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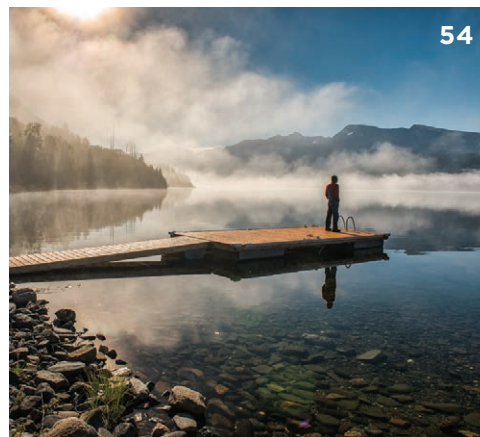
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An adventure van can open up a whole new world—like this incredible image of the aurora borealis, taken on the road in northern British Columbia.

Photo by Braedin Toth/
@braedin



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IT'S THAT #VANLIFE, MAN!

This is the next stage of your outdoor adventures—building a vehicle that puts the world at your doorstep.

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By Andrew Findlay

TRAILHEAD



BY DAVID WEBB
@davidebwebb



VAN-TASTIC

I'm obsessed. For the past few months, my late-evening recreation has been scrolling Craigslist. Nothing nefarious. I'm just looking at vans, man.

Camper vans—not minivans. One is a dream, the other a nightmare. Unless it's camperized, of course. Van life is not always a clear path—you know it when you see it. Could be a 1976 Westfalia, fully restored. Could be a '98 Dodge Caravan with the seats torn out and a plywood bedframe dropped in place.

For now, it's a solitary pursuit. While on Craigslist, I bother my wife with images she cares little about. A 1975 Dodge Tradesman with floral-pattern lino? She rolls her eyes. A rusted-out VW with 300K on the clock that's still somehow worth fifteen-large? I roll my eyes. I've seen vans I badly want for \$3,000 and vans I couldn't care less about for \$30,000. It's incredibly subjective.

Yes, I'm obsessed with #vanlife—and I haven't even started living it.

Camper vans were once the realm of retirees. But more and more young-ish adventurers are seeing the light. Rock climbers forged the way, crafting jerry-rigged campers out of used grocery-getters so they could camp at the crag for weeks on end.

The world's most-famous rock climber, Alex Honnold, has lived in a van for a decade—even with his star on the rise. I recall an interview on YouTube where he summed up van-living: "You know, it's not like I love living in a car. But I love living in all these places. I love being in Yosemite. I love being where ever the weather is good. I love being able to follow good conditions all over and be relatively comfortable as I do it."

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Yes, a backpacking trip is great. Sure, giant motorhomes are luxurious. But neither are the same as transporting all your outdoor toys—SUPs, bikes, skis—anywhere you can find a single-lane road and setting up basecamp on a tiny plot of land. It's an exciting way to live. Even if it's just on the weekend.

When I set writer Ryan Stuart loose on the assignment to uncover the allure of van life (page 36) I'll admit it was with a great deal of self-interest.

Some of the most illuminating bits from the article came not from the gear recommendations and logistics, but from folks living the #vanlife—the why, how and where of it all. We heard from a weekend warrior who invested about \$1,600 in his rough-and-tumble rig—including the initial purchase of the van itself. (I've seen tents that cost half that.) We chatted with a pair of road-trippers who work only to fund their #vanlife—every penny earned is another day on the road. (They also shed some light on vanning as a couple.)

There's the owner of a Ford dubbed 1tonTina—a dude who crafted a rig worthy of the next *Mad Max* flick. And, perhaps the ultimate #vanlife aspiration, there's the digital nomads... the ones who actually work and live on the road, every day waking to a new adventure in their home on wheels.

I hope this resonates with you. Perhaps some readers are already rockin' the #vanlife? If so—we'd love to see your rigs. Snap a photo and send it to explore@explore-mag.com or tag us on Instagram for a chance to be featured on our feed (@exploremagazine).

Back to Craigslist. Maybe by the Summer issue I'll have actually pulled the trigger. ✕

LIVE THE ADVENTURE
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CAMPING/THE HAPPY CAMPER

Kevin Callan shares camping tales, tips and tricks every Monday.

Upcoming blogs:

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- Double-blading a solo canoe.
- Blisters on the trail.
- Ticks on the rise (still).

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LETTERS

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Fall Favourites

I enjoy every issue of *explore* and have to always resist the temptation to write the editor, but after the Fall 2018 issue, I cannot resist. It started with the great cover image of Lake Louise, which I have often enjoyed (but maybe not quite at sunrise). Although I am a senior-senior, I enjoy every article in every issue of *explore* and many I relate to very personally.

The article on the changing larches (page 20) stirred many fond memories. Now that my husband has passed and the opportunity for me to return is quite unlikely, I would like to share one of our personal fall favourites, as the always spectacular Larch Valley has become too crowded.

Although Arnica Lake is in the vicinity of Gibbons Pass, the distance is not so great, so it appeals to any level of hiker. Starting at the Vista Lake trailhead and losing some elevation is a small price to pay for the aspen-dappled trail to Vista Lake as well as the climb to Arnica, as the trail passes through a once-burned-over area now resplendent with low underbrush displaying every shade from soft lime green to burgundy, including the brilliant oranges and reds of the huckleberry bushes.

Margo Pfeiff's Arctic adventures are garnering praise from readers. (From the Winter 2018 issue, page 35.)



As the trail ascends, the larches are splashed between the dark spruces and when you think you are in colour-overload, you arrive at larch-rimmed Arnica Lake nestled at the base of brooding Storm Mountain. Beyond Arnica Lake, a short trail climbs to (possibly unofficial) Arnica Summit where a somewhat indistinct trail leads right up a low spur of Storm Mountain through a larch meadow and into the open, providing a wonderful view of all the many ridges covered in larches and little Arnica Lake nestled below. This spectacular and often-quiet fall hike is one of my favourite mountain memories.

Besides the larch article, Will Gadd's column on hiking caused me some surprise (page 32). For many years, my late-husband aided and advised some of our hiking friends on the trail descents, always indicating safe routes. His advice to use stable rocks, which he termed "anchor rocks," became his legacy and every hiking season my hiking friends remember him affectionately. Imagine my surprise when Will Gadd used the term "anchor rocks" in his column and considering that we are definitely Will's father's (Ben

Gadd) generation, I would venture to guess that perhaps my late-husband coined the phrase first!

I always anticipate and enjoy Will's articles and, as an elite outdoor athlete, he always writes with respect and humility.

—Velma Martin

Amazing trail recommendation, Velma. Thanks for reading and writing in. —Ed

More Margo!

I've been noticing Margo Pfeiff appearing more

regularly in *explore*. She has a really warm writing style that really adds to the magazine. Great that you have added her—she has a nice voice that I think everyone will enjoy.

—Ken Headrick

Last year, Margo wrote "Coastal Connections" (page 20, Spring 2018), "Two, If By Canoe" (page 48, Fall 2018) and "True Arctic Immersion" (page 35, Winter 2018). Glad you enjoyed her writing. —Ed.



Correction

The image on the bottom right of page 3 in our Summer 2018 issue should have been credited to Destination BC/Mathew Massa. See more of this photographer's work on Instagram at @thismattexists.

EXPLORE THE WATERS

PADDLE WITH GREATNESS



OCEAN KAYAK

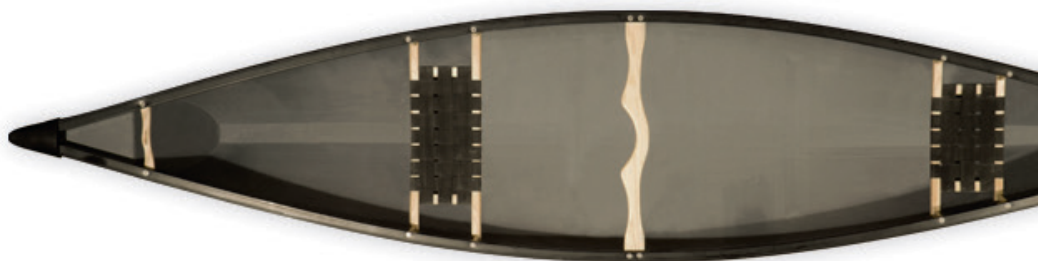
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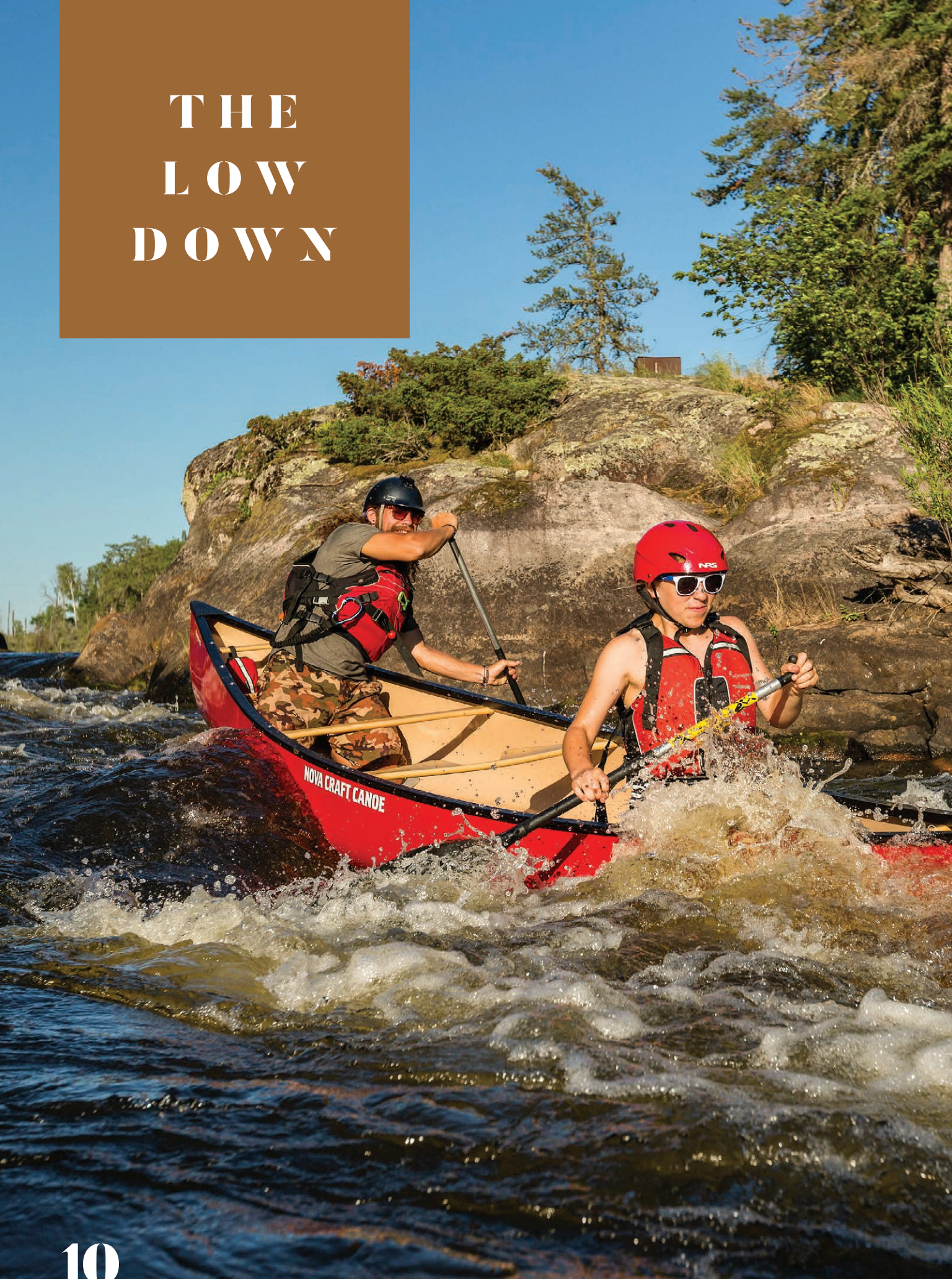
With its contemporary design, this canoe has a small added keel to reduce drift in windy condition



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SAIL

THE LOW DOWN





GO HERE

MANIGOTAGAN RIVER, MANITOBA

Canoeing one of Manitoba's most remote rivers offers a lesson on who really owns this land

**STORY & PHOTOS
BY DUSTIN SILVEY**

Wham! My canoe slams into a boulder the size of a house. My body is forced to one side of the boat and I lean in with as much force as I can muster to regain my balance. These class III rapids continue to push and pull my boat around, doing their best to dump me into the icy river. I regain control just in time for the two-foot step at the bottom of the rapids, where I eddy-out to a safe spot and wait for the rest of team to follow through.

The Manigotagan River, located in central Manitoba, is mostly a class I/II river (with one class III rapid); ideal for people wishing to improve their paddling skills. The river, which translates to “Bad Throat” in Ojibwe, is located about 150 kilometres northeast of Winnipeg and flows from the tip of Nopiming Provincial Park through Manigotagan River Provincial Park, draining into Lake Winnipeg at the community of Manigotagan.

Several class II rapids keep paddlers on their toes while they meander through variable landscapes. Long corridors created by opposing sheer rock faces topped with jack pines line the river. Further downriver, balsam poplar, green ash and elderberry hug the watercourse, witnessing each boat's successes and failures as we pass.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The Manigotagan River is mostly a class I/II river, with some more challenging tests along the route. Setting up camp on the Canadian Shield rocks—canoe travel allows for ample supplies. The open, flat expanses of Manitoba make for stunning sunsets.

For almost 70 kilometres, we paddle the Manigotagan River with little stress or fear of tipping. Small swifts are our biggest concern as we slowly dodge the odd rock, each of us laughing and singing songs by the Ontario band, The Arrogant Worms. Moose and beavers watch us from the shoreline. Every so often we encounter one of the five class II rapids that dot the Manigotagan. This means a little scouting and sometimes even a short portage down the trails that run beside each of the class

II and class III sections.

Manitoba is a wilderness of excess. For the majority of our paddling trip, the sun roasts our bodies and minds. The Manigotagan River runs entirely within the Superior Province of the Canadian Shield. Massive metamorphic rock outcrops make for easy campsites but they also reflect heat and offer little shade. The sun beats

down on us, and the temperatures at the campsites push 40 degrees Celsius most days, requiring frequent cool-offs in the many waterfalls.

One day, the scorching sun is interrupted as dark clouds roll in at a calm section of the river. Rain pours down. I sit back, open my mouth and enjoy the cool water on my skin, hair and face. However, my relief is disrupted by the bite of a deer fly. Then another bites me, and another and another. I remember what hot sun is good for—keeping the bugs away.

While running a rapid just after the rain had stopped, I pull my paddle out of the water to swat at a fly and lose control of my boat as it smacks into a small rock. Frustrated with my own stupidity, I yearn for the return of the sun. And I don't have to wait long—the ball of fire comes blazing back and sends the bugs fleeing to their shady nooks in the Shield.

One evening, while telling stories around the camp stove as the sun sets, we hear a loud slap on the water. A nearby beaver is not impressed with our choice of campsite and is slapping its tail in agitation. One member of our team jumps in a boat to get a closer look and the beaver circles him inquisitively. Since the creation of the Manigotagan

River Provincial Park in 2004, this area of Canada has been left relatively untouched by humans, and the animals are curious rather than fearful. After nosing around the boat for a while, the beaver swims back to one of the several lodges that dot the area. Late into the night, the beaver continues to slap his tail, reminding us this is his home, and we are only guests. ✕

THE LOW DOWN

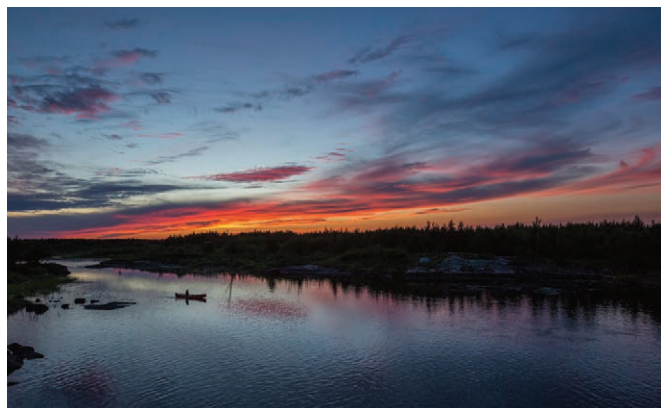
TRIP PLANNER

Getting There: The start of the Manigotagan River is at Quesnel Lake in Nopiming Provincial Park, which is about a four-hour drive northeast from Winnipeg. The last hour of the drive is on a rough dirt road. It is accessible by car, but drive slowly and be sure to have a spare tire in the trunk. gov.mb.ca/sd/parks

Where to Stay: The two best campsites on the Manigotagan River are Sand River Falls (KM 35) and Charles Falls (KM 25). Sand River Falls can fill up in the summer months so try to get an early start if you are planning to camp there. You'll find an excellent class II rapid, so it's worth arriving early if you'd like to score some practice runs. Charles Falls has a fantastic pool at the bottom of the falls which makes for a good place to cool down.

