

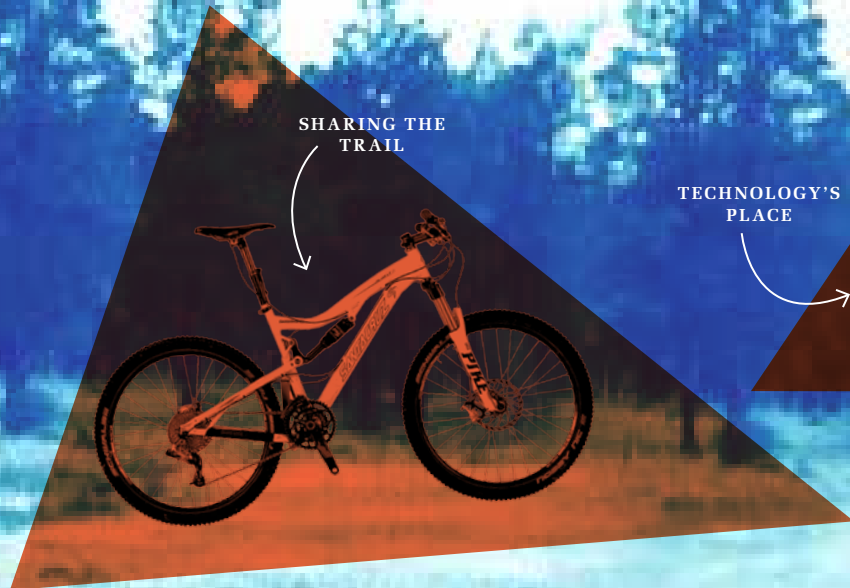
HAVE A LITTLE RESPECT



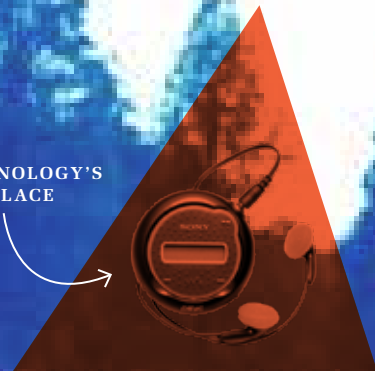
AVOIDING
INSECT
EMERGENCIES



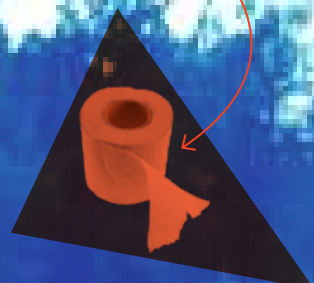
TOSSING
YOUR TRASH



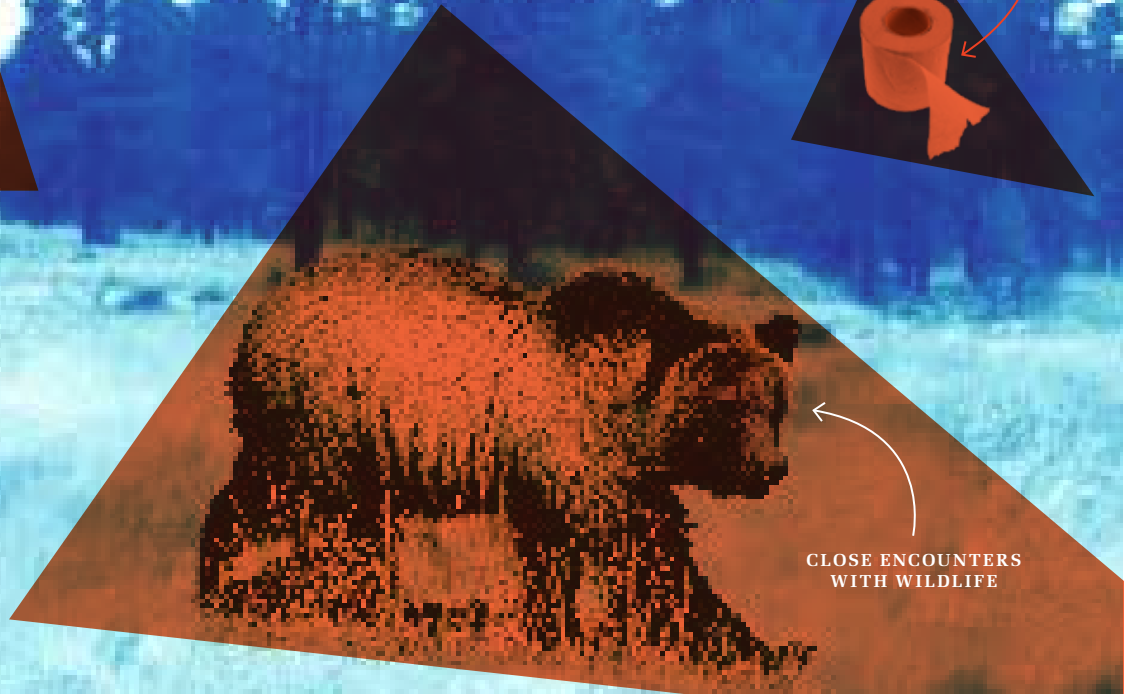
SHARING THE
TRAIL



TECHNOLOGY'S
PLACE



HOW TO "GO"
IN THE WOODS



CLOSE ENCOUNTERS
WITH WILDLIFE

MORE RUNNERS ARE GOING OFF-ROAD,
BUT NOT ALL ARE READING UP ON PROPER
WILDERNESS ETIQUETTE. HERE'S A PRIMER.
by Ian Torrence

Line Illustrations by Charlie Layton > Photo Illustrations by Elizabeth Krenos

W

We've been hearing it for several years: Trail running is gaining popularity. New races on singletrack in remote locations are filling faster, and back-country parks are gaining favor as a preferred training ground for trail aficionados and roadie converts alike.

The burgeoning sport doesn't come with an instruction manual, but maybe it should. The environmental impact all these runners are having on our protected lands (and unprotected, as the case may be) is the high price we pay to enjoy their beauty.

Every runner can take simple steps to become educated in the ways of the wilderness. Before you head out on your mountain adventure, know what to do when you're miles from a critically needed toilet, or you encounter wildlife, or you're tempted to take a shortcut off the beaten path (hint: don't).

NO. 1

DON'T MAKE A STINK

