

A person in a red jacket stands on a rocky cliff edge, looking out over a vast, layered canyon landscape under a clear sky. The canyon walls are illuminated by warm light, creating deep shadows and bright highlights on the rock faces.

THE MOUNTAIN FIT TRAINING PLAN WORKBOOK

A step-by-step guide
to training yourself
for hiking,
backpacking, and
mountaineering
adventures.

THE MOUNTAIN FIT TRAINING PLAN WORKBOOK

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DISCLAIMER

The information provided in this training plan is for informational purposes only. While my recommendations are based on accepted exercise science research and guidelines, they do not (and cannot) take into account your individual needs, abilities, and limitations. This plan is NOT intended to be a substitute for medical advice or working with an exercise professional who knows your personal health history and abilities. All exercise has inherent risks, including injury and (in rare instances) stroke, heart attack and death. Before beginning an exercise program, consult a health care professional to make sure this type of exercise is safe for you. If you do not seek and follow advice from an appropriate health care authority, you assume liability for any injury that may occur while following this plan.

A vertical photograph on the left side of the page shows a person in a red jacket and light-colored pants standing on the edge of a rocky cliff. They are looking out over a vast canyon with layered rock formations under a clear sky. The word "CONTENTS" is written vertically in large, white, sans-serif capital letters over the image.

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HI THERE!

Thanks for checking out my training plan workbook!

I'm Sarah, a fitness coach and certified personal trainer who helps hikers get in awesome shape for backpacking and mountaineering.

I created this workbook to help you write training plans that get results for all your mountain adventures. I'm a big believer that the best training is flexible and personalized. So writing your own plans is a valuable skill to develop.

If at any point you have questions, need encouragement, or do something super rad, don't forget to jump into the **Facebook Group** and share.

Happy training!

Love, Sarah xx



WHY YOU REALLY NEED TO WRITE YOUR OWN TRAINING PLANS

Have you ever set out to climb a big mountain or hike a big hike or run a long distance race — and then googled "training plans" to see how to do it?

I sure have!

And it actually hurt me.

When I was training for Mount Rainier, I followed a plan right out of my favorite fitness book.

Which would have been fine. Except.

THE PLAN was apparently written for 25-year-olds with amazing joints and breathlessly short recovery times.

THE PLAN told me to carry a 50-pound pack up 4,000 ft. of elevation gain every weekend for months on end.

After a few months, my hips were so sore, I felt like my legs were going to snap off.

But because THE PLAN said so, I soldiered on!

Seriously, I would have followed THE PLAN into the grave.

Because it was written by an "expert" who knew all the things, right?

And by the time I got to Rainier, I was so overtrained that I didn't really enjoy climbing the way I wanted to.

(Yes, I was actually happy someone on my rope team had the flu and was moving slowly, because I felt like I was dragging a lead sled to the top.)

Friend, if you are in this boat, put down that coffee/wine/Kool-Aide/kombucha and listen up.

One of the best things you can do for yourself as a mountain athlete is to learn to be a good coach to yourself.

This means writing training plans that not only get results but are right for your body and fitness level.

It also means making any adjustments that you need to so you stay healthy and motivated through the long training season.

And I want to show you how to do it. 😊

Turn the page (or scroll down) to get started!

STEP #1: KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING

A common mistake people make when they're getting ready for a goal hike is not getting super specific about what kind of fitness the hike will require.

I get it. When it comes to training, we're all eager to get started.

But the truth is, training without understanding the requirements of the hike is like charging into the wilderness without a map or GPS ... and hoping you end up on top of a mountain!

So if you haven't already, it's time to research your goal hike in detail, paying attention to daily **distance**, **elevation gain**, and the **weight** you will carry in your pack.

Use the worksheet on the next page to start your planning. Make additional copies if needed!



TRIP PLANNING WORKSHEET

Day	Distance	Elevation Gain	Weight Carried	Other Considerations (High elevation, steepness, technical terrain, stream crossing, etc.)
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				

Once you've filled out the chart, circle your two hardest back-to-back days, plus any other challenges you will need to train for.

