Run Like an Elk (How to Run on Mountain Trails)

I have been mountain running trails for awhile, with most of my running being on trails since I retired & moved to Pine a few years ago. I have also taken some hard falls on the trails, coming home with "trail rash." However, I only fall about once a year since changing my running technique on the trails. Best way to describe the new style is “running like an elk.” If you have ever seen an elk running through the forest you will notice that they lift their legs straight up and then forward. You will also notice that, even through the roughest brush, they never trip. I wish I had a video to share, but every time I see them run through the forest it is because I'm trail running & have startled them (and they have startled me).

How to run like an elk

- Start your stride by lifting your foot a little higher than you would on a street run before swinging it forward. This takes a little more energy but it will greatly reduce the risk of falling.
- Shorten your stride, as this will make it easier to get a higher leg lift. Make the extra effort to lift your leg because as you get tired you just tend not lift your leg as high (I usually trip late in my run).
- Watch your speed going down hill. As your forward foot lands while going downhill you will slide forward ever so slightly. The steeper the hill and faster you are running the more you slide. If your toe slides into the tip of a protruding rock, which you probably didn’t even see, you will quickly become airborne. If you are lucky you will stumble but not fall. More than likely, thou, you will stumble once or twice before landing full frontal and sliding. Trust me, sliding is the worst part. Most of my falls have be running downhill.
- Of course, run with proper form. It’s not hard. Your foot should land under your body. No heel strikes! You can land flat footed, like me, or on your forefoot, but don’t land heel first. This is more difficult going downhill but the closer you can get to landing your foot under your body going downhill the less likely your are to fall. A shorter stride (see above) will make it easier for your foot to land under your body.

I also suggest using a running cap or visor. Not only will it reduce sweat getting into your eyes but will help you see the trail surface when the sun is in front of you. A cap is much more effective than sun glasses, but of course you can use both.

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