

# Unbound Gravel: Plan and Prepare to Crush your gravel goals

You are riding Unbound Gravel!! Yay!! You got into the race, you have trained, you have travelled and now the day is quickly approaching. It's easy to get caught up in the excitement of the days leading up to race day. With a little planning and preparation you can have the ride you want and have been working for, while enjoying the atmosphere of Unbound Gravel.

Whether you are doing the XL, 200, 100, 50 or 25 mile a good day on the bike will take planning and preparation. To plan and prepare for the event you may want to research the course, check the weather, ensure you have the proper kit, gear and nutrition. You should also familiarize yourself with the event rules.

Keep reading for some tips on planning and preparation. Good luck! Have fun crushing your Unbound goals!

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# Planning vs Preparation

Let's talk about the difference between planning and preparing. Planning involves the thoughts, it is the thinking about what you may need or do during the day. Preparation is more an action verb, it is the gathering of what you may need and the mental prep for the day.

Planning:

Kit, Gear, Nutrition, Mindset

Let's look at the areas we want to plan. To make it more manageable I break it down to

*kit*

*gear*

*nutrition*

*mindset/mental tools*

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# Plan: Kit



What are you wearing on race day? Hopefully it's comfortable. When thinking about your kit I suggest thinking about the weather and the course. This can actually be tricky for long days in the saddle. The weather may be chilly at the start, hot in the middle and end with some rain thrown in (just a typical Unbound day). This is a great time to think about what has worked for you in the past. For me, I tend to consider what is most comfortable most of the time. If it's warm, I don't usually bring a rain jacket because it will just make me hotter, and a little rain won't make me melt. Plus, that just mean I have to carry the rain jacket for the times it isn't raining, although it's just a few ounces, I don't want to carry that for several hours, if I'm only wearing it for 30 minutes.

If it's chilly in the morning, I definitely recommend staying warm for as long as possible. If you have somebody supporting you, wear a jacket or sweatshirt or something warm, hand it off to your supporter in the few minutes before the gun goes off.

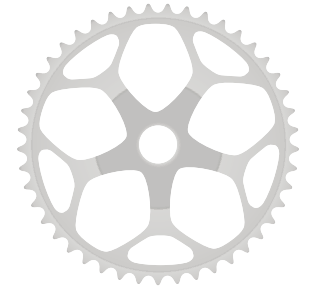
While thinking about the kit we don't want to overlook the usual stuff. These are things like your helmet, shoes, gloves and glasses.

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# Plan: Gear



This is where many Unbound riders get mired in the mud of indecision. The Unbound participant Facebook group is full of *"what tires should I ride?"* At this point, less than a week out, you will probably be riding whatever tires you have. In addition to which tires, you will also probably consider what PSI to ride. I personally don't really measure PSI, I just squeeze the tires, if there is some give I'm hopeful it will withstand the famous (or infamous) chunky gravel of the Kansas Flint Hills.

For most riders, the decision about gear will have been made in the weeks and months prior to the race. Unless you are sponsored by a bike company you will probably be riding the bike you came with. Maybe you are fortunate and have multiple set of wheels, you may have a decision of which wheel set with which cassette.

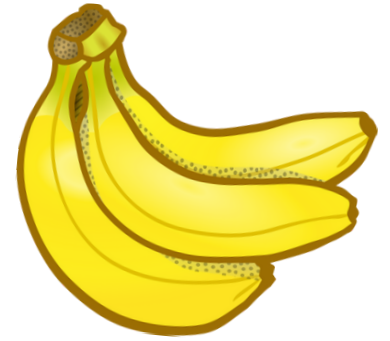
If you are doing the XL or 200 your planning may include how to keep various electronics charged for the hours you are out there. Do you bring a charger? Do you bring an extra GPS unit?

