

## Night Running



As of 2016, I estimate that I have run at least 15,000 miles during the night or early morning before the sun had risen. Once I started to learn how to run, I quickly discovered the unique experience of running safely during the night on trails.

My first experience was in 2002 on Mount Timpanogos. [My first trip](#) up, that started about an hour before the sun rose. It seemed like a strange experience going up in the dark but there were so many other hikers doing the same thing so I didn't feel uncomfortable. I did miss a switchback and made a usual rookie mistake of trying to climb a steep slope near a Scout Falls, but I got myself back on track, feeling quite foolish. [Two weeks later](#) I was more daring and went up again, an hour earlier and went much faster. I began to enjoy the challenge of chasing hiker lights ahead of me and it became a favorite game to push hard up the mountain racing after those ahead.

A few weeks later, I advanced to running up the highest peak in Utah, [Kings Peak](#), in the dark. I had been up on the mountain a couple times before so felt confident. I started the trip at 3:30 a.m. and for the first time felt both excitement and an eerie feeling running alone in the dark on remote trails. I was still such a rookie, running in cotton, not being warm enough, and not understanding the early signs for hypothermia. But when I watched the sun rise in the High Uinta Wilderness, I was hooked on early morning running.

In October, 2002, I experienced my first truly long run, 42 miles in spectacular [Paria Canyon](#). I ran with my brother-in-law Ed and experienced the joy running in a remote, wonderful desert canyon. We stopped for the night, but didn't sleep well, so continued our journey before the sun rose. But progress was very frustrating with just a poor, cheap, headlamp. For all the river crossings, our lights could not detect how deep the water was. After going through the most technical part of the trip during the dark, we were worn out and agreed to stop and wait for the light.

### Lighting

During 2003, my rookie frustrations with poor lighting continued. In September poor lighting caused me to abort my first attempt to run the [Uinta Highline trail solo](#). I ended up wandering around in Yellowstone basin with a cheap dim headlamp without replacement batteries. I didn't learn very well because on another night I again ended up with a dim light as I tried to run down Mount Timpanogos in the early morning. Tripping was frequent and my pace was frustratingly slow. I'm amazed how long it took me to figure out that a cheap Walmart headlamp just wouldn't work for night trail running.

Finally in 2004, I discovered ultrarunning. That September, during the middle of a night I hiked up to the Wasatch 100 course to pace a friend for a few miles near Poleline Pass. I ran the course backward to meet him. As I did, I observed that many of the frontrunners used high-powered green handheld flashlights. They looked amazing coming toward me and I wondered where they got them, and why they used them instead of headlamps. That thought would stick with me for the coming months. I eventually bought one of those bright diver's lights with green LEDs, probably the best running investment I ever made.

My first 100-mile finish was at the [2005 Rocky Raccoon 100](#) in Texas. I used for the first time my handheld green light in a race. Right from the start I was amazed how much easier it was to run fast in the dark, even over the numerous roots on the course. The green light was easier on my eyes, didn't wash out the trail with bright white light, and produced better depth perception. Most important of all, the angle of a

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handheld light is lower and produces shadows to be seen from rocks and roots. I successfully finished my first 100-miler and would use my green light for thousands of miles in the future. The light was so very durable. I crashed with it and dropped it hundreds of times and it never broke. The batteries would last for more than 24 hours. I quickly became used to running with it in my hand along with a handheld bottle.

A couple months later, I ran my first tough [Zane Grey 50 in Arizona](#). For the predawn start, instead of bringing my light, I used a headlamp, and within the first five minutes, I tripped, fell, bruised my ribs, and had bad pain the rest of the day. I learned my lesson. In future races for the predawn starts without my handheld light, I always used a headlamp in my hand. That would allow me to see the rocks better and avoid the tripping.

