Moving Mountains
EMPOWERMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

Paddling Out
3 WOMEN’S STORIES

→ THE SKINNY ON CLEANSING
→ ANXIETY VS. AROUSAL

Editor’s Choice:
SUMMER PRODUCT PICKS

PADDLE, TRI, HIKE, BIKE & JAM

THAI LADIES IN THE RING, ESCAPE SEATTLE, BIG CITY MOUNTAINEERS, KIDS AND BUGS, CAMPING, MEET A CYCLING COACH, MACHU PICCHU, CAMEL TREKKING, AND MORE!
Better Than Peak-Bagging
Big City Mountaineers teaches teens to summit the metaphorical mountains of their lives.

Veronica shares a bedroom with four siblings in her family’s two-bedroom apartment, and although she’s lived within sight of the Rockies her whole life, the 16-year-old has never set foot in the mountains. With a combined income that barely supports the family, her parents have neither the time nor the money for life-changing vacations. That’s where Big City Mountaineers steps in.

Big City Mountaineers (BCM) works with under-resourced urban teens like Veronica. The nonprofit, founded in 1999, aims to enhance children’s lives through transformative outdoor adventures like its core offerings in Colorado and California: seven-day backcountry expeditions that include summiting a mountain.

On her first day out with BCM, Veronica suffered from acute headaches, withdrawal from her at-home routine of drinking a 2-liter bottle of Coke every day. In the wilderness, the only option was water, and she had no choice but to let her body work out its caffeine addiction. Veronica’s trip leader also remembers the teen’s fear on her first night—she’d never slept outside before—and Veronica’s realization and appreciation of wilderness offerings she’d never experienced. On a 20-minute hike to filter water at a stream, Veronica chatted about school and boys the entire way. But as she knelt to purify the water, the teen stopped talking, looked up at the trees, and smiled. “I’ve never heard quiet like this before,” she said.

The magic of peak-bagging is part of BCM’s effort with the kids, and it’s also part of the business model that makes these efforts possible. BCM’s biggest fundraiser, Summit for Someone, brings in 50-percent of the organization’s operating budget by recruiting climbers to raise between $2,900 and $7,500 for guided trips to North America’s most renowned peaks. There are 14 destinations this year including Grand Teton, Devil’s Tower, and women’s-only trips up Mount Shasta or Mount Rainier. The fundraising and summit push for those climbers to provide teens like Veronica with a chance for a summit of their own. Now that’s a reason to climb high.

–Jayme Otto