

TACH Leading and Attending Runs

'Open runs' and 'Pod runs' are our current club running format.

Open runs involve a run leader leading a group from a location of their choice on a run of a distance and route of their choice. Where possible a Long and a Short run will be offered and the start/finish will be at a pub. No sign up is required and runs are open to non-members on a 'try before your buy' basis.

Pod runs allow more flexibility if the runleader or route constrains the numbers. Pod run sign up options are listed in a spreadsheet which is available via the members Facebook page and is also emailed out to members periodically. Unfortunately only members can join Pod runs.

For both runners and leaders always keep in mind that TACH is an inclusive club. If you ever have any concerns before or during a run do communicate this with the run leader so they can make adaptations to the run if needed e.g. drop of pace.

Leading a Run

Within the club there is a huge amount of knowledge about the local terrain which is shared freely, mostly by members volunteering to lead runs. BUT – TACH runs only happen if we have volunteers! If you haven't led a run yet, why not give it a go? Here's some guidance on how to go about it. If you want any additional guidance or advice do approach a more experienced run leader and they will be more than happy to help!

Select a location with or without a pub with adequate parking for the number of pod runners. This has traditionally been anywhere within a 40 minute radius of Bristol but with pod runs and smaller groups travelling this could be further afield if there is interest. Decide on a date – you might want to look at the spreadsheet first to see what else is going on. Pod runs can be held on any day of the week and at any time of the day. Open Runs are held on Thursdays starting at 19:00 sharp.

You can stick to home turf or explore somewhere new: as well as picking favourite paths, some people chose themes such as a seasonal bluebell run, a dramatic view, or a run to a monument on an auspicious date. Get out and recce the course with a buddy if you need to; rights of way can change or be blocked, and the course may be impassable in certain conditions e.g. heavy rain may make streams unfordable or heavy ground a bog.

The run leader can select a smaller number than the maximum the spreadsheet allows for their Pod run if they feel more confident with a smaller group or if they feel conditions require e.g. the run passes through a busy area.

Add your run to the spreadsheet. Give an estimate of distance, terrain and include any other information you think might help your fellow runners get the most out of the run e.g. very boggy, very hilly, best parking etc. Confirm if there is a pub after and if you need to book you could request that anyone who isn't attending the pub lets you know in advance so that you can you book for the correct number. If there is anything about the pub that runners might need to know it's also worth including that information e.g. 'furry friends not allowed' or 'no food available'.

Count heads before you set off. If you need the runners to stand still while you do it, tell them. It's all about communication: shout if you need! For runs of greater than 6 you might want to consider appointing a backmarker to head of the back of the group to ensure no one drops off the back or pops off to look at a llama and doesn't make it back to the group. Allow for a range of speeds attending your

run and encourage sheepdogging where required. Sheepdogging is when faster runners run ahead to the next waypoint and then loop back to the back of the group so the group stays together (and they can show off how fast they are) and everyone keeps moving.

'OK let's go'.

'Diagonally right across the field and come back from the stile'

'Sheepdog';

'No, the other right';

'Regroup';

'Heads';

'Gate please';

'Watch your feet here';

'Log'.

If you have one, talk to your backmarker and do a headcount every time you do a regroup (and when to regroup is your decision). Keep talking. It's your run and people will look to you to do it consistently. If in doubt, talk to another experienced group member.

What if something goes wrong? Although it's unlikely (touch wood!), we've had the odd injury over the years: knee injuries, twisted ankles or a dog gone missing. There sometimes first aiders, GPs or vets on the runs, so ask around. Carrying a mobile phone is a good idea, coverage can't always be guaranteed in rural areas (different networks can be very different, so try someone else's phone if necessary). Assess the injury and the impact on the group. For example, we had someone turn an ankle on top of the Mendips in cold conditions. One of the group members walked with him to a location where he could get a lift back to the pub and the other runners carried on. You don't want people standing round in the cold. Decide what you think is best for the group, not what the individual wants to do. Ask other experienced run leaders on your run for help if you need support in making a decision.

What if you lose someone? In the unlikely instance of this happening, don't panic - you need to consider the facts. Does the person know the area well? What are conditions like? When were they seen last? You will need to make a decision based on the facts: do some people go back and everyone else waits, or does the group go on and a couple of people go back to find them? As above, do ask other experienced run leaders on your run for help if you need support in making a decision. As a runner - if you are going to pop away from the group always let another runner know. If you do end up lost and suddenly can't see the group, stop and wait!