Human feces. A topic that makes us all squirm, but a reality that can't be ignored. In a perfect world we'd "go" before we hit the trails. Unfortunately, our internal systems don't always cooperate. John Medinger, founder and race director of the Quad Dipsea and Lake Sonoma 50 and a board member for the Western States 100 Mile Endurance Run, knows just how difficult it is to anticipate runners' needs. "We have port-a-potties at the start of my races and at some aid stations along the way, but these are typically 5 to 7 miles apart," he says. "But when you gotta go, you gotta go."

Mike Spinnler is the race director for the JFK 50 Mile, a trail race with more than 3,000 participants on the outskirts of the nation's capital, putting it constantly under the scrutiny of the National Park Service. He agrees with Medinger, but adds, "We inform our participants to—if at all possible—use the portable units. We also ask them, if toilets aren't nearby, [to] go at least 30 feet or more off the trail and cover up what they leave behind."

WASTE MANAGEMENT

If the urge strikes and restrooms aren't available during your next race or training run, here's how to handle your waste:



Get out of sight. Use vegetation or terrain to hide yourself. This will ensure that you deposit waste where others can't see or smell it. "Everybody poops, but nobody wants to look at it," Medinger says.



Use the heel of your shoe, a rock or a stick to dig a hole. Six inches is optimal. Make sure you're at least 200 feet (more than half a football field) from the nearest water source.



