Park. Run part of the epic 1,200km Heysen Trail, that goes from the Flinders Ranges to Cape Jervis (southaustraliantrails.com). **ES**



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