

WHAT'S YOUR WORKOUT | By Jen Murphy

# 'I'd Rather Be Climbing'

Angela Limbach, a 28-year-old competitive ice climber, practices on wood structures



When not ascending ice, Ms. Limbach trains at a wood structure she built on her parents' property in Brookfield, Wis.

## The Workout

During the springtime, Ms. Limbach works on strength with a mix of pull ups and push ups and climbing. "I have a rotating cast of people who work out with me," she says. "It's tough to motivate myself when I'm alone." She focuses on building endurance and grip strength throughout the summer. "Your arms are almost always above your head and tire out," she says. "My goal with training is to increase the amount of time I can stay on the wall and hold on to my tools," she says. At the gym, she uses a fingerboard to help increase her finger strength. During the autumn, she works on building power and focuses on technical precision.

On Mondays and Wednesdays, Ms. Limbach teaches classes at an indoor climbing gym. Afterward, she does her own workout, usually light climbing, stretching and core work. Tuesdays and Thursdays she begins with bouldering to focus on power, shifts to work on her core and then does exercises with gymnastic rings to hone her ice-climbing skills. She hangs her ice tools on a pull up bar and does repeats of specific climbing moves, like the figure 9 position, a move where her leg goes above her arm on the same side of the body. This transitions into the more stable figure 4 position, where the right leg goes above the left arm or vice versa. "Figure 4 is used on vertical walls

to generate height while holding the ice in position, or on overhanging walls to keep feet from falling off the wall and the climber left dangling by their arms," she says.

On Thursdays she adds in weight training, mainly deadlifts. Friday is generally a rest day. She tries to climb outdoors on weekends. This could be working on precision pick placements and big spans between holds on a wooden structure she built on her parents' hunting property, about a two-hour drive from her home, or outdoor ice climbing in Wisconsin, Minnesota or Michigan.

## The Diet

Ms. Limbach has coffee and a Power Bar for breakfast, usually at work. For lunch, she packs a turkey sandwich on sourdough loaded with spinach, tomatoes, cucumbers, roasted red pepper hummus and Muenster cheese. "I'm from Wisconsin so the cheese is very important," she says. Generally, she goes straight from work to the gym and has a protein shake on the way. "It fills me up without getting that 'I ate too much' sluggish feeling," she says. She gets home around 10 p.m. and usually makes eggs and veggies for dinner. Her indulgences are ice cream and a good Bourbon Old Fashioned.

## The Gear & Cost

Ice-climbing gear can be pricey. Ms. Limbach borrows crampons

and ice axes from a local mountain club. Her accreditation as an outdoor climbing instructor and her membership in the American Mountain Guides Association often gets her up to 50% off retail prices on gear. Like the sport, the equipment isn't without its risks. "I am a safety squirrel," Ms. Limbach says. "I had two friends knock out teeth with ice tools on the same day. I keep their lessons in mind and ... never swing equipment in front of my face."

Ms. Limbach's competition dry-tooling gear includes Krukonogi Svarogs ice tools (\$650 a pair), Scarpa Rebel Ice boots (\$550) ice fiftis, which are metal hooks, (\$120 a pair), Petzl D-Lynx crampons (\$150) and Krukonogi Speed Hunter crampons (\$70). Her recreational ice-climbing gear includes Grivel Tech Machine ice axes (\$380 a pair), Black Diamond Cyborg crampons (\$150), Salomon boots (\$40 on eBay). She climbs in a Black Diamond Lotus harness (\$55), Glove It brand golf gloves (\$40 for two), and a Grivel Salamander helmet (\$50). "Pink has become my signature helmet color," she says. As an instructor, she receives a free membership at Adventure Rock in Brookfield, Wis.

## The Playlist

"When I run, I listen to a weird mix of musical soundtracks and folk rock, like Mumford & Sons," she says. She also enjoys running to Croatian cellist duo, 2Cellos.

Angela Limbach's idea of a perfect winter day involves hanging by the tip of an ice axe from a frozen waterfall above Lake Superior. "Even on the coldest days I'd rather be climbing above crashing waves instead of sitting on my couch," she says. The 28-year-old data analyst started rock climbing in high school and discovered ice climbing while attending the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Ice climbers ascend rocks and ice in winter with equipment such as crampons, ice axes and ice picks because it is too cold to climb with bare hands. The sport can look intimidating but Ms. Limbach, who is ranked 36th in the world among women, says it's more about leg strength and flexibility than arm strength. In 2017, on a whim, she entered a competition at an ice park in Fenton, Mich. A second-place finish among the women earned her a spot on the Interna-

**tional Climbing and Mountaineering Federation** World Cup tour in 2018. The federation, which has headquarters in Switzerland, is known as UIAA, the acronym for its name in French.

Competitions consist of two disciplines: lead climbing and speed ice climbing. Lead climbing generally takes place on structures made of plywood. The technique-driven discipline, also called dry tooling, is essentially ice climbing without ice. Results are based on the height a climber reaches in a given time. Speed ice climbing is a vertical sprint up an ice tower that is 40 to 50 feet high; the fastest climber wins.

Ms. Limbach, who lives in Milwaukee, competed in World Cup competitions in Beijing and Cheongsong, South Korea, last year. Because of her work schedule, she can't compete in all six annual World Cup competitions. This weekend she competed in Denver in the final leg of the 2019 UIAA Ice Climbing World Cup season.