TRIP RESEARCH RESOURCES

- Your guide service
- Other guide services
 - Check websites for trip descriptions
- Guidebooks
- Online trip reports/blogs
- Forums
- Facebook groups
- Regional mountain clubs (USA)
 - Check websites for trip descriptions
 - [Mazamas](#) (Portland)
 - [The Mountaineers](#) (Seattle)
 - [Colorado Mountain Club](#)
 - [Appalachian Mountain Club](#) (Eastern USA)
- Online trip guides
 - [Mountain Project](#)
 - [Hiking Project](#)
 - [AllTrails](#)
 - [ProTrails](#)
 - [14ers.com](#) (Colorado)
 - [SummitPost](#)
- Map it yourself
 - [Caltopo](#)
 - [Hillmap](#)
 - [Gaia GPS](#)

STEP #2: KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING

Before you dive into training, it's really important to know your current fitness level! So what I want you to do is to log all of your exercise for at least one week.

You can do this in Excel/Google Sheets using [this training log template](#). Or you can use a fitness tracking app like Strava.

Log any "exercise" that feels like a 3 or above on an intensity scale of 1–10 (with 10 representing all-out effort). So if you take a brisk walk with the dog and your heart starts pumping a little, log it!

Also, I'd like you to grade how each workout felt on an A-to-F scale. "A" means it felt easy. "F" means it was so hard you didn't finish it.

At the end of each week, add up your total minutes of exercise, your minutes of cardio, your miles, and your total elevation gain. This should give you a good idea where to start your training.



STEP #3: MAP OUT YOUR TRAINING SEASON

So now that you know where you are and where you want to go, let's design a bridge to get you there. In this step, we'll map out the major phases of your training so you can plan accordingly.

As you work through this exercise, it helps to have a calendar in front of you. Personally, I like to print out a full year of calendar pages and hang them on the wall so I can see everything at once.

If you want to create a one-year wall calendar, check out the website print-a-calendar.com. It's totally fast and free.



PLANNING YOUR TRAINING STEP BY STEP

What to add to your calendar:

- **Start date of your goal hike.** Just guess if you're not 100% sure yet.
- **Your taper.** This is a 1–3-week “easy” period just before your goal hike. During the taper, you will decrease your workout volume to rest and rejuvenate before the main event.
- **Your peak training cycle.** Right before the taper, you will have 1–4 of your hardest training weeks. Expect to be tired during this period. Block this time off, and try to keep it free of other commitments.
- **Life events.** If you know of any upcoming personal, work, or family commitments that will affect your training time, add those to the calendar.

Things to think about:

- **Do you have enough training time?** There's no hard-and-fast rule about how long you should train. But most active people will benefit from at least 4 months of training for a really big goal like Mount Rainier, Mount Whitney, Grand Canyon Rim 2 Rim, etc.
- **How long will your training cycle be?** After a few weeks of building up your training time and intensity, it's important to take an “easy” week. This will allow your body to consolidate the gains you've made.
 - Most people do well on a 4-week training cycle, which means you will build for 3 weeks, then rest for 1 week. However
 - If you are over 50, have a chronic health condition, or need extra recovery time for any reason, use a 3- or even 2-week cycle. It's also fine to adjust your cycle length as the season goes on.
 - You don't need to calendar your cycles. Just have a starting place in mind!
- **How fast will you ramp up?** Plan to increase your weekly volume by about 5–10% each week. Again, no need to calendar this yet! Just make a decision for yourself.

TRAINING SEASON PLANNING WORKSHEET

Today's date	
Goal hike start date	
Taper start date	
Number of training weeks available	
Length of first training cycle (weeks)	
Weekly volume ramp-up (%)	
Current weekly workout volume (minutes) From Step 2	
Current weekly cardio volume (minutes) From Step 2	
Current weekly hiking distance (mi./km) From Step 2	
Current weekly elevation gain (ft./m) From Step 2	
Goal hike distance – hardest day (mi./km) From Step 1	
Goal hike elevation gain – hardest day (ft./m) From Step 1	

When you look at where you are and where you need to go, how do you feel? It's normal to be a little worried at this stage.

The truth is, there's no hard-and-fast rule about how close to your goal you should get during training. But please rest assured, you don't have to get all the way there — or even super close.

