

Short introduction to hill running

What is Hill Running?

Hill running (also called “fell running” when you are south of the Border) is quite simply about running over the hills, moors and mountains of Scotland and beyond. It often takes you off the paths and into wild, unspoilt and beautiful terrain; it can be as much about the places it takes you as the physical challenge of doing it. It demands respect for this environment, as well as a common sense approach to the risks that can be involved in venturing off the beaten track.

What are the different types of Hill Races?

Hill races are organised all year round and in all parts of Scotland, and can range from a short climb on tracks to the top of a hill to long circuits involving a series of climbs and often calling for navigation through rough, pathless terrain.

This website contains a comprehensive chronological listing of hill races in Scotland, giving the key details for each one, including date, location, details on how to enter, and contact details for the race organizer. It also gives the length of each race and the total amount of ascent that is involved. It is also very important to note the race categories, which subdivide the races by length and by difficulty, as follows:

Length

- Category **S** (short) is 10km or less
- Category **M** (medium) is over 10km but less than 20km
- Category **L** (long) is 20km or over

Difficulty

Category A

- Should average not less than 50m of climb per km, and not have more than 20% of race distance on road.

Category B

- Should average not less than 25m of climb per km, and not more than 30% on road.

Category C

- Should average not less than 20m of climb per km, and not more than 40% on road.

As an example, the Ben Nevis Race has the category “AM”, because it is 14km long and has 96m of climb per km.

If you are a beginner wanting to take part in a Hill Race, then you would be well advised to start with a short, relatively easy race – this means a category “BS” or “CS”. Once you have done one or two of these, then you can begin to try longer and harder races.

It’s also important to note that there are minimum age limits for many races, so if you under 18 you need to check these carefully before you enter.

What kit do you need?

The kit you need for hill running is fairly basic, and much the same as you need for running on the roads, but there are some differences. The first is that you will need some hill shoes (though trail shoes may do for easier races in good weather). These need to have robust uppers and good grip on the soles and are best purchased from a specialist retailer. As for clothing, in addition to your normal running kit you’ll need windproof and/or waterproof “full body cover” (that means a jacket and overtrousers), as well as a hat and gloves. Many races, usually the longer ones, also demand that you carry a map, whistle and compass. Plus you’ll need a waistpack, or “bumbag”, to carry this equipment.

Safety on the hills

There are risks involved in hill running, so it’s important to take safety precautions, but these are quite straightforward. You need to think about the weather, check the forecast and bear in mind that it can be wetter and colder on the hills than in the valley, and carry extra clothing. You should take a whistle with you at all times, and a mobile phone is advisable though bear in mind you might not get reception. Unless you are in an area you know well, you should take a map and compass and know how to use them – it’s also always a good idea to plan your route in advance and let someone know where you are going and for how long. You should also carry water and food appropriate to the length and difficulty of your run and the weather conditions.

There’s much more information on all aspects of hill running, as well as the work of Scottish Hill Runners, on this website, so take time to browse the site. Meantime, enjoy the hills!