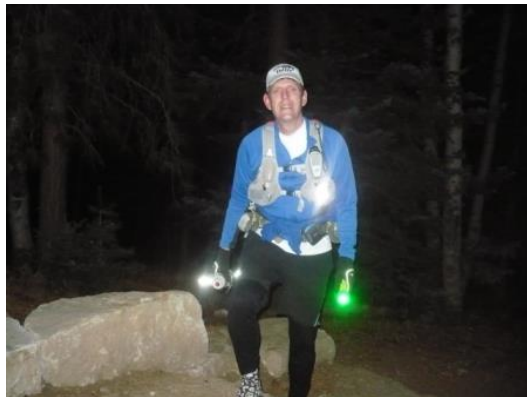
One of my running pet peeves is running behind someone with one of those flashing red lights on the back of their head on the trails. That is fine on the roads with cars, but leave it home when your run trails to avoid blinding those behind you.

### Night Adventure Runs – the early years

Back in 2004, I experienced night running at a new level. I traveled to southern Utah and with a friend and ran in [Buckskin Gulch](#) at night. Buckskin Gulch is twelve sinuous miles of relentlessly narrow slot canyon that at times is between 5 and 10 feet in width. Running it at night gives you the feeling of running in a cave. This was one of my most amazing night runs ever. Years later I would return and run 25 miles of neighboring Paria Canyon in the dark which presented a very challenging experience with its nearly 400 river crossings.



Wading in the Paria River



In May 2005, I ran my [first double crossing \(R2R2R\) of the Grand Canyon](#). I started my adventure in the dark at 1:30 a.m. Back then, there wasn't a lot of information published on this amazing run so it all was an astonishing discovery for me. I can still remember the remarkable feeling as I was dancing down the Bright Angel trail in the dark with my green flashlight. I descended quickly down the famous canyon for the first time, something I dreamed about since I was a little boy. The lights from the South Rim above rose higher and higher. I loved running by the campers quietly at Indian Garden. As I descended further, the roar of the rapids from the Colorado River met my ears and I later ran across that historic river in the dark on the Silver Bridge. It was very cool to run through Phantom Ranch for the first time as a few workers were stirring and preparing the camp for the morning. Running through The Box in the dark was exhilarating! I fell in love with the canyon at night. Dawn arrived and I experienced the unfolding beauty of the canyon for the first time in the morning sun.

I would have many more experiences running in the Grand Canyon at night. In November, 2006, I already was running my [9<sup>th</sup> double crossing](#). I came to run the entire night by the full moon and started at 7:30 p.m. from the north rim. The canyon looked amazing in the bright moonlight. The tops of the cliffs reflected brightly and the lower portions displayed an amazing combination of shadows and light. The moonlight cast some marvelous bright reflections on rocks and pools of water. I returned and finished at

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10:00 a.m. As of 2016, I have spent seven entire nights running in the Grand Canyon, many of those down in the inner canyon on the Tonto Trail.

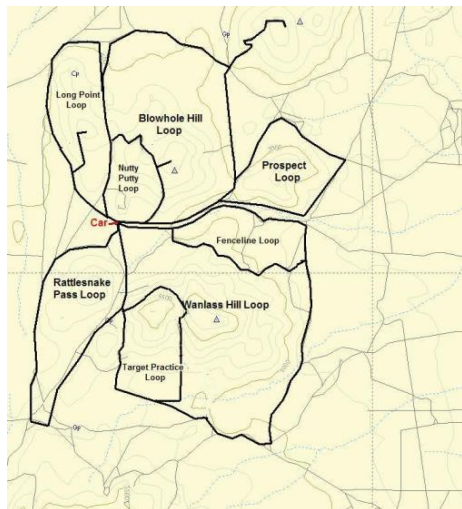
In 2007 I succeeded in running the [Uinta Highline Trail end-to-end](#) with Matt Watts. I entered this adventure knowing that navigating at night would be very difficult. Little did I know! This very remote trail is marked by large cairns at times across wide open meadows. At night it is pretty impossible to see the cairns which are widely spread apart. We had to rely on waypoints that I had stored in my GPS. This generally helped keep us on the trail, but for much of the night we were doing route-finding. As dawn approached we were totally off the trail climbing over hundreds of deadfall, trying to make our way down into a canyon. This by far was my most difficult time navigating at night. I would return in 2010 to run the [Highline Trail again](#), this time solo. Even though I had been on the trail a couple times before, the navigation at night was again difficult and frustrating. But something about the challenge of it all was invigorating.



