



WHY HAVE MANDATORY GEAR

**By Lucas Trihey, Event Safety and Medical Coordinator
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The list of mandatory gear has been devised and refined by the Race Director, Tom Landon-Smith and myself -the event Safety and Medical Coordinator, Lucas Trihey. Together we have plenty of experience with wilderness adventure in all sorts of weather under both race and non-race conditions. We know how grim it can get and what you'll need to stay safe. I am also involved in search and rescue both commercially and as a volunteer.

The Ultra-Trail Australia mandatory gear list contains what we believe is the bare minimum to keep you safe and well if you are delayed for some reason during the event. Obviously if the weather is good and if you don't get injured then you won't use most of your mandatory gear. However the mandatory gear is required so that if you do get injured or exhausted and are immobilised, if you get lost, or if the weather turns nasty you will be able to survive until you can be rescued.

The mandatory gear has nothing to do with insurance company or other bureaucratic pressures – it is a simple, practical measure to keep participants safe.

WEATHER

If you haven't been in the Blue Mountains in bad weather it might be hard to imagine just how ugly it can get - windy, cold and wet – often all at the same time. Remember that Katoomba is 1000m (3000') above sea level. Google "wind chill factor" and see just how cold you'll get if it's windy as well as cold. Then take a few more degrees off if it is also wet. Then add to this the fatigue of running a long distance with reduced energy intake and you won't have much energy left to burn to maintain your body temperature. In this case you will need every bit of your mandatory gear to keep warm.

The consequences can be dire if you are immobilised or caught in bad weather without appropriate gear. If you roll an ankle, can't move to keep warm and don't have enough clothing to wear to maintain your body temperature you'll be dangerously hypothermic in under 30 minutes. In all events from 2008 to 2015, we've been lucky with pretty mild weather conditions for the race. Yet even when conditions are good we still get many calls to evacuate people with a combination of hypothermia and fatigue. I have spent much of the event nights answering phone calls from people who pushed themselves past their limits and who needed evacuation. Usually I have been able to get a medical team straight to them, bundle them into a 4WD and evacuate them to the nearest checkpoint. Despite the quick response and the mild weather we have still had numerous hypothermia cases that



required prolonged nursing to restore a normal body temperature and in 2010 we had a runner who needed ambulance care and hospitalisation for his hypothermia. He had been found lying on the trail, vomiting and lapsing into unconsciousness. All this when conditions were relatively warm!

If we get any combination of wet, cold or windy weather it's likely the Medical Teams will get lots of requests for help and there might be lengthy delays until we can evacuate everyone. In this case you need to be able to look after yourself to stay warm until evacuated. This is what your mandatory gear is for. We want you to put on all your gear, use your emergency blanket and even light a small fire to keep warm until we can reach you. Your gear might also be used to help care for someone else you come across.

KEEPING IT FAIR

It would be nice to think that we could leave it to participants to self-regulate and select appropriate gear for the conditions but many participants would simply not know the danger they'd be placing themselves in if they went too light. As long as everyone carries the gear it's fair so random gear checks are a feature of Ultra-Trail Australia. We'd like to think that as well as seeing the sense in carrying the mandatory gear for your own safety, you will also keep to the spirit of the event and will carry the required gear just like everyone else.