

# HIKING

By Kellie Emmerson



When racing events like Ultra Trail Australia (previously The North Face 100), it's important to respect the trail and the challenge. With 4000m+ elevation (in the 100km event), unless you're Brendan Davies, it's highly unlikely that you'll be running the entire race. You'll be hiking up those steps, just trying to put one foot in front of the other.

Over the past few years I've had the opportunity to race a number of international competitions in New Zealand and Europe. These were a huge eye-opener for me; for a 'running race' I was sure doing a heck load of hiking. I couldn't believe the amount of time I spent walking and realized that I really hadn't experienced *real* mountains before. I came away from these races often questioning my competence as a runner but realizing that I had to find a way to get stronger.

One of my most successful solutions was training for hiking. This has become a very important part of my training plan. I like to refer to 'hiking' as walking with a purpose. It is defined by Wikipedia as a "long, vigorous walk, usually on trails." Trail running is about efficiency and finding the smartest and quickest way to the finish line. Sometimes this means that you don't always run; you hike.

I try to go for a hike once a week. Since I introduced this to my program my race performances have gotten better and more consistent. A hike can be a good option for a rest night, or it can be a serious workout, having benefits to both your aerobic and anaerobic systems. You need access to some decent climbs, but it's a great alternative to a run.

How can you up the ante? There are a few ways to increase the challenge. Find a steeper or longer hill, aim for the top of the climb in a certain time, add weight, or all of the above. A tough hike will increase your leg and glute strength, your core strength, work on your stabilizers, and improve your cardiovascular endurance. And most importantly, it will clear your mind and take you to some fabulous views!

I tried a number of weight vests before finding the best fit for my frame. I settled on one from Iron Edge. It is very adjustable and doesn't bounce around nearly as much as some of the others I tried. The only problem is grabbing it before my partner does! But don't think you need to go out and spend money. There are plenty of other options; find an old pack, fill it with sand bags or water. Too easy.

So get out there and go for a hike! You'll be better prepared, stronger, and more relaxed ☺

## TIPS:

1. Test out what is most efficient for you. Find a hill and time yourself using different techniques- short strides, long strides, swinging arms, hands on knees.
2. How much weight to carry? On average I'd carry ~ 10kg, which is about 20% of my body weight. Start light and build yourself up.
3. If you can't find a hill, ramp the treadmill up to 15%. Push the pace up until you're almost breaking into a run.