Resist the temptation to do the math and find out how much you can ramp up your training before the taper. Instead, take training week by week. Listen to your body and make adjustments.

The goal is to get as fit as you can — while staying healthy and motivated!

STEP #4: PLAN YOUR AEROBIC BASE TRAINING

To have really great endurance for mountain hiking, you have to build up what's called your aerobic base, which is the volume of moderate-intensity cardio you do each week.

Your aerobic system is the energy system in your body that burns fat for fuel. It's most active during low-to-moderate-intensity exercise. So the more efficient you can make it, the greater your endurance will be.

Unfortunately, the aerobic system takes a long time to respond to training! That's why I recommend planning at least 4 months of training to get ready for your goal hike or climb.

So how do you plan your aerobic base training?



AEROBIC BASE TRAINING: THE RULES

- Perform aerobic base workouts at RPE 4–5. (Intensity level 4–5 on a 10-point scale where 10 represents all-out effort.)
- Aerobic base workouts should make up about 75% of your total weekly training time.
- One of your weekly aerobic base workouts should be a long, sport-specific workout. For most of you, it will be a hike. This “long hike” should take up about 40% of your weekly training time.
 - If you will carry a heavy pack on your goal hike, gradually build up your pack weight during long training hikes until you reach the goal weight.
- Break your remaining training time into shorter, moderate-intensity cardio workouts lasting 30–60 minutes per week.
 - Some of these workouts may include speed work, which we’ll talk about in Step #5. But your warm ups, cool downs, and recovery intervals will still count toward your aerobic base time.
- During your shorter cardio workouts, you can do any hiking-specific exercise that requires sustained effort.
 - Examples: hiking, running hills, climbing stairs, stair mill, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing.
 - Add a backpack to boost intensity.
- You can also use one short cardio workout per week for cross-training. This means doing a cardio exercise that isn’t hiking-specific. Cross training adds variety to your program and gives your muscles a break.
 - Examples: Cycling, stationary bike, elliptical machine, aerobics class.

STEP #5: PLAN YOUR SPEED WORK

There are two really good reasons to add speed workouts to your training.

- First, speed workouts create resistance that simulates elevation gain. They are one of the best ways you can train for mountain hiking without actually having a mountain to climb.
- There's also evidence that high-intensity cardio training can improve your performance and comfort at altitude. (Please remember that speed training is no substitute for taking time to acclimatize and moving slowly on your first few days of high-altitude hiking.)

If you haven't done speed work before, I realize it can feel kind of scary and intimidating. But I promise you, these will be some of your favorite workouts. They can also be really short, which is another reason to love them!



SPEED WORK: THE RULES

- Do speed workouts 1–2 times a week.
- Speed work is usually done in intervals. Here's a typical interval workout:
 - Warm up for 10 minutes.
 - Pick up the intensity for a few minutes (work interval)
 - Slow down for a few minutes to rest (recovery interval)
 - Repeat work and recovery intervals the desired number of times.
 - For example, you might set a goal to do 15 minutes total work at RPE 7. You could meet this by doing 3 x 5 min. intervals. Slow down to recover after each interval.
 - Always cool down for 5–10 minutes after a hard cardio workout.
- The length and intensity of your intervals depend on your goals and fitness level. (RPE is the 1–10 intensity scale.)

RPE	Benefits	Single Interval Work Time	Total Work Time
5–6	Great for beginners who want to ease into speed work.	Start with 1–3 min. and build	Start with 5–10 min. and build
7–8	Raises the lactate threshold, allowing you to hike faster without tiring or cramping.	5–20 min.	15–40 min.
9–10	Improves overall endurance. Appears to improve comfort and performance at high altitude. Start only after establishing a good base of fitness (> 7 hrs. of cardio a week).	30 sec.–3 min.	5–15 min.

BEST SPEED WORK EXERCISES

The best exercises for high-intensity training require you to generate power fast with your whole body:

- Power walking (great for beginners; add hills, stairs, or pack weight to boost intensity)
- Power hiking (especially uphill with a weighted pack)
- Running (sprints, hill repeats)
- Running stairs/stair mill
- Squat jumps
- Jumping jacks
- Jump rope
- Skier jumps
- Burpees/squat thrusts
- Mountain climbers
- Weight-lifting circuits
- Group fitness classes and videos (HIIT, CrossFit, Insanity, P90X)
 - With these longer class workouts, make sure you're not getting too much intensity each week. As your training volume increases, you may need to cut back on classes to avoid overtraining. Always remember that aerobic base building is your #1 priority.

