



DIY Adventures and FKTs - A Manual

Events are brilliant. First off, you get a marked route, aid stations that look like child's birthday party buffet, so you don't have to carry much kit or food. You get camaraderie from fellow participants and get cheers and motivation from volunteers and supporters. You get the opportunity to run a really long way supported and tracked so you and your family can feel assured about your safety. And finally (if it's important to you) you have the opportunity to compete against the best, or your age category and walk away with rankings, points, qualifications, a medal or maybe in some cases a DNF.

But events are not the only way to have ultra adventures. You can DIY - do it yourself.

DIYs and FKTs - what are they?

DIY (Do It Yourself) adventures are just big days out, or multi-days, that you plan and execute by yourself (or may be with a friend or two). It does not have to be on a set route. You have total freedom of where and how fast (or slow) you go.

FKTs are one flavour of DIY adventures - FKT stands for Fastest Known Time. It is the speed record for completing a specific running, hiking, or cycling route - some don't like the Americanism 'FKT' and prefer the simple label 'record'. Unlike formal races, FKTs are self-organised runs where individuals attempt to set or break the quickest recorded time on a particular route. fastestknowntime.com is where runners can look for routes and submit times - there are over 800 routes in the UK you can new ones. FKTs can be done in different 'styles': supported, self-supported, unsupported - which have different levels of permitted outside assistance. There are also different female and male records. FKTs became very popular during the Covid times and have continued to capture runners' imaginations all over the world.

So are events or DIYs and FKTs better? Truth is both are great but in different ways.

The good of DIYs

- They can be very affordable. No entry fees involved. You can save by camping
- It can be flexible. You can choose the dates depending on friends who are supporting you or the weather. You can change the dates until the last minute
- You set your own pace. There are no cut off times or targets unless you are trying to beat the previous FKT

- There's no competition unless you are out there to break a record. But on the day, it's you against you - you will be first place and last place!
- You set your own rules and, if you want, break your own rules. You get to choose the style of your attempt.
- You get to explore somewhere new. It's a great way to discover new trails, areas, whole counties or even across the whole country!
- There is a great sense of accomplishment as you have planned and executed the whole thing yourself. It takes a huge amount of commitment and logistics so you can be proud
- You can have as many en-route stops as you want: B&Bs, campsites, bothies, wild camps on mountain tops, cafes, pubs. You do what you fancy!

The not so good of DIYs

DIYs can lack some things that are useful:

- Route markings - most, but not all, races tend to have good route marking with tape and arrows which means that you would struggle to get really lost. On a DIY there's nothing - just you, and whatever mix of map/compass and GPS device you have
- Potential lack of support along the way in form of checkpoints, food and water, drop bags though depending on where you are you might be able to use shops, cafes, B&Bs, or stash kit/food in advance to pick up as you go along
- There's no official start line, no timing chip, no finish line, no medal.
- Being alone - DIYs, particularly if you have no support, can be lonely affairs. Though for some this is part of the attraction of DIYs. You can of course do it with someone else though then you may need to compromise on pace or dates.
- Safety can be a concern. There are no safety teams or medics around. There are areas with no network or coverage. If running unsupported, safety and risk have to be assessed and can be a concern particularly going through difficult and exposed terrain in poor weather
- One way of partly addressing concerns around safety is to have a tracker. If you are concerned about others being able to see your location, trackers can be set so that only certain individuals can see your location

So you have considered the good and the bad and you want to go for a DIY! How do you go about planning one. We suggest you start small to gain experience and confidence. Gradually you can venture further afield and try doing things with less support, more remote, longer trips. These are the main things you should think about.

What route

In many respects the same guiding principles you use for choosing a race apply for a DIY:

- Choose a distance that you're comfortable with and fits your experience - if you have never done more than 50 miles then doing a 100 mile DIY may be too far. There's no hurry to hit the big distances - routes will be around for ever. Also bear in mind that you will probably travel more slowly on a DIY than an event on the same route since you will be carrying more and have less support (and be more tempted to stop and enjoy the view or have a coffee and cake)
- Choose a terrain and degree of ascent you are comfortable with. If most of your experience is on flattish forest trails then a DIY across Snowdonia might break you!
- Also are you comfortable with the level of remoteness and isolation (and lack of phone signal) - there are some routes in the UK where you might not see another person for hours
- Find somewhere reasonably local - if you need to travel 200 miles to the start of the route it can add lots of additional time and cost
- You might also think about likely weather on the route, how difficult navigation might be, and whether there are suitable shops, café, accommodation options

But most of all pick a route that inspires you and you will enjoy - it might be the views, the challenge, the unknown. Whatever rocks your boat.

And if you are after an FKT then you might be looking for a route where there's a record that might be within your grasp.

Route planning

Once you have chosen the rough route you want to do comes the planning. There's lots of thing to think about.

- Where are practical start and finish points?
- Do you want to run only in the daylight?
- Are you camping or staying in booked accommodation - where can you do this?

Consider safety, access to supplies, the quality of the trails and road/trail ratio. Break down your route to chunks and plan each leg based on the above information.

Whilst during the day you can rely on shops, cafes and pubs, if you are travelling through the night it can be tricky to get provisions. 24 hour petrol stations can be a great pit-stop. Churches might have public taps so you can research and locate the ones that do. This has a

[list of public taps](#). Try and locate public toilets in case you needed a break or a shelter from bad weather - churches also are good emergency refuges.

