

WFRA Policy on Poles

Traditionally, poles have not been used in fell races in Wales or elsewhere. However, we recognise that increasing numbers of runners are using them in trail or ultra races and these runners often look to transition to fell races (which is very welcome!) and therefore the question of whether to permit them in WFRA races has arisen. We note that poles can pose hazards or inconvenience to other runners, may have impacts on path surfaces and may also confer an advantage on those using them. It is notable that several high-profile mountain races in Europe, where poles have been used for much longer, have banned the use of poles (e.g. Sierre-Zinal), for the reasons noted below. The FRA in England has also banned poles from their races.¹

The WFRA has adopted the following policy to provide clarity to Race Organisers (ROs) and runners and to safeguard the ethos of fell running:

Poles are not permitted for *competitors* on any WFRA Short or Medium races. ROs, in consultation with the WFRA, *may* consider permitting poles on a small number of Long races (over 20km) and Mountain Marathon style races, in which case this will be clearly communicated in advance to all competitors. Unless clearly stated otherwise, assume poles are not permitted.

Additional notes for Race Organisers and Runners:

Ethos

1. Part of the ethos of fell running is simplicity: for runners and officials alike. The equipment required for most races will fit in a bumbag. Rules are usually minimal and as far as possible are common to most fell races. The WFRA is keen to maintain this ethos.

For races where poles are not permitted:

2. *Can an exemption be made for specific runners who have injuries/health issues?* ROs are volunteers and have limited capacity to deal with special requests. However, if an RO is happy for an individual to complete the course *as a non-competitor*, using poles that is their decision. However, they will not be counted as a competitor in the race and the points below on avoiding inconvenience to other runners still apply.

ROs considering allowing poles in a race:

3. If you are considering allowing poles for competitors in your race, please discuss this with the WFRA Committee well in advance of the race. Poles will only be considered on races longer than 20km or Mountain Marathon style events.
4. Even in longer races, careful consideration is required if allowing poles to be used.
5. ROs and participants need to be aware that poles can inconvenience and endanger others: they are a considerable trip hazard. They may also confer a competitive advantage on those using them.

If allowing poles:

6. ROs may choose to restrict their use to certain age or other categories (e.g. over 60s, or “non-competitive walkers”), and/or to stipulate that those using poles would not be eligible

¹ <https://www.fellrunner.org.uk/faq/frequently-asked-questions>

for prizes. ROs should not allow specific *competitors* to use poles and not others in the same category (even if for legitimate health/injury reasons).

7. ROs may need to impose restrictions on pole use to ensure fair competition and runner safety. For example, specifying sections where they are not permitted to be used and must be fully folded/collapsed and stowed. Poles are likely to cause problems during mass starts, sections on narrow paths, or descents. They are therefore only likely to be appropriate in the later stages of long races, once the field has spread out considerably and/or where paths are very wide, the route is pathless, or competitors are spread out over multiple routes and start times (as in a Mountain Marathon style event).
8. Even on sections where poles are permitted, the onus is on anyone using poles to ensure that they do not inconvenience or endanger anyone else (participants or otherwise). In particular, runners using poles need to always be conscious of other runners overtaking them and take great care to ensure that overtaking is not impeded.
9. Any race permitting pole use should ensure rules relating to their use are clearly communicated to all competitors (and marshals) well in advance of the race, through the race's page on the WFRA website and any other communications, and reiterated in pre-race briefings. Rules should be as simple as possible to avoid misunderstandings and make life easier for marshals and ROs.
10. Poles are often a hindrance to map reading, but remember: no GPS-assisted navigation is permitted in any WFRA fell race, whether poles are allowed or not.