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# Plan: Nutrition



This is where planning may have to go a little deeper and take a some more time and energy. The planning for nutrition is very individualized. For events like Unbound, I like to think about nutrition in terms of how long I am going to be out there, what support is available and when I will reach the support. If you are doing the 100, 200 or XL, it's about knowing where are the water stops, support crews or convenience stores. What is your estimate of how long it will take to get to each? How much hydration do you want to go through for each period of time and what food/snacks/gels do you want to eat. I failed algebra and most math classes as a kid, now, I am an expert at solving for x if x is bottles of water or snacks and y is length of time on the bike.

*$n=xy$  (is that even close to the correct formula??) If I drink 1.5 bottles of water, and it will take me 4 hours to get to the first checkpoint I need  $1.25*4=5$ . I will need 5 bottles to get me to the 1st checkpoint*

Even if that formula isn't correct, I think you get the point. In the day or 2 leading up to the race figure out how much fluid and fuel you will need to get to water stations, support crews and finish line. I generally recommend taking a little more than you need, because you just don't know what the day will bring.

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# Nutrition Continued

As you are planning, think about what you grab on training rides when you stop at a convenience store. Have that with your support crew, it will be a nice treat (I LOVED the Bugles my wife had for me at the checkpoint. My mood was low when I pulled in, the salty carbs and the different taste and her words of encouragement got me out of the funk and back on the bike). As you are thinking about what you enjoy eating and drinking also consider what your GI system can tolerate. Unfortunately this can be impacted by stress, weather and temperature. If possible, have a selection at the check point, grab what you are in the mood for.

As you are planning your race day nutrition, let's not forget the importance of nutrition and hydration in the days leading up to the race. If you go into the race under fueled or dehydrated no amount of Skratch, Gu gels or Snickers bars are going to refill your tank. Plan where are you going to get food when you arrive in Emporia. What will you eat for your prerace dinner? What will you have 2-3 hours before race start? Although a smaller town, Emporia is not that small. They have a great selection of restaurants, and there is a grocery store and Walmart to buy food.



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# Plan:

## Mindset/Mental Planning

In my opinion, mental planning is an important part of the day. Most riders will have their gear dialed in, their nutrition will be squared away but they haven't paid much attention to the stress, anxiety, fear and other feelings that may creep in. Let's plan for coping with that.

The mental side includes many areas, the two that we are going to focus on in planning are visualization and self talk.

Visualizing: I like to visualize the start, the finish, moments of success and even challenging moments of the race. This can be done by actually pre-riding or driving parts of the course. I like to see the start and the finish. You can also visualize by watching various YouTube videos, there sure are enough of them on Unbound, take your pick. You can also visualize by picturing yourself in a situation. As as an observer what would you see if you got a flat? Picture what steps you would do to fix that flat. Talk out loud to yourself as you describe this. *"I get off my bike, open my top tube bag, get my plugs and CO2, I will find the puncture, put the plug in, fill the tire with air, spin the tire, check for a leak, get back on my bike and continue riding."*

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# Mindset and Mental Planning Continued

Self talk: What we say to ourselves about ourselves and our performance impacts how we perform. In the days leading up to the event think about what you would say to somebody on the course if you see them struggling. Write down what you would say to them. Now, say it to yourself. Maybe consider keeping a few index cards with those thing written, read out loud in the morning and if needed, your support crew can read them to you at the stops.



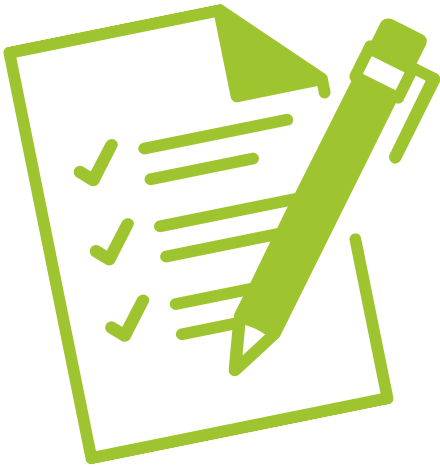
You've got this!!!!

