



Hill Running

By Graham Hand & the coaching team at Up Coaching

Recently, over the usual post training session latte/honey brew at our local 2773 (where all the world's problems are discussed), the topic of conversation turned to hill running: how to take them on; when to run; when to walk and so on. We all loathe hills, and if you say you love them apparently, you're a sadist, but regardless, I thought I would share some of the dos and don'ts of taking on the little ones, the mid-size and the big boys – both up and down.

First, let's dispel the myth that you get good at hills by dead lifting, squats, box jumps and burpees. Sure, these exercises are great for building muscles, and a great gym routine mixed in with a tailored program will help you strengthen your body and sort out imbalances, but to get better on hills you need practice and adaptation. Embracing the hills is a term that comes from accepting your fate. You are at the bottom and need to get to the top, or you are at the top and need to get to the bottom. In this series of blog posts, we will take you through technique, tactics, and racing to help you become a hill master.

Uphill

The moment you face upward or downward on a hill your body position will naturally change. The moment you become slanted on an incline it will alter your stance and foot strike, forcing you to hit in the middle of the foot and begin to engage different muscle groups in order to keep your momentum going.

- One thing for sure the moment you hit any incline on top of the body adjusting to its position your heart rate will increase.
- Ideally, we want to do the following
 - Keep a nice tall posture
 - Keep eyes forward and chin up
 - Keep arm swing in a forwards and backwards motion
 - Use the Glutes (Imagine Holding onto a Hundred Dollar bill in between your Cheeks)
 - Shorten the stride
 - Increase the cadence
 - Breath steadily
- Typically, when we hit an incline the body naturally leans forward, by all means we need a forward lean but we want to avoid the following
 - Leaning too far forward
 - Putting head down
 - Slouching
 - Holding onto your Knees (if you are walking)
 - Holding your breath

There is no rule of thumb to say you must "RUN THE HILLS!" but the more you practice going up and down the less likely you will walk them. The term "Embrace the Hills" is a very good analogy to take on in training to see to it within a Race that you can pull the old chestnut "It's just a Hill" out the repertoire.

That being said there is a few different approaches that could be more tactical then technique.

Tactics

- 50/50 which in itself is self-explanatory. Run Half and Walk the rest or vice versa.
- 1 Min Run 1 Min walk, which is a good method for fatigued legs or someone who skipped out Hill training on their program.
- Point and Promise, this method generally breaks up the hill into segments, you look at a landmark like a tree and promise yourself from that point I will run to the next landmark and so on until the hill is done.
- Blind Freddy, this one is dangerous to all but essentially the blinders are put on and you just go for it.
- Slow and Steady, this by far is the most sensible approach a controlled measured ascent is partaken and the body will thank you for it at the top.
- Power Walker, this one can sometimes beat someone running but as the name would suggest powering up the hill walking is as taxing if not more that Slow and Steady.
- Usain Bolt, this one is ridiculous and unless a Strava segment is to be crowned upon your head this one should be avoided at all costs. There is no time for a foot race on a hill plain and simple.
- Backwards Walking, Ok so what goes up must come down but reverse is a faster gear right? Wrong, walking backwards will blow up your calves' big time and fire your glutes into outer space. Practice this in training by all means, but it should be only used in strength training like RunFit.

Hill Types

First the little ones, of course it will depend on where you are in the race but the simple trick on the little ones is to get them over and done with quick, just tell it you're not even a hill and before you finish the sentence you are done and dusted with the little sucker.

The next one is the teenage hill, it's not quite a small one but it's not that grown up either. These ones should be given a little respect but not too much or they will walk right over you rather than the other way around. The best trick for the teenagers split it into two and imagine you are running through it and not over it. Just like a teenager if you give it a little respect you will get some back. The trick with these types is to accelerate at the crest so you are running over it and have momentum on your side at the top.

The next one is the Adult hill this one cannot be taken lightly, you need to put them muscles to work for this one. If the incline is steep but runnable don't go jumping out the blocks. Keep a steady pace, control the breathing keep the posture tall and crank out them mantras to calm the mind.

Some good mantras to work with are as follows.

- It's just a hill, it's just a hill (Keep cadence in line with the words)
- I know I can, I know I can (Keep cadence in line with the words)
- Light feet, light feet, Light Feet (Keep cadence in line with the words)
- It's not a hill it is a mound of opportunity
- If you can take it you can make it
- Just keep running, just keep running (Keep cadence in line with the words)
- Hills pay the bills
- Suck it up BUTTER CUP

Lastly is the Grandfather, unlike the Adult this one demands total respect, you must kneel and pray for forgiveness, simply looking up and the Grand Daddy gives you a shudder, somewhere up in the clouds is the top of it, but be not afraid for it has a summit. These ones need all systems firing, mind and body must be as one, breathing should be controlled, and cadence consistent and legs/arm turn over should be measured. Do not enter too fast or change any speed, stick to low gear, shorten the stride, smile big breath in and grind away. Once you see daylight you can accelerate over the top but don't be fooled by a switch back. Some of these Grand Parents like to teach us lessons, beware of the left and right hand switch back which introduces a couple of teenagers and young kids in the mix to toy with your emotions. The best approach other than aerial surveillance and course profiles is checking the tree line and pitch.

Downhill

Ok so as Galileo says what goes up must come down. There are 3 types of downhill runners and really the best approach you may be surprised to learn is one you have had since you learnt to walk.

It is fair to say that one thing downhill runners have on their side is gravity, in theory you could be twice as quick coming down if you run at your maximum potential. This will vary amongst runners but can be used as a rule of thumb.

Runner 1: Nervous Nancy

Nancy likes to slow it down to almost a walk and not tread too much as the feet might splay, a tilt backwards is always done and the constant correction and slipping is witnessed. This type of approach is sensible to a degree but certainly will slow you down and could actually put you and everyone else at risk. Leaning backwards will see you lose footing very quickly and you need to make sure you stay upright. If you want to slow down in Nancy mode you need to go into a squat or seated like position to slow the descent as opposed to leaning back.

Runner 2: Crop Duster

This pilot's motive is to go down in a zig zag like approach winding their way down the hill in an unpredictable and uncanny approach to descent. This type of runner is careless on the Trail and also can do themselves harm pretty fast, moving in opposite directions on the downhill puts stress on the body and often they get to the bottom and onto the flat and have spent all their efforts staying upright their quads and calves are screaming blue murder.

Runner 3: The Child

The child you guessed it should be copied and mimicked in every way. If you have witnessed a kid take on a downhill then you will see the best approach to not only looking after your body but also how to correctly descend in both style and speed. Yes, you are correct the child has not been taught right or wrong they go with the flow, arms are wide, they lift their knees and the feet are falling well behind the Centre of mass like water flowing down a drain. Most of all they are fearless and free and make use of the free energy like a pro.

So, whichever one you are the Goal is to get down in one piece and don't change your method on Race Day. IE if you have trained conservatively then you should go bombing down the hill on Race Day as your muscles will not be conditioned to the impact and will be very unforgiving once the load is taken off at the bottom.

If you would like to speak to myself or any of the UP Coaching coaches about UTA and/or your training please email graham@upcoaching.com.au or brendan@upcoaching.com.au or check out the website www.upcoaching.com.au