### Training runs at night

Generally, I only run at night on a trail that I've run on before during the day. As my confidence increased, I started to do most of my training in the wee hours of the morning. On many mornings my green light could be seen in the foothills above my home. In 2006, I started to do repeats of Mount Timpanogos and ran all through the night on the mountain several times.

I started to learn how to feel the trail with my feet. I recall one night in [2006 running on the overgrown Desolation Trail](#) which forced me to run without seeing my feet. It turned out to be great training and I learned the importance of trusting your feet and being able to react quickly with good balance. During July 2006, I ran three dusk to dawn runs.



Some mornings I would get up very early and run one-mile loops near my home to get in a marathon before work. One such run was very memorable when I ran loops while watching a lunar eclipse. I've done other runs watching meteor showers.



In 2007, I decided to create my own 50-mile run during the night by running various loops about 20 miles south of my home in [the area around Nutty Putty Cave](#). I had great fun planning for this run. I mapped out and named the various loops that I would run, each time returning to my car using it as an aid station. As I was running in the dark, a guy drove up, probably heading to the cave, and called out of his car window, "Dude, why are you running in the middle of nowhere?"

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With each year, my training miles increased. By 2008, I began doing routine 10-15 mile runs multiple times per week before work in the hills to west in what is now called Hidden Hollow. I ran regular loops on the ridges and at time extended my run out to Eagle Mountain, seven miles to the west. I would at times leave the house at 3:00 a.m. or earlier and listen to sport radio each morning for a few hours. I would return home as the sun was rising.

Running at night does come with risks. One early morning in the dark on these trails in December 2008, I jumped down off a rock and rolled my ankle pretty badly. I seemed to recover but a few months later during a 50-mile race the ankle really flared up and later in the week I could hardly walk. For about five years or more I suffered from periodic pain from the peroneal tendon which always reminded me of that early morning injury in the dark.

When I start a very remote run at about 2:00 a.m., even after many years of experience, I still feel a lonely uneasy feeling as I start out into the dark night. But within a mile, I feel at home, enjoy the peace and quiet, and look forward to running many miles before sunrise.

### 100-milers at night

With all of the night training, I started to have more success in running 100-milers, especially during the night. During the races I would look forward to dusk and the cooler night temperatures. I began to recognize that I had good skill running at night and looked forward to passing runners going slowly in the dark. At [2007 Leadville 100](#), where I finished in 26:15, I remember a guy saying to me as I passed him and his pacer quickly, “Oh sure, we could run that fast if we had a green light too!”

Out in the west desert in Utah is an amazing place to run, especially with others because you can see their lights for miles. At the [2009 Pony Express Trail 100](#), after recovering from a hot afternoon, the cooler evening air revived me. I found myself in second place with Ed “the Jester” Ettinghausen several miles ahead. I then participated in my most fun chase ever during a 100-mile race. With the long straight open landscape, it was very easy to spot your competition ahead or behind because of your light and the lights of the crew cars. I plotted with my crew chief how we could sneak up and catch Ed. I ran for the next ten miles without a light. Usually the crew car pulls ahead about three miles and waits for the runner which is a clue if a runner is catching up. I had my crew hang behind me so it looked like I was still way back. With 18 miles to go, I reached the top of a pass and could see that Ed was only a quarter mile ahead. I ran quickly down the road without my light on and as I reached him, turned the bright light on, surprising him. “Is that you Davy?” he asked. I laughed, “yes.” He pointed ahead, “The win is now all yours.” I continued on for the win in 20:53, 37 minutes ahead of Ed. We still laugh about that night.



Start of Bear 100

At [2011 Cascade Crest 100](#), I really learned how to push the pace at night. I was struggling with drowsiness on a dirt road climb about mile 55 near midnight. Eventually I had to lie down by the side of the road a couple times to rest my eyes and watched runners pass me. I eventually stumbled back on my feet, at first weaving around, but then found my balance and could run again. I turned on my music and a perfect song with a beat came on. I forced myself to run hard uphill with that beat, singing along, and it quickly woke me up. I only stopped to walk when the song was over, and then played it again. I did this for a full hour, passing runner after runner. I would use this night trick over and over again in future 100-milers.