Once back at the finish location, do a final headcount to make sure everyone is back then you can sign-off for the night, have a well-deserved drink if you are ending in a pub and soak in the plaudits of your fellow runners and pick your next location for the run list.

Attending a Run

Where do you run? How long are the runs?

TACH covers a wide area, centred on Bristol, with a mix of runs in the "town" and the "country". Runs are typically within a 10-mile radius of the centre, although the pubs have been as far north as Dursley, as far east as Marshfield, as far south as Chewton Mendip, and as far west as Clevedon. The main runs are typically 6.5 to 8 miles and there is normally a short run option, typically 4 to 5 miles.

What time do you start? What time do you finish?

Unless otherwise noted on the website and weekly e-mail, runs start at 19:00 sharp. It's a good idea to try to arrive by 18:50, as parking can be a challenge at some pubs. If you are new to TACH, then it also gives you time to introduce yourself to the run leaders. Short runs normally finish by 20:15, with long runs back by around 20:45.

How much does it cost?

There is a modest annual fee to join TACH, but there is no charge for the our weekly runs.

Why do you normally meet at pubs? Is there food?

Because they sell beer and cider. Next question...

Where possible, the run leaders try to ensure that post-run food is available, but this can't be guaranteed. Details are normally posted in the e-mail announcing the weekly run. Many pubs help us by allowing pre-ordering.

Do I need a map?

Maps are not needed. The run leader will have tested the route and we run as a group, sheepdogging as necessary to keep everyone together. Mapping and a mobile phone can be beneficial for safety if you are able to carry them.

What do I need to bring?

Normal trail running kit, plus a headtorch with decent batteries is all that's needed. Hi-visibility clothing, such as a reflective vest or tabard, is encouraged in the darker months. For the feet, a decent pair of trail shoes is pretty much essential. If you are new to trail running and only have road shoes, bring your shiniest, newest shoes, rather than an old pair with worn-out soles. Most TACH members will be only to keen to engage in a pub-debate about the best shoes.

Remember that conditions out on the trail, especially on higher and more-exposed ground such as Dundry, can be noticeably colder, wetter and windier than in the city, so a hat or buff, gloves and a decent microfibre windproof (which is easy to carry if not needed) are a really good idea. Waterproofs are worn in the worst weather, although overtrousers are a very rare sight. Packs are not needed – the people sporting them are normally super-keenies training for mountain marathons.

Except on the balmiest of summer evenings, you are unlikely to need to carry water, but if you do, a waist-mounted bottle is much better than a held-held bottle, which can unbalance you on tricky sections. Most runners prefer to run without water and to work-up a decent thirst for the pub.

Post-run, apart from beer money, it's a good idea to have a small towel to wipe-off the inevitable mud and sweat, and to have a fleece/sweatshirt to wear as you cool down. Please respect the pubs hosting us, and as a minimum, take some clean footwear. Bear in mind that the changing facilities will often be behind a car at the side of a road, although this doesn't stop some people having a squaddie's shower and slipping into a full change of clothes. The most common post-run outfit is a TACH hoodie, jeans and trainers.

Can I bring my dog?

Dog-compatibility is dependent on the route (stiles, fences, local byelaws) and how well behaved your dog is. It's always best to check with the run leader in advance.

I've not run off-road in the dark before. How hard is it?

All of the runs vary, so it's difficult to define "hard". If in doubt, consider a trial night run, on a route you know very well, with a friend, before joining a run. This will also shake out any headtorch problems. For your first TACH run, pick the shorter option.

I'm trying to get fit. Can I join the runs?

TACH has a broad mix of members ranging from "elites" through to slower runners, or people recovering from injury, but is primarily a club for experienced and enthusiastic trail runners. Whilst we always ensure that non-one gets left behind, it's not fair on your fellow runners if they have long periods of waiting at each "regroup". If you want to start running, we'd recommend attending a beginner's course or doing some training until you can run a flat on-road 5 km (or more) at a 12-minute mile pace, and have tried some daylight trail running.

Do I have to lead runs?

Everyone is encouraged to do their bit and to lead runs, and it is great fun introducing people to your favourite run (and pub), but it's not compulsory. If you need more information, chat to the RunMeister or some recent run leaders in the pub. Someone else might be wavering about leading a run, so why not buddy-up and plan a route together?

Original: February 2015 (FAQs) and May 2021 (leading)

Consolidated: September 2022