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### The Green Athlete: Running Wild

Scientists and ultra marathoners join forces to document what's at stake with the spread of fracking in the North Dakota badlands.

BY JESSICA KUEPFER

APR 29 2013 | IN THE WILD SIDE

CATEGORIES: WILDLIFE PROTECTION - PARKS - NON-RENEWABLES - HABITAT PROTECTION - GEOLOGY

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Photo provided by Adventure Science.

It may stretch our imaginations a little to merge the worlds of marathons and fracking, but that is exactly what is happening this spring in the badlands of North Dakota.

**Adventure Science** is currently carrying out **100 Miles of Wild: North Dakota Badlands Transect**, a trek across the badlands to explore, discover and record the wild terrain that inspired President Theodore Roosevelt to create the National Park System.

In 100 Miles of Wild, ultra marathoners and environmental scientists join forces in order to help nearby communities understand what's at stake with the **spread of hydraulic fracking** into the badlands:

*North Dakota is in the midst of an unprecedented oil boom that has led to a rapid increase in road construction, drilling, pipelines and infrastructure throughout the oil-rich Bakken Formation. The new oil boom has brought with it new technologies, and oil extraction is now accomplished by drilling lengthy horizontal wells, and then fracturing the shale formation (fracking) to release*

#### Author Information

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Jessica is AJ's Advertising and Outreach Liaison, and a recent graduate from the University of Waterloo with an English major and French minor.

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Posted May 9, 2013  
in The Wild Side

*trapped oil. The rapid pace of this massive industry has caused an astonishing expansion of drilling pads and roads into the wild interior of North Dakota. Questions about the environmental impact abound, and there is concern about potentially hazardous frack fluid entering the aquifers relied on for drinking water, cattle, and agriculture.*

While Adventure Science doesn't take a stance on fracking itself, the team members feel strongly about the need to "help communities gather the information they need to make informed decisions." And gathering information in inaccessible, wild spaces is Adventure Science's specialty.

Founded by Simon Donato in 2008, Adventure Science combines outdoor adventuring with the scientific exploration of nature, from back yards to remote locations. Adventure scientists explore the world in a low impact manner, using non-motorized means whenever possible to make new discoveries.

Rather than take the established Maah-Daah-Hey Trail, the team, comprised of accomplished volunteer scientists and ultra marathoners, will navigate primarily off-trail through areas of interest. They will begin at Killdeer Mountain, a sacred location and site of a large battle between U.S. and Sioux Forces in 1864, to tie the trek to the history of the area and head to Theodore Roosevelt's Elkhorn Ranch, concluding at a camp used by General Custer.

The goal is to travel on foot over 100 miles to seldom-visited, isolated places within the Badlands. The Badlands (once referred to as "Hell with the fires gone out") seem an unlikely place for a trip on foot, and that is precisely why the team undertook this project. The difficulty of the trek leaves the majority of the wilderness undocumented and unexplored.

Teams will stop every hour along the way to document the flora, fauna and geology through photos, video and notes on their experiences on observations. What they collect will be shared with researchers at North Dakota State University and used to produce public educational materials about the natural and historical significance of the area and "the relationships between oil development [and] natural and cultural resources."

The creative solutions of the scientists and athletes at Adventure Science should inspire us to look at ways to merge our talents for the environment in Canada. Combining science and sport to explore the natural significance of our wild areas (and to expose the harmful effects of fracking) is something to be imitated and admired.

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While researching for this blog post, Jessica, an ultra-marathoner herself, was offered a spot on the team to replace an injured athlete for the last few days of the trek. She set out two days later for North Dakota and will hopefully be able to send us occasional updates along the way this week! You can follow along with the adventure at the [100 Miles of Wild blog](#) or [Facebook page](#).

The David Suzuki Foundation's 30x30 Nature Challenge is a great opportunity for you to get and explore the great outdoors, wherever you are! To fulfill the challenge, you just need to spend 30 minutes outside, 30 days in a row in May. AJ has signed up, and [you can too!](#)

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Posted Apr 29, 2013  
in The Wild Side

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