

2025 CATS 50K Training Plan Outline

Goal Race: Promise Land 50k – Sat April 26th, 2024

Week of:	Monday	Tues day	Wednesday	Thurs day	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Jan 6th	1 HOUR EASY	OFF	1 HOUR EASY	OFF	1 HOUR EASY	LONG TRAIL RUN 8-10M	ACTIVE RECOVERY
Jan 13th	1 HOUR EASY	OFF	1 HOUR EASY	OFF	1 HOUR EASY	LONG TRAIL RUN 8-10M	ACTIVE RECOVERY
Jan 20th	1 HOUR EASY	OFF	1 HOUR EASY OR WORKOUT	OFF	1 HOUR EASY	LONG TRAIL RUN 10-12M	ACTIVE RECOVERY
Jan 27th	1 HOUR EASY	OFF	1 HOUR EASY	OFF	1 HOUR EASY	LONG TRAIL RUN 10-12M	ACTIVE RECOVERY
Feb 3rd	1 HOUR EASY	OFF	1 HOUR EASY OR WORKOUT	OFF	1 HOUR EASY	LONG TRAIL RUN 8-10M	ACTIVE RECOVERY
Feb 10th	1 HOUR EASY	OFF	1 HOUR EASY OR WORKOUT	OFF	1 HOUR EASY	LONG TRAIL RUN 12-14M	ACTIVE RECOVERY
Feb 17th	1 HOUR EASY	OFF	90 MIN EASY	OFF	1 HOUR EASY	LONG TRAIL RUN 14-16M	ACTIVE RECOVERY
Feb 24th	1 HOUR EASY	OFF	90 MIN EASY OR WORKOUT	OFF	1 HOUR EASY	LONG TRAIL RUN 14-16M	ACTIVE RECOVERY
Mar 3rd	1 HOUR EASY	OFF	90 MIN EASY OR WORKOUT	OFF	1 HOUR EASY	LONG TRAIL RUN 14-16M	ACTIVE RECOVERY
Mar 10th	60-90 MIN EASY	OFF	90 MIN EASY	OFF	1 HOUR EASY	LONG TRAIL RUN 10-12M	ACTIVE RECOVERY
Mar 17th	60-90 MIN EASY	OFF	90 MIN EASY OR WORKOUT	OFF	1 HOUR EASY	LONG TRAIL RUN 16-18M	ACTIVE RECOVERY
Mar 24th	60-90 MIN EASY	OFF	90 MIN EASY OR WORKOUT	OFF	1 HOUR EASY	LONG TRAIL RUN 18-20M	ACTIVE RECOVERY
Mar 31st	60-90 MIN EASY	OFF	90 MIN EASY OR WORKOUT	OFF	1 HOUR EASY	LONG TRAIL RUN 20-22M	ACTIVE RECOVERY

April 7th	60-90 MIN EASY	OFF	90 MIN EASY OR WORKOUT	OFF	1 HOUR EASY	LONG TRAIL RUN 10-14M	ACTIVE RECOVERY
April 14th	1 HOUR EASY	OFF	1 HOUR EASY WITH STRIDES	OFF	1 HOUR EASY	EASY TRAIL RUN 6-10M	ACTIVE RECOVERY
April 21st	1 HOUR EASY	OFF	1 HOUR EASY WITH STRIDES	OFF	OFF	RACE DAY!!	DO NOTHING:)

I'm going to start by saying that I hate training plans. Why? Because nobody can predict how they are going to feel and what their life will allow every day for the next 12 weeks. Yes, training plans provide a very useful framework for a distant objective, but you simply HAVE to be flexible. Be committed, be dedicated, be tough....but listen to your body and be flexible. And your family is more important than your training plan.

Also, the people writing these training plans (so me, for this one) are humans and I'm here to tell you that when it comes to training for an ultra, there is really no single right way to do it. Some folks are low mileage, some are high mileage. Some are low intensity, some are high intensity. So you also have to be very skeptical of every training plan/program you read - including this one!