In Winnipeg, the Mere Hotel is a great spot to rest your head before or after your paddling trip. merehotel.com

Plan Your Trip: There is only one guiding company currently running trips on the Manigotagan River: Twin River Travel. They offer a five-night trip and supply all meals, boats and gear. From \$1,100 per person. twinrivertravel.com

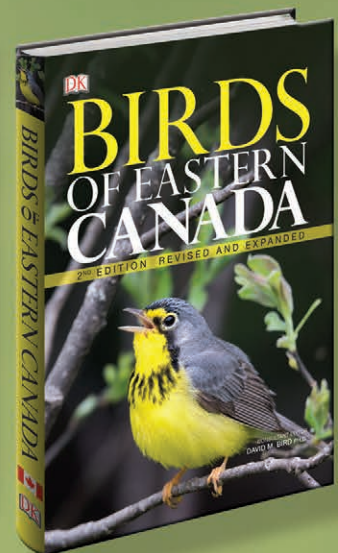
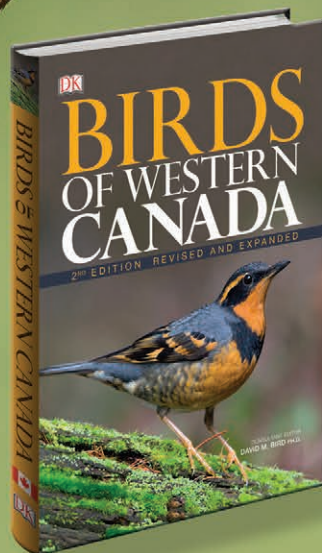


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Pemberton, BC's Naomi Prohaska is the youngest person to summit Mount Logan.



NAOMI PROHASKA

Meet Canada's "youngest on top"

BY NORA O'MALLEY



Some girls just want to bag peaks. When she's in class at Pemberton Secondary School, north of Whistler, British Columbia, Naomi Prohaska's thoughts tend to drift off into the mountains. While kicking around with friends, doing normal teenage stuff, Naomi can't help but ponder: *What is the point of all this?*

Her idols aren't pop stars or screen queens, but the likes of Australian teenager Jade Hameister, the youngest person in history to complete the "Polar Hat Trick," traversing the North Pole, South Pole and the Greenland ice sheet. Or American phenom rock climbers Ashima Shiraishi and Brooke Raboutou, who both held climbing records before even hitting puberty.

On May 23, 2017, a 15-year-old Naomi made headlines of her own for being the youngest person in history to summit Mount Logan, Canada's highest peak at 5,959 metres.

"We were probably at the very top for 10 minutes," said Naomi, who turned 17 on January 30. "I've read lots of stuff about Everest and people say that they spend like an hour at the summit. I think that's so crazy because it's so dangerous and you're wasting so much time, you're wasting so much daylight and energy even. I think it's kind of weird how much time people spend up there."

The Logan expedition took three weeks, and was led by her dad, Rich, with Holly Walker as the assistant guide and two other clients in tow.

"The worst was definitely summit day, coming down," recalls Naomi. "Bad weather came in when we were about halfway to

our camp. It was scary. It was hard to keep going."

She said the storm surge left all five with minor frostbite, which was a first for the young mountaineer. They spent two days waiting in Camp Five for the storm to pass.

"When I got back to the tent, I touched my ear and I had ice stuck on my ear."

Rich, a professional heli-ski and mountain guide, took them up the King's Trench route. He's been up and down Mount Logan so many times he finds it hard to remember the score.

"There are so few people around. It's completely peaceful... It's clean and pristine. You don't see any people around and there's no evidence of trash," he said. "I'm just super proud that she's able to not be intimidated by mountain size

or by people or by difficulty or by suffering or cold. She really enjoys days that are challenging. It's a very mature way of looking at things, which I didn't even get to until a few years ago."

Simply put, Naomi thinks expeditions with Dad are number-one: "We're a good team. He's more easygoing in the mountains," she proclaims.

Naomi's mom, Heather, says the sport of mountaineering was never pushed on their daughters.

"We would make them go, but we wouldn't overdo it. Then she decided to set this goal [to summit Logan] and it was in the training process that she realized how much she likes it and how much happiness she has when she's in the mountains," Heather notes, and then went on to say that Naomi's younger sister, Anna, is more fond of ocean sports like surfing.

For summer 2019, the father-daughter team are Denali dreaming. Conquering North America's highest peak would be a first for both.

"If we do the standard West Buttress route, the preparation is mostly just how to be on a mountain with that many people," said Rich. "It's more to do with ethics and getting along with mass amounts of people."

(Naomi has their 16-day Denali itinerary posted on her personal website: naomiprohaska.com.)

"I definitely find myself daydreaming a lot, especially when I can see the snow falling from the window," reveals the bilingual A-student.

"But I thought about Logan a lot more than I'm thinking about Denali now. I thought about Logan like every day, so much. I'm not really sure why that is," Naomi's voice trails off as her thoughts return to the Saint Elias coastal massif.

Perhaps because Logan was her first love? **X**

THE
LOW
DOWN

EXPLORE BC'S SUNSHINE COAST

Photo: Walt Hill by @thismatetextists

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GEAR GUIDE

BY DAVID WEBB

SPRINGTIME STASH

Tackle the shoulder season
with our staff favourites

THE
LOW
DOWN



Redbear Apparel Stitched Up

(\$60; redbearapparel.ca)

We love that Redbear Apparel is owned-and-operated by a couple of British Columbia outdoor enthusiasts. They ethically source their fabrics then stitch their homegrown designs in Port Moody, BC. This cotton-poly zip-up hoody is stylish, with a two-tone design and a "Redbear" logo, as well as a cozy way to warm up on a spring evening.

Buff Headwear CoolNet UV+

(\$25; buyabuff.com)

As temperatures warm, we stash our winter gear and look for a breathable, lightweight and sun-protective kit. Which makes Buff's new CoolNet UV+ lineup ideal. Twenty per cent lighter than a classic Buff, with UPF 50 and an evaporative cooling fabric, it'll keep us covered right 'till summer. Three styles available.



Eddie Bauer Microtherm Stretch Down Jacket

(\$250; eddiebauer.com)

We've been sporting this lightweight puffy for months. Its outstanding chilly-weather performance rests on the ultra-narrow baffles, each of which is stuffed with 800 fill RDS-certified goose down. Thin channels means the down doesn't move around and cause cold spots. A DWR coating stands up to West Coast showers and the outer even has a light stretch.

Oboz Sawtooth II Mid Waterproof

(\$185; obozfootwear.com)

We look to Oboz for comfort. Take the Sawtooth Mid Waterproof—narrow heel cups hold feet in place, reducing slippage and blisters, while the wide toebox allows the forefoot to spread out. The insole has three different densities of EVA where they're needed and the BDry membrane is one of the driest we've tested. (Women's pictured, men's available.)



Backroads Mapbooks Adventure Topographic Maps & Guide

(\$26; backroadsmapbook.com)

There's no substitute for a Backroads Mapbook. Each book details regional hiking routes, parks, communities, fishing spots, paddling routes, winter sports and adventure getaways. Available books cover British Columbia through to Ontario as well as Atlantic Canada; most are 200 pages plus.



Yeti Rambler One-Gallon Jug

(\$170; yeti.com)

Built of 18/8 stainless steel and double-wall vacuum insulated, this jug feels bombproof. We love the magnetic dock on the lid—unscrew the cap and it sticks in place. It weighs two kilograms dry, but offers performance worth the weight. Case in point: we filled it with boiling water, left it outside for 12 hours and made tea come morning.

Purica Zensations Universal Harmony

(\$30; purica.com)

Purica fortifies this mix with the *ayurvedic* (which means "healthy body and mind") herb *ashwagandha* (used in traditional Indian medicine for millennia), plus eight organic mushrooms aimed at enhancing focus. Mix it in your coffee when there's a strenuous day ahead or close out the evening with a shot in your cocoa.



NEW BRUNSWICK'S ANCIENT PORTAGE

Volunteers uncover traditional trails that crisscross the Maritime province

BY RYAN STUART

Say you're a Mi'kmaq chief living in northern New Brunswick in the mid-1700s and you need to get to Boston to sign a *Peace and Friendship Treaty* with the British. You could paddle your birch-bark canoe along the Gulf of St. Lawrence, around Nova Scotia, across the Bay of Fundy and down the coast to Massachusetts. Or you could save yourself a couple of weeks and use the inland highway system.

Back then, the interior of this region was a labyrinth of travel routes: rivers, lakes and ocean linked by portages. More than 100 portages connected the various drainages, including the Gulf of St. Lawrence, to the Bay of Fundy.

All disappeared as horses and cars replaced canoes, and logging cut the forest clean. Now, a dedicated group of volunteers and historians are uncovering the ancient portage trails, re-establishing these historic travel routes as they go.

"This foot-and-paddle highway system allowed the First Nations people to travel all over the province," says Tim Humes, co-leader of Canoe Kayak New Brunswick's heritage committee. "When we learned that this incredible network was lost, we decided we wanted to do something about it."

They turned to Robert Doyle for help. An amateur historian and passionate canoe-head, Doyle started researching the portage trails around 1995 using the journals of early European explorers. Eventually, Doyle set out to ground-truth his research.

"You can only see so much on [topographical] maps or aerial photographs," Doyle says. "You've got to get into the bush and walk that exact route, from waypoint to waypoint, just to see if it makes sense on the ground."

He had GPS'd many of the trails by the time the canoe club started the project in 2008. With Doyle's help, the club settled on six trails that seemed the most interesting from a historic and recreational standpoint and then set out to re-establish them.

Over the last 10 years, volunteers have spent weeks in the forest flagging routes, clearing brush, building bridges and cleaning



THE CIRCUIT

The six Ancient Portage Trails open up all kinds of new canoe routes and loops for day-trips to summer-long epics. The longest of all is The Circuit, an 800-kilometre loop around the interior of the province using three of the rediscovered portages to make it passable. A couple of groups have paddled sections of it, but no one has traversed the entire circuit. Before packing the Wampanag to give it a go, know that many of the rivers are small tributaries. They are best paddled in May or June. canoeayaknb.com/ancient-portage-trails

up deadfall. Grants helped with equipment and supplies. They finished clearing the first portage trail in 2016. The rest are in place but need more work and signage.

Humes spearheaded much of the effort and did plenty of the work. All that time in the forest left him in awe at how the First Nations found the routes in the first place.

"How did they know if they got out at this bend in the river and hiked that way they would get to a completely different river system that would take them where they wanted to go?" he wonders. "There were no maps. It was all passed on orally. The knowledge they would

have had to build up over generations is amazing. How long did it take to 'see' the map of all the trails?"

More than opening up the possibility to travel routes used for thousands of years and for historical important missions, like the Boston peace treaty signing, Humes thinks the project has a greater importance.

"It sounds corny, but the longer I spent out there the more I felt like we were building a bridge between two different times and two different cultures," he says. "The portage trails are a pathway to allow people to talk, to value each other and to learn. That's pretty amazing." ✕



The culmination of years of effort—re-opening the ancient portages that connected New Brunswick to the rest of North America.

TOURISM RIPPLES

When you travel, who benefits?

BY RYAN STUART

Jim Hamp founded ExtravagantYak with the goal of helping Tibetans build a sustainable tourism industry. From a base in Chengdu, China, the ex-pat Canadian runs a variety of trips, everything from monastery tours in Lhasa to trekking in the spectacular but little-known Minya Konka range. He taps Tibetan horsemen to shuttle gear on his backpacking journeys, stays in Tibetan-owned guest houses and hires Tibetan guides and drivers. He figures it's win-win.

"I think most Western visitors would rather a Tibetan person explain Tibetan culture than a 20-year-old kid from Beijing,"

Hamp says. And by using locals, Hamp ensures the money stays in Tibet.

That's no guarantee on many tours and trips. The UN Environmental Programme estimates that for every US\$100 the average tourist spends, only \$5 stays in the local economies. In extreme cases, tourism can exploit residents and leave a destination worse off.

"When tourism is done wrong it can be devastating," says Paloma Zapata, the CEO of Sustainable Travel International, a non-profit that advises companies and destinations. "It can alienate the local economy and even ruin a destination."

No one wants that, but for the average Canadian tourist heading abroad, knowing whether a hotel, tour company or even restaurant is having a positive or negative impact on a destination is challenging, says Zapata. It's why she's excited to see a growing number of travel companies focus on local suppliers and educating travellers about the impact they're having.

One of the best examples is G Adventures' Ripple Score. When Bruce Poon Tip founded G Adventures in 1992 he wanted to create a travel company that gave guests an authentic experience while enriching the people and places they visited. It was easy to communicate that ethos when G Adventures organized a handful of trips, but today with more than 700 tours to 100 countries, it became a lot harder. Every tour is a sum of all the hotels, taxis, guides and meals. Each trip includes at least 15 suppliers. Poon Tip wanted a simple and clear way to score the local impact of all the company's trips.

"I think it was an extraordinarily brave thing to do," says Jamie Sweeting, the person G Adventures hired to develop the score. "It's risky, because some of the scores aren't going to be great."

With the help of STI and Planeterra Foundation, another sustainable travel non-profit, Sweeting surveyed every supplier and even the suppliers' suppliers—more than 2,000 businesses in all.

The goal was to determine how much of each tour's budget stayed in the country. The complicated process

HOW TO TRAVEL SUSTAINABLY

Good travellers leave a place better than they found it. Here's how to do it during your next trip, according to Paloma Zapata, the CEO of Sustainable Travel International.

- **Buy local.** Skip McDonald's for a local cantina and the chain hotel for one run by a mom-and-pop.
- **Choose authentic experiences.** They should educate about a destination and involve local people, culture and environment.
- **Consume consciously.** For instance, bring a water filter instead of buying plastic water bottles.
- **Vet tour companies.** Look for ones with concrete examples of how they leave lasting benefits behind.

filtered out to a simple number—the Ripple Score. For instance, if a tour in Sri Lanka scores 80 that means Sri Lankan-owned businesses receive 80 per cent of the tour's budget.

A lower score is not always a bad thing, stresses Sweeting. Sometimes it means a local business doesn't meet G Adventures safety, animal welfare or health standards. But the scoring process forces G Adventures to justify every supply chain choice they make.

"It's our duty to be transparent about how often we use local services on each of our tours," he says. "As well as educating our travellers about the positive impact they can have through travel, we want to push the industry forward so our suppliers and other operators become more accountable for their local economic and social impact." ✕

G Adventures has created a way to accurately track the local benefits of tourism dollars.



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Is Long Beach once again in need of lifeguards?

LIFEGUARDS IN DEMAND

Following two fatalities in 2018, is it high time to reinstate lifeguards at Canada's most popular surfing beach?

BY KERRY HALE

In 2012, the lifeguard tower that had stood watch for roughly 40 years over Long Beach in Pacific Rim National Park Reserve was torn down. The lifeguard service in the Tofino, British Columbia-area park—credited with an average of eight water rescues per season—was terminated due to a federal government decision to cut Parks Canada's budget by \$29 million.

THE LOW DOWN

But after two surfing deaths at Long Beach in 2018, calls have returned for the resurrection of the lifeguard program near Lovekin Rock, a notoriously dangerous surf locale where both fatalities occurred and where the tower once stood.

In May of 2018, 52-year-old Ann Wittenberg drowned just hours before she was set to walk her daughter down the aisle for her wedding ceremony. Earlier, in February, University of Victoria research student Nijin John also

drowned while learning how to surf.

According to Parks Canada, once it became evident that the landscape of surfing in the region was dramatically changing, maintaining the lifeguard service made little sense. In an email sent to the Tofino-Ucluelet Westerly Newspaper in the aftermath of Wittenberg's drowning, Pacific Rim National Park Reserve Superintendent Karen Haugen defended the decision to cancel the lifeguard program:

"The Surf Guard program, which ran during summer months in a popular section of Long Beach, concluded in 2012 as it was no longer in step with evolving surf and water recreation practises in the area. While surfing used to be centralized around a small area of Long Beach, primarily during peak summer months, now surfing is common over a wide area stretching from Ucluelet's Mussel Beach, through the Long Beach Unit and into Tofino's North Chesterman Beach. Surfing is also more of a year-round sport now."

A new, broader-based initiative dubbed CoastSmart was adopted in

lieu of the lifeguard program which turned to signage and education to promote visitor safety to the 1.2 million annual visitors.

"Through the CoastSmart program, which launched in 2016," added Haugen, "Parks Canada has been collaborating with Tofino and Ucluelet, along with tourism-based businesses and safety organizations, to educate visitors and local water-users about the risks of the ocean in this region. We educate people on the dangers of tides, unexpected waves, the power of rip currents and the debilitating effects of cold water."

The information is dispersed via the CoastSmart website (coastsmart.ca), an interactive online quiz, videos with local ambassadors, rack cards, information sheets, restaurant coasters, advertisements and sharing CoastSmart information face-to-face with beach-goers.

But the region's Member of Parliament, Gord Johns, claims that while education is important, the new program, acting in isolation, is falling short. Throughout 2018, he made repeated calls for action, including asking Canada's Environment Minister twice to reinstate the lifeguard program and raising the topic during the question period in the House of Commons. "It is clear that signage in our parks is not enough to keep the public safe," he said in a statement. "I share the serious concerns expressed by Tofino residents for public safety on Long Beach, especially at the area of Lovekin Rock. The Surf Guard program is essential to prevent future accidents and fatalities."

Johns claims Parks Canada is heavily marketing the region as an attractive place to visit, meaning added responsibility to ensure visitor safety. He said other popular surf destinations within Canada still have lifeguards in place and the park reserve in Tofino should be able to reinstate the program fairly quickly. "Maybe some infrastructure is gone that we need to rebuild a program like this, but I think it's something that could possibly be reinstated in short order."

Local surfers have also expressed concerns that, while there are signs at Long Beach's trailheads warning surfers about the dangers of both Lovekin and Incinerator rocks, the onus routinely falls on seasoned surfers to protect others who neglect to take note of signage.

Adds Johns, "We are extremely hopeful that lifeguards will be back for the summer of 2019 because eight lives saved annually is a lot. How do we possibly put a value on saving a life?" ✕

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PADDLING QUEBEC'S NEW NATIONAL PARK

In Opémican National Park, canoe and kayak through a landscape steeped in Canadian history

BY CHLOE BERGE

In the middle of Lake Kipawa, the front of my canoe knifes through the water's still, mirrored surface. Dawn turns the steely lake a light turquoise, striking down in honey-hued shafts to reveal a rocky bottom. My eyes seize upon a peregrine falcon sailing over the red and white pines that crowd the lake's edge, one of several endangered species that live in the area, and that will now receive protection thanks to its designation as a national park.