Strava's heatmap or Garmin's 'frequented route' are great planning tools to find out which paths on the map were likely actually to be walkable or runnable (if you plan to go that fast). Consider doing reconnaissance, running segments of the route in training particularly on the tougher parts. This helps avoid any unpleasant surprises and identify any sections you'd want to avoid or reroute. Not all public footpaths are maintained. Some can be overgrown. Some gates end up being locked and not all farm dogs are friendly. Familiarity with the route gives the much needed confidence to tackle those challenges.

Transport and accommodation

Think of how you're going to get to the start and get home from the finish. Think about exit plans, where the train stations are. Where you can get taxis. Identify remote areas where you are more cut off. Plan your accommodation and overnight stays if you are planning to have one. Be respectful of landowners if you are wild camping. Wild camping is not legal in England but is generally tolerated if you pitch a tent up away from the path once it's dark and pack up at the crack of dawn before anyone sees you. Leave no trace. Don't start a fire. Take your trash with you. Take a poo shovel and poo bags and pack your toilet paper with you until you can dispose of it correctly. If a landowner asks you to leave, do so respectfully. Youth hostels and bunkhouses are great options in the more popular areas.

Navigation

One difference with an event is there will not be any tape or arrows showing you which way to go. If you are following a national trail then you will get acorn signs, but these can be patchy and obviously no use when you are coming off the national trail. It is probably worth creating your own GPX file for your route (and may be plan B, C, D options) which you download on your watch and also on a phone app like OSMaps. But also familiarise yourself with the route on a paper map and perhaps take the map (and a compass) along too and know how to use them. You need to be familiar enough with the route and able to navigate well enough to be able to change where you are going it in case of emergency, bad weather, or when you've just had enough.

Safety

This is a very important part of your planning and preparation. Unlike in a race - where there are people monitoring your tracker and can call in rescue - if you break your ankle or fall and hit your head on a rock on a trail in the dark, you could be there a long time before anyone found you.

Make sure you have the right skills and experience to take on the challenge you are planning. If your route involves scrambling or an exposed ridge, make sure you have been on similar terrain before and ensure the conditions are safe for you to go ahead. Tell people where you are going and what time you are expecting to be back. Plan your contacts and have plan Bs (and Cs and Ds). Taking a bivi bag, and anything that will help you survive the wait while rescue gets to you is very important but ideally do not put yourself in a situation where you might need one. Prevention and preparation are best! There is a reason why on self-supported long races like the Spine participants have to carry so much mandatory kit.

Please take a look at [this](#) which is by mountain rescue about how to stay safe on the hills.

Also, if you are in more built up areas you might want to plan to avoid going through them at night.

[Renting a tracker](#) is one way of improving safety since other people (that you tell) can see where you are. It comes at a cost but not very expensive (into ultra may be able to get one free for you).

You also need to make sure you can call/message others in the case of an emergency or book last minute accommodation if plans change.

- You can use a mobile phone in most areas in the UK but be careful with your mobile phone battery and carry a power bank. You might check phone coverage as part of your planning
- If you are in more remote areas without mobile phone coverage then you can use a device that communicates via satellite like a Garmin InReach. Into ultra can lend you one if you need it.

It's always good to have a navigation app on the phone too. OS maps are great as a back-up if your watch fails. Make sure you download the relevant maps *before* you leave.

One key element of safety is being able and willing to change your route in case of a problem - taking too long, twisted ankle, weather turned bad. Getting home safe and sound must be the number one priority.

The mental challenge

This can be one of the hardest aspects of a DIY. People who have done 100 mile races can find solo DIYs on shorter routes harder. These might be some of the reasons:

- An unmarked route adds to the mental load, particularly in the early hours

- You're on your own much more
- There isn't the regular lift from checkpoints if you are having a tough time
- The route is more likely to have practical problems than a well-planned race route such as some very muddy flooded stream crossings or fenced off public footpaths

Though for some, these are the attractions of DIYs.

Podcasts, music and audiobooks could be your best friend to getting through the tougher times but make sure you can still hear what's ahead or behind you. You'd want to see and hear incoming dog walkers, cyclists, and traffic.

Or, if you don't fancy the solo aspect then take a friend along - who is also up for the challenge.

What to carry

What to carry depends on the route, time of year, possible weather, type of terrain (and obviously whether you are camping). Generally you want a more 'defensive' kit list than you'd take for a planned race in similar terrain particularly since you cannot rely on the checkpoint or a drop bag to top up what you are carrying. Some of the extra things you might think of carrying compared to a race are:

- spare top and bottom to wear overnight - one way is to use your emergency base layers overnight and put your smelly (and may be wet) running gear back on in the morning
- a good first aid kit, with K tape and blister packs
- a power bank with cables to recharge your phone and watch
- a few cable ties and a metre of duck tape (wound on an old credit card) is always handy for repairs
- a toothbrush and little toothpaste
- a way of filtering water

One option to reduce the amount you carry particularly on longer DIYs is to deliver parcels to where they are staying along the route. Or you stash kit along the route in advance which you pick up as you progress (you need to put it all in something that keeps the critters out). You can also post kit that is wet and used back along the way (use pre-paid parcels).

Research

Finally, read and read. Listen and listen. The more you find out about the route and how others went about doing it, the more prepared you can be! There is always something you wouldn't think about! Learn from other people's mistakes. And once you have done it, share your knowledge and experience with others. Often much of the fun is in the planning.

Into Ultra's support

We'd like to support our runners with your DIY adventures and FKTs as much as we do with events. So if cost or kit is a barrier, do talk to us about your plans and we'll try and help as much as we can. Or if you just want a sounding board for ideas or a bit of advice drop us a message.

Good luck!