

Playing Outside

By taking advantage of Central New York's natural bounty, these students balance the rigors of medical school with their love for outdoor sport and adventure.

By Renée Gearhart Levy

Within an hour of completing his MS III year with his OB/GYN shelf exam, Travis Cobb '09 was in the car bound for Colorado for a month of backpacking and fly fishing in the Rockies.

That was no surprise to any of his classmates, who know Cobb as an outdoorsman who partakes in outdoor activity and adventure at any opportunity.

"That's one of the reasons I chose Upstate over schools in more urban settings," says the Pennsylvania native. "I spent a lot of time in the outdoors growing up in the Poconos and wanted to be able to continue that in whatever little free time I had."

Despite the rigors of medical school and his clinical rotations, Cobb found time each week for canoeing, camping, hiking,

and especially fishing. Up to three times a week, Cobb would fish the Salmon River in Pulaski or other "secret" locales in the Central New York region, often with classmate Brent Roster '09.

"The Salmon River has rolling water year round," he says. "In the winter, we snowshoe to the river and fish for steelhead," Cobb says.

The summer before medical school, Cobb spent two months hiking and fishing in the Colorado Rockies as a way to unwind before medical school. "I was able to carve a month out of my schedule and I'm going back for a little more of the same thing," says Cobb, who will begin a rotation in Emergency Medicine, his intended specialty, upon his return.

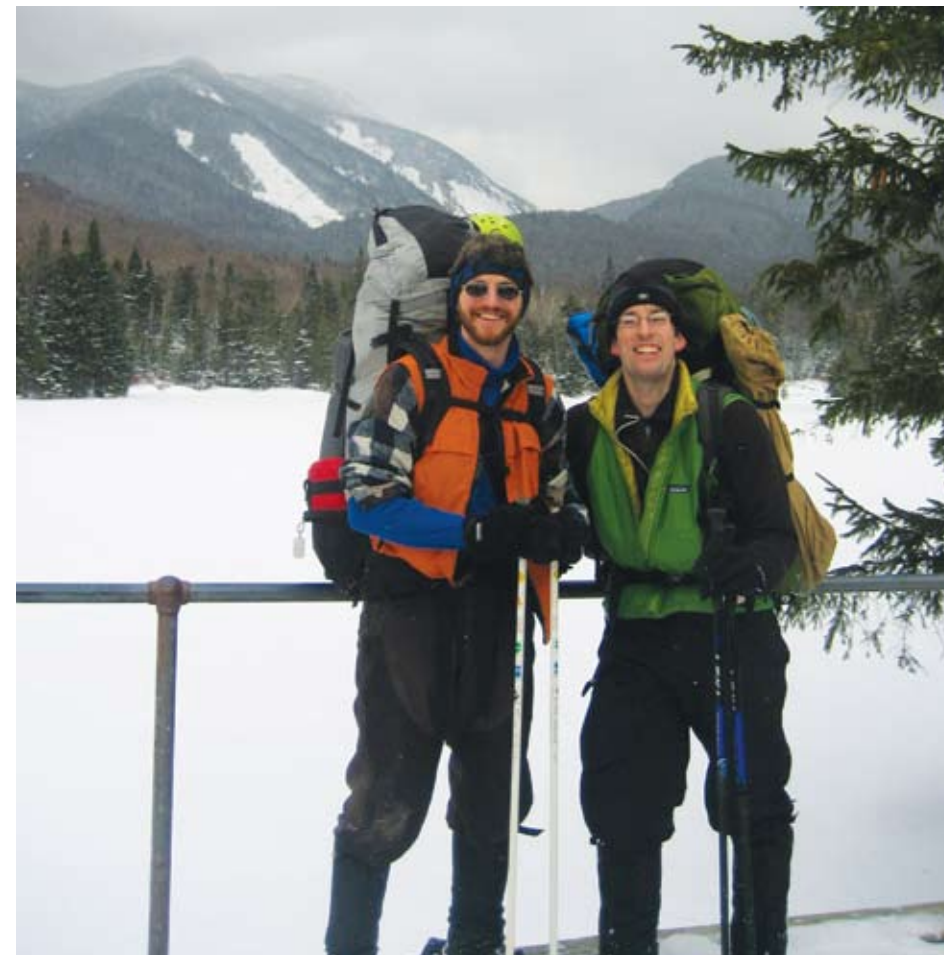
The following summer—after their MSI year—Cobb and Roster traveled to Soldotna, Alaska, at the invitation of Roster's dad, where they spent a week fishing out of his boat on the Kenai River.

"We caught a bunch of fish. It was a good time," says Roster.

The two had been members of the same advisory group during their first year at the College of Medicine and soon discovered they had similar backgrounds and interests. Both were from small towns (Roster is from Klamath Falls, in south central Oregon), and enjoyed outdoor recreation.

"That was a big part of my life growing up—hunting and fishing with my dad," says Roster, who was attracted to Upstate in part by the listing of "hunting and fishing" as recreational activities in upstate New York in a guide to medical schools.

Brent Roster '09 and Travis Cobb '09 with a 62-pound king salmon they caught during a fishing trip in Alaska.



Darrick May '09 and Stephen Weinberger '09 at Marcy Dam, with Mt. Colden in the background.

"In many sectors, hunting isn't the most politically correct activity in the world, so it was meaningful to me that the school would actually list it as a potential pastime," says Roster, who balances the demands of medical school with hiking, snowboarding, camping, fishing, and yes, hunting.

"It's all about finding a balance. If you want to spend an evening fishing, you just need to study more the night before," he says.

An aspiring orthopedic surgeon, Roster would love to match at Upstate and ultimately would like to live and practice in Alaska, Montana, or Western Wyoming. Cobb says he has no idea where he's going next, but "the only requirement is that I have access to the outdoors."

Roster and Cobb are not the only adventurous spirits in their class. Despite a surgery rotation this spring, Darrick May '09 took on learning to hang glide. Three times a week he'd travel 70 miles to Farmington, New York, for evening training. "It's only offered during the spring because the hill you launch off from lands in crop fields, so once the corn and soybeans get to a certain height you start doing damage when you land in them," he says.

After finishing his surgery final, May headed to Farmington for a weekend of hang gliding, earning his "hang 2" certification so he can fly on his own. "This was probably my most impressive outdoor feat during medical school because it was a tough commitment to make during my surgery rotation. I was

hesitant, but I was able to balance it all," he says.

Hang gliding is only the latest adventure sport for May, an avid hiker since childhood who became a "46er" at age 13 after climbing all the high peaks in the Adirondacks. As an undergraduate at Cornell, he became an active member in the Outdoor Education Program and began teaching hiking, rock climbing, and telemark skiing.

During medical school, May has filled his free time with mountain biking, white water paddling, skiing, hiking, and rock climbing.

In May, he climbed Mt. Colden (4,800 feet) via a technical ice route with classmate Steven Weinberger '09, their fourth attempt at the feat in two years.

"The first time last year, it had rained the entire night before and it was just a waterfall—no ice. The second time we didn't have all the right gear for the conditions because there was a lot of snow. The first time we tried this year, we got half way and then a storm rolled in so we had to turn around," says May. Finally, in March, they had a perfect day and a great climb.

"Outdoor adventure sports appeal to me not only because they're fun, but also because to do them safely, you have to be more aware of your environment and surroundings than you usually are," says May. "Medicine and adventure sports do have a commonality: both are human attempts to encompass nature, and as such, instill exhilaration with achievement."