I'm just scratching the surface of one of myriad paddling routes in Opémican National Park, which straddles the boreal and deciduous forests of the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region in southwest Quebec. The 252-square-kilometre park lies between the Kipawa and Témiscamingue lakes and boasts a unique

landscape that's been shaped by tectonic faults and glacial melts, which locals are hoping will grant its pending status as a UNESCO Global Geopark.

Officially open to visitors this year, kayakers and canoers will be able to choose between class V rapids or calm serene lake

systems, ranging between half-day to seven-day routes. In addition to a natural landscape of crystalline water, leafy trails and colourful, marbled cliffs, the routes will offer a glimpse of life in the area as it was centuries ago for the Indigenous Anishnabeg people. "Opémican means 'where the First Nations were passing,'" says my canoeing guide and park conservation specialist Ambroise Lycke.

Here are the best routes to explore this summer, when you can sleep under the stars and shed the day's heat in the lakes.

Kipawa River

The 16-kilometre Kipawa River route will take you through some of the most spectacular rapids in the country. For over 30 years, practised whitewater rafters and kayakers from all over North America have been gathering for the annual Kipawa River Festival in June, where they compete on class III to V rapids.

Between the churning rapids, swirling eddies and calm respites, the route is punctuated by the thunderous clap of the 19-metre Grand Chute Falls, which paddlers need to portage around should they wish to take on the entire half-day route.

Kipawa Lake Islands

At the quiet, remote Iles aux Fraises, waterways snake their way in between towering, old-growth pines that shelter moose,



eagles and peregrine falcons. "It's nice to lose yourself in all the little islands, but be careful not to actually get lost," says Lycke. "Kipawa means, 'it's closed' because it's easy to get turned around and find only dead ends."

From the community of Laniel at the northernmost

tip of Lake Kipawa, paddlers can head southwest towards the small archipelago, which is home to several wilderness camping spots where canoers and kayakers can break up the two-day, 20-kilometre route. From the islands, paddle to Dorval Bay where you can deposit your canoe and ride a bike back to Laniel.

Three Lakes Portage

One of the most heavily trod portage routes used by the Anishnabeg people is an eight-kilometre, three-lake trail that connects the Témiscamingue and Kipawa lakes. Historically, this route was also a prime hunting area and paddlers are still treated to an abundance of wildlife, including moose, bears and wolves.

Starting at Laniel, guide your kayak or canoe from Petite Lac Laniel through three lakes flanked by verdant boreal forest and end at



Paddle amongst a glacier-carved landscape in Quebec's newest national (provincial) park.

Troisième Lac du Portage. A short portage between each lake takes you through the route. Pack a lunch, leave your canoe on the shore, and hike one kilometre down to the banks of Lake Témiscamingue for a picnic before returning to Laniel.

Témiscamingue Lake

Formed by a rift caused by shifting tectonic plates thousands of years ago, Lake Témiscamingue is flanked by 70-metre-high cliffs marked by red, white and black marbled patterns. "It's a remarkable area in terms of geology," notes Lycke. Start the 30-kilometre trip near the Kipawa canoe deposit and continue south down to Opémican Point.

The two-day trip is peppered with tumbling waterfalls—the highest a dramatic 50 metres—and pristine sandy beaches where you can break for a picnic and swim. The remnants of a historic

sawmill can also be spotted from the water en route.

White Lake Portage

"This part of the park is really remote so there's a good chance you'll have the lakes to yourself," says Lycke. Wedged between the Kipawa and Témiscamingue lakes in the southern part of the park lies this 20-kilometre interconnected lake system. Trout and walleye are plentiful in this area and paddlers are welcome to fish anywhere along the way and catch their dinners.

Starting with a 400-metre portage along a wooden platform from Lac Long to Lac White, paddle your canoe up through Lac White, Lac Croche, Lac des Aigles and end at Lac Star which hugs Lake Kipawa. After reaching Lac Star, set up camp for the night on the shore before paddling the remaining 10 kilometres back in the morning.

Opémican Point

After the arrival of Europeans in the 17th century, Opémican Point was the epicentre of fur trading and logging activities. The original structures are under restoration and will act as a living museum, which will include an inn, blacksmith shop and office buildings. Paddlers can choose between a five-kilometre out-and-back route, or a 10-kilometre self-guided loop.

Opt for the five-kilometre trip and you'll get to hear from a park historian as you paddle in unison in a 10-person Pointeur canoe, a logging-era re-creation, taking in the historical village from the water. Home to the main visitor's centre, an array of camping options and white sandy beaches, Opémican Point is an ideal place to set up basecamp while you explore the park.

La Grande Tour

If a Herculean feat is what you're after, the Grand Tour

GET THERE

From Rouyn-Noranda Airport (YUY), rent a car or hop on an Autobus Maheux (autobusmaheux.qc.ca) and make the two-hour drive to the park. To drive from Ottawa or Montreal, it's a scenic four or seven hours, respectively.

Gear Up

Canoe and kayak rentals are available at the Laniel and Opémican Point visitor centres (sepaq.com/pq/ope), where you can also get help plotting your route. Head to Algonquin Canoe Company (algonquincanoe.com) for a more diverse assortment of outdoor gear.

Sleep Tight

The paddling routes are home to countless wilderness camping spots. Four solar-powered, ready-to-camp cabins complete with dinnerware and a stove sit cliffside near the Kipawa canoe deposit, while an additional 11 are nestled in pine groves at Opémican Point (sepaq.com/pq/ope).

strings together most of the park's established paddling routes into a six- to seven-day adventure. Starting at Lac Long, follow the White Lake portage route, then head out onto Kipawa Lake and explore the Îles aux Fraises. The next day, paddle up to Laniel where you can regroup for a night before continuing on through the Three Lakes portage to end at Opémican Point.

More than 70 kilometres total, the journey will take you through small tributaries and wide-open expanses of water, along cascading waterfalls and in between high rocky cliffs. "You go through all sorts of different habitats and waterways, it's really gorgeous," says Lycke. ✕



SAP, THE LIFE-SAVER

Turning a near-death experience into a healthy springtime ritual

It's interesting how alternative definitions of "sap" tend to be negative. For example: *that poor sap is about to get fired, or, that nasty flu sapped my energy.* For me, I think of sap as stored sunshine, and, quite literally, a lifesaver. Without sap, I might not have survived getting lost in the wilds of Mongolia.

In 2001, two friends and I completed the first descent of the Yenisey River, the world's fifth-longest river, and when we were rafting the upper tributaries of the Selenga River during spring flood, we were swept through an inundated forest. Our inflatable boat collided with tree limbs and capsized in the powerful current. Although our gear was tied down, the strong flow worked items loose and several dry bags washed away, including one that contained the film footage we'd been recording for our documentary.

Watching the film bag drifting away, I instinctively leapt into one of our whitewater kayaks and gave chase. In my haste, I didn't communicate a plan for reunification. Instead, I charged downriver, racing through the flooded forest, trying to catch the bag that contained our digital cassettes. Little did I know it would be 12 days before I would see Ben and Remy again.

After several hours of fruitless searching, I emerged from the flooded forest in a high-banked area where the river was once again contained. The current was too strong to paddle back upriver, so I decided to find a spot onshore where I had a clear vantage of the river and wait for my friends to catch up.

I waited on the sandy bank for two difficult days. I had no provisions or equipment to sustain me. Even my clothing was severely lacking. All I had was a pair of pants—no shoes, no socks, no shirt or hat to fend off bugs, sunburn and cold. Although it was mid-spring, at night the temperatures dropped to well below zero and I huddled inside my plastic kayak with chattering teeth. I did have a small knife and lighter in my pocket, so at least I was able to light a fire with the scarce supply of wood.

After two days without seeing anyone, two nomadic herders neared the river on the opposite side. They waved me over and invited me to their encampment, fed me rice and horse meat—my first food since the capsizing—and gave me a T-shirt to protect my sun-burned skin. When the herders left, I returned to watching the river.

Three days after leaving Ben and Remy, I finally accepted that they must have

slipped past me; perhaps during one of those few times I'd nodded off in the warm afternoon sun after shivering throughout a mostly sleepless night.

If that was the case, I reasoned, my only chance of finding them would be to paddle quickly downriver with the hope of catching up. But they would likely be moving fast too, trying to catch up with me, so I needed to hurry. I slipped my boat back into the murky water, and began on what would become a 500-kilometre paddling journey with no food, camping gear or shoes.

My time alone voyaging the Selenga River was one of the hungriest periods of my life. I foraged regularly along the shore, eating a range of unfulfilling foods such as stinging nettles that I cooked over a fire, raw bird eggs and bugs. The most palatable food, however, was birch tree sap. I slashed the bark with my pocket knife and greedily lapped at the watery, slightly-sweet fluid that dribbled out. Although far from satisfying, it provided a bit of nourishment and fluid. Despite spending all my days on or near the river, I drank from it infrequently, worried I would become sick from the countless bloated animals that floated in its waters, victims of an especially harsh winter.

ABOVE:
Sap, as a
luxury or a
life-saver—
depends on
the situation.

Finally, I reached the border town of Suh Baatar, where the now-sizeable Selenga River slipped from Mongolia into Russia. This was the farthest I could go, since to continue on the river meant a risk of getting shot. Reaching this point without being reunited with my friends meant only one thing: they were still behind me.

The border police were sympathetic to my situation and gave me a bed and food. Several days later, Ben and Remy reached Suh Baatar, and I learned that they had remained for days where we capsized waiting for my return. When they finally continued downriver, they passed my watchpoint just hours after I'd left.

The time I spent lost in Mongolia will stay with me forever, indelibly etched in my memory. Now when I see a birch tree, I think about the sap, how crisp and delicious and satisfying it is and how it helped save my life.

YOU DON'T HAVE to be lost in the woods to enjoy getting sap from a tree. With some basic equipment and know-how, you can tap a tree and get far better results than I did in Mongolia. As Canadians, we think the syrup for our pancakes should come from sugar maple trees, however, there are

several other Canadian trees that contain sweet syrup—including the birch tree, big leaf maple and hickory.

Depending on the type of tree and geographical location, the time varies when tree conditions are ideal for tapping.



JUST LIKE COLLECTING MUSHROOMS OR BERRIES, GATHERING TREE SAP IS A REWARDING PROCESS AND PERFECT FOR THE GASTRONOMY-MINDED ADVENTURER

Since sap carries essential nutrients for tree growth, it flows in greatest abundance up the tree when the leaves are about to bud. In warmer regions, such as the West Coast, the sap starts running earlier. The big-leaf maple on Vancouver Island is at its peak for tapping in January and February, while the sugar maple in Quebec usually runs from mid-March to mid-April.

It's best to use purpose-designed tree tapping equipment for maximum effectiveness and to ensure no damage to the tree occurs. There are three components—the bucket, a hook to hang the bucket and a spile, which is a metal tube inserted into a small hole drilled into the tree. Often the spile includes the hook.

The first step is to find a decent-sized tree. A hand- or battery-powered drill can be used to create a hole the same diameter as your spile. Drill on the sunny side of the tree at a slightly downward slant just deep enough to insert the spile firmly. Then hang your bucket and wait.

The buckets should be collected at least once a day and the sap condensed over a fire or stove. To make a nice thick syrup, 95 to 98 per cent of the water needs to be boiled away, so it takes a fair bit of time. You can also drink the unprocessed sap, which has a refreshing lightly-sweetened taste.

Just like collecting mushrooms or berries, gathering tree sap is a rewarding process and perfect for the gastronomy-minded adventurer. There's nothing quite like hot pancakes slathered with your own organic syrup. While that's not exactly what I had in Mongolia, I don't think anything will ever beat my Mongolian version. ✕



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GADD'S TRUTH
BY WILL GADD

CANADIANS IN CHINA

In the middle of a diplomatic crisis, Will Gadd travels to China to climb some world-class routes

Only a week before I left for China to film an adventure travel TV show, the headlines went ballistic: “Canada has updated its travel advice after one of its citizens was sentenced to death” and “Canada has joined the U.S. in raising its travel warnings for China, fearing a growing pattern of the arbitrary application of local laws to detain citizens from those countries.”

This was all in response to Canada’s arrest of Meng Wanzhou, the CFO of the biggest—and Chinese—cellphone maker in the world, Huawei, at the behest of the Trump administration. Both Trump and Canada’s ambassador to China, John McCallum, further politicized the arrest and made it look more about politics than the rule of law. China followed suit. McCallum lost his job, Trump didn’t.

In only a few days, three of the seven-person film crew pulled out, the producer wanted to cancel the trip and lose tens of thousands on plane tickets alone and I too was nervous.

Maybe climbing new ice routes wouldn’t be the biggest hazard we’d face in China?

But as I dug into the warnings and hype, I realized the headlines weren’t matching the reality. Only three Canadians had been detained.

One had smuggled 500 pounds of methamphetamine into China, which will get you a healthy prison sentence in Canada as well. China was posturing by changing his sentence from jail to death—not something to be taken lightly in a country where the death penalty is common—but I wasn’t planning on smuggling in any meth. The other two were high profile ex-diplomats and businesspeople with complicated connections to China.



Real adventure travel involves real adventure and the possibility of unforeseen consequences. But I put the safety of my film crew over my own—was it safe enough for them? We had a production meeting to go over the potential risks. And our insurers were still OK with the trip.

None of us can buy life insurance for paragliding or climbing, but we could for travel to China?

EVEN SOME OF our friends prophesied doom for us at Chinese customs, and the team was tense as we lined up after the flight. We were travelling with 10 carts of expensive camera and climbing gear, but the paperwork process for entry into China was faster than it often is in Canada when returning home. (We were almost disappointed to not have more of an adventure.)

But how would the average Chinese citizen feel about us? The Chinese government had cited the “arbitrary detention” of a Chinese national in Canada at the request of a “third-party country,” and it urged its citizens to “fully evaluate risks” and “exercise caution” when travelling to Canada.

There are two ways to recognize Canadians travelling internationally, neither of which are very flattering: the Canadian flags stuck like corporate sponsor

logos all over everything and because they’ll tell you with an American accent. Our crew was patch- and accent-free, but we stuck out like white sore thumbs.

As soon as we arrived in Linzhou, we literally stopped traffic and took hundreds of selfies with the locals. I don’t think I’ve ever really understood what it meant to be a minority until I saw locals walking up a trail, lost in their own thoughts, who would catch sight of me and literally lose a step and look completely surprised. But they all invariably smiled and said, “Ni hao!” once past their shock. Yes, even after learning we were Canadian. Apparently the diplomatic spat hadn’t reached ground-level.

We were still worried about interacting with the police or anyone in government, and kept a low profile as we climbed some of the most amazing ice lines I’ve ever experienced. We were worried about our cameras attracting attention, but after getting sucked into a dance party one night, we realized cameras are a bonus in China—and they are everywhere, all the time. That’s normal. I can’t dance and that’s on video, but our cameras frequently pulled us into local scenes and the continuous requests for selfies made it hard for the crew to work.

Our ice dreams melted as the temperatures spiked, so my Chinese climbing partner, He “River” Chuan, and I decided to climb a new rock route above a tourist lookout in the Taihang Mountains.

ABOVE:
Will Gadd and
“Mr. Smooth”
fist-bump on an
epic rock face
in the Taihang
Mountains near
Linzhou, China.

PETER HOANG

I've competed in front of thousands of people, but I've never attracted a crowd like the one that spread out on the road below me. The Lunar New Year was in full swing, and many of the residents of Linzhou had come to the mountains to enjoy the sun, only to find a skinny white guy stuck to the wall above the viewpoint.

Traffic jammed. Police were called. When I looked down and saw the flashing lights and mayhem I thought maybe things were about to go sideways. I was putting the route up on lead, which meant I was seriously going for it, and I didn't want to come down. The director's voice came over the radio: "Ah, slight problem. They think you need rescuing." We had always assumed mountain rescue in China was non-existent, so I wasn't too worried about a fast response and kept climbing. I was surprised when a smiling face popped over the edge of the cliff less than an hour later.

I can't pronounce the guy's name, so I'll call him Mr. Smooth—because he was. As a guide, I can look at someone's gear and how they are using it and tell a lot about their background. Mr. Smooth and his spotting team were running a tight operation. Eventually he determined I

didn't need rescuing, but they figured they'd use my climb as a scenario and get in some practice. Mr. Smooth and I gave each other a fist bump and as I finished my line, then rappelled on our separate lines back to the ground, much to the crowd's approval.

The police were there to direct traffic, not arrest us, and were also enthusiastic about selfies. We were all mobbed by the crowd, and then got an invite from the rescue team's leader, Mr. Yang, to visit his very well-organized headquarters and then his home to learn how to make dumplings. Somewhere around the third beer we were trading hats and laughing at my malformed dumplings, along with his team and about 30 kids, parents and friends. River and I named the route "Linzhou Rescue" in their honour.

THE SHOW IS going to be solid, as much about travel as climbing; we left a lot of assumptions on the ground along with the loose ice we cleaned from those world-class lines we climbed. We celebrated the shoot, climbs and the New Year by lighting off 20,000 firecrackers, flying a drone respectfully far off the ground to take aerial shots of the climbs and

entering all the national parks for free.

River remarked: "I found it difficult [when I was] in Canada. I couldn't fly my drone, got a lot of speeding tickets, the parks cost money, fireworks were illegal... not so free."

It was interesting to see my own country with a new set of eyes. As Mark Twain remarked: "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one corner of the Earth all one's lifetime."