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Drowsiness at night during 100s is always a constant battle. For me, lying down for a quick cat nap just 3-5 minutes can put new life in me for at least an hour. The problem with doing this is that the other runners passing by wonder if I'm having trouble and make me respond while I'm trying to sleep. At [2007 Vermont 100](#), I heard two runners whisper, "Should we check his pulse?" I have learned that the best thing to do is go off the trail and hide while I cat nap.

### Challenges at night

Running at night is not always easy and can bring challenges and dangers. I recall while running The Bear 100, I heard that some lost runners had to wait out the night up on a ridge until the morning because they were hopelessly lost. I've never been that seriously lost, but at [2007 Plain 100](#), a self-supported race without a marked course, I became lost in a campground doing circles. It was so frustrating, but I finally backtracked enough to figure things out. Unfortunately I had laid down so many footprints on those wrong trails that later on my buddy Tom Jackson came through, saw the footprints and became hopelessly lost until he missed the cutoff.



Summit mailbox register on North Timpanogos

In 2013 I [submitted the three highest peaks in the Wasatch Mountains in one day](#). I ran the entire ridge on top of Mount Timpanogos for the first time, and did it during the night. To add to the challenge, I ran up there in the fog. It was so thick that I was constantly worried about running off a cliff and had to be very careful. Once I reached North Timpanogos, my sense of direction was totally shot. I couldn't figure out which way I needed to return from the peak but eventually figured it out. On South Timpanogos it was even worse. I descended down the wrong way in the fog and needed to climb back up to the top of the peak again to get my bearings. I feared I would be up there for hours, but eventually listened carefully for car traffic far down in the valley below and figured out the right

way to go.

The morning before in the dark, I was on my way up Mount Nebo in, the highest peak in the Wasatch Mountain. It had been years since I had been on the trail and I arrived to the hairiest part in the dark with steep cliffs on either side of the ridge. Using a usually safe method, I followed indicators where boot traffic had gone before, but I ended up on a very precarious talus slope, in a rather dangerous situation. I inched my way up and got out of trouble, but it taught me that you can't always trust the trail of those who have gone before. I've learned that it is better to trust the trail of a deer, than the faint trail of a man. Many times when I'm trying to find a safe way around a mountain I'll tell myself, "trust the deer."

Becoming too cold at night can be a great danger while running at night. I realize that if I keep moving, I'll be fine, but worry that if I can't, I'm would be in danger of hypothermia. My most challenging times have been trying to do long runs in the winter at night. In 2012, I ran 82 miles, [all the way around Utah Lake](#). My run started at 2 a.m. in the bitter cold and began with a long 30-mile road run before reaching the next town. I recall almost turning back several times, suffering too much in the cold. I remember telling

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myself, “OK, just one more mile. If I don’t feel better, I’ll turn back.” I did feel better, continued on and finished that run. I’ve had several other similar runs like that.

If you combine the night, with the cold, and with rain, that can really be hard. At Grand Mesa 100, it was just too much rain and my clothing was not adequate. I had to quit at about midnight and it would rain steady for the next nine hours. Rain usually falls on the [Salt Flats 100](#) and it did so terribly in 2014. I suffered for a long ten-mile stretch during the cold night and discovered my jacket was not waterproof. I had my best race there going, but the cold, wet night halted me. When I reached an aid station at 2:30 a.m. with only ten miles to go, I plead with the people there to let me sit in a warm truck to recover. I sat there for an hour, shivering and drying out enough to continue on and to the finish.

Pacers during a 100-miler can be great company at night during a 100-miler. However, I rarely use them. As of 2016, I’ve only had pacers with me in about seven of my 79 finishes. For me, I enjoy the peace during the night and the challenge of running through the night alone.

Having a light at night is pretty much required. At [Coldwater Rumble 100 in 2015](#), I forgot to take a headlamp with me when I left an aid station during the late afternoon. I eventually was left out in the dark, stumbling around, trying to make it to the next aid station where I begged for a light. They didn’t have one for me to use so I resorted to following a slow runner for the next miles until I reached my light. This does happen a lot in races, but should not happen to someone experienced.

