

Climbing Cardiovascular Training without Commuting

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Q: I'm looking for a good way to work my mountaineering muscles without several hours' commute each way to get to the mountains. What sorts of workouts do you recommend that would be beneficial, preferably outside, but not require a huge chunk of driving time?

Our two-part answer to this question focuses on 1) the cardiovascular exercises anyone across the country can do to effectively train the uphill propulsion muscles involved in climbing mountains, and 2) local (in the Seattle area) options for outdoor workouts if you prefer to exercise outside but do not have enough time to get to the Olympics or Cascades on a regular basis.

FLAT LAND TRAINING

In order to train appropriately for safe, fun, predominantly pain-free travel in the mountains, you need to prepare the ascending and descending muscles for elevation gain and loss. Loosely translated, that means you need to get the glutes, calves, and hamstrings (i.e. butt and backs of the legs) ready to move you uphill, and the quads and core ready for going downhill.

There are a number of gym machine options that will allow you to train these muscle groups. These include a) Elliptical cross trainers, the gym machines that are a cross between treadmill and bicycle (with or without arm levers); b) incline treadmills (the higher the ramp, the more challenging the workout and the steeper the hill you are climbing); c) step mills, which look like revolving stairs or escalators; and d) stairmasters, machines with pedals that shift up and down while your torso stays relatively stationary. Exercising on any of these aerobic machines will target the muscles that propel you uphill. To optimize your time on any of these machines, make sure you are not draping yourself over the hand rails, bending excessively at the waist, or holding so tightly to support railings that a lot of your bodyweight is supported by the machine, rather than by the working legs.

Options that do not involve aerobic machines include participating in step aerobics classes, trail running with moderate elevation change, and climbing real stairs, both up and down. By adding pack weight to any of the workouts suggested here you get even more direct mountaineering benefit, strengthening the legs, core, and pack-carrying muscles in the upper back and shoulders. Adding a pack to a local walk can provide

direct benefit, engaging all the pack-carrying muscles even if you do not have access to high mountains. While cardiovascular workouts that include rowing, flat running, roller blading, cycling and swimming are all good general cross-training fitness options, for mountaineering you want to be sure that most of your training time is spent loading the spine in the same way you will be in the mountains: upright and going up and down hill, not seated, in water, or on flat land. For more information on targets and how each of these types of workouts can help you get ready, you may find it helpful to view the DVD: Train to Climb Mt. Rainier or Any High Peak for more information about this product) or visit www.bodyresults.com/S2benchmarks.asp for suggested flat-land targets for mountaineers.

LOCAL SEATTLE TRAINING OPTIONS

Take a look at www.bodyresults.com/S2I90hikes.asp for some great hikes along the I-90 Corridor, if you can sacrifice a little driving time (up to an hour each way from Seattle). If you must stay in town for your hiking training, try visiting local areas with hills. Five that come to mind immediately are 1) Golden Gardens, out of Shilshole Bay Marina; 2) Discovery Park, with nature trails looping throughout the park that are great for trail running or hiking; 3) Queen Anne itself, walking from base to top, 4) Carkeek Park (6 miles of hiking trails and beautiful views of Puget Sound); and 5) West Seattle from shore to top. Snoqualmie Falls also offers a pretty, steep 1-mile round trip trail that could be done multiple times, merely 25 driving minutes out of Seattle.

Finally, load up a pack and try stair climbing at one of the local suggestions below:

- * University of Washington / Hec Ed stadium bleachers
- * University of Washington / lower parking lot stairs
- * SW Thistle St. (West Seattle) 352 stairs gain=150 ft.
- * Any downtown building that grants public access (I liked the challenge of 23 stories in the Seattle Tower Building)
- * East Blaine St. (Capitol Hill)
- * East Howe St. (Capitol Hill)
- * Freeway Park (Downtown, good place for an outdoor circuit)
- * John Street (one of the best hill climbs downtown) between 3rd and 9th
- * Bell St Overpass between Anthony's and the Odyssey Center (Waterfront)
- * 3rd and Yesler (near Harborview)

Be forewarned, however, that if you are planning on doing stair climbing for your main training, but have not yet tried it, we strongly suggest

reducing the load in your pack by as much as half, as your calves need a few workouts to adjust to this type of training. If you have a favorite local training spot that you would like to add to this list, please send it our way. Happy training!