Have a game plan for your crew at the checkpoints. Get in and out quickly. I would plan on eating real food and stretching at the midway checkpoint but other than that, 5-10 minute stops max at the other checkpoints (15 at the midway). While you are stretching, using the bathroom, eating or whatever, your support team will reload supplies, wipe and lube the chain and whatever else you have on your list. Have a list and have your crew prepped to take care of it. You may be completely out of it at the checkpoint. At the very least you will be tired. Let your crew take care of you. Here’s what I put on my list for my crew (some of these may be just for the midway checkpoint or the last one, but this is just to give you some ideas):

* check in at the DK200 tent
* change out the bladder in my Tangle bag with a fresh one with ice (made pre-race and kept in a cooler). I do this every stop no matter what on a hot day. Even if the bladder is half full, save time get a full, cold one.
* change out my water bottles (cold water)
* wipe off and lube my chain (This is assigned to someone on the crew and may or may not be needed but I HATE bike noise) Have tools and stand ready
* change out my food bag (I usually need trash removed and new [rice cakes](http://adventuremonkey.com/blog/the-best-on-the-bike-food) put in – I like to keep it simple)
* eat pickle and drink some pickle juice (they hand me the pickle jar without me asking)
* if you are a juicer – drink juice made especially for endurance events from a juicer (handed to me without asking)
* clean off sweaty sunglasses (cotton cloth at the ready)
* stretch with some Yoga poses while my crew takes care of the bike (maybe only at midway checkpoint)
* change into a fresh new kit (midway checkpoint if needed, I’ve never done this but heard it’s heavenly)
* If hot, pour cold water on my head without soaking chamois (wet chamois is not comfortable to wear for 10 hours)
* If hot, make [ice sock](http://adventuremonkey.com/blog/the-farmhouse-classic) to put in my jersey, on my back as I ride off (in place of an ice sock and maybe more useful would be a water bottle, frozen solid and put into your middle back jersey pocket – It will last longer and give you extra water to drink)
* have someone video me and see how things are going (good for blog posts)
* hit the lap button on my Garmin
* If bad weather give me a rundown of the weather report
* If I am a contender, let me know how long ago the leaders left, how on track I am to beat the sun, ie, have a goal to keep yourself motivated
* Chamois Butt Butter or whatever butt butter you use. I apply before the race and at the midway, but maybe at every checkpoint if the chamois I am wearing requires it
* If you use electrolyte pills, whatever you are fueling with, if you need medicine, Advil, whatever it is you need, have a bag made beforehand to have ready for each checkpoint. You may not need all of it but it is nice to have it ready. YOU DO NOT WANT TO DIG IN AN UNORGANIZED BAG/BOX/CAR FOR SUPPLIES WHEN IN A HURRY

With planning, one person can handle your support, but having more people is fun and does help. Making a list keeps this all easy and flowing. Since you’ve been training, you should know what you need, so plan accordingly. The more experienced I get, the less I need to take on the bike and at the checkpoints. I can go on a 100 mile ride with no support and minimal supplies. But over-planning or preparing for the worst never hurt anyone! Famous last words:

* I shouldn’t need that much water
* I shouldn’t need that much food
* I’ll only bring one tube (no tubes)
* I’m tubeless, I won’t need a tube
* These tires should be fine
* The gravel can’t be as bad as they say
* It’s not that hot out
* It’s Kansas
* (leave some you’ve said in the comments and I’ll use them next year!)

**FIGURE OUT YOUR NUTRITION PLAN**

This may be the most important item for the day. You are the motor. You have to make sure you fuel the motor properly. My body is pretty touchy about what I feed it to keep it going. The only way I figured this out was to experiment with different foods, drinks and all the scientifically formulated endurance products on long training rides. *Don’t bring something to race day that you haven’t tried out.* Natural foods work best for me. Some products are great but after a long, hot day on the bike I can no longer eat or drink them. If I don’t eat I won’t pedal. I also sweat a lot leaving salt on my jersey and body. I need to replenish with water and sufficient electrolytes. Everyone is different but here is my plan:

* Eat a good breakfast! I have cut any added sugars from my diet and have been working on fueling my body with fats rather than simple sugars. I like to eat 2-3 eggs cooked in coconut oil, one avocado and a small bowl of oatmeal with cinnamon, blueberries and protein powder. I also like to have one cup of coffee.
* In the Tangle bag I have 3L of fluid on a hot day. I am currently experimenting with drinks, looking for a sugar free one, but I do really like[Skratch labs](http://www.skratchlabs.com/).
* In my Mountain Feed Bag I have rice cakes. [Here](http://adventuremonkey.com/blog/the-best-on-the-bike-food)is a recipe I love, but I have since removed the syrup.
* I will eat a pickle spear or two and drink pickle juice at each stop. It works.
* If you are a  juicer, make juice the night before to drink at the stops, especially at the midway checkpoint. Juicing puts the vitamins, minerals and macro-nutrients of a shopping bag full of fruits and veggies into a glass of juice. Nothing beats it.

