



# RUNNING IN THE DARK or NOT!

By Peter Watson

Running at night can be a great experience or a scary one; choosing the right gear for the job takes some research. Here's some tips to help you decide what to bring to the Fat Dog trail race.

## ***Where will you be running at nightfall?***

Choosing the right headlamp involves knowing where and what you will be running through. If I'm running in an open desert with a full moon, I can get away with the smallest light that the market has to offer (e.g., Petzl Zipka, BD Ion, Princeton Tec). In the Fat Dog trail race, for \*most racers, nightfall will happen when you will be in the depths of a coastal rainforest and that means that even with the biggest moon, it will be pitch black.

### \*Location and Night Running in Fat Dog 2010

- 120 mile and relay: nightfall began on Heather Trail (Leg 4) for many. Arrivals at Cayuse Flats (near the end of Leg 4) varied from 19:18 hours to 4:43 a.m. Skagit Valley (heavy tree cover) was next, and then Skyline to the finish.
- 115 km: nightfall began in Skagit Valley (Leg 5) for most; this section has heavy tree cover. Arrivals at Skyline aid station (end of Leg 5) ranged from 20:31 hours to 2:10 a.m.

Although tree cover plays a huge factor, this is not your only factor. What you are running over both in quality of the trail and technicality of the trail should be first and foremost and the Fat Dog races are run on some very technical trails.

The limitations of your lighting choices are as follows:

- burn time of the batteries,
- distance and the power of light (adjustability of the lighting beam)

Let's break down these two things and then I'll disclose my top picks for this race.

## ***Burn time = number one factor***

Burn time is the number one factor. If you have a powerful light and the battery goes kaput, then you are up shit creek without a paddle. This takes practice with your headlamp/torch and planning. If you know your batteries give you top end output for 2 hours, then you need to **estimate spare batteries on the generous side** to know how many you should be running with and where to place spare batteries in drop bags.

## ***Distance and the power of light (adjustable beam lighting)***

A headlamp or torch that has a burst mode, which typically means giving a little more output than what you need to run with, will help you spot the trail if you ever question where the route goes. Headlamps like the Petzl Myo XP have this feature; with the touch of a button, they provide about 20% more output than the highest regular mode. Also a light that provides adjustable beam lighting will be better suited to changing weather conditions. Ever tried to run with a wide beam light in the fog by some water while it's raining? It feels like driving your car in a blizzard with your high beams on. If you have the ability to change your light from a wide beam to a focused beam, then you have a solution to your problem. Practicing with your headlamp/torch and trying various types will make all the difference.

## ***Some Lighting Options***

1. Headlamp only (Petzl Ultra -350 lumens)
2. Running with a hand torch
3. Headlamp and hand torch
4. Headlamp with second headlamp worn around waist or attached to pack like Petzl Myo XP (80 to 150 lumens), Princeton Tec Apex (200 lumens), Black Diamond Icon (100 lumens).

## **Pete's Picks**

1. The **Petzl Ultra** is my solution to all my ultra running races. Once you have tried this headlamp, you will never have to think of what to bring to your next ultra. This headlamp is like running with car lights with the high beams on. At 350 lumens, not much comes close for the weight. Limitations are the cost of both the headlamp and the spare rechargeable batteries of which you might need up to 4 to get through a 10 hour night section. This headlamp provides enough adjustability to allow both perimeter lighting of your feet but also forward lighting to see down the trail for a good couple hundred feet.
2. My previous solution was the **Petzl Myo XP** (85 lumens on max level) on my head **and a Tikka XP** (60 lumens on max level) around my waist. These headlamps have great burn time on AA and AAA batteries, are lightweight and have an adjustable setting which lets you switch the beam between diffused for perimeter lighting and a focused beam. These headlamps both offer a button which can be pressed for up to an 80% increase of light to help guide your way if ever in question of which way to go.

I have never run with a hand torch but know that it is a really popular solution for providing lighting around your feet. But like handheld water bottles, torches are not for everyone.

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*I suggest that a headlamp and a hand torch would be the bare minimum for this race.*

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All manufacturers of headlamps make comparable units to the ones mentioned above and use lumens (the quantity or power of light emitted by the light source, as perceived by the human eye) as a way of comparing them.

All of these headlamps are available at North Shore Athletics and other fine outdoor or running stores.

## **Battery Packs and Lithium Batteries**

Remote battery packs. Both of my picks have options for this, which allow you to carry the battery pack in your pack for less weight on your head.

Lithium batteries. If you can use lithium batteries with your headlamp, this will not only increase burn times but will lighten up what you have to carry.

## **Blind me with your light!**

I hope to be blinded by you as you run into an aid station or cross the finish line. If you blind me, I know that you were able to see confidently throughout your night section.

Peter Watson

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**Skagit Valley**

P.S. What we provide to help you find your way at night:

- 12 hour glowlights,
- reflective strips on flagging and stakes.