Urinate on rocks or bare ground so absorption is quick and unnoticeable, and so fragile plants, such as wildflowers and mosses, aren't negatively impacted.



Don't burn used toilet paper. Depending on rules for the area you're running, bury it in the hole or pack it out. If you don't have tissue, use vegetation that you can confidently identify. (Be on the lookout for poison oak, ivy or sumac.) Smooth stones or sticks work, too. Take care to bury those as well.

Use hand sanitizer as soon as possible. Always pack out personal hygiene products.

NO. 2

TECHNOLOGY'S PLACE

Just as the sport of trail running has grown, so has the use and availability of new technologies. Smart phones, personal listening devices and GPS systems, if used appropriately, can enhance the outdoor experience and provide a measure of safety.

Smart phones can be used to document your journey by photo, voice or video. However, that's where the line should be drawn, except in dire emergencies. Don't rely on your phone as a dependable piece of backcountry equipment, because it rarely gets reception. Make sure you attend any pre-race briefings. This is when updates are announced and course marking is displayed. Carry a map or familiarize yourself with your route.

Listening to music can be a welcome distraction, but make sure the rules allow it. And if you're racing on single-track, make sure you can hear other runners approaching. "We disallow personal

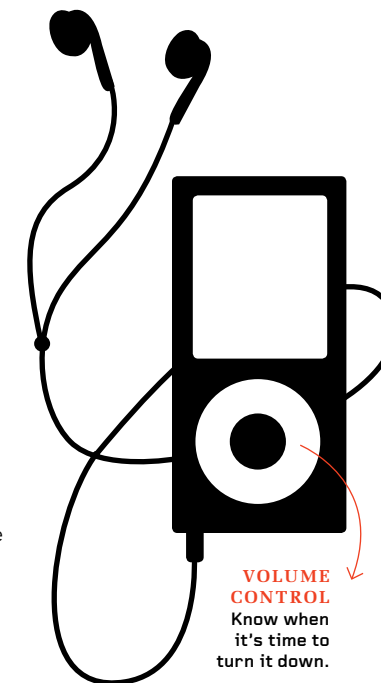
listening devices. The Appalachian Trail has dangerous footing and is a singletrack trail," Spinnler says. "Anyone caught using them is disqualified."

If you run an event that permits the use of these devices, act prudently. Karl Meltzer, trail running coach and race director for Utah's Speedgoat 50K, who loves his music and even avoids the races that have no-headphone policies, says, "Crank up the tunes, but use respect by removing your headphones at aid stations and in places where danger is possible, where there is possible rock fall or busy trail traffic."

Depending on its accuracy and functionality, a GPS unit can

keep track of your mileage. Some devices can also provide rudimentary maps with your estimated location. Be aware that GPS units have limited battery life and can lose reception, rendering them inaccurate on twisty trails, under tree canopy and in deep ravines.

There's no better place to fully disconnect. "Once in a while, it's good to run without the watch or phone, just to totally let go of that attachment to technology," says Sam Fiandaca, the owner of Brazen Racing, an event company that organizes trail races in the Bay Area. "You can certainly enjoy your run a little more that way."



VOLUME CONTROL Know when it's time to turn it down.



NO. 3

STAY ON THE PATH

Though there are a few races that allow it, like the Dipsea in Northern California, shortcutting is considered unethical and can be ecologically detrimental. The temptation is great to cut to avoid curves, switchbacks or muddy areas in the trail; however, those turns were constructed to eliminate erosion, protect vegetation and keep soil on the trail. Skipping out on those turns makes you a race-day cheat, converts

specifically engineered singletrack to wider and rutted roads, makes you an accessory to environmental damage (which can carry a fine of up to \$5,000 and/or six months in jail in many national parks) and could give you a wicked case of poison oak.

"The environmental impact of course-cutting is detrimental, it's a safety hazard, and it creates a tremendous amount of displeasure with the park's management, which, in turn, impacts my

ability to hold the race the following year," Fiandaca says.