### Wild Animals

I’m always asked if I fear running into wild animals while I run at night. The answer is no, I rarely think about them at all. I see more animals during the day than at night. I have had a few brushes with them at night that skipped a heartbeat. While running on Mount Timpanogos, it is common to come upon a porcupine at night. More than once I’ve had to come to a screeching halt, almost running right into one of those prickly beasts. They just waddle away. Running into moose at night on Timpanogos also occurs. In those cases, I’m very cautious and wait for it to leave the trail.



Early in my running experience at night on the mountain behind my house, I kept getting spooked by glowing eyes on the trail. As I would come closer it would take off flying and at first I thought they were bats. But they were birds. They would take flight, go up the trail another hundred feet, land, reflect their eyes back at me, and then fly again. This freaked me out for a while but now is a common thing to see.

While running in the Grand Canyon at night, I ran through a marshy section above The Box (this section now has boardwalks), and rounded a corner. I ran right into a large beaver who wasn’t very happy about me being there. It certainly startled me. I thought it was very cool to meet a Grand Canyon beaver up close and personal.

Moths are about the worst thing to run through at night. One year they were terrible in the Wasatch Mountains and they would flock to your lights, get in your face, and crawl on you. The solution is to avoid a headlamp. By using my handheld light they would mostly avoid my head.



[The Grand Canyon beaver](#)

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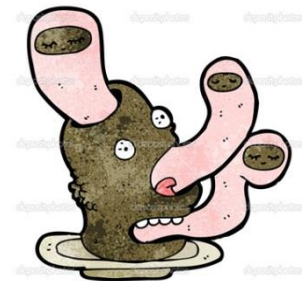


Skunks are what I truly fear at night. In 2004, trying to convince myself that I could finish a 100-miler, I attempted a long run going from [Spanish Fork Canyon to Provo Canyon and beyond](#). I stopped during the night to sleep for a couple hours. At 1:30 a.m. I woke from a noise near my campfire. I yelled, “Hey”, go up and saw a large skunk sniffing around my stuff. I did my best to coax it away and it finally crawled off into the brush. I packed up and started to leave. That crazy skunk started to come after me. I ran away scared and quickly came upon another. I frequently run into them on the Jordan Parkway paved trail near Lehi. Because of that, I now just avoid running that trail at night.

My freakiest encounter with animals at night occurred in 2013, when I ran the Kat’cina Mosa 100K course solo and self-supported at night. Dusk arrived near Little Valley and ahead of me about 30 yards came a big black bear running across the road. I cautiously continued, but constantly kept looking behind me as I pushed the pace hard to get out of that area. In about another mile, I heard moaning noises. It turned out to be a massive sheep herd. The herd covered about a half mile and they weren’t happy to see my green light. Soon dogs barked. “Great!” I thought, “now they are going to chase me.” The barking stopped but soon I felt nudging behind me. The bear! I jumped out of my skin! No, it wasn’t the bear, it was the dogs trying to herd me. They persisted and kept nudging my pocket. It finally dawned on me! I had bacon in my pocket. I learned a new lesson, beware when running with bacon in your pocket at night.



### Hallucinations



With sleep deprivation, hallucinations can afflict me while running late at night. This affected me the worst down in the Grand Canyon after being awake for about 48 hours during my quad crossing. As dusk approached, the rock formations started turning into houses, water tanks, and even people. I was convinced that they are there and puzzled that I had never noticed them before. It finally got so bad that I forced myself not to look up, but to just stare at my feet on the trail because it is so disturbing. Many times my mind detaches itself from my body. On the Uinta Highline Trail, I had thoughts like, “We need to make him eat something” go through my mind. My mind started having a dialogue about the best things to do for the body that is trying to keep moving. It’s like I’m two beings, a mind suggesting actions, and a body that it takes care of. When it happens, it freaks me out and I finally wake up enough to yell out loud, “stop it!” Another time in the Grand Canyon in a sleepy fog at night, my mind was telling me that the steep trail without switchbacks that I was going up, was constructed by a friend purposely to torment me.

