



CANADA'S BEST MICRO- ADVENTURES

EXPEDITIONS WITHOUT
COMMITMENT—HERE ARE
21 MICRO-ADVENTURES TO
PUSH YOUR LIMITS

By Ryan Stuart

Wilderness in the middle
of our biggest city? Check
out Toronto's Rouge Park,
our first Micro-Adventure
(next page).

EXPEDITIONS SOUND LIKE

fun—adventuring across new lands and waters for weeks or months at a time. But most of us can't afford the time away from work and home. Plus, expeditions typically require advanced skills, lots of money and complicated logistics. But you can still put in a similar effort and experience the same reward. All it takes is a subtle mindshift.

Alastair Humphreys, an English explorer, calls this new idea of expeditioning, "micro-adventures." These are trips that are close to home, affordable, easy to organize and doable in short periods of time—but wild, original and challenging.

"Adventure is only a state of mind," Humphreys says. "It is about doing what you do not normally do, pushing yourself hard and doing it to the best of your ability."

Imagine the possibilities here. That's just what we did. Read on for 21 micro-adventures to get you started. And then get out there and find your own.

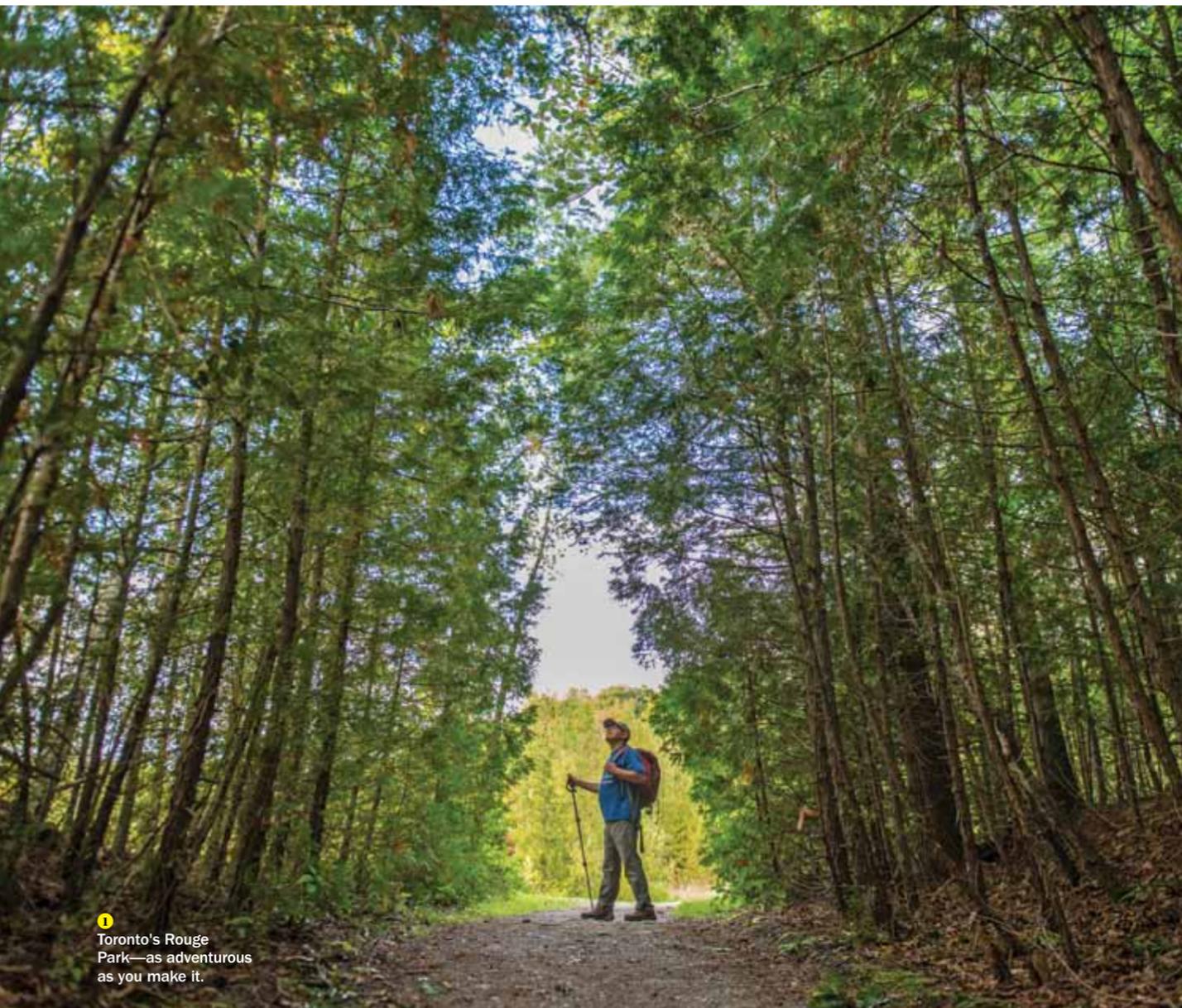
DIFFICULTY RATINGS

Easy: Barely sweating; it won't hurt a bit.

Moderate: Breathing hard; some minor pain.

Hard: Legs are cramping, a stick poked me in the eye, where am I?

Brutal: It doesn't have to be "fun" to be fun.



1 Toronto's Rouge Park—as adventurous as you make it.

ONTARIO

1 Traverse the Newest Park

Where: Toronto's Rouge Urban Park
Why: An almost wilderness-feeling trek in the middle of our country's biggest city.
What: Take the fact that there is no obvious route leading from one end to the other in this future national park as an invitation to ramble. Start walking near Lake Ontario and head north. Stop at two national historic sites, farms, the zoo and plenty of wild-feeling Carolinian Forest in between. Day-hike and return on public transit. Random camping is frowned

