



PREPARING FOR THE CHALLENGE

MOUNTAIN CHALLENGE TRAINING PLAN

September 25 - September 28, 2025
Sunday River, Maine

We've included month-by-month training suggestions at three different fitness levels: Level One program for persons relatively out of shape but ready to test themselves; Level Two for "weekend warriors"—active but not in peak condition (i.e. could not run a half-marathon this weekend without being sore for days afterward); and Level Three for experienced endurance athletes looking to tailor training specific to the rigors of the SCI Mountain Challenge.

If you have any questions regarding training or the event as a whole, please reach out to our team at MountainChallenge@Seamenschurch.org.

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MARCH

LEVEL ONE

We recommend consulting with your doctor before starting any exercise program. You should plan to develop your fitness and endurance over many months. We recommend scheduling in two 30-minute cardio workouts per week that will elevate your heart rate, get you moving, and leave you sweating by the time you're done. This could mean an activity such as riding a bike, stair climbing, vigorous walking, jogging, paddling or swimming. You may even want to cross-train to keep it interesting and stay motivated!

LEVEL TWO

The suggestions here are based on the assumption that you are regularly active; for example, you might play basketball on weekends or jog/run a couple of times a week. We recommend two 45-minute cardio workouts per week, outdoors or inside. By doing a steady 45 minutes of physical activity, you will most likely elevate your heart rate for longer than you're accustomed and by doing so you will start to develop the endurance and mental toughness that will serve you well in September. For extra credit, borrow from the Level Three workout below.

LEVEL THREE

Okay, you are already in pretty good shape and looking to burn up the Vermont trails in September. We recommend at least two days of 40-minute running workouts per week. Bring a watch and stop every 10 minutes to complete 25 push-ups and 25 squat jumps. This is a great way to spice up a treadmill run and really boost your metabolism!

APRIL

Spring is here—make the most of it and get outside! The April workouts continue to use the three levels of intensity mentioned at the top of this section.

LEVEL ONE

Assuming you're doing two 30-minute cardio workouts each week, ramp up the intensity of each to make the most of that exercise time. For one of your two workouts, incorporate intervals, pushing your pace for 30 seconds and then slowing down for 90 seconds. If you do a 30-minute workout, this creates 15 sets of 30 seconds of higher intensity, and 90 seconds of lower intensity. If you ride a stationary bike, bump up the resistance for your 30 seconds of intensity. If you jog, pick up your pace to a run for those 30 seconds. If you've been doing all of your workouts inside, get outside and do some trail running. These intense 30-second intervals are great for your cardiovascular system and will boost your metabolism for the entire day.

LEVEL TWO

Assuming you've got the two weekly workouts of approximately 45 minutes each, let's make April all about interval training. For one of your two workouts, follow a schedule of intervals, pushing the pace for one minute and then slowing down for one minute. If you do a 45-minute workout, allowing time for warm-up, this creates about 22+ sets of one-minute high intensity, and one-minute low intensity. Your high-intensity interval should create enough exertion to keep you from being able to carry on a conversation. No matter if you're hiking, swimming, running, or doing something else you should be sure you're working hard during those one-minute periods.



LEVEL THREE

We're figuring you're doing a variety of workouts each week; for April, we want to add a serious interval workout or two into your weekly schedule. For the day following each of the below interval workouts, you should focus on rest and recovery by making sure you stay off your legs and eat good nutritious food. You'll need a running track, path or better yet, a trail with enough room to go all-out for 200 meters.

Here are the specifics:

10- minute warm-up (light jog that progressively becomes more intense).

For set 1, do 5 repetitions of the following:

- 200-meter sprint (yes, sprint)
- 60 seconds of walking and recovery

For set 2, do 5 repetitions of the following:

- 200-meter sprint
- 45 seconds of walking and recovery

For set 3, do 5 repetitions of the following:

- 200-meter sprint
- 30 seconds of walking and recovery

For set 4, do 5 repetitions of the following:

- 200-meter sprint
- 15 seconds of walking and recovery and a 5-minute cool-down.

This workout is no joke. You'll build strength and stamina that will serve you well as you power over the mountains of western Vermont this fall!

MAY

For May, we're going to build on the interval concept from April and introduce our very own "SCI Mountain Challenge Circuit" routine; we'll calibrate the Circuit for Levels One, Two, and Three. Even the basic Level One Circuit will elevate your heart rate and build strength, agility, and balance in all the muscles you'll need for the event in September.

It's easy to find motivation to exercise once spring arrives, and by mixing some "SCI Mountain Challenge Circuits" into your training you will build a great foundation for the race in September. If you put the effort into it, this workout WILL pay dividends.