China is different. I'm under no illusions about their human rights record domestically or internationally. I refused to visit China for many years because of that record. But Canada's is also far from perfect—from residential schools to the *Chinese Exclusion Act*—and I value actually visiting China and understanding its citizens rather than just reading about both. The differences on the ground are a lot smaller than the headlines and hype, and the climbers, hikers and random people we met were unfailingly gracious and open with us.

Xièxiè! Gong hei fat choy! ✕

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WILD SIDE
BY ANDREW FINDLAY

SOUL SKIING

Shames Mountain offers a welcome antidote to the mega-resort blues

In a world of homogenization and corporate consolidation in the ski resort industry, the local grassroots hill has never looked better. Statistics excite skiers; especially ones like Shames Mountain gets to boast about. Tucked in the rugged country of northwest British Columbia, 35 kilometres west of the unpolished resource town of Terrace, Shames routinely receives more snowfall than any other lift-serviced resort in the world with an annual snow base that tops 10 metres; enough to bury a three-storey chalet. But something more difficult to measure with stats is *soul*.

I'M SKINNING WITH Shames locals Dean Wagner and Chris Pucci, headed for the Dome, a golf-ball summit above the resort. Imposing rock walls flank a nearby drainage, rifled with avalanche paths and known as the "Valley of Doom."

In 2011, Shames itself appeared destined for doom. The local investors, who had nursed the mom and pop ski hill since the early 1990s, wanted out. If a buyer couldn't be found, Shames would close before that autumn's first snowfall. Panic swept through the avid Shames ski community but they rallied to form My Mountain Co-op. By late-spring volunteers had sold enough memberships to secure financing and take ownership in December of 2012.

"There's a really strong community that supports Shames," Wagner says, as we ascend and weave among snow-encrusted white gargoyle trees.

After 25 minutes, we reach the Dome. Besides the folksy grassroots vibe, Shames' other big draw is its easy access to stunning backcountry skiing. We slide across the Dome then peer down steep couloirs plunging into the Zymacord Valley. Wary of heightened avalanche hazard from the recent storm-snow, we opt to ski a safer treed ridge—Zymacord Trees. Wagner clicks

ABOVE:
Shames Mountain is the antithesis of the mega-resort.

his poles together then disappears over a pillow of knee-deep. Pucci drops in next, then I follow, gathering speed quickly into my first turn that sends an arc of white into the air. I spot the flash of Wagner's orange jacket as he and Pucci turn among the fir trees 50 metres below me. In two minutes we regroup, breathless. We slurp some water, share an energy bar, then begin the arduous climb back up to the Dome. Numerous times during our ascent, we cross freshly imprinted wolverine tracks. I sense that this elusive master of the

mountains in winter must be watching us. An hour later we reach the summit. Music from the Shames day lodge drifts up toward the clouds as I unfold a trail map from my pocket to get my bearings. Nothing pretentious here at Shames Mountain; its three lifts are simply called, Handle Tow, Red T-Bar and Blue Chair, and together serve 35 runs.

One at a time, we pop a head-high cornice into the North Bowl, now etched with tracks from the morning's wave of powder hounds. This time I follow Pucci; Frank Zappa-esque black curly hair exploding from his helmet. I find a lane of still-untracked snow that leads to a knoll above a final steep face. Surface snow slides around me as I carve a tentative turn before dispatching the remaining vertical with a couple of super Gs to where my powder skiing cohorts await on the flats below. From there we follow a traversing track back to the ski hill. By late afternoon, the tummy grumbles from the day's effort. So we link lazy turns in sun-warmed buttery snow down a blue run called Panhandler while a pair of kids plays cat and mouse on a bumpy trail in the adjacent forest.

At the day lodge we head upstairs to Galloway's Mountain Bar. Children cavort on the deck outside, waddling



ANDREW FINDLAY



PEOPLE ARE WHAT MAKE PLACES LIKE
SHAMES TICK ALONG FROM ONE SEASON
TO THE NEXT, WHEN VOLUNTEER
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around like miniature astronauts in their puffy winter clothing. Inside there is a cacophony of excited chatter and clinking beer bottles after one of those legendary powder days in the Shames slackcountry that stokes the flames of even this seasoned ski bum, who has been, admittedly, spoiled from a lifetime of ski adventures in amazing places.

When I sift through this catalogue of adventures, beyond the obvious barrage of memories of glory face-shots, trips when the weather goddess conspired in my favour or not and the occasional first descent, it's the friendships forged in the mountains that endure most vividly.

People are what make places like Shames tick along from one season to the next, when volunteer effort, in-kind donations

from local businesses and a tiny profit margin can mean the difference between red and black ink.

Wagner and Pucci are northwest BC boys to the core, the former a commercial fishermen and the latter a fisheries technician. Both are proud Shames co-op members and also partners in the

boutique ski company Divide Rides. With redcedar cores, yew wood sidewalls and stout dimensions, Divide Rides' skis are works of art, a product of the rainforested mountains of deep snow that form their backyard. Ask Wagner and Pucci, or any other co-op member, and they'll tell you that their worlds would be smaller and much less rich if Shames were ever to close.

SHAMES IS THE antithesis of the modern ski resort, to Whistler what the rusting VW van is to a Mercedes Benz—a little rough around the edges, staggering from one repair to another but oozing with nostalgia for a time when ski hills were simply about skiing rather than premium real estate. My elemental ski experiences as a five-year-old occurred at a similar

place, Grandview Ski Acres. I should say, similar in spirit. From a terrain and topography perspective, the two areas couldn't be more different. While Shames is cradled in the rugged and moisture-laden Skeena Range, Grandview occupied a diminutive hillside near Knutsford, a tiny rural community south of Kamloops, where 30 centimetres of snow was all you needed to sufficiently cover the bunchgrass and cow patties. With cotton underwear and frozen jeans for outwear, I would lap the three runs that meandered among groves of trembling aspen and ride the hand-me-down chairlift all day as though I was put on the planet for this sole purpose. Though by any modern yardstick, Grandview would not qualify as a ski area; this community-driven bump of snow with a ski lift on constant life support represented a universe of enjoyment to my young mind and body. In some ways, it helped to shape the course of my life. Grandview is long gone. You'd have to be an archeologist to uncover any suggestion that this little wave of interior grasslands was once home to a ski area. And that's why I have a serious soft spot for time capsules like Shames Mountain, where the soul of skiing dwells. ✕



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THE HAPPY CAMPER
BY KEVIN CALLAN

MY LOVE AFFAIR WITH ALGONQUIN

In an excerpt from his upcoming book, Kevin Callan expounds on the Canadian canoeist's most beloved park

As an author of several canoeing guidebooks, I spend a good portion of my life telling paddlers where to go. So, you might think I have a good answer to the most common question I am asked: "Kevin, where's your favourite place to paddle?"

The answer is not as easy as you might think.

I've been to many wild places and have fond memories on each and every trip. Each route is special—some are spectacularly scenic, others very remote. Some offer something entirely unique, like wild fishing, incredible wildlife-watching or breathtaking campsites.

When someone asks me about my favourite route, I often rattle off a couple of favourite routes in Algonquin or Killarney provincial parks. Then I mention some lesser-known provincial parks and wilderness areas—Quetico, Woodland Caribou and Wabakimi. From there I ramble on about lost routes only the die-hards have heard of—Kirkpatrick, Chiniguchi, Tatachikapika. But why stick close to home? My growing list soon includes western rivers, like the Milk in Alberta, or the Bowron Lakes chain in British Columbia. And don't forget about the east, I tell them.

Before long, I've mentioned far-off trips to the Scottish Highlands and the inland rivers of Ireland, and the person who asked the question has long since regretted saying anything at all.

I once delivered a presentation about the best North American canoe routes at an outdoor show in the U.S. In the front row, a paddler—wearing the standard Tilley hat and holding a pen and paper at the ready—looked hungry for answers. "So, Kevin," he asked me during the Q&A, "which is your favourite canoe route?"

Inspired by his Tilley hat free of a single stain or squashed mosquito, I responded by rhyming off a litany of pre-loved routes. It was the wrong approach.

"It's the next one I'm going on," I told him, elusive and sly. "And after that, my favourite will be the next one."

I hoped my clever response would inspire the man to paddle out and discover his own wilderness route—and maybe even get his Tilley hat a bit dirty.

Instead, the man stared blankly at me.

"But Algonquin is always a good choice," I stammered. "Next question!"

Algonquin is my go-to. It's familiar wilderness to me. I've been exploring there since I was in diapers. It's where I start my paddling season every year, and where I end it, too.

There's much to be said about paddling in a familiar place. It doesn't offer the same feeling as travelling to places unknown, yet

it can still surprise you.

Exploring a new place expands horizons, which is why I started canoe-tripping in the first place. Unfolding a new map, scouting rapids, locating portages, searching for feasible campsites, dreaming of magnificent grandeur around the next bend in the river—that's at the heart of canoe-tripping.

That same impulse fuelled explorers and Voyageurs to set out into the unknown, venture to the edges of the map and fill in a few details along the way.

Deepening my understanding of I places I already know and love is why I really wanted to paddle Algonquin's "Meanest Link."

I'VE DONE SOME extensive trips in the park, but nothing like a trip right around it. Once I started planning, gathering maps and packing

gear, I began to second-guess the route. And I was right to rethink it. It's a seriously crazy trip. Only a handful of paddlers had completed the full loop, and all were in far better shape than me. What kept me going was the pure pleasure of spending quality time in the sheer magnitude of Algonquin. This is one big and beautiful park.

I have to admit, sometimes I question going to Algonquin. The average portage in the park is well over a kilometre, so portaging becomes commonplace. The park can also be crowded in summer, and the odd disrespectful person who trashes campsites and lacks proper camp etiquette inevitably shows up. The most accessible places in the park are along the Highway 60 corridor, and they can seem a little zoo-like, with human-habituated wildlife and several campgrounds boasting a combined 1,200 drive-in sites.

The good far outweighs those minor negatives though, and that's what has kept me coming back, year after year. I have memories aplenty. Spring canoe trips in search of trophy-sized trout; fall backpacking trips with the forest lit up with changing colours; pulling a toboggan full of winter gear across a frozen lake, where the sense of isolation is so great I feel like the only man on Earth; and even pitching a tent in a busy campground and camping beside complete strangers who quickly become friends for life.

Algonquin offers all that, and more, to more than a million people each year. It has enough wilderness to satisfy the soul while inspiring many of us to search for even wilder places beyond its borders. Long portages and crowded campgrounds be damned—I love Algonquin, and always will.



ABOVE:
Kevin in
Algonquin—
his happy
place.

THE BLOG

Check out Kevin Callan online every Monday at:
explore-mag.com/camping



It was tourists who initially helped protect Algonquin. Devoted anglers, renowned artists and wealthy vacationers arrived by train and stayed at lavish hotels. Many were outdoorsy Canadians, but more than 30 per cent were from south of the border or Europe. They were all drawn to Algonquin for a good reason. Algonquin Park provides some of Canada's best canoeing, with over 2,400 lakes and 1,200 kilometres of streams and rivers located within the park, together forming a 2,000-kilometre-long interconnected system of canoe routes.

Tourists loved it here, and grew concerned over the encroachment of agriculture and depletion of fish and game. The dream was to protect the half-dozen watersheds that gave birth to the main rivers flowing out of their familiar piece of paradise, and they succeeded. Algonquin Park was established by the Province of Ontario in 1893.

At the time, it was considered the most significant wilderness park in all of Canada—a place twice the size of the province of Prince Edward Island, or the size of the states of Delaware and Rhode Island combined. Algonquin is a quarter of the size of Belgium. It was promoted as the largest tract of dedicated bush in the world.



Kevin Callan's latest book *Once Around Algonquin: An Epic Canoe Journey* tells the story of Kevin and his pal Andy completing Algonquin

Provincial Park's legendary Meanest Link. The 420-kilometre route is made up of 55 lakes, six rivers and over 100 portages, with the total portage distance adding up to a daunting 68 kilometres. Look for the book on shelves and online now.

SINCE ITS CREATION, Algonquin has more than doubled in size, from 3,797 square-kilometres to 7,630 square-kilometres. It's changed its name from Algonquin National Park to Algonquin Provincial Park (becoming Ontario's first provincial park) and expanded its borders eight times. Along the way, the original intent hasn't changed much. Park commissioners set out a plan well over 100 years ago to maintain watersheds, protect and encourage the growth of birds and animals, maintain the park in a state of nature, do field experiments in systematic forestry to a limited scale, secure a place for healthy recreation and to

study the beneficial effects of protecting a large forested area.

Algonquin's popularity has continued to grow since the park's creation. People worship this place. The devotion of its fans far exceeds the loyalty others would give to their favourite rock band, hockey team and even lover. In its honour, songs have been written (including three by The Tragically Hip), art created (the Group of Seven, Robert Bateman and Bill Mason, to name a few), books published (including from the legendary Roy MacGregor and Ralph Bice), as well as poems scribbled, theatre performed, films produced, a symphony established, clubs gathered and websites launched. Algonquin Park is world-renowned. If you mention any other larger and wilder place in Canada, you surely won't get the same response or the same fidelity that Algonquinites give to their park.

Simply put, this remnant piece of semi-wilderness, a mere two-hour drive from Toronto's international airport, wouldn't be here if so many people didn't love it. They protected this large chunk of green amongst an ocean of development. The forest was managed, wildlife monitored, poachers arrested and its solace shared by countless outdoor enthusiasts alike. ✕

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ALPINE BONDS

Even on a 130-kilometre self-supported ski traverse through the Bugaboos, group dynamics can be the toughest cliff to climb

The alarm jolts me out of a restless sleep. It's 2:30 a.m. and time to leave the hut and start skiing again. We are on the fifth night of our Bugaboos to Rogers Pass ski traverse. After four nights sleeping in tents, the Kingsbury Hut seemed like a welcome change.

Our group had arrived at the hut in the early afternoon and stripped down to let our clothes and feet dry before we dug greedily into the food cache, which had been dropped a few weeks prior. Getting to the hut early allowed us to celebrate Anne's birthday while lounging in the sun with a bag of wine and a bag of chips, trying not to get too sunburned on this bluebird day. We even had a birthday cheesecake for dessert.

While the hut had become a lovely place to spend the afternoon, it had only provided a

stuffy, sleepless night for me. I forced myself to slide down from my lofted bed and begin the morning routine. Hot coffee with butter is always welcome in the morning. Forcing down oatmeal at 2:40 a.m. is not—but it's OK when paired with leftover cheesecake. By 3:15 we were out the door, ski-touring in silence by the light of our headlamps.

FIVE DAYS PREVIOUS, the four of us—Anne, Amelie, Marie-Michelle and myself—were dropped on a remote glacier in British Columbia with the intention of skiing self-supported for more than 100 kilometres through two different mountain ranges. The Bugaboos to Rogers Pass ski traverse is one of the most famous traverses in Western Canada. To quote author Mark Klassan in his guidebook *Summits & Icefields 2*: "The Bugaboos—Rogers Pass Traverse may well

be the most sought-after Grand Traverse in Canada, and for good reason. The route has everything, from valley-bottom camps to high alpine cols and airy ridge traverses to multiple steep rappels." In other words—the perfect springtime adventure.

Anne and I had known each other for about a year and had dreamed up the idea of a springtime traverse with the caveat that it would be an all-female group. We figured it would be easy to convince a couple of our

girlfriends to spend nine days traversing from the granite spires of the Bugaboos to Rogers Pass for 130 kilometres with 10,000 metres of elevation gain and a 60-pound pack on your back. Unfortunately, our idea of a springtime girls' trip didn't sound too appealing to many of our girlfriends.

Through friends-of-friends, we added Marie-Michelle and Amelie to our team.

ABOVE:
Hard days
are the best
days—alpine
touring at its
finest.

Other than Anne and me, the four of us were, at most, acquaintances. We all had similar interests—a passion for spending time in the mountains—and seemed to get along well over FaceTime. The night before we started, we met to organize the gear. It was the first time all four of us had been in a room together.

In retrospect, it was kind of crazy how four girls who barely knew each other planned to spend nine days finding their way through 100-plus-kilometres of wilderness on skis; relying on one another's route-finding skills in complex avalanche terrain with numerous hazards, large cornices, steep slopes, open crevasses and bergschrund crossings.

THE LATEST WEATHER update had provoked the earlier-than-normal start from the Kingsbury Hut. A large high-pressure system is on its way, bringing freezing levels up to 3,000 metres. We're approaching the high alpine portion of the traverse. It is not only one of the most beautiful and remote sections, but also the part with the most hazards. Many of the slopes would be dangerous once the sun hit them, thus the reason for the early wake-up call.

We approach our first crux of the day. We are just beginning to wake up as we peer down a steep, icy slope. It is the obvious route, but I can only see as far as my headlamp. The darkness plays tricks with my eyes, making it impossible to determine the steepness or length. Amelie begins down the slope, cautiously slide-slipping. A fall here could be disastrous. One at a time, we make it down the slope and each breathe a sigh of relief at the bottom. It's the first time that morning I wished a helmet had made the cut on my packing list.

We continue along at a steady pace, traversing one at a time under an icefall and climbing over the remnants of ice that had fallen due to the sun's previous-day intensity. As we push onward, we begin climbing up Silent Pass and see the first glimpse of our next crux: a large east-facing slope. Looking at it from across the valley only intensifies its steepness and though still early in the morning, the sun had already warmed the slope.

I can barely hear myself think as I slide into the valley. This is the second time that morning I wished I had a helmet! As we reached the valley bottom, group dynamics had changed drastically from the carefree afternoon we'd had the previous day.



There hadn't been the normal amount of chatter this morning and tensions are high. The sun is starting to hit the far slope and it's warming fast. First, though, we have to decide if we will push on or not. It is still relatively early, around 8:00 a.m., but the sun is strong. Anne isn't feeling well. Maybe it was the early morning cheesecake, the late afternoon wine or the previous days of ski touring with a 60-pound pack. Most likely it's the combination of it all.