STEP #6: PLAN YOUR STRENGTH TRAINING

Although strength training isn't the most important part of endurance training, it's very important for your overall health and wellness.

Strength training is awesome, because it aids with weight loss and management, helps prevent cardiovascular disease, maintains bone density, and improves mood.

So I strongly encourage you to do at least 1–2 strength workouts a week — even when you're not actively training.



STRENGTH TRAINING: THE RULES

- Do 1–2 strength workouts a week. Recover for at least 48 hours between intense strength workouts.
- Most hikers do really well on what’s called **high-rep low-resistance strength training**. This develops your muscular endurance so that your muscles can contract over and over and over without fatiguing.

Sets	Reps	Rest	Program
2–3	12–20	30–60 seconds	Warm up with 10 minutes cardio. Then do a full-body workout with 6–10 exercises, emphasizing core and lower body.

- Some hikers, especially those who will carry a lot of weight on their goal hike, also benefit from occasional **heavy lifting**, including a dedicated heavy lifting period early in the season.

Sets	Reps	Rest	Program
4–6	3–6	2–5 minutes	Warm up with 6–8 core exercises. For heavy lifting phase, choose 3–5 sport-specific exercises.

- Another great, sport-specific strength workout is to hike on hilly terrain with a weighted backpack.
 - Carry enough weight so that your lower-body strength is challenged before your cardiovascular system.

BEST STRENGTH EXERCISES FOR HIKERS

To balance your workout, choose exercises from each category. To learn more, check out my [YouTube playlist](#).

CORE

Hanging Leg Raises	Reverse Crunch	Russian Twists
Wood Choppers	Planks	Bicycle

QUAD DOMINANT

Goblet Squat	Split Squat	Bulgarian Split Squat
Back Squat	Lunge Matrix	Body-Weight Squat
Box Step Up	Reverse Step Up	Leg Press

HAMSTRING DOMINANT

Deadlift	One-Leg Deadlift	Romanian Deadlift
Hamstring Curl	Calf Raise	

PUSH

Push-Up	Overhead Press	Shoulder Press
Tricep Kickback	Bench Press	Dips

PULL

Pull-Up	Bent-Over Row	Horizontal Pull-Up
Cable Row	Bicep Curl	Lat Pull-Down

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Use this worksheet to map out your weekly workout plan. You can also use your [training log Excel sheet](#) to plan in more detail.

Start Date:	Plan	Minutes
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		
Total		

BONUS TIPS

- Plan your training one-cycle at a time.
 - If you plan too far ahead, you may feel pressured to stick to your own plan — even if it's too hard for you.
 - Life happens during training! You will need to adjust your plan to make room for illness, injuries, personal and work issues, and weather. This is much easier to do when you take training one cycle at a time.
- Listen to your body and adjust your plan as needed.
 - Remember, the goal isn't to reach some arbitrary benchmark that you invent (or that some guru on the interwebs invents). The goal is to see how far you can take yourself while staying healthy and motivated.
- Have a plan B for when life happens.
 - When face a training interruption like an illness, make that week the “easy” week in your training cycle.
 - Design a couple of go-to workouts you can do at home when you need to.
 - Try to get your long-hike in, even if you have to skip other workouts.
 - Consider buying travel insurance in case an injury or life event prevents you from taking your goal trip.

YOU JUST KILLED THAT!

Congratulations on writing that training plan! Knowing how to coach yourself is a valuable skill for endurance athletes. Hopefully this simple, 6-step planning process will carry you through many amazing adventures for years to come.

If this workbook raised any questions for you, be sure to hop into the **Mountaineers and Backpackers in Training Facebook group** for help and support.

If you want to learn how to train yourself for tougher hiking, backpacking, and mountaineering trips, check out my online course, **Mountain Fit: Self Coaching for Mountain Athletes**.

Happy training! I see great things in your future.

Love, Sarah xx

