

FRA Trial of Trackers - answers to member's questions

Which races are in the trial?	We are pleased to say that the Wasdale fell race in July and the Lake District Mountain Trial in September are the two races in the pilot. They both fit the bill for the type of fell race that we think could use justify the use of trackers in the future, being held in the most mountainous terrain over long distances with the highest risk of runners being lost or injured out of sight of fellow participants or marshals. And with the Mountain Trial not being on a fixed course, the use of trackers makes particular sense from a safety point of view. And by the way, both race organisers were delighted to be contacted to take part in the trial as they had previously been thinking about the benefits of using them.
Are trackers not against the spirit of fell running?	We all love the simplicity of just “running in the fells”, the grass roots nature of our races and undoubtedly want to protect our sport from unnecessary rules, costs and technology. Having said all that, over the years we have embraced technological change where it makes sense – I don’t think many people would want us to delete our race database from the website, return to paper entry forms and cheques and to waiting weeks for race results to come through the post! Sensibly approached, we don’t think using trackers will really be against the spirit of fell running; they won’t be obtrusive, we don’t see them being widely rolled out to lots of races and they don’t move us away from the principle of fell race participants being self-reliant.
Why are we doing the trial now?	As many of you know, this technology has been around for a while now. Indeed, several FRA-licenced races use trackers already. With improvements to mobile phone coverage in the countryside, lower costs and longer battery lives, the technology is becoming more mature and accessible.

	<p>As guardians of the sport, the FRA is mindful of striking a balance between retaining the spirit and low cost of fell running (as per the previous question!), whilst at the same time not being closed to the potential safety benefits.</p> <p>Therefore, on balance, we think the time is right to consider how and where trackers fit in the overall race organiser “armoury”. Also, we are mindful that it would potentially be seen as negligent if we did not consider them, given how widespread their use is at other types of running events.</p>
Trackers are used widely in other running events, why don't you just leave it up to RO's to make the decision if they want to use them, why should the FRA decide?	We don't anticipate the FRA deciding which races use trackers and which do not, although we might in future consider making a recommendation based on the score from the Race Assessment Matrix. This will be looked at as part of reviewing the trial, listening to race organiser and member feedback and considering the costs.
Won't trackers push up the cost of race entries?	It is a fact that using trackers at a race will cost more. As part of the review, the FRA will be seeking to understand how much additional cost is involved and then to consider whether we should subsidise (in part or in full) the certain races that justify using trackers. No decisions on this yet, but just to say we are well aware that cost is a factor and we want to avoid pushing up entry fees if possible.
What aspects of safety are we looking to monitor and evaluate?	Our motivation is to reduce the risk of a future tragedy occurring where a runner is lost or falls, can't be found quickly, and then either dies as a result, or suffers significant harm due to the time taken finding them. We are therefore specifically testing out the ability of trackers to speed up the whole process of identifying that an incident has occurred and then getting help to the right place.
Would it make sense for the trial to be in winter when weather plays a bigger role in the safety of a race?	Good question, but we wanted to get on with the trial this summer and the weather conditions can be terrible at any time of year in the mountains!
What about entry on the day?	The sort of races we are considering will be suitable for using trackers are the AL and

	<p>MO/MM events that do not typically allow entries on the day, therefore we don't think this will be a factor. Having said that, it could still be possible to allocate trackers on the day of a race, so it isn't a fundamental issue.</p>
What about races with no signal?	<p>The trackers use the mobile phone network (including legacy 2G and 3G signals) to send their location back to the internet. The ones to be used in the trial will roam on to any available network as they are not tied to EE, Vodafone, etc, etc. This means that there are very few places in the UK where there isn't at least some signal that can be picked up by a tracker. Clearly if there is a race out there with literally no coverage, the trackers would be useless, but this is becoming increasingly rare. As part of the discussions with Open Tracking we are checking current coverage for the locations where our AL and MO/MM races take place so that we are informed about where the gaps are.</p>
What about drop out dead zones?	<p>Whilst there is now some level of coverage virtually everywhere, there are still lots and lots of gaps, particularly as you come down from summits and pass "in the shadow" of the available coverage. This can lead to "dead zones" where a course has mainly good coverage, but a section or two with none at all. Whilst such "dead zones" are not ideal, the tracker would at least provide a trace to a runners "last known position"; this would, of course, be a benefit should a search be invoked. In any event, we will be considering this potential limitation as part of the trial.</p>
How do the trackers communicate back to the race organisers?	<p>As mentioned above, the trackers use the mobile phone network to report their location. This means that whilst often referred to as "GPS trackers", they are in fact nothing to do with GPS! Having sent their most recent location back to the Open Tracking hub (with a time stamp), the Open Tracking software can place that tracker on a map, at the same tying this to the name and number of its allocated runner. The race organiser (or member of their team) therefore needs a computer with a good internet</p>

	<p>connection in order to monitor the race using the Open Tracking software. In theory the monitoring could be done remotely and issues reported by phone, but we envisage race HQs needing a connection to the internet so trackers can be monitored on site. This then leads on to the topic of proving good internet access, something which we will be taking in to account.</p>
Where will the trackers go? Will they work in bum bags?	<p>The trackers we are assessing <u>do not</u> need to be on a shoulder strap like ones you may have seen or used at events like the OMM or Saunders. Because fell races are shorter than these types of events, the tracker can use more battery power to find a signal and will therefore work ok inside a bag. Don't wrap it in a foil blanket though!! It is a key part of our trial to test the trackers inside bum bags and other types of bag, without requiring special clips, straps, tape, etc.</p>
How big are the trackers? How heavy are they?	<p>The trackers are about the size of a small match box and weigh 65 grams.</p>
How are race organisers going to monitor the runners? How will they decide there is a problem?	<p>This is another key part of the trial. Since trackers are not intended to replace the existing approaches to accounting for runners on the course, the race organiser will now have an additional method for counting runners along the course. We want to see how this benefits, alongside existing methods. Of course, the main benefit of trackers is when something goes wrong and will come in to play if the race organiser (or marshal) detects someone is missing.</p>
How will the trackers be allocated to runners? Won't it make registration slower?	<p>There are two methods for allocating trackers to runners, one that is done before race day and the other one is done on race day. There are pros and cons with both. We will be discussing these pros and cons as part of the trial. Either way, we hope it won't be too onerous and little different from the allocation of dibbers.</p>
What if I forget to hand my tracker back?	<p>As with dibbers, there will probably need to be an incentive (aka threat of a bill being sent out!) if you forget to return your tracker.</p>
Will fell runners be expected to buy their own personal tracker in the future?	<p>No, we see trackers only ever being used at a limited number of races.</p>