Being on these kinds of trips with other women means we tend to really discuss our options. Everyone puts their two cents in and we talk about it, then we talk about it some more. Maybe as females we can discuss the options almost to a fault, but all aspects of the situation are analyzed. I want to continue. I feel good and don't want to lose our window of opportunity. It is purely selfish, but I don't want to miss out on the high-alpine aspect of the traverse.

However, the decision is made to stay put. It's a hard call to make. I want nothing more than to make sure that we don't have to skip the next section of the traverse. But the sun is warm and with one team

member not feeling well there is no reason to test our luck. It made for a long day hanging around camp drinking tea and reading books, but we made the right decision. And we made it together.

IT DIDN'T CHANGE the outcome of the trip. We wake up early the next morning and are able to tackle the next crux with success. Three days later, we complete the traverse. We had times of poor communication, disagreements and frustrations. We had to make tough decisions. We didn't always agree, but we learned to take the time to listen and respect one another's decisions. Otherwise, it would have been a long nine days in the mountains.

We suffered through physical exhaustion, smelly feet (it's bad when you can smell your own feet), funny sunburns, route-finding on broken glaciers and lots of bootpacking. Our evenings were filled with lots of giggling and dreaming about eating fresh vegetables; and we truly got to know one another while passing around a flask of whiskey.

On the morning of the ninth day, we ski the sloppy slopes of the Illecillewaet to the parking lot on Rogers Pass. We went in as four girls who barely knew each other and came out as good friends with great memories.

What an incredible way to get to know some strong and fun women on our little springtime girls' trip through the mountains. ✕



TOP: A mix of huts and tents provided respite throughout the nine-day trek. ABOVE: A girls' trip to remember—ski-touring through BC's scenic and challenging Bugaboos.



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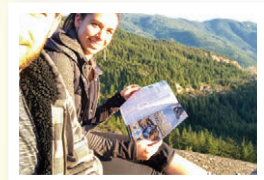
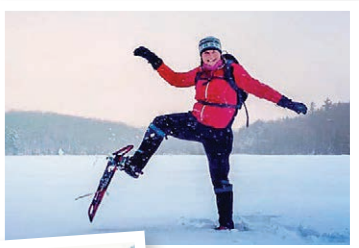
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WHAT ARE CLUB MEMBERS SAYING ON FACEBOOK?



Rhonda Pohl
18 December 2018

Got my box today! Santa is going to hijack some of the amazing things!



Chris Stubbs is feeling excited.
19 December 2018

I felt like Christmas came early for me today. My winter explore box was delivered. I love everything inside.



Steven Scanlan
21 December 2018

Came home to these two and very impressed with the box. Also for anyone interested, the explore magazine is ten times better than the backpacker



Tan Tanner
20 December 2018

I was so excited to receive my Explore Box today. I'm looking forward to using my goodies



Yvonne Guertin
19 December 2018

got my box on sunday. opened it up-so excited! now i am going to wrap it up and put it under the tree and be excited all over again!



Christa Wilton
18 December 2018

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Dan Kincaid
17 December 2018

Arrived today in Thunder Bay! Such a glorious Winter Box!

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IT'S THAT #VanLife, MAN!

THIS IS THE NEXT STAGE OF YOUR OUTDOOR
ADVENTURES—BUILDING A VEHICLE THAT PUTS
THE WORLD AT YOUR DOORSTEP

By Ryan Stuart

36



Foster Huntington is the Godfather of van life—or at least the hashtag. In July of 2011, he moved from his New York apartment into a 1987 Volkswagen Syncro and started a photo project hashtagged #vanlife on Instagram. “It’s a celebration of ships of the open road and the notion that, ‘home is where you park it,’” he wrote in a November 2011 post.

The hashtag took off and so did the lifestyle. More than 4.4 million Instagram posts are now tagged #vanlife, up from 2.1 million since October 2017. There’s little doubt the idea of owning a camperized vehicle, and everything associated with it, has never been more popular.

Huntington is the first to admit van life is not new. The iconic camper, the Volkswagen Westfalia, first hit asphalt in the 1950s. (We all know a person who drove one to Central America before 2011.) Working on this project I wrestled with this conflict: why is it suddenly so trendy? And is #vanlife any different than travelling in a van before the hashtag?

For sure it’s easier. Mobile coverage means it’s simple to stay in touch and get

out of trouble. Remote jobs and better Internet coverage make working from the road far more possible. The boom in people doing it feeds back to more and better products designed specifically for softening the rigours of tiny living, which in turn makes it appealing to more people. And all those enviable pictures of #vanlife helped normalize and perpetuate the lifestyle.

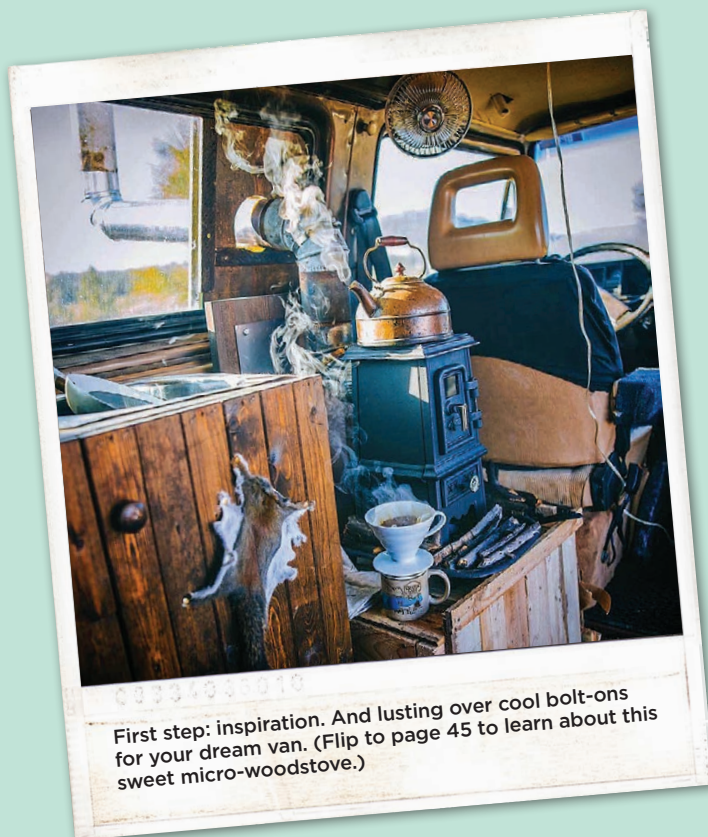
Plus, I think #vanlife popularity is a push back against the “dream” of owning a house, working a steady job and raising a family. More and more people want lifestyle as well as security—to ride their bike every day, ski when it snows, chase the waves, explore, experience and sleep in their own bed every night. Owning a van makes it possible, even if it’s only on the weekend.

Essentially, while life on the road has changed, the allure has not. Jake Daly, a van life veteran, summed it up perfectly.

“At some point everyone’s got to get in a car and just hit the road without a plan and just see where you end up,” he told me. “Even if it’s only for a couple weeks. If you haven’t done it, you owe it to yourself. It’s life changing. You don’t know what adventures or epiphanies are waiting for you until you go for a rip in a van.”



The folks behind the Instagram @faroutride are rocking the #vanlife all over North America.



First step: inspiration. And lusting over cool bolt-ons for your dream van. (Flip to page 45 to learn about this sweet micro-woodstove.)

Get Inspired

It's not all pretty pictures, but there are a lot of them

Nothing's done more to popularize #vanlife than Instagram. The photo- and video-sharing app is the perfect venue to glorify life on the road. Every van-lifer I talked to said the reality of living on the road is far different than what's depicted. But, damn, do they ever make it look fun.

Expect lots of pictures of beautiful people doing yoga on beaches, cute dogs on beds, lit-up vans under starry skies and impossible shots of camping solo in incredible spots. It will make you want to join the hashtag. There are many accounts to choose from. Here are a few to get started and that helped with this article:

- Exploring Alternatives, @exploringalternatives
- Chad Guenter, @chadguenter
- Far Out Ride, @faroutride
- Desk to Glory, @deskto glory_ash
- Tiny Life Supply, @tinylifesupply



The Weekend Warrior

It doesn't take much to change the way you weekend

Two years ago, Sean Kerrigan forked out \$1,500 for a 1992 GMC Safari. He then pumped all of \$75 into the classic minivan to build a bed and buy an organizer. The limited investment changed everything.

"I think differently about travelling," he says. "I can get up and go without worrying about where I'm going to stay or about the cost. I can pull over whenever I want and change plans any time."

The minimalist setup is perfect for his needs as a weekend warrior. The bed folds up into a bench, creating a perfect hangout area, and there's plenty of storage for gear. He and his daughter

camped out of the van almost every weekend during the summer.

It's been especially useful for servicing his surf addiction. Instead of forking out for pricey accommodation in Tofino or not having anywhere to stay during

peak season, when west coast campgrounds and hotels are usually full, he just parks on quiet streets or logging roads. "With the incognito Safari I can camp anywhere," Kerrigan says.

With only 2,000 kilometres logged so far, he figures the

Sean Kerrigan chases waves in his \$1,500 rig.



Safari will last a while yet. But the siren song of the digital nomad is calling and Kerrigan is planning an upgrade.

"With a dedicated work space and satellite Internet I could, literally, work from anywhere," he says. "That would be pretty amazing."

#Vanlife doesn't always mean a van. It's about being mobile and following adventure and curiosity where ever it leads—like the Giordanos do with their modified Toyota pickup.



The Road Trippers

Scrimp and save and you can really go places

The first time Richard and Ashley Giordano hit the road they only gave themselves four months to prepare.

"We wanted a vehicle to help us experience different cultures and see new landscapes," says Richard. "We'd backpacked before but we wanted more freedom than we could get hopping on and off a tourist bus. A vehicle allowed us to be on our own time and have everything we need with us."

They sold much of what they owned, saved what they could and then set off, in 2013, in a Toyota pickup with a roof-top

tent over the canopy.

"We chose a truck because that's what we had," he says. "We left without ever having tried the tent before. We figured we could sort it out on the road."

With about \$9,000 in the bank they made it seven months, all the way to Costa Rica, before flying home and leaving the truck in storage. They came back to Canada, rented a 450-square-foot apartment and put their heads down for a year.

"We both worked professional jobs," he remembers. "We banked one check, didn't go out, didn't drink. We knew every \$70 we saved was another day on the road."

On the second trip they made it all the way to Buenos Aires, Argentina. They're now back in Canada living in Canmore, Alberta, enjoying the mountain life, while Richard works as a freelance photographer and Ashley helps run Women Overlanding the World retreats. The open road is starting to call again.

"We hope that on our next trip we'll be able to work while we're gone" Richard says. "That should give us the freedom to travel even longer if we want."

Read about their first two trips and other adventures at DesktoGlory.com

VAN LIFE FOR COUPLES

The van life is not for everyone. Solo it can be lonely—but living in a tiny cramped space is challenging for even the strongest couples.

Richard and Ashley Giordano spent two years, 50,000 kilometres and hundreds of hours living side-by-side in their pickup truck.

"It's a good test of a relationship," says Richard. "It's going to go one of two ways: divorce or best friends."

His best strategy for maintaining the latter: "I try not to be an asshole. But seriously, you have to be honest and open. We talk about everything. What else are you going to do when you have hours of time next to each other?"

After all that time on the road he's noticed van travellers may be different ages, have vastly different backgrounds and experiences, but they tend to share a few key traits: experiences matter more than things; patience is essential; curiosity is more important than adventurousness; they're open-minded and friendly.

The last is key, he says: "Being friendly will get you out of almost any situation."

The Adventurer

Have 4x4—will go anywhere

Chad Guenter has one of the most enviable #vanlife rigs out there. He converted a 2012 Ford E350 into a 4x4 adventure-hound named 1tonTina.

"Almost every gas stop or parking lot stop I end up getting asked: 'What the hell is that?' 'What do you do for work?' 'Are you in the middle of a crazy long trip?'" he says. "I've even had more than a few people follow me for blocks because they want to talk vans."

1tonTina is the culmination of a decade of van life obsession that started with a road trip from Ontario to Mexico in a convoy of a converted school bus and a 15-passenger van.

"Just having the van pushes me to get out on the road more," he says. "Knowing that I have a comfortable and safe

place to sleep makes it easier when it comes time to decide where to go and how to pack. And having the four-wheel-drive conversion in my van gives piece of mind when travelling where I do."

In addition to being a firefighter based in Canmore, Guenter teaches rescue

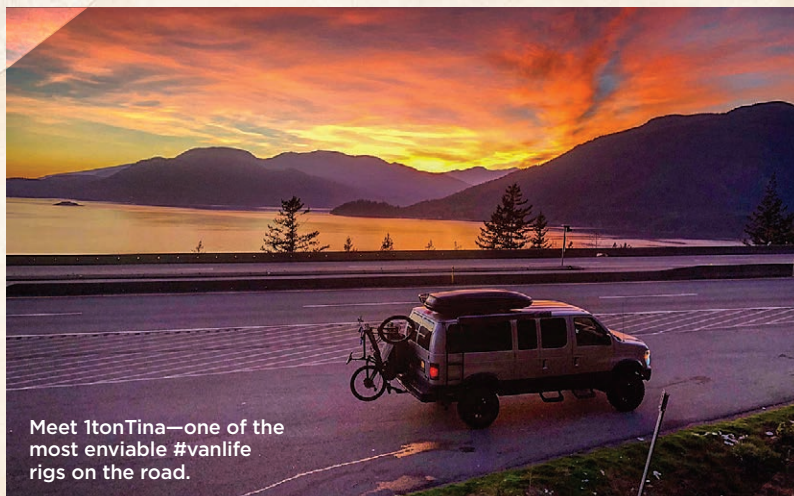
courses and runs Keep Calm/ Paddle On, a charity focused on raising awareness about mental health through paddling.

Both work and play often take him to new places, and the van allows him to tack-on extra time to explore.

"Can I bike or paddle there?"

Back roads to explore? Any camping? Hot springs close by?" he says. "Some of the places I work may not be on my 'road trip radar' but that just means I get to check out a spot I may not normally go to."

Learn more about Keep Calm/ Paddle On at kcpo.ca



Meet 1tonTina—one of the most enviable #vanlife rigs on the road.

The Digital Nomads

Six years into the digital nomad experiment

Matt and Danielle Chabassol's van is their work and home. The couple run Exploring Alternatives, a social media business focused on the tiny living movement. Running Exploring Alternatives, living out of a van and travelling full-time is their main muse. And where others might put in a year or two, this Ontario-based couple is into their sixth year on the road. We caught up with Danielle by email to find out how they do it.

"Our decision to downsize our lifestyle happened one night after I came home from work upset and overwhelmed by my job and the stress of all the responsibilities we had committed to (including a 35-year mortgage). Around that same time, we'd been talking about how we could probably afford to travel year-round on the same budget we were spending living in our house if we could find cheap accommodation and location-independent work. So we decided to take a risk and see

if we could make a digital nomad lifestyle work for us.

"This lifestyle is a lot of work because we're always having to find new places to stay, and having to pack

up and move every month or so, which can be a little exhausting and stressful at times. It can also be really tough, and sometimes uncomfortable, to live in a cramped space that might

be too hot or too cold, or just a complete mess (it happens quickly in small spaces!).

"But it's worth it. Living in our van during the summer has been the best way for us to spend quality time with our families, and to do our work, while sleeping in our own bed, making our own meals and not having to stay in hotels and rent cars. It's the perfect setup for what we're doing right now." ▶



Could you live in a van for years? Mixing work and play every day?

Park It

Finding a place to camp is harder than ever

When Jeremy Grasby decided to pack up the family into an RV and hit the road for a year he left the itinerary open—except for his time in British Columbia. While passing through his home province in the height of summer, he pre-booked campsites for every night.

"I couldn't risk not finding a place to stay," he said. Indeed, finding a place to camp in the front-country is getting difficult. Even on weekdays, popular sites are overflowing and forget long weekends unless you book months in advance. When the Canadian Camping and RV Council

studied the economic impact of camping in 2014 they found occupancy at public campgrounds hit 93 per cent. Since then, sales of campers and trailer campers increased to their highest levels since 2007. Just between 2017 and 2018, RV sales in Canada increased 15 per cent.

At the same time, campgrounds are actually closing, says Shane Devenish, president of the Canadian Recreational Vehicle Association. The law of supply and demand would suggest the opposite—so what's going on?

"We are seeing some campgrounds close due to

the threat of higher income tax rates and in BC due to the increasing property values and the potential for land development," Devenish says. He says it's harder than ever to open a new campground because of the cost of land, infrastructure and especially environmental approvals.

Until there is relief on property and income tax for campgrounds and more support from tourism organizations to help promote private campgrounds, he doesn't see more sites opening up any time soon.

That's one of the reasons overlanders and van-lifers are often experts at covert camping. With the right vehicle it's possible to camp just about anywhere—even city streets—without anyone knowing. Some design their van to be incognito, all the better to not attract

unwanted attention.

Finding free camping is a skill that many also hone. In Canada, camping on Crown Land is generally allowed for up to 21 days. The same is true south of the border on Bureau of Land Management, or BLM, land.

Antoine Gagne, who lives in his van full-time, relies on iOverlander.com or Freecampsites.net for tips and reviews. But he also finds his own spots using Google Maps and other resources.

"But sometimes you spend more money in fuel trying to find a free spot than just paying for camping," says Richard Giordano, who's travelled for months through the Americas in a pickup.

As a last resort, most Walmarts allow overnight parking. "We try to avoid them," says Gagne, "because they're very noisy."

When living the #vanlife, you sometimes have to get creative with your campsite. Connect with the community to learn the (legal) tricks of the trade.





Do It

It only takes an afternoon to join the movement

The hardest part of taking the plunge into road tripping is usually self-created.