LEVEL ONE

Assuming you're doing two 30-minute cardio workouts each week, such as riding a bike, jogging, or hiking, with intervals built in. For the second half of one of those weekly workouts, let's mix in a set of "SCI Mountain Circuits." After 15 minutes of your chosen cardio activity, complete one "SCI Mountain Challenge Circuit" as follows:



- 20-second run/jog
- 10 planks with arm lifts ([see this video for more on the plank with arm lift](#))
- 20-second run/jog
- 10 squat jumps ([see this video for more on the squat jump](#))
- 20-second run/jog
- 10 push-ups
- 20-second run/jog
- 10 walking lunges ([see this video for more on the walking lunge](#))

If you finish one “SCI Mountain Challenge Circuit” and feel up for more, do another Circuit or a modified Circuit with ½ the repetitions (so 5 planks, 5 squats, 5 push-ups, 5 lunges) instead of 10.

LEVEL TWO

Assuming you’re up to two 45-minute cardio workouts each week. For May, we’re going to replace one of those two workouts with an “SCI Mountain Challenge Circuit” workout. Refer to the video references in the Level One workout to learn the details of each exercise. After completing a 5-10 minute warm-up, one Circuit will be as follows:

- 20-second sprint (yes, sprint)
- 15 planks with arm lifts
- 20-second sprint
- 15 squat jumps
- 20-second sprint
- 15 pushups
- 20-second sprint
- 15 walking lunges

Rest for 60 seconds ... then start over again at #1 for two additional circuits.

LEVEL THREE

Make one of your workouts each week an “SCI Mountain Challenge Circuit” workout and improve your core strength, balance, and get a great cardio workout in 30 minutes or less. If you want a video walkthrough on how to complete the various exercises below, refer to the videos in the Level One routine. Here are the specifics:

- 20-second sprint
- 20 planks with arm lifts
- 20-second sprint
- 20 squat jumps
- 20-second sprint
- 20 pushups
- 20-second sprint
- 20 walking lunges



Rest for 45 seconds, then start over again at step #1 but decrease your exercise repetitions by 4 so you'll do 16 planks on the second time through, 12 on the third time through, 8 on the fourth time through, and just 4 on the fifth and final time through the circuit.

JUNE

It's June and if you've been progressively building stamina and strength through the spring, you should have a good fitness base at this point. Now it's time to hit the hiking trails with a mini "SCI Mountain Challenge" to enhance your fitness, regardless of your level. This is a chance to fill your backpack with water and snacks and carry it along. Use trekking poles if you want to alleviate strain on your knees and back. For all these hikes, take a map and go with a friend. Also make sure to inform somebody of your plans as well as your expected return time—this is a good habit to develop in case you encounter an emergency on the trails.

Besides being solid workouts, hikes can be a great way to figure out how your backpack fits, which shoes and socks you prefer, and if you need to fine-tune the rest of your gear. Enjoy the outdoors and take a break for lunch or to take some photos. Save the racing for September!

LEVEL ONE

Pick a park near you (the more hills, the better) and plan a route that will take approximately two hours, or roughly 5-8 miles. Just hiking is fine, no need to jog or anything too intense! Repeat the route twice this month (or pick a different 5-8 mile route for your second hike, if you have the luxury of choices).

Additionally, continue to do variation workouts that involve cardio and intervals from April and May during the weeks you do not go on a hike.

LEVEL TWO

As with Level 1, pick a park—ideally a hilly one—and hit the trails for a couple hours. If you're moving steadily, 4 miles per hour should be a good target pace but don't worry if you're slower. Do this on two occasions in June. If you're having trouble finding time to work in a hike like this, try an early morning sunrise hike before work and see how your metabolism is fired up for the remainder of the day. Taking these hikes while also continuing your cardio and interval workouts from April and May will REALLY increase your endurance. Don't forget a light pack, poles, water, and some snacks!

LEVEL THREE

Serious endurance athletes have a couple choices for June. You can do a version of the Level Two workout, but you should exceed the 4 miles/hour target and maybe aim for a couple of hikes covering 10 miles in two hours, depending on the elevation. You could also consolidate both workouts into a single four-hour workout this month, aiming for 16-20 miles in total for your own mini "SCI Mountain Challenge." Four hours on the trails will give you a better understanding of the fit of your pack, shoe issues, and supplies, so as long as you stay active in other ways the rest of this month, doing one big workout for June is a great plan for Level Three.



JULY

For July, we're going to switch things up. If you've been following the suggested training and consider yourself a Level Two or Level Three athlete, you can skip to the end of this month's suggested workouts. We really need to talk directly to those Level One athletes, especially the ones who may not have prepared well for the race so far or those who just recently committed to the event.