upon, but there's also Glen Rouge Campground near the beginning, the only campground in the city.
Difficulty: Moderate, some bushwhacking may be required.
Time: Half-day to two days.
Logistics: Plenty of roads crisscross the park, so shuttling is easy. Better, use public transit. There's a Go Transit train station close to the southern border of the park.
Resources: pc.gc.ca/rouge; rougepark.com; gotransit.com; trca.on.ca/glenrouge

2 Paddle the Credit

Where: Through the heart of Mississauga.
Why: A rarely considered whitewater run with a taxi shuttle.
What: While it's a lazy float in the summer, after a solid autumn rain,

the Credit River becomes a little wild as it tumbles towards Lake Ontario. Put in at Steeles Avenue and then rock-and-roll past golf courses, parks and roadways. The green artery of forest and river not only harbours an impressive diversity of critters—beavers, muskrat, otters, raccoons—but also an instant escape from the surrounding city all the way to Port Credit.

Difficulty: Moderate; up to Class II whitewater; watch for sweepers.
Time: A long day.
Logistics: Car shuttle from Port Credit to the put-in (or take a taxi).
Resources: creditvalleyca.ca (maps)

3 Run the Highland

Where: Highland Backpacking

Trail on the southeast side of Algonquin Provincial Park.
Why: Fall colours, few bugs, fewer people and no reservations.
What: While it's one of the better backpack trips in Algonquin, to trudge the full 35-km loop (or one of the shorter options) with a full backpack can be painful. Instead, go light and fast and hike or trail-run the whole thing in a day. You'll speed through the monotonous portions and shrug off the big hills at the northern end, leaving energy to savour the panoramic views.
Difficulty: Hard (full loop). Rough trail and lots of ups and downs.
Time: Four to 10 hours.
Logistics: Drive to the trailhead, 30 km east of the west gate on Highway 60.
Resources: algonquinpark.on.ca