All that being said, folks like me who have a lot of experience in ultrarunning can share the following points with confidence. In no particular order:

- The main objective is to get to the start line healthy, non-injured, and mentally engaged. Being "trained" is less important than being non-injured and non-burned out!
- Most of your training should be easy. Like really easy. You WILL be walking/hiking a lot in your first ultra. You need to get used to this concept and pace in your training. Chill out and enjoy the miles! Know how I can break the top-10 at Promise Land? By regularly walking 75% of Jarman's.
- Be consistent. Consistency is key. Don't let the weather or being tired or a missed alarm make you miss a run.
- Training is all about "time on feet". You should be less concerned about miles or pace, and more concerned about hours/week.
- Race day will be tough. However, if you show up healthy and not "burned out" mentally, you can achieve amazing things on race day!
- The biggest challenge for most people is getting used to the climbing and descending, with downhills being the hardest thing for your legs to adapt to. Always take the downhills super easy if you're new to vert/mountain running. Easier! Really easy on those downhills!
- Listen to your body and get help if you are feeling some injury or unusual soreness. Sources of help? - Experienced runners and medical professionals such as PTs and docs like the UVA Runners Clinic.

This training plan is geared toward a runner who can currently run 4 days a week and do a slow-paced 10-mile long run without too much difficulty.

Now let's adjust this outline for YOU:

- Note, this is not a high mileage plan – if you are newer to long distance running, don't worry! We want you to show up to the start line fresh and not over-trained. If you are an experienced long-distance runner, please feel free to add time and miles to this basic framework to suit your abilities and your body's capability.
- If you can/prefer to run 5 days per week, we recommend that you still take a day for "Active Recovery/Cross Training" and simply trade an OFF day for another "1 Hour Easy" run. We still recommend that you take at least one day completely OFF per week to let your body recover.
- It is important to note that sleep, rest, and recovery are just as important as running in order to allow our bodies to adapt to our training! And remember that your bed is one of your most important training tools (i.e., a good sleep schedule is very important!)
- Training plan outlines like ours above do have limits however because each individual runner's fitness level, life schedule, and ability to adapt are so unique and different, that one single plan simply cannot fit everyone. Thus, **it is very important that we mold the above plan to fit your unique abilities, preferences, and life schedule.**
- If you are an experienced marathon runner, and have previously incorporated regular workouts into your training – great! You have experience to know how your body handles these types of workouts. Do what you are comfortable with and what you have fun with! If you've never done workouts, don't feel you have to, however they are good to try to see how your body responds to shorter bouts of faster running.
- You can see from the above plan, that each week starts on a Monday and ends on a Sunday
- Also, you can see that each week is centered around two "quality days" - one workout and one long trail run. The rest of the days are ALL EASY. Do not feel any pressure to do a workout! You can do just fine without doing any workouts and keeping all your runs easy - the long run is most important.
- Resist the urge to run easy days at medium effort! You will get more out of your quality days and your long runs if you are fresh and rested for them!
- The scheduled days above of course should be modified to your own life schedule. Some of us are better suited to doing longer runs during the week, and some of us cannot run on certain days of the week. The key in scheduling your week is to make sure you are rested for your quality days. Ideally, you'd

like to separate your workout from your long run by at least 2 days if possible, both before and after.

RUNS:

- **“1 HOUR EASY”** – These easy runs are meant to keep your legs moving and getting you more miles and time on your feet, however in the least taxing way. When we say “easy”, we mean “EASY”! Do not worry about your pace on these runs! It is best just not to look at pace!! Instead, focus on a SUPER EASY effort – even walk some uphill. And don’t worry so much about mileage, but make sure you are out there and moving for an hour. If you are feeling great, don’t hesitate to stretch these easy efforts out to 1:30, but again, keep them EASY! You can do these on roads, trails, whatever you like or whatever fits your schedule. **These are your recovery runs, use them as such!**
- **“ACTIVE RECOVERY/CROSS TRAINING”** – On these days, get out and do some active recovery or cross training. Active recovery is like a step below your easy runs. Good examples of this are hiking with the family or dogs, going to the park with friends, going on a really easy bike ride or a long walk, etc. You will find that you will recover from your long runs much better if you get out and move for at least an hour the next day. Cross training is simply any other type of exercise – swimming, yoga, mountain biking – keep it fun! Depending on your level of fitness, be careful with intense cross training – we don’t want you sore and wrecked from these sessions, as they are meant to compliment your running fitness.
- **“WORKOUT”** – These are your toughest days of the week. This is where you’re going to work on getting uncomfortable. As you go through your training, I want you to choose from the list of different workout types detailed below – SPEED workouts (track, fartleks), THRESHOLD workouts (tempo running, cruise intervals), or HILL workouts - these will all get your legs turning over faster, get your heart rate and breathing up, and they will help you to become more fit – improving your running economy, your speed, your oxygen delivery, your strength, and your mental toughness. Do not feel that you have to do these at all! If you are newer to these types of workout efforts, rotate through them during the program, but you may find your body prefers one type more than another – and that’s fine! If you hate running at the track, or if running fast seems to make you really sore, maybe you should substitute for more hill workouts. Alternatively, if your calves and glutes seem overworked from the hills, maybe you should throw in some more threshold running. If doing workouts is new to you, just experiment, and err on the side of doing these too easy vs. too hard! ****Always start and end EVERY workout, regardless of type, with at least 1 mile of easy running.** On the really cold mornings, you may find you need 2 miles to really warm up!

- Your workouts should take you anywhere from 60-75 minutes, including the warm up and cool down.
- **HILL workouts:** These are typically intervals or repeats run at a hard effort up a hill with easy recovery back down the hill. There are many different variations, so play with these and find what works for you. A few suggestions:
 - Regular ol' hill repeats: Find a nice hill and let's do some repeats! Consider a workout such as 6-10 x 30-90 seconds, each followed by 2-3 minutes rest after each interval. You can make these shorter or longer, but **try for consistent speed and time up the hill repeats** – i.e., your 8th hill repeat is the same time/speed as your first.
 - Long Hill repeats: Find a long hill, i.e. one that is ½ to 2 miles long and do some repeats up the hill. These will be slower efforts than the shorter repeats, but they will help your endurance. Again, be sure to pace yourself so you are not walking the top of the hill, or the last of the repeats. An example is 4 x 1/2 mile – finish the half-mile-long hill, run back down easy, rest, and repeat.
- **SPEED workouts:** These are interval workouts – running relatively short intervals hard, followed by rest intervals, and repeating. SPEED workouts should be run at a hard effort, think 85-90% effort. However, pacing is important. **Your last intervals of the workout should be at the same intensity and pace as your first ones.** So, start easy and you will soon learn what a sustainable speed workout pace is. Below are a few suggested workouts – but feel free to adjust these and have fun! If you are new to speed workouts, EASE into them!
 - On the track – Warm up, then 6-10 x 400m, with a 200m recovery between each interval, and a 400m recovery lap after a set of 3-5. Then cool down. (400m is one lap at the track, 200m is a half lap... So, you will run one lap at a hard effort, and walk or really slow jog a ½ lap, then repeat. After 3-5 intervals, take a full lap recovery and then start your second “set”)
 - On the track – Warm up, then a “ladder” workout – 4 x 200m with 200m recovery, then 2 x 400m with a 200m recovery, then 1 x 800 (2 laps) with a 400m recovery, then 2 x 200m, then cool down.
 - On the road or trail – Warm up, then 10 “fartleks” – random intervals of fast running – just come up with some 30second-3 minute intervals – i.e., “run to the stop sign up ahead”, or “from this crosswalk to the playground”...have fun with these and challenge yourself. Just be sure to give yourself an equal time of rest between the intervals.

