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UNH Launches New Undergraduate Program In Environmental Sciences

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UNH Professor Competes in Hawaii Ironman Triathlon Oct. 16 to Raise Money for Cystic Fibrosis

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DURHAM, N.H. -- Vaughn Cooper of Dover is ready to tackle what athletes refer to as the “holy grail” of all races – Hawaii’s Ironman Triathlon. A 2.4 mile swim, a 112 mile bike ride and a 26.2 mile marathon. Ironman, he says, is an extension of his lifestyle, helping him stay fit and stress free. Now it’s become an extension of his research.

The University of New Hampshire assistant professor of microbiology is participating in the Oct. 16 Ironman Triathlon World Championship in Kona for a cause – to raise money for Cystic Fibrosis research. He says it was serendipitous that he came to this. He’s participated in Hawaii Ironman before and had qualified for this year’s event, when he “got googled.”

A woman named Tracey Richardson from New Zealand, the mother of two children with Cystic Fibrosis, found Cooper’s name on the Internet when she was searching for potential participants for her racing team. Every year, World Triathlon Corporation receives dozens of requests for special entry into the race as “charity challenges.”

Tracey found me because of my connection with the CF research community,” Cooper says. “I’m an evolutionary biologist, and I’m interested in how bacteria transform from non-pathogens to cause disease. One bacteria I study is Burkholderia cepacia, an opportunistic soil microbe that colonizes the lungs of Cystic Fibrosis patients.”

Cooper will be riding with Richardson, Lisa Bentley of Canada, and Alison Caiafa of Australia. Bentley, who was diagnosed with CF in her early 20s, has competed in 20 Ironman Triathlons and has won 6 international Ironman titles. Caiafa is a dietician at the CF clinic in Melbourne.

A website, www.cure4cf.com has been launched that shares both Richardson’s and Bentley’s story and provides an opportunity to learn more about CF and support their cause with a donation to Cystic Fibrosis research. NBC will highlight the team’s Ironman effort in their coverage of the 2004 Ironman Triathlon World Championship, scheduled to air Nov. 20.