

Terrain Trouble

By Paula Shingler, BSc, MCSP

Australian bush can be very testing on the body. Any event can have you scrambling over logs, negotiating prickly bushes, fighting thick ferns, wobbling over boulder fields, straddling rocks, puffing up steep ascents and careering down steep descents - and combinations of all these. It is little wonder that after a weekend orienteering you can feel like every muscle, tendon ligament and joint has been tested to its maximum. All this does leave us in a vulnerable position, at risk of injury and of having an accident. I thought it would be a good opportunity to have a look at a few strategies to adapt or add to your training to prepare your poor body for the onslaught of our

Basics for negotiating the rough stuff

unforgiving bush and so minimising injury and accident.

In my view to survive terrain you need:

- Ankle stability
- Knee stability
- Quadriceps (thigh) strength
- Core stability
- Good technique
- Confidence

Let's have a look at these in some more detail.

Obviously if it is rough underfoot then the first part of the body to notice will be the foot and ankle. Maintaining ankle strength and proprioception (balance ability) is crucial. If you do tend to have ankle issues then some daily ankle exercises will only help. Please, please do not solely rely on firm strapping. Doing this only weakens the ankle as the strapping will limit normal muscle action and normal flexibility and will cause increased strain up to the knee, hip and even the low back. A few simple exercises are standing on one leg, hopping and tip-toeing - a few minutes spent doing these will very quickly tune up your ankles - easy to do and really can help.

Thighs and knees take a beating

Thick rough terrain does take it out of the thighs and knees. If you do tend to feel these after an event then

do try some of the quadriceps exercises in the article on thigh strengthening. (**Ed: *How to strengthen your quads when you are way too old for squats, Apr 2014 AO E-News***) Building extra power is only going to help you to get through thick vegetation more easily.

Yep – core strength. Can't get away from it...

I am always mentioning core strength, so no article would be complete without popping it in again! Core stability, or strong inner abdominals, really does assist in thick vegetation or in rough terrain by maintaining balance and providing stability of the pelvis and hips by controlling rotation of these. Core stability exercises are easy to do anywhere and the more you work at strengthening, the better a stabilising effect you will get. The best initial core exercise that I like is this one: Lie on the floor, imagine you are trying to do the zip up on a pair of pants that are actually two sizes too small and pull your abdomen in, hold for a count of 5 and then relax off. Once you have mastered this lying down you can then try it out anywhere - sitting, standing, or even in the supermarket...!

Work on your technique

Having good technique will make a huge difference to your performance. Working on individual areas is really valuable but putting all this together and getting all your limbs co-ordinated really is the key. Lack of co-ordination can result in overuse of one area and potential injury, and under-utilisation of another. To get through thick uneven bush a higher knee lift than usual is the most efficient. To achieve this it is good to work on that thigh strength but compliment this by practising and over emphasising knee lift. Incorporate this into your training by doing some high knee drills, steps and hill intervals. This will strengthen the hips and knees for this particular action.

Terrain running is a confidence trick

Confidence in your ability is also really important. Lacking confidence can mean that you tense up when

you encounter forbidding terrain which actually takes up more energy, will take longer - and you are more likely to suddenly stop or trip, potentially leading to an accident or injury. If you have worked on your strength and technique then your confidence will be boosted. Gain confidence by practising running in terrain. Take it really slowly and think about your high knee lift, relaxing your shoulders, using your core muscles - practising these in training will mean that in an event you will confidently plough your way through with an efficient technique that you have taught your body to adapt.

So I guess I advise working on a few specifics if you know you have a weakness, then gaining confidence by practising technique. Being able to get through terrain easily is a huge advantage in orienteering. Getting stuck in thick green does unfortunately happen, but being stronger and more confident will help you to emerge from it unscathed - I guess the only other option is to carry a machete with you so you can hack your way out!

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