- **THRESHOLD workouts:** These are longer efforts of “uncomfortable” running, lasting anywhere from 3-6 miles during a workout. Think “medium hard” effort. Some specific suggestions:
 - The tempo run: Warm up for 2 miles, then run 2-5 miles at the threshold/uncomfortable pace, then run 1-2 miles as a cool down. You should be running the same effort during the entire tempo portion of the run, so try to pace it so your last mile of the tempo running is the same effort as the first. Note – if you do your tempo runs on our hilly roads, your exact pace will vary depending on the hills. **Don’t look at pace!!** Keep the general speed/effort consistent and don’t worry about your pace.
 - Cruise Intervals: Warm up for 2 miles, then run the same threshold effort/pace, but only for ½ to 1 mile, then take a 30-60 second break of really easy jogging, then repeat another interval. Do 2-4 “cruise intervals”, then 1-2 miles cool down.
 - 2-mile intervals: Warm up, then run 2 miles at threshold pace, and take a longer break (2-3 minutes), and repeat. Do 2-3 repeats of this for a total of 4-6 miles

- **“Hill v.2” Workouts:** As we get near the end of your key portion of the training block, let’s step up the intensity of the Hill running workouts. Either lengthen the time of your uphill running intervals (i.e., from 30 second uphill repeats to 60 or 120 second repeats) and do the same number, or increase the number of uphill running intervals (i.e. do 10 x 30 seconds vs. 6 x 30 seconds). A great “epic” hill workout here in Crozet is doing 3-minute intervals all the way up the 3-mile gravel portion of Jarman’s. 3 minutes on, 2 minutes off (walking). This is a TOUGH workout, but it’s only as tough as you make it and it will give you great confidence in tackling the long hills that you have in your first 50K.

- **“LONG TRAIL RUN”:** These are your long runs, your most important runs of the week. It is very important to get out on the **trails** for your long runs, however doing some occasional long runs on hilly roads such as Dickwoods Road, Fox Mountain loop, or Decca/Ridge are also good substitutes. You need a lot of time on your feet, you need to get your legs used to the uneven terrain and the long uphills, and just as important the long downhills. This is also an important time to figure out things like hydration, eating, gear, etc.
 - We have so many great trails in this area! Sugar Hollow, the AT starting at Afton or Jarman’s, Carter’s Mountain in C’ville...the key here is race specificity. So if you are running Promise Land 50k, which has several climbs and descents that are 2-3 miles long, you need to get your body experienced at 2-3 mile climbs and descents, so you should do a lot of your trail runs in Shenandoah National

Park, on Jarmans, or in the National Forest where you can get these types of experiences. If you are running a trail race with less elevation change (such as Holiday Lake 50K), then you are probably better off sticking to trails with similar elevation changes such as Walnut Creek Park, the Rivanna trail, or the hilly roads such as Dickwoods and Ridge.

- You need to learn how to eat while running. During your 50k, you want a goal of consuming about 200-300 calories per hour. What works best for you? Gels? Blocks? Sports drink? PB&J sandwiches? You need to figure this out because you will NEED to eat on race day. Simple carb options like Gels, Blocks, and sports drink mixes tend to be the easiest for your body to digest on the run, but everyone is different and some people do better with real food. But ideally these should be mostly simple carbohydrates, which your body can assimilate rapidly.
- The most important benefit of these long runs is simply getting “time on your feet”. Perhaps you’ve run a marathon in 4 hours. Well, your 18-mile group trail run might take 4.5 hours – and although you may not be “running” the entire time, you are still out there moving for a very long period of time, and there is a lot of “body management” you will start to learn the longer you are out on the trail.

Ok, now you have a lot of great tools to personalize your training plan, now let’s find some friends and go hit the trails! Please don’t hesitate to email jimmeh.rhoades@gmail.com with any specific training questions. Also, please ask questions on the CATS email listserve and Facebook Group, as we have lots of experienced trail runners standing by to chime in with their excellent advice!