"When you explore #vanlife content, you see people doing it super polished," says Jake Daly, a veteran of four camper-van conversions and owner of Tiny Life Supply, an online store of van life accessories. "It's easy to assume that's how it has to be done. But those high barriers don't actually exist. Just take what you've got and get creative."

He understands the anguish; he's holding out on getting started on his next conversion because he wants it to be perfect. Yet, he also knows that his favourite vans are the most unique and eclectic ones, not the \$80,000 Mercedes Sprinter with \$20,000 of appliances.

"It can be daunting to get started," he says. "But what is van life? It's a van and a bed. Move your bed to your van—it takes an afternoon—and, congratulations, you are part of van life."

Work It

Staying on the road long-term means finding a job you can do anywhere

Richard and Ashley Giordano pinched and saved. Jake Daly tags adventures onto work trips. Mat Dubé sells art. Eamon Fitzgerald and Rebecca Moroney run a chai tea business. There are as many ways to fund living out of a van as there are people doing it.

To keep the lifestyle going long-term, most people need to find a way to work from the road. Certain types of jobs are easier to pull off from an office on tires

than others: creative jobs like photography, video production, social media and web design are popular. But in the connected world it's easier than ever for just about anyone to make it work.

Tutoring

Got a skill? Maybe you can teach it. tutor.com or chegg.com

Artsy

Create products and sell them on Etsy.com and other online marketplaces.

Freelance

Websites like Thumbtack.com, Upwork.com and Freelancer.com link remote workers with projects in just about every field.

GEAR GUIDE

Turn any vehicle into a getaway van



Thule Force XT

(from \$630; thule.com)

A roof box is the easiest way to carry more gear and few shoulder as much as the Force XT. Available in four sizes—up to 623 litres—it's rated to 75 kilograms, about 22 more than most boxes.



Mpowerd Luci Solar String Lights

(\$35; mpowerd.com)

Flip on the lights with this string of 20 white LEDs spread along a 5.5-metre nylon cord. The carrying case is also the power bank—charge it from the sun with the built-in solar panel or from an outlet.



Kelty GYST Big G

(from \$20; kelty.com)

The hardest part of going camping is organizing all the gear. This system of totes, bags and sleeves makes it easy to get gear organized and keep it that way. It folds flat for easy storage.



Biolite FirePit

(\$265; bioliteenergy.com)

Say goodbye to white rabbits forever. A battery bank fan on the side of the FirePit injects air into the fire box, improving burn efficiency and eliminating smoke. All mesh, it looks awesome and works well for cooking, too.



GoalZero Yeti 400 Lithium

(\$800; goalzero.com)

Keep phones, cameras and tablets cranking with this 400-watt power bank. About the size of a car battery, the lithium bank has AC, USB and 12-volt outlets, and an LCD screen monitors energy flow and supply.



Four Wheel Campers

(price varies; fourwh.com)

Lightweight, compact and pimped-out, these truck bed camper units turn any pickup into an overlander. The pop-top function cuts wind drag on the road, they come decked-out or stripped-down and go on and off easily.

Click over to explore-mag.com/vanlife to learn some van-building tricks from the folks at Far Out Ride.



Build It

Five steps to DIY #vanlife

Sometimes the hardest part of doing anything is taking the first step. And sometimes the hardest part of that is knowing what the first step should be. That goes double for ripping out the interior of a motor vehicle. Here's the advice we gleaned from van life experts:

Take Your Needs

Being in a small space means you can't have everything. Before you do anything—including deciding on your vehicle—figure out your

“must haves.” If you're always getting dirty, maybe it's a shower. If you plan on stealth-camping, it might be a skookum kitchen and standing room. Once you've stripped out your wants from your needs, you have your North Star for the design.

Keep It Simple

In a tiny space, less is often more. Install the minimum you need and then hit the road. Pretty quickly you'll figure out what else you really want and what you're

happy doing without. But you probably won't know until you've actually hit the road.

Add What You Have

Whatever you set as your budget, you will spend it. But money doesn't have to be an obstacle. Take a crappy car, your uncle's old motorhome, a pickup truck with a DIY canopy. Salvage old appliances. Take apart pallets to make a bed frame. If it has wheels and a mattress, you're road tripping. Have fun and be different.

Get Lost Online

There is so much content showing how to do every little thing, for every style of van.

Get lost watching YouTube tutorials and following #vanlife on Instagram. Reach out to van-lifers. They're usually stoked to get back to you, answer questions, give advice and point you in the right direction.

Make Some Friends

Yes, woodworking, electrical expertise and other skills are super handy, but don't let a lack hold you back. Everyone's got a handy uncle or a friend. Buy them some beer. Help them out with something. Watch a few tutorials. None of it is that difficult. And the worst case is you'll end up with a funny-looking van you can improve on the next go around.

Try It

Take #vanlife for a test drive

Most devotees recommend giving the van life a demo before committing to the investment of buying your own. The only option used to be renting an RV—which isn't quite the same thing. Thankfully, these days a growing number of companies are getting in on the #vanlife trend.



Wheel Estate
AirBnB for RVs, vans and camperized trucks. The website links owners not using their rigs with people looking for a temporary setup.
wheelestate.ca

JUCY Rentals

With a pop-up tent on the roof and a fridge, stove and sink inside, these family mini-van conversions offer a good taste of what living out of a tiny space will feel like. jucyusa.com

Wicked Campers

Spend time in any popular camping destination and you've seen these camperized vans and cars with... um... unique paint jobs.
wickedcampers.ca

Gotta Have It

Don't hit the road until you have these essentials

We tapped #vanlife veteran and gearhead Jake Daly for the essentials for any road-ship. Most are available at his online store Tiny Life Supply.

1. Dometic Fan-Tastic Fan (\$290)

Breathing, body odour, wet gear, cooking: in a confined space like a van you need to move air. This roof-top fan and vent has a sensor that closes it automatically when it starts to rain.
tinylifesupply.ca

2. Rhino Rack Bat Wing Awning (\$900)

Even the biggest van gets claustrophobic after a couple days of rain. A retractable awning like this L-shaped monster creates tons of extra protected living space, out of the elements. rhinorack.ca

3. Fusion2Go 3.0 (\$845)

It doesn't take long to leave cellphone range in Canada. This cell signal booster adds range for calls, increases speed for data and works with multiple

devices simultaneously.
surecall.com

4. Goal Zero Yeti 1400 Lithium (\$2,400)

We live in a power-hungry time. Keep everything, including a fridge, running, as well as your van starting, with this 1,400-watt power bank. Add a GZ Boulder 100 Solar Panel (\$330) and re-charge it anywhere. goalzero.com

5. Ecoxgear EcoJump (\$130)

Jump-start your own battery with this booster kit. It holds enough spark for 25 restarts, doubles as a power source for many devices and recharges fast. ecoxgear.com

6. Unique Portable Fridge/Freezer (from \$1,000)

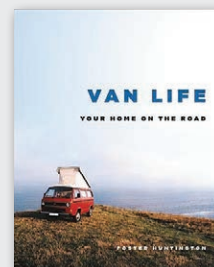
A cooler works fine, but road trip with a fridge and it's hard to go back to soggy egg cartons and lukewarm beer. These are rugged enough for rough roads and efficient enough for off-the-grid.
tinylifesupply.ca

7. Cubic Cub Mini Stove (\$560)

A heat-source of some kind is crucial, even for fair-weather van-lifers. Nothing has the warmth and ambiance of wood heat and stoves don't come much smaller than this one.
tinylifesupply.ca



Resources



Convince Me

The beautiful coffee table book *Van Life: Your Home on the Road*, by Foster Huntington, will corrupt many responsible city folk.

I Can't DIY

Wayfarer Vans makes simple conversion kits for RAM Promaster vans. Shipped in pieces, they're plug and play, turning a gutted van into fully camperized one in a couple hours.
wayfarervans.com

I Need a Little Help

Outside Van is devoted to taking aspiring van-lifers from zero to hero. Using interviews and questionnaires, they help newbies figure out what they need and then build it for them.
outsidevan.com

I'm Looking for Ideas

There is no shortage of tutorials and forums full of information and ideas. Two of the better ones are Overlandbound.com and ExpeditionPortal.com

I Need X

The online store Tiny Life Supply is full of accessories and appliances for #vanlife. Bonus: it's Canadian, so no worries on duties and exchange rates.
tinylifesupply.com x

The Singularity *Was* Here

A 1,750-KILOMETRE CANOE TRIP ACROSS THE BARREN GROUNDS POSES THE QUESTION—ARE WE MOVING TOWARDS UTOPIA, OR AWAY FROM IT?

Story & Photos by Frank Wolf



The heavyset tween moves slowly in front of us on the tarmac as the line of passengers shuffles toward the waiting connector flight to Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. He suddenly freezes in place, pats himself down in a panic and then explodes into a wail.

"My iPad! I don't have my iPad!"

His eyes are wide with horror as my friend, Ryan Bougie, and I step around him. It's as if someone has executed the boy's mother in front of him. But in fact, she's quite alive—she's the one trying to settle him down.

Soon a circle of airline workers and security move in around him. He tries to bolt back into the airport to hunt for the device, but they manage keep him on the tarmac for the time being. He rages on inconsolably, cursing the workers for not being able to find the precious tablet. The

flight is delayed for 20 minutes as everyone tries, as politely as possible, to either get him on the plane or get him and his family members to check off the flight.

Finally he boards, slumping in the seat behind me. He kicks the back of my seat and swears loudly—completely oblivious that he's held up a plane with 100 people waiting to depart. I suppose it's not all his fault—he's probably been attached to that device since he was a toddler and it's become a psychological extension of his being.

I think to myself: *I can't wait to paddle away from all this.*

Our addiction to technology seems almost inescapable. It's one reason I'm headed to Yellowknife to begin a 1,750-kilometre canoe journey across the wilds of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, where the only functional use for an iPad would be as a cutting board—and a poor one at that.

This kid on the plane—so disturbingly attached to a small metal and glass object—brings to mind the writings of Ray Kurzweil. Kurzweil is a famous contemporary futurist who for years has predicted that *The Singularity is Near*—"The Singularity" being a time in the near-future when humans and technology will assimilate. Kurzweil sees it as a utopia where, among other things, microscopic robots called "nanobots" will exist in the bloodstream of every human, diagnosing and fixing any illnesses that may strike, allowing individuals to live for hundreds of years.

His positive spin on this unity of man and machine confuses me. We live in a finite world—if everyone were to live forever, wouldn't we quickly use up all the resources on the planet and perish of starvation, war and other calamities associated with scarcity? As far as I can tell, there's no technological escape from the unavoidable. Death has been around ▶





as long as life. The two are, and always will be, inextricably linked to each other. That bond will never be broken no matter how many nanobots you throw at it. Our limited time on this planet creates an urgency in me to make the most of it—so off to the Arctic I go.

ON THE EVENING of day-five of our trip, Ryan and I glide past towering cliffs along the south shore of the East Arm of Great Slave Lake. The waters here are crystal clear and over 700 metres deep—making it the deepest lake in North America. We're nearing the treeline in this aptly named "land of little sticks" and the spruce forest spreads out in a sparse, stunted patchwork over the surrounding hills.

Our canoe hits the gravel beach with a hiss and we hop out, unloading our myriad packs in order to set up camp for the night. The lake is dead calm and a brilliant double rainbow emerges from the vapour of a passing storm, lingering for our viewing pleasure as we erect our tent and tarp.

Perhaps more momentous than the rainbow is the burning of four illicit rolls

of toilet paper in our fire that evening. I have never used toilet paper on any of my wilderness journeys. If Indigenous people of the past and wolves of the present can do without it, why bring along another superfluous piece of technology that takes up valuable cargo space?

I recall the joy in Ryan's eyes when he held up the toilet paper while we packed

oats and pepperoni sticks.

Ryan remains undeterred, squirreling away the bleached rolls of luxury into one of the packs. I would have to wear down his resolve.

Day by day, I needled him about the TP, and introduced him to the wonders of sphagnum moss and smooth pebble stones as superior replacements. At our

The lake is dead calm and a brilliant double rainbow emerges from the vapour of a passing storm, lingering for our viewing pleasure as we erect our tent and tarp

up our food in Yellowknife a few days earlier.

"I got the toilet paper!" he beamed

I stared at him dumbfounded.

"What's that for?"

"It's... toilet paper."

"I don't use toilet paper on a trip. I use moss, sticks and stones..."

"Really?!"

"Yes, really." I said, and then returned to packing our 50 days-worth of dried food,

camp this evening he finally relents—partly due to my efforts, but maybe more so because the Pike's Portage is looming at the end of the lake.

The prospect of carrying anything extra over the two-day slog around the cascades of the Lockhart River is perhaps all the motivation he needs. Curls of smoke from the fire carry away the last bits of particulate from the offending sheets, and I am content.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Frank Wolf and Ryan Bougie begin their journey from Yellowknife to Gjoa Haven. A glassy lake and a double-rainbow; the beauty the pair immersed in for a month last summer. Frank meets Austrian solo paddler Bernie Kohl, a fellow adventurer in Canada's barren grounds. It's not all paddling—gruelling portages were a fact of life, such as this one between Aylmer Lake and the Great Fish River. Camping on the tundra as a thunderstorm approaches.



ON DAY 12, we're riding a beautiful tailwind down Ptarmigan Lake. We broke from the treeline a couple of days earlier, meaning there's minimal shelter to tuck away from notorious north winds that can stall a canoe trip for days on end. But a favourable wind also helps you that much more—and today we have an unobstructed southerly urging us onward through this sparkling, sun-splashed basin.

A flapping green material draws my attention to the low, bare hills of the shoreline in the distance and the wind quickly brings us alongside it. A man is taking down his small green tent on top of the hill in the breeze, unaware we have pulled up to his camp. I step onto the beach and call out, "Hello!"

He turns, sees us, smiles and scurries down to greet us.

His name is Bernie Kohl, an Austrian solo canoeist who began his journey 10 days before us in the Dene village of Lutselk'e, about three-quarters of the way between Yellowknife and the start of Pike's Portage. We compare notes about our trips and find out he's behind

schedule. He was trapped by lingering ice on Great Slave Lake for five days, which melted away by the time we passed that section. His goal, like ours, is to continue to the Back River and paddle it to the Arctic Ocean.

With this lovely following wind, I ask Bernie why he isn't taking advantage of the conditions to claw back some of his lost distance.

In his strong accent he says, "I have to debone *zee* fish."

"Excuse me?"

"I'm getting all of my protein from fish. I caught a bunch yesterday but have to debone them all before jarring them." Bernie lifts the top from a big metal pot to reveal a pile of whole trout sitting in brine. "Once I debone them, I put them in jars. They'll last over a week that way."

Ryan and I shoot each other amused glances.

"Would you like to watch me debone *zee* fish?" Bernie asks hopefully.

I look down at the pot of fish, then feel the beckoning breeze on my cheek. "We're going to keep on paddling. Good luck."

On one hand, I see that Bernie is living a completely different kind of Singularity to Kurzweil's. He is literally single—a lone person depending largely on the bounty of nature, not technology, to sustain himself. It's very pure in its intention, but perhaps not practical if you actually want to finish the route you set out to do.

I give Bernie a parting hug and we promise to look each other up post-trip to see how things went. Ryan and I peel our canoe into the wind and are whisked away. I turn to give Bernie a last wave but see that he's already bent to his chore.

(A few months later, Bernie reaches out to me. He eventually got stuck partway along his route due to relentless north winds, and called in a plane to pick him up. I suspect he spent too much time deboning fish and not enough time paddling.)

I DRAG THE canoe over the barren grounds between Aylmer Lake and Sussex Lake. It's day 14, and Ryan and I have travelled almost 750 kilometres through a myriad of lakes and rivers to get to this landmark point in our journey. Sussex ▶



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:
Runaway canoe—the pair rescues their boat on the Great Fish River. Welcome to the land that never thaws—remaining ice on Clinton-Colden Lake in early-July. A herd of caribou 10,000 strong eyeballs the duo from afar, keeping a wary distance. An Arctic wolf stops by for a look—it's possible this animal has never before laid eyes on a human.



Lake is the source of the Back River, which flows for 974 kilometres from this point to the Arctic Ocean at Chantrey Inlet.

Originally named the Great Fish River by the Dene people, the British decided to rename it the Back River after George Back, a Commander in the Royal Navy who was the first European to travel its length in 1834. The river is known for its remoteness, and the 83 sets of whitewater rapids that rumble along its course.

Ryan and I pose proudly, arm-in-arm at the source of the Great Fish, with images of exhilarating downstream paddling dancing in our heads. We load up the canoe and paddle about 200 metres across the initial fattening of the river before we're stopped by boulder-choked narrows that have us dragging our fully-loaded canoe over rocks, or portaging around them, for the following two days. We soon figure out that anything marked as a rapid on our maps in this first section of the river is anything but.

After each day of grinding drags and bludgeoning portages, I retire to the tent and write a page in my journal, followed by

reading a chapter of my book for the trip—Joseph Boyden's *The Orenda*. It's a fitting tale, telling of a time near the beginning of colonization when Indigenous people were still independent and free.

Ryan doesn't have a book, but instead watches videos downloaded to his phone. I was aghast when it dawned on me that this would be his nightly ritual—until I realized that this was the first-ever expedition where I've partnered with... a Millennial. That's right, one of those tech-loving,

entitled kids born somewhere between the late '80s and early 2000s.

I came to escape technology, to read and write in the evenings to the sound of the wind and rushing water, and here beside me was a Millennial gazing into his flickering phone. Not surprisingly, I discover he's also a fan and proponent of Kurzweil. He happily tells me that wi-fi will one day be available on every square-inch of the planet—even here. I was bearing witness to the evolution of The Singularity on the North American continent's most remote river.