I used to fill my pockets with gels, chews and other sugary goodies, but once you start burning simple sugars you have to keep eating them. On a long race that leads to stomach issues and fluctuating energy levels for me. I am currently training my body to use fats for energy. Google it. For an endurance race, it’s a good plan. Everyone’s body is different. Find out what works for you.

**STAY COOL ON A HOT DAY**

The heat knocks out many riders and can be very dangerous. There’s only so much you can do in the middle of nowhere with no shade but there’s a few things I do.

* make ice socks at each stop ([read more here](http://adventuremonkey.com/blog/the-farmhouse-classic))
* freeze full water bottles and put them in your jersey pockets.
* add ice to all your fluids when refilling to cool your core
* if overheated find water and pour over your head – this has brought farmers and cyclists together during these races
* know the signs of heat stoke and pay attention to your body – this can be deadly – know when to pull the plug

# ****LEARN TO BREATHE CORRECTLY****

Since heart surgery, I have done meditation called heart rhythm meditation. I have to pay attention to my breath. Now when I ride I pay attention to how I breathe, taking in full breaths, holding them longer than usual and exhaling fully with my abs. I feel I have more energy doing this on the bike. I also visualize nutrients and oxygen filling my leg muscles with each inhale. It sounds airy-fairy but it works. My mind wanders and I don’t pay attention to my breath and when I “wake up” again, my breathing is shallow and I am cheating my muscles of those full breaths.

**TIRE CHOICE**

This could be the most important thing you do to assure a good day on the bike. There are a thousand different opinions on tires out there but one thing that is true is Flint Hills gravel *will* shred a tire. I am always looking for a tire that has good durability with low rolling resistance and weight. There are no perfect tires but one thing is sure – use new ones on race day. I like to put mine on a few weeks before the race to ride them a bit to make sure everything is good to go. *Don’t put new tires on the day before.*Don’t do anything major to the bike close to the race. You should have done a few shake-down rides to test your gear and be ready.

I used a [Bontrager XR-1](http://bontrager.com/model/07798%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) on the front and a [Kenda Kwest](http://www.kendausa.com/en/home/bicycle/commuter/kwest.aspx%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) on the rear for two years in a row with one flat. Not bad. I liked the comfort of the bigger tire on the front and the XR-1 is a fast rolling, fairly durable tire. The Kwest has Kenda’s protective layer for commuters in it and handled the sharp gravel well. I have also used:

* a [Kenda Karma](http://www.kendausa.com/en/home/bicycle/mountain/karma.aspx%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) on the front in training and loved the comfort and float it provided and never flatted with it
* [Kenda Kommandos](http://www.kendausa.com/en/home/bicycle/cyclocross/kommando.aspx) for 100’s of miles with no flats. I was going to try 35c’s on the front and back for more speed (but less comfort) before I had to pull out of the 2012 race.
* The [Schwable Marathons](http://www.schwalbetires.com/bike_tires/road_tires/marathon_mondial%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) are proven reliable but a little expensive. I was turned off when more than one reliable person told me their rolling resistance wasn’t that great. But many riders rely on these tires.

I have currently been running tubeless four-inch wide [Husker Dus](http://45nrth.com/products/tires/husker_du) on my fatbike in the Flint Hills. I’ve had many punctures on the road and they sealed nicely. On that note, running tubeless is pretty sweet in the Flint Hills.

Use good tires, bring tubes, patch kits and a [tire boot](http://amzn.to/1N9CAPS). I am always surprised at the number of flats I see at the DK200. KNOW HOW TO CHANGE A FLAT AND PATCH A TUBE! Don’t do a 200 mile race without some knowledge. Practice in the field when training. Learn how to handle bike repairs with your multi-tool. It would suck to be out of the race because of a mechanical that can be fixed.

# ****TRAIN YOUR BODY AND MIND FOR THIS RACE****

I think the first hundred can be done with good training but the second hundred takes a will of steel. You won’t want to continue. You may break down and cry on the side of the road. Cramps may attack your muscles. You may decide this is stupid. You may throw up. Your body won’t want to keep going. That’s when people like us tell our bodies to shut up and keep going. It takes a will of steel to pedal through the pain and doubt. I think training in the wind and on the trainer with only a boring wall to look at helps build discipline. But there is something about the people who finish. They have a mind that can make it through things mere mortals cannot. Don’t give up.