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# Prepare: Kit

For your kit, what have you decided to wear? To free up energy on race day, I suggest laying out your kit the night before. This gets rid of any unnecessary decisions or scrambling for a lost sock on race day.



- Jersey/Top
- Shorts/Bottoms
- Socks
- Sports Bra
- Helmet
- Shoes
- Gloves
- Glasses
- Chamois Butt'r
- Buff
- Sunblock
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

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# Prepare: Gear

Using the same concept from kit preparation, lay out what you need the night before. Any decision we don't have to make is more energy we can put toward the actual race. I've broken the gear checklist to 2 days: the day before and the day of.

## Day Before

- Bike maintenance check
- Route loaded on GPS
- Charge bike computer/GPS
- Charge electric shifters
- Charge Phone
- CO2
- Plugs
- Air Pump
- Hydration pack/Water Bottles
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Morning of

- Air Pump
- Hydration pack/Water Bottles
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

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# Prepare: Nutrition

Again, prepare as much as possible the night before the event. Have your nutrition packed in your top tube bag, or hydration pack, or whatever you are using label what you need at the checkpoints. If you are doing the 100, you only have 1 checkpoint, if you are doing the 200 you will have 2 checkpoints. Your loved one who is your support crew knows you and loves you, but can't read your mind. If you are using paid support crew or people you don't know well, they really can't read your mind. Honestly, at the checkpoints, you may not even know what you need. Hopefully you are not, but you can be calorie depleted, you will be tired, and you will not be thinking clearly. The night before, label what you need. If you are using somebody you know, sit down with them the night before, go over exactly what you will need.

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# Nutrition

## Pre-race

- 2-3 hours before the start: breakfast
- Hydration throughout the morning
- Gel/bar/something just before the race starts
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Race start to checkpoint 1

- Hydration bottles
- Hydration pack
- Gels
- "Real food"
- Salt tabs
- Caffeine
- Drink Mixes
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

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# Checkpoint 1:

*What to eat and drink at the checkpoint (you decide what you like, this is just what I have had)*



- Water
- Drink mix
- Soda
- Chips
- Cookies
- Other treats
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_



*What to bring for the next section of the ride*

- Hydration bottles
- Hydration pack
- Gels
- "Real food"
- Salt tabs
- Caffeine
- Drink Mixes
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

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## Checkpoint 2:

*What to eat and drink at the checkpoint (you decide what you like, this is just what I have had)*



- Water
- Drink mix
- Soda
- Chips
- Cookies
- Other treats
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_



*What to bring for the next section of the ride*



- Hydration bottles
- Hydration pack
- Gels
- "Real food"
- Salt tabs
- Caffeine
- Drink Mixes
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

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# Mental Preparation

Like kit, gear and nutrition, the preparation for the mental side of the game starts before the event. Unbound is a BIG event, the days before the actual race can be overwhelming. You have the expo, packet pickup, shake out rides, social gatherings, riding sections of the course, dealing with any last minute mechanical issues, etc. If you're like me, you don't want to miss out on any of this! But we do have to pick and chose. We know we need to go to packet pick up, the rest is up to us. What works for you? A casual stroll through the expo, picking up free samples and lip balm? Going on 1 or 2 shake our rides? Or are you more, go to the expo a few times, you never know who you will see, do every shake out ride so you can meet so many awesome people? And go to every social event? What works for you?

I suggest looking over the schedule, picking what you really want to do and do it. Remember, you are here for the fun and the experience. However, also balance time to rest. Having a well rested body, getting plenty of sleep the night before, eating a good dinner, staying hydrated will put you on the best path for having a great mental day on the bike.

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Practice saying the positive self talk you wrote down, give some index cards with those affirmations to your support person, stash some in your treats bag, jersey pockets or anywhere you may find helpful.

On race day, as you line up to start, remember jitters are normal. Focus on your breath. Know that all the hard work is done, it is now simply time to go for a bike ride with your 2,000+ new friends.

Most importantly  
**Good luck!!**  
**Have fun!!**

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