Ryan shivers under the tarp we hastily constructed to escape the full brunt of a passing thunderstorm. The old tattered clothes he brought along are soaked through. He wears a zip-lock bag to keep his head dry since his porous rain jacket is hoodless. He has no rain pants at all.

I may like to keep things simple, but I'm not a complete Luddite. I fully embrace Gore-Tex and a three-layer clothing system to keep myself warm and dry in the elements. It's the current-day version of the caribou skins the inland Inuit used to use for the same purpose. A little comfort goes a long way.

GET AWAY FROM IT ALL



Canadian North Airlines offers scheduled flights between Yellowknife and Gjoa Haven, as well as a wide selection of other locations in Canada's Northern Territories. canadiannorth.com

Looking to experience your own version of The Singularity?



Ryan is an experienced outdoorsman, having traversed the entire Coast Range of British Columbia by ski, among many other epic accomplishments. When I ask him why he didn't bring his functional outdoor apparel on this trip, he tells me, "I didn't want to wreck my good skiing gear." And so here he is, shivering away. I suppose his iPhone is too small to shelter him from the downpour.

I turn around to see a large Arctic wolf standing beside our tent. White and grey in colour, with keen yellow eyes, it observes us nonchalantly

THE RIVER IS smooth and swift in the upper Great Fish as it snakes through the scoured, emerald terrain of the tundra. As we approach the next curve, one of the hillsides seems to vibrate. The source of this seeming illusion soon becomes apparent—a sizeable herd of caribou are milling about on the slope.

We hop out to get a closer look, walking around the base of the hill to a small lake behind it. The sight there is stunning.

Thousands of the ungulates are amassed, covering the entire valley around the lake. Comparing their numbers to a capacity audience at a Canucks hockey game in my hometown of Vancouver, British Columbia, I estimate the throng to be around 10,000 strong.

We watch them for 20 minutes, bleating and grunting as they graze away. They

never let us get closer than 20 metres. Moving in unison like a flock of birds, they always stay just out of reach. A fog suddenly descends upon the landscape and the herd begins to move. In minutes they are gone, evaporating into the mist. We are suddenly by ourselves, as if waking from a dream.

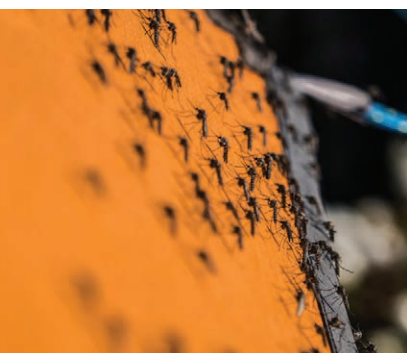
Later that evening, we set up camp above a boulder-strewn beach. I'm standing and chatting with Ryan when he suddenly looks

past me at something over my shoulder. "Hello there," he casually remarks.

I turn around to see a large Arctic wolf standing beside our tent. White and grey in colour, with keen yellow eyes, it observes us nonchalantly. The wilderness here is so expansive that this creature has probably never seen a human before—its curiosity drawing it in to inspect our alien presence. After about a minute, it loses interest in us—we're neither caribou nor molting goose—and ambles slowly away over the ridge at the back of our camp.

We jog up in pursuit to see where it's headed. A vast barren plain stretches endlessly before us with seemingly nowhere for it to hide. The wolf, however, is gone. Like the caribou this morning, it has melded with the land and disappeared. A harmony of blood and dirt, of fur and rock—the creatures up here possess an ancient shape-shifting Singularity with the land that's born of evolution, not computers.

A MONTH INTO our journey, we're nearing the river's end. Ryan proudly shows off the haul of grayling and lake



trout he pulled from the pool below the rapid where we've settled in for the bright night. The fish will supplement our freeze-dried dinner this eve, and make for delicious lunchtime tacos tomorrow. Quietly busying himself gathering small bits of dwarf willow and birch to cook over, he's shed the clasps of technology and fallen into rhythm with the land.

Earlier in our journey, I feared Ryan would be lost to Kurzweil's prophecy. At one point he even listened to a podcast for a few hours while we canoed—separating himself from the reality of our journey, from being present in such a spectacular landscape.

Eventually, things began to turn. He removed his earphones and replaced them with the rush of the wind and with silence. YouTube videos ceased to glow in the tent as he read one of my books. His awareness sharpened and he began spotting animals onshore before I did. We were unified in the canoe, deftly running booming whitewater sections of the river with names like "Wolf Rapids" and "Rock Rapids." Where once he tried to maintain a

barrier between himself and the wild with technology, Ryan now sought union with it by simply opening up all his senses to what the Arctic had to offer.

TWO WHITE CANVAS tents are set up along a creek at the base of a waterfall. We spotted them from 10 kilometres away and made our way across Chantrey Inlet to get

No one is out in the evening swarm of mosquitoes so I knock on the wooden frame of the first tent. I hear someone speaking in Inuktitut, then the tent flap opens and an older woman's eyes go wide; she gasps and the flap is quickly closed again.

I hear her exclaim, "*Kabloona!*" [white person] to someone inside.

The entrance flips wide and out comes

This engaged way of living, of the Singularity with the wilderness shown in Tuktuk, was so interesting it was deemed worthy of capturing on film

here. We didn't know exactly how we'd be getting to the town of Gjoa Haven (170 kilometres away on King William Island) from the end of the Great Fish River, but heard that Inuit from the community head out to camps around the mouth of the river once the sea ice clears. Serendipitously, the ice went out a few days earlier, and we happened to glimpse this camp soon after we officially hit the Arctic Ocean. A 14-hour day on the water is at an end.

a stout, barrel-chested Inuk man. He is grinning ear-to-ear and shakes my hand warmly. His wife is the one I surprised and she quickly goes about baking up some bannock and getting coffee ready. I communicate via charades with the man, as both he and his wife only speak Inuktitut, until a younger man named Marvin emerges from the other tent.

Marvin is fluent in both English and Inuktitut. The older couple in the tent are



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:
A muskox roams the shore of the Lockhart River—a primitive animal native to the Arctic barrens. Caribou antlers mark an Inuit hunting camp on the Lockhart River. Hanging out with the Atqittuq family; one of the few local families who still hunt out on the land over summer. Exploring an abandoned RCMP post at Fort Reliance, Nunavut. Ever-present mosquitoes—the Arctic paddler's constant companions.

his parents, Jacob and Martha Atqittuq. Marvin is here with them, his wife, his son and his brother. They set up their camp just the day before, and are the only people from town in the area as far as they know. Finding them was truly a stroke of luck, and they arrange via satellite phone to have some friends come pick us up tomorrow by boat.

Over the course of the evening we learn that Martha and Jacob, now 75 years young, lived nomadically in the area around the mouth of the Great Fish River in skin tents and igloos for the first quarter-century of their lives, before moving into the permanent settlement of Gjoa Haven in the 1970s.

Jacob is sharp and spry, still providing his family with sustenance from the land as he has his whole life. He feeds Ryan and I slices of raw meat from a caribou he shot just yesterday. The flesh is so tender it melts in my mouth. From his kit he shows us a fishing lure he made from caribou bone that he's used for years to pull lake trout up to 80 pounds from below the last rapid of the river.

The next morning he spots a distant caribou on the shoreline, and springs into action like a rabbit. He grabs his ancient rifle and stalks nimbly to our canoe, where he braces the rifle and waits. Ryan follows along to learn from the master. After a half-hour of waiting, the caribou fails to reappear—but we were given a glimpse of Jacob's synchronicity with the land.

Afterwards, Marvin chuckles with pride as he tells us how the previous winter his dad accurately navigated hundreds of kilometres of frozen tundra on his snow machine purely by reading the shape and direction of snowdrifts. Jacob is a living example of an ancient Singularity—one of the last true holdovers of a time when humanity and nature were one.

WE END UP staying with the Atqittuq family for five days in Gjoa Haven while we wait for our flight. One afternoon we're sitting in Jacob's living room watching a 50-year-old NFB documentary series called *Tuktu*, which filmed Inuit people seal hunting, building igloos, making sealskin

clothing and playing communal games using pre-contact methods. Jacob actually knows the folks in the film, and he laughs with glee as he nods and recalls a life he once lived.

This engaged way of living, of The Singularity with the wilderness shown in *Tuktu*, was so interesting it was deemed worthy of capturing on film. It's unlikely a series will be made of people sitting idly as nanobots keep them alive for hundreds of years. It would be like watching paint dry.

Though Kurzweil's prediction of a man/machine amalgamation may very well be prophetic, it doesn't mean it's good. His Singularity envisions a dystopia similar to the film *The Matrix*, where sedentary humans are irrevocably bonded with technology. Jacob's version of Singularity—where humanity and wilderness are intimately intertwined—is quite the opposite.

As we hurtle ever closer to Kurzweil's prophecy, the Jacobs of the world will soon exist only in grainy NFB footage. The Singularity isn't near, it was already here—and we've passed it by. ✕

Junction Sheep Range
Provincial Park, located
to the south of Williams
Lake, is one of BC's most
fascinating wild spaces.

Welcome to “The

54

A person wearing a blue jacket and a tan hat is walking on a grassy ridge in the foreground. The background features a vast, hilly landscape with a sunset or sunrise, casting a warm glow over the scene. The hills are covered in sparse vegetation and some mist or smoke is visible in the valleys.

Puddle”

FORGET HIPSTER CRAFT BEER SCENES AND
KOMBUCHA BARS—WILLIAMS LAKE, BRITISH
COLUMBIA, IS GRITTY, REAL AND RIFE WITH
OUTDOOR ADVENTURE

By Andrew Findlay

It's afternoon tea at Chilcotin Lodge, a 50-kilometre drive west of Williams Lake, British Columbia, on Highway 20. David Kurt and Brenda Van Ember are chatting up a pair of travelling Germans in a dining room decorated with a lifetime's worth of antique collecting.

In 2017, Kurt and Van Ember traded their life in the BC town of Salmon Arm, where they had started the small but successful bakery, Chestor's House of Cinnamon, and headed to the central interior as the new owners of this iconic 80-year-old lodge. It was a baptism by fire—literally.

From the front door of the lodge you can look across the highway at blackened timber, evidence of where, just weeks after they had taken possession of the property, wildfire threatened to rip up the hillside and engulf the lodge and surrounding buildings. As nuclear mushroom clouds of smoke blossomed across the horizon, Kurt and Van Ember wondered if their dream would turn to ash. They were advised to evacuate, but Kurt and his son decided to stay and fight the flames, or at least douse their buildings with water and hope for the best. It was a David and Goliath fantasy. But in the end, a change in wind direction saved the lodge. An act of God, if you are a believer. Before the new owners had even had a chance to formally meet their neighbours—local ranchers, homesteaders and First Nations—they were bonded on the fire line, out of necessity.

"The entire horizon was red. I anticipated a battle but I didn't anticipate a war," Kurt says, before going back to work restoring an old barn next to the historic lodge. That was the summer of 2017 when Williams Lake and surrounding rural communities,



situated on the dry plateau between the Coast and Cariboo mountain ranges, were under siege by the flames. Thousands were evacuated, ordered to leave behind homes and livelihoods, left wondering what they'd find upon return. As if that wasn't enough, after the forest fires had fizzled, in early November a blaze broke out at Tolko Industries Ltd.'s Lakeview Division sawmill, putting 100 people out of work—and more salt on the wound.

Experiences like these can break or make a town. But Williams Lake emerged stronger; the ties between neighbours greater. The city knows about adversity. After all this interior city, known as "The Puddle," lives with the vicissitudes of the resource sector, from the devastation of the ongoing mountain pine beetle epidemic to the failure of the tailings impoundment pond at the Mount Polley copper and gold mine in 2014 that shone an



Williams Lake is a gritty place. There are no kombucha bars, and last time I checked this city was yet to embrace the craft beer revolution and all its attendant manicured beard and plaid-shirt hipster culture

unfavourable international spotlight on the city (in early 2019, Imperial Metals, owner of Mount Polley, announced that it would be suspending operations due to slumping metal prices, putting hundreds out of work).

THERE'S NO AVOIDING it; Williams Lake is a gritty place. There are no kombucha bars, and last time I checked this city was yet to embrace the craft beer revolution and all its attendant manicured beard and plaid-shirt hipster culture. (Happy hour at Mr. Mikes will do just fine, thank you very much.) In Williams Lake, plaid is a functional garment choice not a fashion statement. Even Williams Lake local Geoff Moore, a good friend in the biz and the gregarious media rep for the Cariboo Chilcotin Coast region, speaks with a sort of off-the-cuff, shall I say freshness, far removed from the polished, sanitized

delivery one might expect from someone in the tourism PR trade. That's part of the community's unpretentious appeal, a quality that I first discovered years ago as a tree-planter toiling in cutblocks near Horsefly, east of Williams Lake. On days off I hit The Puddle to do laundry and party with fellow crew in local bars, hoping not to run afoul of rednecks and find myself on the receiving end of a pool cue.

On this visit, I found my way to Red Shreds Bike and Board Shop, where I met owner Mark Savard, a.k.a "Shreddie." As it has done since opening more than 20 years ago, Red Shreds, with its trademark Rasta colour scheme, stands out conspicuously against the working class grit of The Puddle. It is, without a doubt, Williams Lake's adventure HQ. On this sunny late-June morning, a group of visiting mountain bikers talk trail beta with the



FROM LEFT: The Fraser River carves a massive swath through the dry Cariboo. Williams Lake is a recreation hotbed—but the tourist hordes have yet to discover it. Chilcotin Lodge—a heritage, 80-year-old staple of the diminutive tourism industry in the area.

shop guys while a young climbing couple fills some gaps in their rack before heading to Esler Bluffs, the local crag.

Though it may be hard to convince anyone who revels in the cool outdoor cachet of, say, Whistler or Nelson, Williams Lake has legit recreational cred. There's ski-touring in the wild and snow-blessed Cariboo Mountains east of the city and access to world-class rafting and paddling on rivers like the Chilko and Chilcotin to the west. Esler Bluffs, west of town, offers up some respectable sport climbing. North-facing and ideal for respite from the summer heat, the prickly limestone crag is home to more than 40 routes, easily enough to fill a few afternoons of fun. And there are fascinating nearby protected areas to explore, such as Junction Sheep Range Provincial Park and the semi-arid arroyos of Churn Creek. And if one more reason was needed to pitch a tent in Williams Lake for a week, then look no further than mountain biking and the city's mind-boggling trail network. However, true to character, locals waste little energy tooting the town's horn as a core recreation destination; they just stay busy getting after it.

LONG BEFORE MOST towns started to think about mountain bike tourism, Williams Lake riders reached out to ranchers, loggers and other landowners and stakeholders to devise a land-use agreement that worked for everybody. ▶



"I first started building trails and exploring routes on my dirt bike in the 1980s," Shreddie explains.

Legitimizing the rogue trails of Williams Lake has taken many long conversations over many beers, but the effort has paid off. The four-leaf clover trail network, which Shreddie says he dreamed of when he first started mountain biking, now exists. Williams Lake boasts one of the largest fully sanctioned, legitimate trail networks in BC, and that's no minor claim in a province with a bounty of mountain bike trail assets.

With four geographically distinct zones—Desous, South Lakeside, Westsyde and Fox Mountain—there is more than 300 kilometres of single-track, 200 of them within city limits. At Desous Mountain, Williams Lake's hallowed trail network continues to grow. A 30-minute drive west of Williams Lake, Desous rises high above the roiling Fraser River. It's long been a shuttle-friendly downhill zone, with a half-dozen screaming descents from its summit. These days, trail builders are putting the




others like the Baumanns, one of many families forced to leave homes in nearby 150 Mile, to camp on their property. It was Williams Lake community spirit on full display.

West of Desous Mountain, Highway 20 crosses the Fraser, then climbs steeply up the

finishing touches on the latest addition to the Desous zone, Shiney Badger, a cross-country epic that ascends through Douglas-fir, ponderosa pine and sun-kissed limestone crags for a continuous 20 kilometres to the summit, best undertaken early in the morning or on a cool day.

During the summer of 2017, when Williams Lake was under evacuation order and eerily drained of its populace, Shreddie hunkered down with his partner and young kids at their property on Chimney Lake. The Savards welcomed

other side of the river valley. Then almost abruptly, the highway pops travellers onto the vast and rolling Chilcotin Plateau, a sweep of rolling hills beneath an open sky that somehow suggests possibility and potential. And there's also more fire-scarred landscape. Veering off the highway at Riske Creek, a brief detour south leads to Junction Sheep Range Provincial Park—a gorgeous amalgam of cliffs, hoodoos and undulating grasslands at the confluence of the Chilcotin and Fraser rivers; a miniature Grand Canyon where the Fraser wraps



Williams Lake boasts one of the largest fully sanctioned, legitimate trail networks in BC, and that's no minor claim in a province with a bounty of mountain bike trail assets

through crumbling walls scaled by wild sheep. The park is home to rare grasses and lichens, but must notably to roughly 500 California bighorn sheep, the largest population of non-migratory California sheep in the world. Hiking along the canyon edge, with the Fraser swirling below, visitors will often spot sheep adhered like geckos to the cliffs, using cloven hooves and extraordinary coordination to deftly traverse a landscape where no predators dare tread.

LATE IN THE day, a hazy sun sets over Williams Lake. Fox Mountain, home to some of the city's original mountain bike trails, overlooks the city from the north. At the end of a long summer day it glows pink-orange, a colour scheme that, given the past two hellacious summers, has taken on ominous connotations. Though last year's forest fire season was even more destructive than 2017 in terms of the total amount of BC land burned, Williams Lake

escaped the worst, mostly because so much of the forest surrounding the community had already been scorched. Still the city spent much of the summer of 2018 under a choking veil of smoke from fires that burned elsewhere in the BC interior.

