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NUTRITION

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How to Build Up to 100km

LINO LOPES

## From Fat to Phat

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Photo: Alexis Berg

# HOW TO BUILD UP TO 100KM

BY BEN DUFFUS

**A**re you ready for a 100km trail run? With enough determination, you might be able to complete this arduous feat, as early as tomorrow. But chances are that it wouldn't be a particularly enjoyable experience, and could even lead to injury. To avoid this, let's take a closer look at what it would take to arrive at the start line confident in your ability to complete such a daunting distance.

Extending your weekly long run will be the most crucial step in your preparation. Let's say, currently, your weekly long runs are 2h long — a gradual progression to 4h would involve lengthening the run by (on average) 15min each week (perhaps intermixed with an easier week every 4-5 weeks, to help your body absorb the training). Hence, the buildup would take around 6-10 weeks, and then regular 4h runs would ideally be sustained for at least another 4-6 weeks. And, preferably, a few 5-6h runs 3-5 weeks before the event would be wise, but may not fit into your

busy schedule.

In an ideal world, your long runs would all be done on the actual course you're training for. Although this is not usually possible, still, aim to mimic your race course in your long runs — a good place to start would be matching the amount of elevation change per kilometre. If, for example, your target race has 4,000m of vertical in 100km, then in your long runs aim for 400m of vertical per 10km.

Chances are you'll be hiking a lot of your race (especially if it's hilly), so make sure you practice your fast hiking during your long runs. This is also the time to perfect your race day's nutrition plan.

Are you currently doing any speed-work? If you are simply looking to complete a 100km race, getting in adequate long runs should be (just) enough, but if instead you're looking to come close to your full potential, then speed-work is an absolute

must. It will not only improve your ability to sustain faster paces, but will also teach you to run on sore and tired legs.

Laying a speed-base will take 8-12 weeks, and in the beginning the emphasis will be on 1-5min repetitions: For example, six 3min-long hard efforts, with 2min recovery. This type of exhausting work may enhance your VO2 max (the trainability of which varies among individuals, but is likely to improve in runners who have never done this type of training before) and has also been shown to improve running economy (meaning that it'll take less effort to run at a given pace).

Once the base is laid, it's time to move on to 8-12 weeks of more race-specific tempo sessions — involving upwards of 30min of steady running with only short recovery periods. An example of this type of session is three 15min-long comfortably hard efforts, with a 3min jog between repetitions. This period will get you used to the struggles of being out of your comfort zone for extended

periods of time and will increase your sustainable aerobic pace.

Does your goal race contain hills or stairs? Many Asian trail races do! Just as with speed-work, first you must spend 8-12 weeks building up strength with short, fast hill-work (like 10 2min hill repeats with an easy jog back down) before moving on to another 8-12 weeks focused on long, sustained climbs.

If you only have access to small hills, don't worry! Because not only should you work on your ability to run up hills, but must equally address your ability to descend them. It is the descents that blow runners' quads in hilly races, due to the increased eccentric loading. So even if your target race is flat, downhill training is great for strengthening your legs. However, this type of training is quite intense and needs to be eased into gradually, and should only be sustained for a maximum of six weeks during peak training. Given you only have access to a hill that takes you 7min to ascend, an example session would be to run hard up and down this hill, twice (in roughly 20-25min), then to take a 5min jog

recovery at the bottom, and then to repeat.

OK, you've done your long runs, improved your speed, and conditioned your legs for both uphill and downhill running? Now all that's left is another 2-3 weeks of tapering before your race, to absorb all of the hard training you've done, leaving you feeling fresh at the start line. During the taper phase, keep the quality of training up (i.e., keep doing some form of speed-work), but gradually reduce the overall volume of training to sufficiently recover for race day.

There you have it! Depending on your current level of training, and goals for the race, you are probably looking at 3-6 months of training to properly develop all the necessary energy systems, physical strength, and psychological grit for the rigours of a 100km trail race. The journey may not be easy, but the reward will be worth it! 🏆

*Ben is an elite ultra marathon runner with podium finishes all around the globe. If you want help pursuing your trail running goals, he also offers online coaching at [www.mile27.com.au](http://www.mile27.com.au).*

**EXTENDING  
YOUR  
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Photo: Alexis Berg

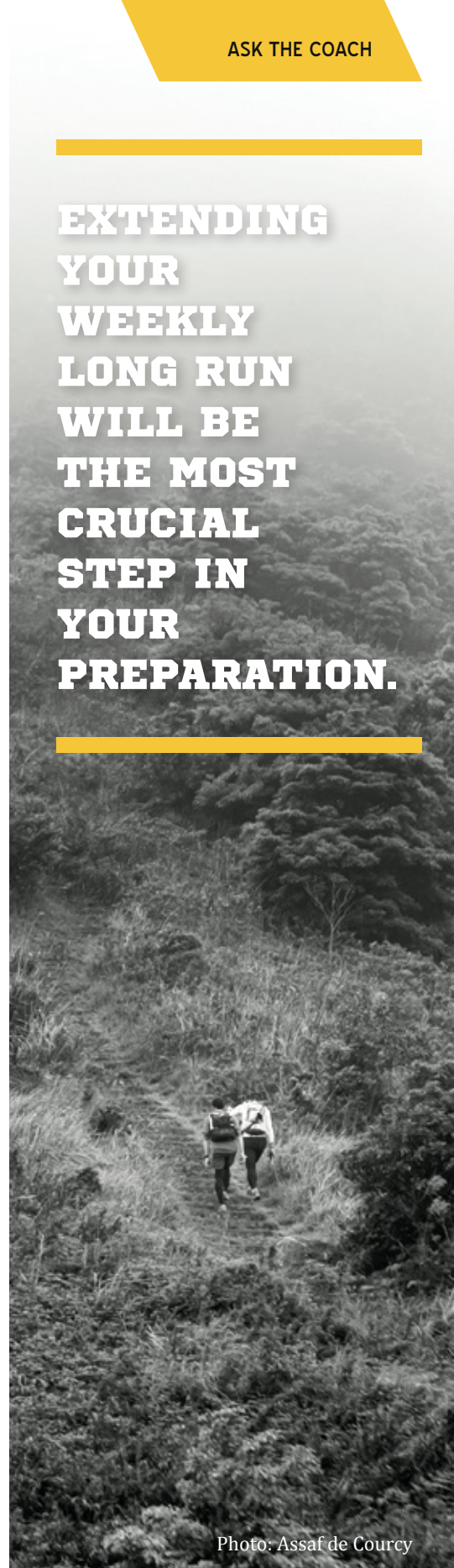


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