 FROM TOP: Ethan Meleg/Ontario Tourism; Hans-Gerrard Pfaff/Tourism Saskatchewan

MANITOBA

4 Get Lost in a Swamp

Where: The Delta Marsh Wildlife Management Area on the south shore of Lake Manitoba, 24 km north of Portage la Prairie, Manitoba.
Why: One of the country's largest coastal wetlands and no maps to show you the way.
What: Stretching 30 km along Lake Manitoba's south shore and stretching up to four kilometres inland, the marsh is a vast labyrinth of channels, passages, lakes and dead ends. The protected waters see few people, but harbour abundant flocks of migrating waterfowl in the fall and all kinds of wetland and songbird species during the rest of the year. Bring a GPS and a canoe and put in on a channel from the lake where Highway 240 meets Delta Beach. Explore east and north, poking around ponds and lakes towards Saint Ambrose Beach Provincial Park.
Difficulty: Easy paddling; hard navigation.
Time: Day-trip.
Logistics: With no landmarks rising above the watery world, a GPS is vital.
Resources: gov.mb.ca

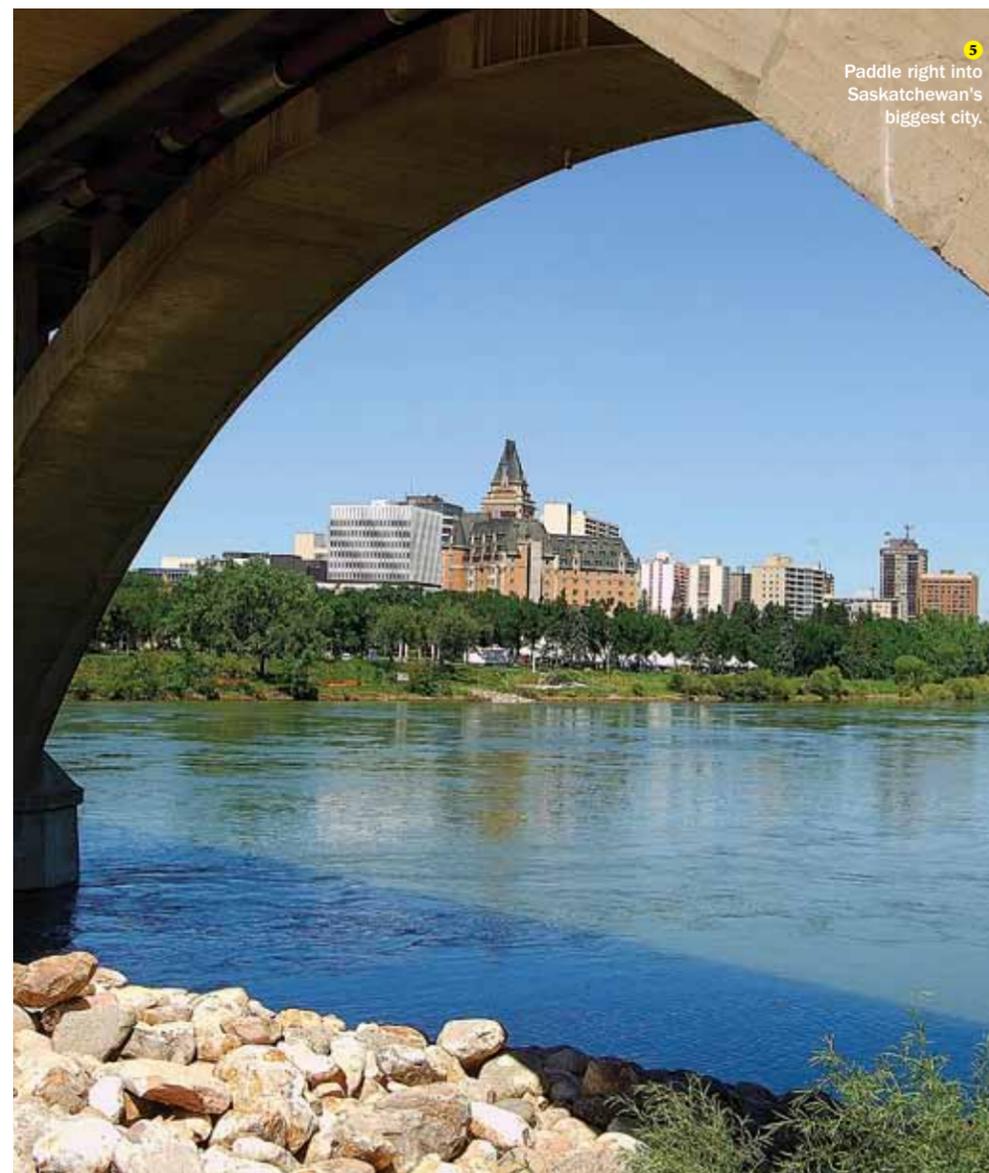
SASKATCHEWAN

5 Paddle the Trans Canada Trail

Where: The South Saskatchewan River into Saskatoon.
Why: Prairie paddling and dark nighttime skies on a newly noted Canadian Heritage River.
What: It's 130 km from the Gardiner Dam to Saskatoon on the South Saskatchewan River. With fall's low water and shorter days, that's a solid pull for a weekend trip. It's possible to bite off a smaller chunk or just commit and let the changing colours along the bank fuel long hours in a boat. Camp at abundant sandbars en route.
Difficulty: Hard, because of distance—easy paddling.
Time: Three long days.
Logistics: CanoeSki Discovery Company runs shuttle and rental services.
Resources: canoeski.com



3 Algonquin Provincial Park's legendary leaf show.



5 Paddle right into Saskatchewan's biggest city.

7
Could you do Jasper's famous Skyline Trail in one day?



ALBERTA

6

Explore Alberta's Sandhills

Where: On the north shore of the Athabasca River near Fort Assiniboine, 1.5 hours north of Edmonton.

Why: Beyond its namesake sand dunes, Fort Assiniboine Sandhills Wildland Provincial Park's transitional forest is home to 436 plant species and abundant wildlife.

