Trail Running 10 + Essentials

Trail running is not much different than hiking, but one will typically move at a pace of 3-6+ mph for a trail run versus hiking’s 1-2+ mph. This increase in speed means weight and fit of your pack are crucial. It’s important to keep your ten essentials lightweight and compact so that you can run more easily, prevent injuries, but still be prepared.

**All of the following is chosen based on planning.** So, though not an item, per se, but very important."Plan the run, and run the plan." In other words, plan your route ahead of time and beware of spontaneous deviations from it! Having a plan helps you determine what to wear as well as how much food and water to bring and whether you need additional supplies such as micro-spikes.

1. **Navigation.** There are various tools for navigating.
   1. **Map.** A map is an important element of navigation. Ideally take a waterproof map, or put printouts in a Ziploc bag. Make sure you know how to read a map and how to do basic navigation.
   2. **Compass.** Although you should never leave the plan trail, fire road or paved route it is not a bad idea to carry a small compass that can be used for taking bearings and reverse bearings, assuming you are not in dense forest. A small wristwatch compass will work.
   3. **Altimeter** (not required). A barometric altimeter gives you important navigation information. If you know which mountain you’re on, knowing how high up it you are gives you a good idea of location.
   4. **Watch.** Knowing the time of day plus how long you have been running is vital. Trail runs often go by time rather than distance so there are many factors besides pure mileage that combine to determine how long it will take you to cover a given route. A watch that is appropriate for outdoor use is a great tool.
   5. **GPS** (not required). There are various models of GPS watches that show distance, time, altitude, etc. Smartphone apps can be useful though you will be limited by your phone's battery life. More information on free or cheap apps can be found here: <https://www.mountaineers.org/blog/free-or-nearly-navigation-apps-for-smart-phones>. Be forewarned that on twisty trails GPS devices will not record accurately.
2. **Dress appropriately: from head to toe!** Know the terrain you will be covering and the weather forecast to select your outfit. Your clothing choices depend on the terrain and conditions: please ask your leader for further clarification of what to expect if confused. As always with outdoor pursuits, **do not wear cotton.**
   1. **Clothing:** Wear only clothing made from technical fabrics or wool; no cotton. If you run into different climate zones, e.g., a significant ascent is part of your route, or expect to encounter precipitation or wind, a lightweight jacket that is water-resistant or waterproof and/or windproof is a must. Layering with a long-sleeved top over a short-sleeved top, gloves, a hat, and a buff can provide flexibility as conditions change. Arm/calf warmers can also be an option. For hot, sunny days, sunglasses and a hat can be a must.
   2. **Shoes:** Mud, snow, rocks, sand, scrambling all dictate different shoe choices. Look for comfortable and light weight, but supportive, with aggressive tread, toe bumper, and possibly some sort of impermeability. Questions? You can find more information here: <https://www.mountaineers.org/blog/what-is-a-trail-running-shoe>.
      1. **Gaiters** (not required)can complement your shoes to keep twigs, pebbles, etc. out. There are shorter, lighter gaiters for running shoes and taller, heavier gaiters for hiking and alpine climbing. Running-specific gaiters tend to need you to glue/stick Velcro strips to the heels of your running shoes, so plan ahead.
      2. **Traction devices** (not required) such as Kahtoola micro-spikes and Yaktrax can enable you to run without slipping on icy or snowy trails. These are sized to your approximate shoe size.
      3. **Snowshoes** (not required). There are running-specific snowshoes that provide both traction and flotation for snow-covered trails.
   3. **Socks:** Remember cotton is rotten; stick to polyester or wool blends.
   4. **Storage system:** A small running-specific pack, vest, belt, etc... can hold key items, plus food and water. A bouncing pack will chafe you: be sure to buy a pack that is appropriately fitted to you and will hold what you need. Longer runs tend to require somewhat larger packs.
3. **Whistle:** A lightweight, plastic whistle will allow you to call for help and many packs have it built in. Shouting does not work well, as you will tire quickly.
4. **Food:** Food provides energy and running requires energy! Carrying calories is also a safety measure in case you’re outside longer than anticipated. Sport nutrition products such as: gels, sports drinks, etc. can be nicely packaged and\or easy to digest. However, particularly for longer runs, most people enjoy real food. A good rule of thumb is 200-300 calories per hour or roughly a small snack every 30-45 minutes. Pack what is both light weight and what you know you’ll eat.
5. **Hydration.** You need 16 to 28 ounces per hour while running and will need to carry your own supply or purification methods (filters, Aquatabs, Aquamira, etc…). Depending on the distance and water availability options include: hand held/waist supported bottles, vests, or hydration packs (including vests) for a long haul. For longer runs it's important to ascertain if water sources are available on your route since it's unlikely you can carry sufficient water.
6. **First Aid.** Some of the most common maladies encountered on the trail are: blisters, chafing, abrasions from falls, and stomach upset. Prone to blisters? Pre-taping problem spots and port tapes, band-aids, or Moleskin. Chafing a problem? Apply an anti-chafing lubricant before starting your run and carry some with. For abrasions and cuts resulting from falls, pack anti-microbial wipes and antibiotic ointment. The tape and band-aids you carry for blisters do double-duty and can help with scrapes too. For stomach issues, chewable Pepto-Bismol tablets, Tums, or ginger candies can help. Electrolyte tablets can also help. Being smart about your first aid kit/set is important. Plan appropriately.
7. **Multi-tool.** From helping you devise a shelter to creating more first aid possibilities to small repairs a knife or small multi-tool is a compact and simple way to increase your survivability if the worst happens.
8. **Light.** You may be out in the wilderness much longer than you expect, so take a headlamp or other device to illuminate your way along the route.

**Note:** While **extra batteries** are not required, if you anticipate using a headlamp a lot, bring extra batteries. Temperature also affects some batteries.

1. **Firestarter.** It can be important to have the ability to start a fire to stay warm in the event of a run-stopping injury or being lost. Waterproof matches or a small lighter will suffice. A cotton ball dipped in Vaseline will burn nicely.
2. **Sun Protection.** For long exposures, snow, and higher altitudes sun protection is a must. Sunblock, polarized sunglasses, and a hat will protect your skin and eyes from the sun. There are also shirts, sun sleeves and sun gloves to provide additional protection. Lightly tinted sunglasses are also great for running through insect-filled woods to avoid getting a bug in your eye!

**Buddy:** Don’t go out in the great outdoors alone, a lot of things can happen. Whether assistance with trail finding, injury/sickness, or enjoying the experience, a buddy is a must and running with friends is more fun!