As to the physical training, I recommend making sure you can ride a gravel century, but people have finished strong doing 60-80 mile training rides. Train hard. Ride in the wind. Ride gravel. Focus on interval training. Ride with people faster than you. Have fun but train hard. Two hundred miles of Flint Hills gravel will bring you to your limits.

# ****FIND YOUR PACE AND****

#  ****STICK TO IT****

If you are a slower rider people will be passing you right and left. Let them. If you stick to your pace you will pass them when they give up. There’s like a 20% finishing rate on hot years. You won’t finish if you start too fast. I ride with a HR monitor and keep my HR around 145. It works for me. If I keep it too high I will sputter out after 50 miles and have to limp the rest of the way with no strength. I also keep my eye on my average speed. I’d like to get my average around 15mph, but the two years I did the DK, my average was about 13.3. I am training again to do the DK200 and my average speeds continue to rise.

# ****STICK ON A WHEEL****

I didn’t do this my first year. I felt like it was cheating. It’s not. Take turns pulling for each other. My good friend Scott told me to ride someone’s wheel as much as possible and that’s what I do, taking turns to pull of course. In 2011, I went from pack to pack riding my way towards the front of the middle, saving as much energy as possible by drafting. Make sure to return the favor. If you are riding with a team, this is a great strategy especially in the Kansas wind. Although this is a self supported race, the DK200 Rider’s bible allows drafting on another race participant.

# ****HELP OTHER RIDERS****

See a rider changing a flat or in any kind of pickle? Make sure they are OK and don’t need help before riding past. I gave away my tube to a guy in dire straits somewhere near Little Egypt in 2010. Karma is a bitch – respect it.

# ****HAVE A SUPPORT CREW YOU CAN TRUST****

They need to be there and have all your stuff. Choose a person or people that will keep you motivated and not baby you. When I made it to the midway checkpoint in 2010 I learned later that Brooke, Adam’s wife, was quiet because I looked so bad she didn’t know what to say. Adam is a badass and just kept saying “You can do this” type of things even though I looked like a pile of dogsh\*t. That year I cramped so bad from mile 32 to 103 that I was sore and beat in Council Grove with the hardest part of the course ahead of me. I was saved by pickle juice – no joke. Also they should have your supplies and food spread out and ready for you. They need to act like a Nascar pit stop crew and take care of everything for you. Make that list. You will be tired and maybe delirious.

# ****THE WEEK BEFORE THE EVENT EAT AND DRINK AS HEALTHY AS POSSIBLE****

I would add nuun or electrolyte drink to my daily regimen of water drinking. Maybe on Wednesday do an all out but short workout (20-30 mile ride as fast as possible) to use up your glycogen stores and then eat good, healthy carbs to replenish them. Here’s other advice I have heard the week before the race:

* Carbo load by eating lots of good healthy carbs (I continue to eat healthy and don’t change much)
* Eat lots of protein the week before (I just continue to eat healthy and don’t change much)
* Take the week off from hard training (some say two weeks from *hard* training)
* Do lots of stretching every night (yoga)
* Sleep well
* Don’t do anything different from the usual

This sort of thing is different for everyone. Work out the kinks during training. The more of these races you do the better you will get.

**BRING A CAMERA**

Trust me you will want to remember this experience.

# ****INVITE EVERYONE**** TO THE FINISH LINE

The love of your family and friends at the finish line is the best thing you will ever hear in your life after 200 miles of grueling gravel. I will never forget my 2010 finish at 1:50 in the morning.

# ****LEARN TO YELL AT DOGS AND CATTLE****

You may be chased by dogs. Be assertive in your tone and body language. I’ve never had to kick a dog, you shouldn’t have to either. If you are fast enough, they won’t get you :).

Cattle roam free in the free range areas of the  Flint Hills. You may have to yell at them to get them to get off the road. Be careful, I’ve seen them charge. They outweigh even the largest of riders so just use some common sense. Once again an assertive yell and they usually run away. Oh, and watch out for cow patties too. That could be nasty.

What else? Next year I hope to be a racer, not a shooter if everything goes as planned. I may  be riding a fatbike, so a lot of my choices have changed. I love the buttery smoothness it gives me on the chunky gravel. Since I added the aeros, it serves me well for longer distance rides. Plus it exudes Adventure Monkey persona. 

Taking this into account, I would lean more towards telling people to use the widest tires they feel they can go fast with because it will be a more comfortable ride and in the long run they will go faster. This is a new mindset for me as my CX bike has 35’s on it and before surgery that’s what I was planning on riding in the DK.

Enjoy this race! You are riding through some of the most beautiful plains in the world! Keep your spirit high and enjoy. I will see you out there on the course. I am shooting all weekend. Say hi and don’t forget to stop into the Emporia Arts Center to see the Adventure Monkey photography show.
Anything you can think of that I forgot? Leave a comment for all to see.