Lush green grasses and pine seedlings burst defiantly from blackened ground. The forest begins its healing. Lives are rebuilt. The show must go on. Fifth-wheels and campers are shoe-horning into the stampede grounds for an annual show that draws cowboys from across North America—the Williams Lake Stampede. It's held on the same late-June/early July long weekend as the Rustlers Stampede Rugby Tournament. The individual who masterminded this schedule must have had a devilish sense of humour—when you unleash cowboys and rugby players into the same bars, the fireworks tend to fly.

However, I suppose that's how things roll in Williams Lake—in all its unvarnished glory. ✕

FOR YOUR ADVENTURES

Gear

Red Shreds Bike and Board Shed has it all from mountain bikes, to skis, kayaks and climbing gear plus outdoor clothing for all pursuits. redshreds.com; 250.398.7873

Barking Spider Mountain Bike also carries a wide selection of mountain and road bikes, as well as cross-country skis. barkingspidermountainbike.com; 250.392.5177

Mountain Biking

For trail maps and info on events and all things mountain biking in Williams Lake and surrounding communities in the Cariboo: ridethecariboo.ca/williams-lake

Climbing

Go to mountainproject.com/area/113280688/esler-bluffs-near-williams-lake for Esler Bluffs access info and a general description of the crags. (Red Shreds stocks a climbing guide to Esler.)

Stay

Sleep at a historic lodge with walls that echo with decades of Chilcotin frontier stories. thehistoricchilcotinlodge.com; 250.659.5646

Destination Details

Look to the Cariboo Chilcotin Coast Tourism Association: landwithoutlimits.com



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The Williams Lake area has some 300 kilometres of designated, legal single-track mountain biking. Mark Savard—a.k.a “Shreddie”—rips over a suspension bridge near town. Every year, Williams Lake hosts BC's biggest rodeo. Shreddie relaxes post-ride—Williams Lake is free of pretence and polish; just real people and real recreation.



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EXPLORE THE WORLD: MALAYSIA

STORY & PHOTOS
BY DAVID WEBB

RAINFOREST RARITIES

*Unparalleled wildlife experiences
await in the jungles of
Malaysian Borneo*

I'm looking into a jungle canopy thick enough to block out the equatorial sun and an adult orangutan is staring right back. It's said homo sapiens share 96 per cent of this ape's DNA.

Focused on her personable features and occasionally catching a glimpse of the bug-eyed baby clinging to her breast, that seems a conservative estimate. For a half-hour, I gawk at this ginger-coloured primate, Asia's only great ape, as she munches greenery from the treetops.

But this is normal, I've come to understand, while exploring Malaysian Borneo.

BISECTED BY THE equator and located between mainland Southeast Asia and the Philippines, Borneo is the third-largest island on Earth. Three countries share this landmass—Indonesia, Brunei and Malaysia—with the latter home to some six million people along the northwest reaches. Kota Kinabalu (KK), the half-million-strong working class capital of Malaysia's Sabah province, is regularly reached via flight from Hong Kong and provides an accessible gateway for visitors to Borneo.

Arriving in KK on a sweaty autumn night, I've joined a G Adventures tour group



ABOVE: A momma orangutan munches greenery as she swings through the forest canopy outside of Gomantong Caves. BELOW: A pygmy, or Sumatran, elephant meanders along the riverbank—one of Borneo's most sought-after sightings.

for their Highlights of Sabah and Mount Kinabalu adventure. I'll soon summit the highest peak between the Himalayas and New Guinea and visit the sandy shores of Turtle Islands National Park. Today, though, I'm primed for jungle-bound wildlife excursions in this storied region of Asia—a setting that's still very much a frontier, yet on the cusp of tourism greatness.

WE'VE TRAVELLED overland for eight hours since leaving KK; through forest-lined highway that led to high mountain roads and then transitioned abruptly to massive and controversial palm groves before easing back to *au naturel* foliage. It's here that Myne Resort is set alongside the muddy Kinabatangan River; where guests are soothed by the cicadas' orchestra and refreshed by abrupt fits of rainfall.

Verdant lowland rainforest lines the Kinabatangan, a 560-kilometre-long watercourse that travels from the mountains of Sabah to the Sulu Sea. Noted for riverine forests and oxbow lakes, it is the second-longest river in Borneo. Perched at the apex of a hairpin river-curve, Myne Resort puts Borneo's biodiversity on full display. Walking

trails lead through the humid jungle and daily boat cruises along the Kinabatangan seek out birds, reptiles and mammals.

As we set out on our inaugural afternoon river cruise, our guide, Omar, lets slip a guarded hint: for the first time in three months rare pygmy elephants have been spotted up-river.

Loaded into a 10-passenger fibreglass boat, we cruise past egrets stilt-legging on the banks and beneath flying hornbills and the occasional crested serpent eagle. We spot a saltwater crocodile—a fearsome species that can grow to be six metres long. We see such a plenitude of silverback monkeys they become pedestrian.

Further, orange-and-white proboscis monkeys gather on the branches of a tualang tree. Endemic to Borneo, they are man-faced and pot-bellied; males sit arrogantly with legs splayed in an attempt to court mates. (Centuries ago, when the first Europeans arrived in Borneo, natives re-dubbed these creatures “Dutchman Monkeys” in response.) Our boat captain—who leisurely identifies fauna from absurd distances—pulls in close to shore. Above, a family of proboscis monkeys gingerly climbs along branches and jumps from one tree to another, at times dropping a half-dozen metres before grabbing safety. A luminescent kingfisher flutters past, followed by a gaggle of lesser adjutant birds.

Omar jumps up and points wildly toward the riverbank. A trio of pygmy elephants ▶



IF YOU GO

G Adventure's 11-day Highlights of Sabah and Mount Kinabalu trip is priced from \$2,399; international airfare extra. (gadventures.com)

leisurely lumbers from the jungle. A moment earlier or later and we would have missed them completely. A large bull, who flails his trunk in impudence at our intrusion, leads a gentle-tempered sow and a playful juvenile. Through a telephoto lens, I can see the blue of their eyes. We stay in their presence for 20 minutes until they vanish into the dense grass.

The smallest of all elephant species—standing a maximum of two metres at the shoulder—a pygmy elephant is one of the rarest wildlife encounters in all of Borneo, second only to the all-but-extinct Sumatran rhinoceros.

GOMANTONG CAVES, located about 30 minutes' drive from Myne Resort, is the world's premier location for the collection of swiftlets' nests. Often selling for thousands of dollars per kilogram, these edible birds' nests are consumed in soup and are said to have medicinal properties. Twice yearly, workers build rattan and ironwood scaffolding to reach the 90-metre-high ceiling of Gomantong to collect the nests. It's dangerous work. And as one of our group members puts it as we hike along a boardwalk toward the cave mouth, "It's a ridiculous thing to eat anyway."

We're encased in fragrant fig trees and other broadleaf rainforest flora. But ahead, and in contrast to the sweet scent, I notice piles of fresh animal scat splattered across the boardwalk, as if dropped from high above. I don't put the puzzle together quickly enough before a nearby park ranger flails his hands upwards and bellows: "Orangutan!"

Above, a momma orangutan, baby clinging tightly to her torso, meanders arm-by-arm through the forest canopy. She stops above us to chew some leaves, indifferent to our awe. Orangutan literally means, "man of the forest," and it's easy to see why—their faces



LEFT: Cockroaches line the walls and ground in Gomantong Caves. **BELOW:** A crested serpent eagle makes good on its name with a slithery snack. **BOTTOM:** Proboscis monkeys hang around on hardwood trees.

reflect our own. Soon another orangutan shows up to double the excitement. We are virtually surrounded, gobsmacked by the second-largest ape on Earth showing up so casually it was as if to say hello. As the awe levels off, I scan the treetops for signs of nests—as the only completely arboreal ape, industrious orangutans construct new homes to sleep in every night.

Momma ape swings away and we continue on to Gomantong Caves, following the ammoniac scent of guano that emanates from the cavern mouth. Within, we spot dank-dwelling creatures that seem manifested from the mind of Tim Burton: long-legged millipedes, leathery fruit bats and about a billion cockroaches crunching beneath our footsteps.

It's all very interesting, but we're too entranced by our ape encounter. Combined with the throat-burning stench within, it makes for a hasty tour. And on the way back out, two more orangutans oblige for more photo ops—young apes who play and frolic like characters from Kipling—which leaves Gomantong Caves, impressive in its own right, to play second fiddle in the ape experience.

THE BORNEAN rainforest offers many memories. Later, we cruise into an oxbow lake half overrun by invasive water hyacinth to enjoy morning coffee among kingfishers diving for carp. We spot dozens more proboscis monkeys. Our guide spins

terror-tales of growing up around king cobras and venomous vipers. And we even see another orangutan swinging distantly from atop a 20-metre-tall hardwood tree. But the pygmy elephants, those wise-eyed brutes of the jungle, and our close-encounter with apes near Gomantong Caves stand above the rest—a true connection to the wild creatures that epitomize Malaysian Borneo. ✕



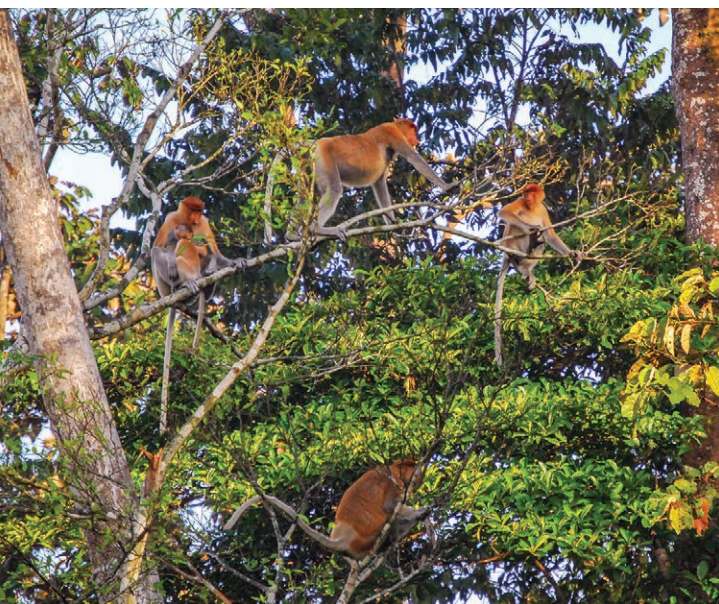
BORNEO MUST-DO

- **Mount Kinabalu:** Mount Kinabalu offers a lung-busting overnight trek that covers more than 2,000 vertical metres, leading from dense jungle to barren granite atop a massif said to harbour the spirit-world. Fitness, hydration and comfortable boots are key elements for a successful summit of this 4,095-metre mountain.

- **Turtle Islands National Park:** Forty-two kilometres offshore of Sandakan, idyllic Turtle Islands National Park awaits. Spend the day lazing on the sands of Selingaan Island; stay up late to witness a hawksbill or green turtle lay eggs in the sand and assist in the release of newly-hatched babies.

- **Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre:** Located in North Borneo, Sepilok stewards 43-square-kilometres of virgin lowland equatorial rainforest dedicated to the rescue, rehab and, hopefully, release of orangutans. Visit during feeding times to closely observe these apes; you'll be inspired to symbolically adopt a baby orangutan to help fund the centre's good work.

- **Sandakan Memorial Park:** "You will work until your bones rot under the tropical sun of Borneo." These words hint at the brutality British and Australian soldiers faced at the hands of Japanese forces at the Sandakan POW Camps during the Second World War. Set within a garden park in Sandakan—once the start of the infamous Death March—Sandakan Memorial Park is a place of sombre reflection on the planet's most destructive conflict.



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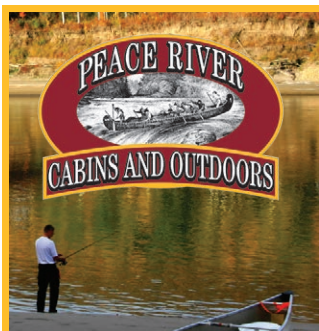


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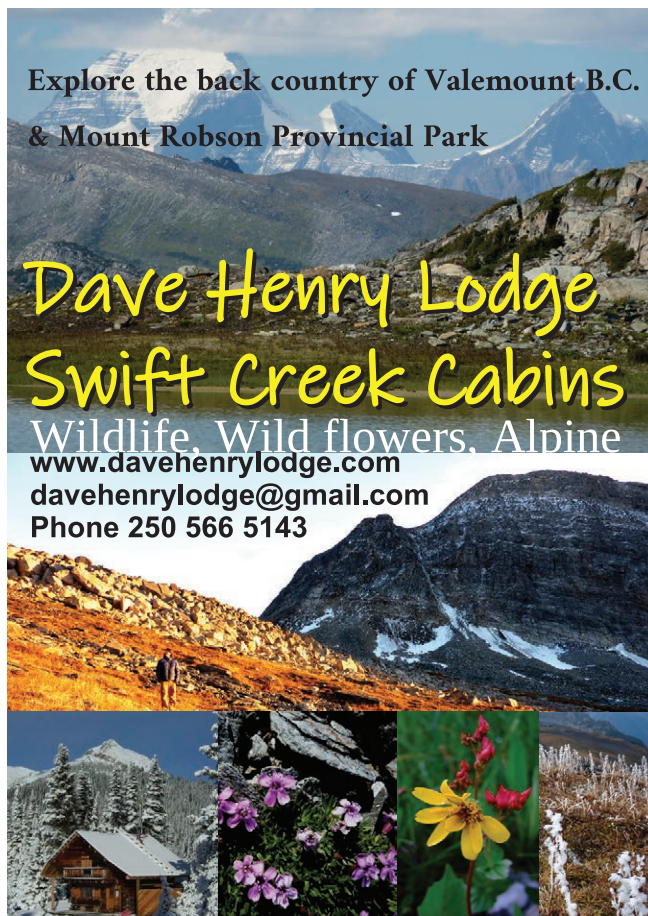
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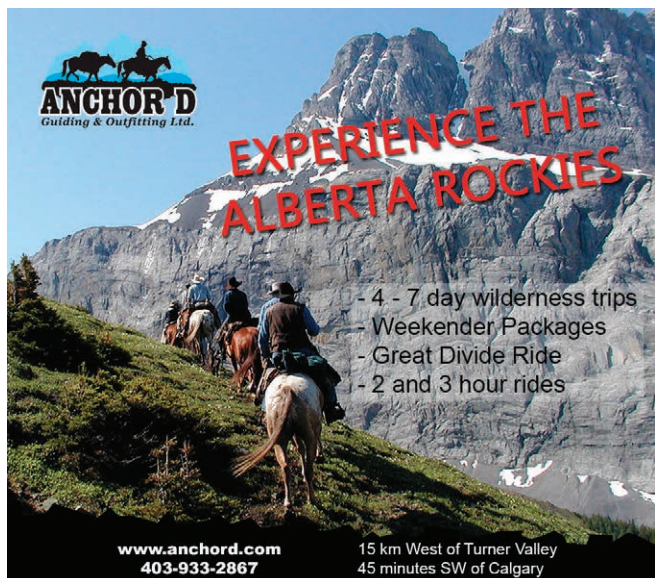
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THE MOMENT

Photo by Lachie Carracher | Text by David Webb

Last August, five whitewater kayakers travelled to Alexandra Falls, near Hay River, Northwest Territories, to drop the iconic 33-metre-tall waterfall. (Bren Orton, pictured.) Photographer Lachie Carracher accompanied the paddlers to capture this event: "Shooting a drop like this obviously puts my heart-rate through the roof as a photographer and as a friend of the athletes risking it all on the day."

However, the feat was not universally condoned. Two of the kayakers suffered injuries that required rescue. The government of the Northwest Territories criticized the move and members of the regional Dene First Nations dubbed it a "disrespectful" use of their traditional lands.

On the flipside, some in the adventure community stated the government would better serve to further address the risks of sedentary lifestyles rather than regulate athletic endeavours.

What do you think? Unnecessary stunt or admirable achievement?

Send your thoughts to explore@explore-mag.com and we'll print the best in our Summer issue.

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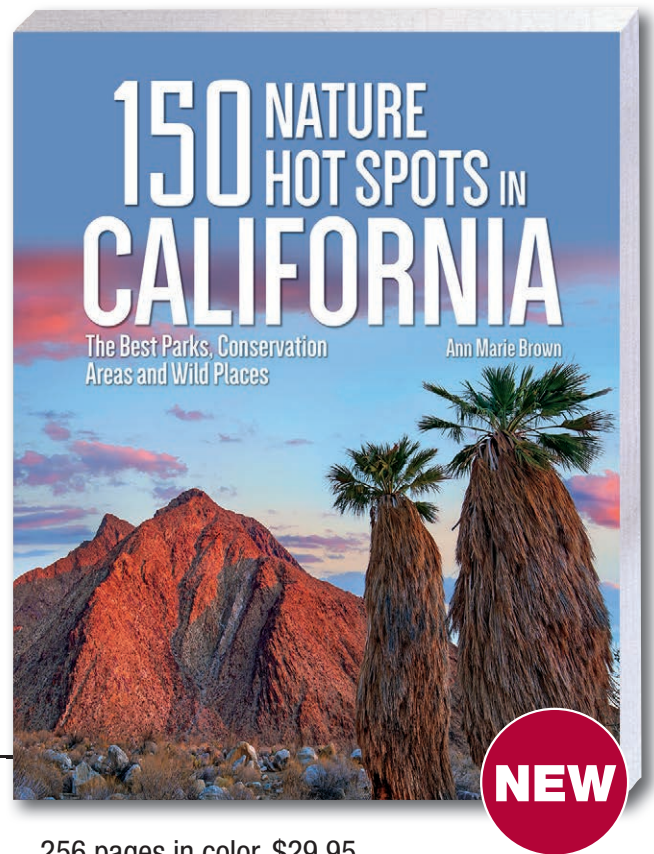
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