### Run at Night

As I gained experience and tossed away my fears, I discovered that running at night increased my senses and awareness around me. The night sounds of insects, wind, trees, and creeks became music to my ears. Away from civilization the complete silence at night with brilliant stars above seems to be a totally different world to me.

Navigation at night for me has never been a major issue. Being familiar with the location of the stars and planets certainly helps to keep me on course. Pre-run planning helps me know the locations of



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mountains and canyons. For many of my early years, I only ran at night on familiar trails, but with more experience I have ventured into discovering new trails, even at night. However, I'm careful to plan on avoiding difficult unknown trails before sunrise.

Why don't I usually run with friends at night? I like the peace alone, I like to run at my own pace, and I don't like to worry about other runners with me. In 2010, one morning I took two friends on a creative 50-mile run in the wide-open Cedar Valley, near Eagle Mountain and I lost one of my friends. He was finally found, but we teased him terribly and I wrote the following story to mock him.

Yesterday morning I went on a long early-morning run with two friends in a remote valley near a couple small towns. The valley is wide-open, very flat with no trees, 11 miles long, 7 miles wide. We parked in the middle of the valley and then ran some loops in order to do some big mileage. One of the loops stopped off at a historic state park with a nice heated bathroom. As we returned, one of my friends got lost and never paid attention where we had parked our cars. It was still dark when he made his way to one of the small towns. Below is what is believed to be the actual conversation he had when flagging down a car for help.

"Excuse me sir, could I get a ride?" "Sure, where do you need to go?" "I need to go to my car." "Where is it?" "I can't remember where I parked it." "Huh, there isn't a parking lot here." "Well, I parked it somewhere in this valley." "Huh, when?" "Oh about 3:30 a.m. I can't remember where I parked it." "Oh, Ok, have you been drinking?" "No, really, I can't remember, it is somewhere within 3-4 miles of here." "Why did you leave your car, was it out of gas?" "No, I was running with two guys and I didn't know where we were going." "Two guys? Where are they?" "I don't know, but one of them had a green light." "Oh, I understand now, was his skin green too? I'll make a call to someone that can really help you. You need a long rest."

"OK, let me get this straight, you were following a guy with a green light." "Uh, huh, and his name was Davy Crockett." "Oh....ya, right, and you didn't know where you were going?" "Well, the other guy had the laminated map and directions." "Laminated?" "That's right." "Were they green to?" "I'm not sure, maybe." "Do you remember at all where you went?" "Well, there was this heated bathroom." "Out in the middle of the valley?" "I think so." "How far away was the heated can?" "About six miles from the car." "So you ran out to a heated toilet in the middle of the night and then got lost?" "Well, I was following the guy with the green light but he disappeared?" "Disappeared?" "Yes." "Into a flying saucer by chance?"

"OK, I think I'm understanding now. Daniel Boone with a green light disappeared after you visited a heated toilet." "Uh, his name was Davy." "Ya, whatever, Davy, Daniel. You left your car to run six miles in the dark to a heated toilet. Where were you going next?" "Back to the car." "Huh? Why didn't you just drive to the heated toilet." "Actually it was a heated bathroom." "Whatever, couldn't you have just 'beamed' over to the heated toilet seat?" "Uh, sir, are you going to help me find my car or not?" "Sure, just give me the laminated map."

"OK, I'll help you find your car, but I still can't understand why you were wandering around in the middle of nowhere during the night." "Well, my friend wanted to run 50 miles." "The guy with the green light who disappeared into the saucer?" "No, the guy with the laminated map." "Why would anyone want to run 50 miles in the dark, were you trying to stop him?" "No, just trying to keep up." "50 miles? That is crazy, no one can do that." "The other guy runs 100 miles." "Huh, Daniel Boone with the green light?" "Uh, ya, that guy, he does it all the time." "Dude, you need help. You claim you were wandering around in the night, chasing green lights, heading to heated toilets, trying to run 100 miles, and then you get lost and can't



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remember where you parked your car in the first place? Man, if this doesn't beat all. And I thought I was just going to have a normal day driving into work.”

Running at night can be great fun. Venture out in the night but do it safely. Before trying to run a 100-miler, you should have dozens of hours of experience running at night.