What: Trails spider-web across the park. With a little imagination, link them together into a loop stretching 40 km. Start at the Klondike Trail Staging Area and head clockwise, following a wagon route from Voyageur and Gold Rush days. Heading north and east, the trails leave the swamper, higher ground and enter the dune fields, a unique environment left behind by Ice Age glaciers. On the return, take the River Valley Trail. It descends into old growth trees along the river, home to the most plants and animals.

Difficulty: Easy to hard, depending on distance.

Time: Up to 12 hours.

Logistics: Drive to Fort Assiniboine and follow Township Road 620A to 621A.

Resources: albertaparks.ca

7

Marathon in the Sky

Where: The Skyline Trail backpacking route links Maligne Lake to Jasper, almost all above the treeline.

Why: Travel one of the best backpacking routes in the Canadian Rockies without a reservation or a heavy pack.

What: The 44-km trip is usually done over two to three days.

Instead, lace up at Maligne Lake and hit the trail running. After a steady climb into the alpine at Little Shovel Pass, the trail stays above the trees for 25 km. Views across Jasper National Park's craggy peaks are constant, as the trail follows into the forest for its final plunge to Maligne Canyon.

Difficulty: Hard. Good trail but a long distance and lots of elevation gain and loss.

Time: A long day.

Logistics: Have a car waiting for you at the end by taking the daily morning shuttle to Maligne Lake from the trail's terminus at the North Skyline Trailhead.

Resources: malignelake.com; pc.gc.ca/jasper

8

Bow River Triathlon

Where: Cochrane to Calgary and back under your own power.

Why: Paddling the Bow River doesn't need to be complicated by shuttle logistics.

What: With a canoe on your car roof, drop a bike off at Calgary's Edworthy Park, and drive to the Highway 22 bridge in Cochrane. Put in here and get stroking, portaging around Bearspaw Dam, 25 km in. Float through downtown Calgary and take out at the zoo. Lock-up your canoe and start running, following the riverside path and then the Douglas Fir Trail for 10 km to Edworthy Park. Hop on your trusty steed and pedal 35 km back to your car in Cochrane.

