



CLIMBING FOR CANCER

■ Hikers and climbers scour the summits for an algae that may help cure cancer.

Attention hikers and climbers: **on your next trip to the local crag, you might have a hand in curing cancer.** Sound ridiculous? Megan Sturdy, a medical chemist at the University of Illinois at Chicago and an avid climber, is calling on anyone who frequently explores the outdoors to help with her ongoing cancer treatment research. Sturdy is testing different strains of naturally occurring blue-green algae to see how it affects a certain cancer enzyme. As part of Climbing for Cancer Research, Sturdy will send anyone willing to help a simple algae collection kit for free. She's hosting a climbing benefit for the cause at the Muir Valley area of the Red River Gorge in Kentucky on June 6.

How did you figure out how to fit climbing into your cancer research?

■ I've been climbing for about five years. I learned quickly that climbers and hikers travel to remote natural areas. If I could encourage some of them to collect samples from different habitats, I realized that we'd have a better chance to find an effective strain. Blue-green algae growing in different habitats allow for different chemical diversities to develop.

Is blue-green algae easy to find?

■ Definitely. The collection kits we send contain a basic set of instructions and pictures of exactly what we are looking for. It's just pond scum.

Any particular places best for collection?

■ The greater diversity of blue-green algae is found in more extreme habitats such as high altitudes. Those particular strains have gone through so much to adapt and survive.

Can non-climbers be useful?

■ Absolutely. You can often find blue-green algae in your backyard. Each microhabitat is intriguing. We can often find cyanobacteria growing on rocks near waterfalls, which is not your everyday pond scum. And some of our most promising samples have actually come from puddles on the side of the road.

ASK THE EXPERT > Paddling Playgirl Anna Levesque

Anna Levesque has a bronze medal from the 2001 Freestyle Kayaking World Championship, and was a member of the Canadian National Freestyle team for five straight years. She's worked as a whitewater guide across the globe and currently devotes her time to teaching women how to kayak with her North Carolina based company Girls at Play: watergirlsatplay.com.



I really want to learn how to kayak, but I'm terrified of drowning. Any tips for helping me get over that?

■ One of the best skills that you can develop in kayaking is the ability to work through fear. Although fear can be healthy because it helps to keep us alive in certain situations, if we let it, it can make us so conservative and safe that we don't live life to the fullest.

First, take professional instruction. A good, experienced instructor has tools and progressions to help you feel more confident and comfortable on the water. Second, practice the wet exit in calm flatwater near shore over and over until you become comfortable being underwater and getting out of your kayak. Once you know that you can get out of your kayak easily, flipping over becomes less scary. The wet exit is the most overlooked skill in kayaking to help build confidence.

What sort of cross training can I do during the off season so I'm in good kayaking shape when the rain starts to fall?

■ Most paddlers in this area love to mountain bike and trail run. It keeps them fit and strong. Working on your core strength is important because for paddling, your power comes from your core. Personally, in addition to cycling, swimming, and running, I like yoga and salsa dancing as additional cross training activities.

Sea kayaking looks so easy and peaceful, but when I tried one on my local lake, it was exhausting. What did I do wrong?

■ You were probably using your arms instead of your core. Proper paddling technique harnesses torso rotation. Instead of pulling with your arms every time you take a stroke, try planting your paddle in the water and then rotating with your core. Think of your arms as an extension of your core. Twist from your belly button for the most power.



WHITewater WUNDERKIND

13-year old Lauren Burress paddled the 30-foot Pine Creek Falls in Colorado this spring. Burress, a Freestyle and Slalom Kayaking Junior National Champion, learned to paddle on the Ocoee River in Tennessee.



RIVER HIGHS AND LOWS

The South made two top 10 lists for its regional rivers. On the bright side, Forbes Magazine named three regional cities to its best paddling town list: Chattanooga was heralded for its

creek boating; Charlotte made the list for its Olympic Whitewater Center, and Washington, D.C. was lauded for the Potomac River and the lineage of Olympic kayakers who've trained in the area.

Unfortunately, Dixie also has three waterways on a new list of America's Most Endangered Rivers. Watchdog group American Rivers listed Georgia's Flint River at number two due to a proposal to dam the river. The Saluda River in South Carolina came in at number six for its pollution from human waste, and Maryland's Mattawoman Creek—a rare unspoiled tributary of the Chesapeake Bay—is being threatened by the development of a new highway.



PADDLING FOR PARKINSON'S

Joe Forrester, a fourth year medical student at the University of Virginia, will paddle for four months down the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers to raise funds and awareness for Parkinson's Disease. Forrester lost his great uncle to Parkinson's, and his grandfather is currently fighting the disease that afflicts over one million Americans. Follow the journey: paddlingforparkinsons.com.