LEVEL ONE

Let's not mince words: time is running out. In less than three months, the SCI Mountain Challenge will place some serious mountains before you. The combination of vertical ascents and paddling will use new combinations of muscles and will be a rude awakening to those who haven't conditioned their bodies for what's in store. You may not make it out of bed for Day Two!

We want everyone to succeed, and we recognize that "success" means different things to different people, but we're assuming if you're reviewing this training information that a measure of physical achievement factors into your personal definition of "success" for this event. To jump-start your preparations, in case you're just now focusing on the SCI Mountain Challenge, we offer the following words of training wisdom:

1. Get walking. No need to run, but log several miles each week on your feet. This will start conditioning your body to what is in store this September. Try to walk for 30 minutes or more four times a week, and once a week plan a two-hour walk (or even longer) to experience some extended exercise sessions. Walk at a park, in your neighborhood, on a treadmill, whatever works best for you.
2. Pay attention to your equipment. Pick some good shoes for hiking, either hiking boots or trail running shoes. Do your walking in those shoes to confirm they fit well and don't bother your feet. Try out a variety of socks to determine what you're going to bring to Vermont in September. This is valuable practice time, so try out your equipment and be certain it will work for you.
3. Walk some more. There are a number of ways to introduce more activity into your daily schedule:
 - a. Take the stairs at work, and challenge your teammates to do the same. If you catch an SCI Mountain Challenge teammate on an elevator between now and the event, have them contribute \$1 to the "SCI Mountain Challenge" fund as their penalty. This sort of thing can really work!
 - b. Take a 15-minute walk to conclude your lunch hour and add in sets of planks with arm lifts from May. Fifteen minutes is sufficient time to walk nearly a mile, and the metabolic boost can really lift your afternoon energy levels. The rotational planks will help with new elements, especially on day 1.
 - c. Call someone on the phone while you walk. A 30-minute catch-up with your relative/friend can be done while you tick off 2 more miles!

LEVEL TWO AND LEVEL THREE

If you're in either of these groups, just stay focused on your training! As long as you're continuing to work out three to four times a week with one session including interval training as previously discussed, you're going to be in good shape for September. Remember to inspire your teammates to put in the time and distance!



AUGUST

For August, we continue with our focus on those Level One competitors who need to make the most of this next month or so. At this point the race is just around the corner, so we want to do our best to help you to get into shape.

The SCI Mountain Challenge routes are varied and challenging. The trails are steep, flat, narrow, wide, rocky, bumpy, smooth, and almost everything else you can imagine. Preparing for two days through terrain like that requires attention to overall fitness and things such as balance and conditioning of your feet; it can be hard to replicate in a gym. A stair climber can be fine for cardiovascular fitness, but it won't train your balance or stabilizer muscles the same way a good hike will. So go take a hike!

Aim for several good hikes in August and use the time to build your true trail fitness and to test out your backpack, shoes, socks, hat, and everything else that you need for two days on the course in Vermont. Though this is an individual choice, we cannot emphasize enough the value of using trekking poles. If you find your backpack chafes your shoulders, try a different pack or figure out a padding solution that will work for you. These short hikes serve as vital trial runs for the actual SCI Mountain Challenge.

For more experienced participants, use these August hikes to figure out the best way to pack your team gear. For example, maybe your fittest teammate carries all the heavy items for the team, since you're only as fast as your slowest teammate. There are no right or wrong answers here, just the solutions that work best given your team composition and ingenuity.

Once you're on the ground in Vermont in September, the time for trying out new things is over; make the most of this August and enjoy some quality time on some hiking trails near you. Hikes tied in with cardio and endurance workouts are the key to your success on the mountains.

Get your team together, find a canoe, go on a paddle. Try each of you in each position in the boat. Figure out who is best in the stern, bow and who can add extra horsepower from the all-important middle seat.

SEPTEMBER

Endurance events like the SCI Mountain Challenge capture our imagination, and as a competitor, you should feel the excitement building for the event. Discipline is key to all your training in September, so don't get carried away by visions of majestic Vermont peaks and run yourself into the ground before the race. Make sure you sleep well and eat healthily. You may be tempted to push yourself, and motivation right now is probably easy to come-by; but for these few weeks leading up to the SCI Mountain Challenge, dial back your training intensity and do what's considered "active rest." Play tennis, go paddling, walk your dog, go for a fun swim—but don't take any aggressive hikes. You want to make sure your team starts the event in good health, so make these "lighter weeks" in terms of physical activity. Focus on getting you, your team, and your gear to Vermont in good shape and ready for a great experience.