Difficulty: Hard, because of distance, particularly the canoe.

Time: A long day.

Logistics: Bring two locks, one for the bike and one for the canoe. Find maps and guides to the Bow and Calgary pathways online.

Resources: paddlealberta.org; calgary.ca



9 Big Peters Lake from above South Caribou Pass; Monashee Provincial Park is easily accessed from Sol Mountain Lodge.



11 Urban adventure: kayak/portage circumnavigation of Esquimalt.



10 Pitt Lake: remote wilderness near Vancouver.

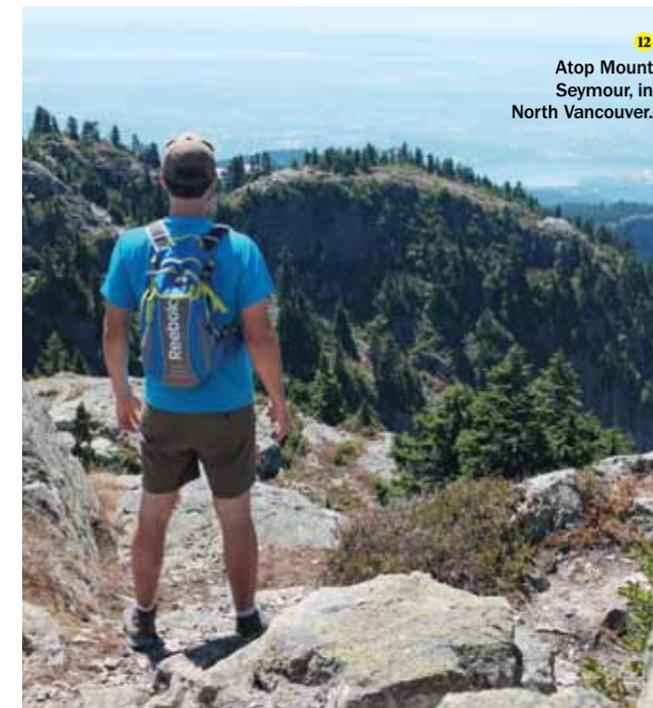
BRITISH COLUMBIA

9 Explore a Little-Known Park

Where: Monashee Provincial Park, deep in the southern BC interior.
Why: A vast sub-alpine ramble with a chance to see caribou.
What: Tucked deep in the Monashee Mountains, northeast of Kelowna, the park is an anomaly: remote, but easy to access, rarely visited, but with a good approach trail. Hike to Little or Big Peters lake campground, both set in an alpine basin full of lakes and meadows and surrounded by easy-to-climb peaks and passes. From the base, pick a destination and explore—the big prize being the summit of Mount Fosthall.
Difficulty: Moderate.
Time: Three days.
Logistics: The park is most easily reached from the west, via good logging roads from Cherryville, or with a stay at Sol Mountain Lodge.
Resources: bcparks.ca; solmountain.com

10 Earn a Hot Spring Soak

Where: The Pitt River above Pitt Lake, northeast of Vancouver.
Why: A backcountry hot springs—need more?
What: Locked off from Metro Vancouver by sheer mountain walls, getting to the upper Pitt River Valley means paddling 28 km up Pitt Lake



12 Atop Mount Seymour, in North Vancouver.

from Grant Narrows Regional Park. Marvel at the nearly vertical walls of forest and paddle all the way to the dock at the lake's northern end; switch to bikes and pedal 21 km up the logging road until it crosses the river. A short trail leads to the hot springs. Soak tired muscles, camp in a pullout on the logging road, soak again, then reverse your route.
Difficulty: Moderate. Easy paddling and biking, but a long distance.
Watch for wind on Pitt Lake.
Time: Two to three days.

Logistics: Pitt Lake is tidally influenced. Try to coincide the start and finish of the trip with a high tide.
Resources: mapleridge-pittmeadows.com (info and canoe rentals)

11 Circumnavigate Esquimalt
Where: Paddle the inner waters of Victoria.
Why: A fresh perspective on a charming city's waterfront.