Meltzer has had problems with racers using alternative routes on the fragile alpine course. He goes out of his way to ensure that participants know the rules. "Before the race, I make everyone say, 'I will not cut switchbacks.' I make them say it twice so they remember it," Meltzer says. "We use binoculars to watch runners and police the course as best as we can. We take this very seriously."

TRAIL RUNNER



NO.

4

LEAVE NO TRACE

Unlike the common practice at large races in the city, food wrappers, cups and other trash, as well as peels and rinds (which may take years to biodegrade in some ecosystems), cannot be dropped on the ground for somebody else to clean up.

"We do have many participants whose only experience is with the 'big-city road race,' where it's OK for runners to throw their cups on the ground," Fiandaca says. "To combat that, we try our best to push the fact that we're in a park and littering is unacceptable. We cover this in the pre-race briefing, literature, and add signage at aid stations as a reminder. I think if everyone gets behind that, then there will be little to no mess to clean up."

Litter attracts wildlife and ruins the experience of the runner or hiker behind you. It could also cost you a race. "We see somebody dropping trash on the course outside the aid station areas, and we disqualify them," Spinnler says.

Whether you're running first or last, pick up any garbage you find and dispose of it at the next aid station or trash can. "When I'm on the trails," Fiandaca says, "I try to either carry a Ziploc baggie to put trash in, or I just designate a trash pocket in my water bottle or on my shorts."

NO.

5

THE CALL OF THE WILD

When you step away from the roads and venture into the woods, remember that you're never alone out there. A face-to-face encounter with a wild animal or stinging insect can be a traumatic experience. "In races, wildlife encounters are pretty rare. The fast guys chase away everything in the vicinity and the rest run along behind without issue," Medinger says. "However, training on trails while running quietly alone can present a greater opportunity for wildlife encounters."

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

The backcountry is inhabited by animals that are larger, hungrier and stronger than we are. Know what could be lurking.



Be especially careful if you come across babies or young animals. "Stop running, retreat quietly or take an alternate route if you can," Medinger says.



If you're stung, don't stop. Keep moving and put distance between you and the hive or nest. If you're allergic, always carry and know how to use an epinephrine autoinjector to counteract a life-threatening allergic reaction.



They don't hunt or chase people; however, they will defend themselves if threatened. Give it a wide berth and don't get between it and its natural cover (bushes and rocks).



Not all encounters are with critters—study who has the right-of-way. "Mountain bikes, off-road vehicles and off-leash dogs are far greater dangers on the trails than a coyote or snake," Fiandaca says.



The National Park Service suggests: Do not run, but wave your arms or hold open a coat in order to look large and threatening. Maintain eye contact, do not crouch, and throw rocks or sticks. If attacked, fight back.



Do not approach, the NPS warns. If a moose charges, run. Do not hold your ground.

NO.

6

PAY IT FORWARD

Local municipalities are mandated to maintain the streets around our homes; however, most trail systems aren't allotted similar support. "The trails we love are in our hands, literally, and their future depends on our stewardship," says Matthew Nelson, the executive director for the Arizona Trail Association, an organization that not only stewards the 800-plus-mile Mexico to Utah pathway, but also supports several running events that take place on the trail. "Each year, federal agencies have less money for trail development and maintenance, so it's up to people who use the trails to care for them," he says.

Volunteers do the majority of the upkeep by repairing and installing signage, removing downed trees, de-rocking tread and trimming overgrowth. Help preserve your favorite trails by setting aside one day a year to join a trail work party—you can find them by searching for your local or national trail organizations. "The next time you're running down a trail you helped build or maintain, you'll feel a powerful sense of ownership that will stick with you forever," Nelson says.

Every sport has a tacit code of conduct and, though no definitive manual exists, trail running is no exception. The trails are an attractive place to run because of the peaceful setting they provide. Never forget that we are only visitors and it's our responsibility to keep them pristine by treading lightly while we're out there.