

ACTIVE II

RUNNING WILD UNDER DARK SKIES

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PHOTOS courtesy of Stuart Lessels



Exmoor is a trail runners' playground, its varied landscapes making for an amazing environment in which to immerse yourself and enjoy a truly wild running experience – from the rugged and beautiful South West Coast Path, to the wide-open trails around Dunkery Beacon on the Holnicote Estate; from the wooded valleys of Horner Water and the East Lyn, to the wild and remote moorland of the Chains and the romantic Doone Valley. And, whether it's a swift 5km or an ultra-marathon you're after, you can plan the adventure that suits you!

For many, running happens when the days are longest and the weather friendly but don't hibernate your running this winter; get out there and explore this fantastic landscape after dark and throw yourself into a whole new world of adventure. Exmoor National Park was Europe's first designated Dark Skies Reserve so what better place than here to experience the thrill of trail running at night!?

SO WHY RUN AFTER DARK?

There are many reasons to hit the trails after nightfall and many benefits of doing so. Firstly, you'll find the trails much quieter, with the majority of other trail users sticking to daylight hours. You'll see and hear a variety of wildlife, much of which is nocturnal.

With the reduced number of other trail users and the quieter Exmoor roads at this hour you'll find yourself immersed in a surreal environment where your senses are heightened; the sounds of the nocturnal wildlife, the river raging through the valley and the wind in the trees will mean you can leave your headphones behind and listen to Exmoor's very own playlist.

With the only visibility coming from the light of your head torch you'll find your running improves as you gain more confidence. You'll relax into the environment and deal with the technicality of the trail as it unfolds in front of you.

DO I NEED ANY SPECIALIST EQUIPMENT?

If you are already an experienced trail runner, you'll have most of the required equipment. If not, then you'll need a good pair of trail shoes with suitable tread to give you grip, a wind/waterproof top, appropriate running clothing for the weather and the lower temperatures at night and it's worth carrying fluids, snacks, mobile phone, a map (paper or electronic), hat and gloves, basic first-aid kit and an emergency thermal blanket/survival bag. You may not carry all of this on your daytime runs, but you need to be mindful that you are entering a remote environment where meeting others will be unlikely should you get into trouble.

The most important piece of equipment is a head torch with a minimum of 250 lumens of power. If you are serious about running at night, do your research and purchase a good-quality head torch with a good battery life. If rechargeable, make sure its fully charged for every run; if it takes batteries make sure you carry spares. The last thing you want is to be mid-run, in the middle of nowhere and lose your only light source. A head torch is highly recommended over a chest torch or handheld as the beam of light will shine in the direction you are looking, making route finding much easier and keeping your hands free.

WHAT SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS DO I NEED TO THINK ABOUT?

Never run alone – make sure you have a buddy or buddies to run with. Even in the current coronavirus situation you can still keep socially distant and enjoy a run with others.

Make sure someone at home knows where you are running and what time to expect you back. If you have phone signal, communicate to those at home when you start your run and when you finish.

Your route should have public access or permission from the landowner.

Be equipped for the run you have planned, taking into account the length, the terrain, the remoteness and the weather.

Know how many there are in your group and make regular checks that all members are present and ok.

WHAT NEXT?

You'll have seen the amazing pictures in print and online and you may have the confidence to explore and that's awesome. If, however, you and your running buddies don't have the confidence to head out into the wilds of Exmoor alone then there are a number of ways to gain the experience and confidence to enjoy trail running at night. Join a club and head out with the groups that night run, employ a coach/guide to take you out and develop your skills, enter your local night-running events or a combination of these.

If you are interested in night-running events, then check out Channel Events. We are a local Community Interest Company based in Minehead, 'gateway to Exmoor'. We have a passion for the National Park and exposing more people to its beauty through organised events. We run the Dark Skies Series of 5km and 10km night-trail running fixtures.

Five of the events in the Dark Skies Series are based either within the National Park at stunning venues like Heddon's Mouth, Watersmeet and Selworthy Beacon or just on the fringes at Fyne Court on the Quantock Hills and Baggy Point on the North Devon coast.

Channel Events CIC is a National Park Partner and minimising the environmental impact of our events lies at the forefront of what we do. We achieve this through sustainable initiatives like re-useable signage, compostable products and reducing our carbon footprint.

As for taking part... it's not about racing but about having fantastic and challenging experiences in great locations. Interested? See our website – channelevents.co.uk – and get your entry in for one of our events today. So, what are you waiting for? Grab those trail shoes, strap on that head torch and turn your trail running into a year-round passion.



DARK SKIES SERIES DATES

Moonlit Meadow Run, Taunton
31 October 2020

Heddon Howler, Heddon Valley
14 or 21 November 2020

Selworthy Stargazer, Minehead
19 December 2020

Storm the Fort, Brean Down
16 January 2021

Assault of Baggy Point, Croyde
13 February 2021

Waters Meet, Lynmouth
13 March 2021

One Fyne Night, Broomfield
10 April 2021

DARK SKIES SERIES PRICES

Individual Event Ticket Price: £19.50
Somerset Mini Series (4 events): £70.00
Devon Mini Series (3 events): £52.50
Whole Series (7 events): £122.50

WIN A PETZL HEAD TORCH!

We've teamed up with Taunton Leisure to give away two Petzl Tikkin head torches. To be in with a chance of winning, head over to the Channel Events Facebook page for full competition details (facebook.com/ChannelEventsUK). The competition goes live on 15 August and will run until 31 August.