12 Sea to Sky & Back

Where: North Vancouver's Seymour watershed.
Why: Because one type of adrenaline is never enough.
What: Take advantage of the North Shore's topography with a triathlon effort from ocean to summit and back. Drop a whitewater kayak at the put-in for the Seymour River. Drive to the take-out near the industrial park at Burrard Inlet. Now the fun begins. Ride a mountain bike up to the base of Mount Seymour ski area and hike to the summit of Mount Seymour, with its expansive views across the Lower Mainland and on to Vancouver Island. Back at the bike, find the CBC Trail and point it down this classic North Shore test-piece. Link the trails to your stashed boat. Trade spandex for neoprene and float the Seymour to the ocean and your car.
Difficulty: Brutal. You'll gain almost 1,500 metres of elevation. Up to Class III paddling. Black-diamond mountain biking.
Time: A long day.
Logistics: Two locks for your boat and bike.
Resources: nsmba.ca (mountain bike trail map); bcparks.ca

LEFT: Sol Mountain Lodge; CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP: Brian Henry/Ocean River Sports; Tourism BC; Erin O'Connor-Webb

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

13

Time-Trial the Confederation Trail

Where: Tip-to-tip on Prince Edward Island's railway turned cycling and walking route.

Why: A car-free crushed-gravel trail running through the island province's prettiest farmland.

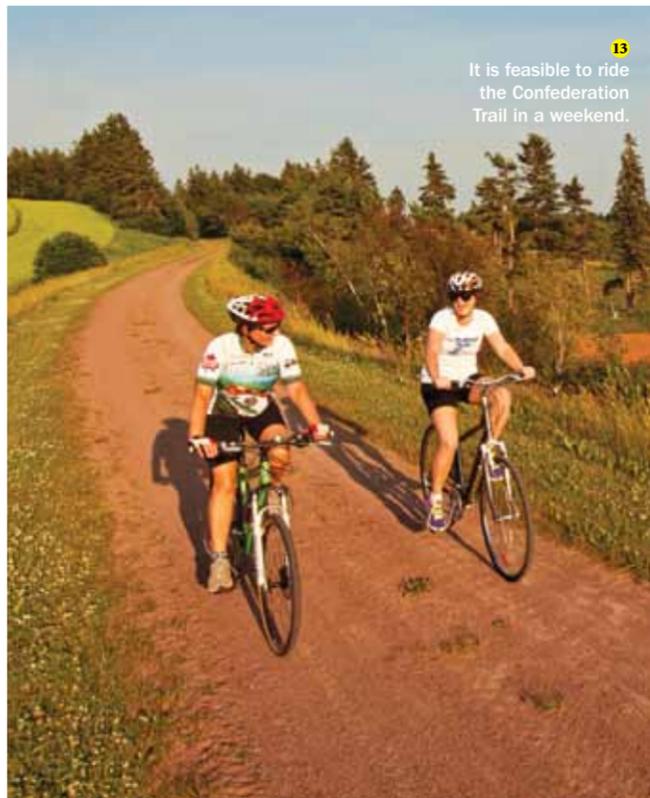
What: Even a nine-year-old and his 78-year-old grandmother have ridden the 273 km of the Confederation Trail between Tignish in the west and Elmira in the east. Most people take at least a week, so to make this a worthy challenge, try it in a weekend. With the grade never more than two per cent and PEI's vertically challenged topography, this is doable by most fit people. Patronize "Cyclists Welcome" program members, B&Bs, hotels, campgrounds and other businesses that cater to cyclists.

Difficulty: Hard, because of distance; easy riding.

Time: Two days.

Logistics: Make it a loop and ride back along the south shore using Confederation Trail branch lines.

Resources: tourismpei.com/pei-confederation-trail



13
It is feasible to ride the Confederation Trail in a weekend.

NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR

14

East Coast Trail Slog

Where: The planned extension of Newfoundland's East Coast Trail on the northwest side of the Avalon Peninsula.

Why: Wild coastlines, rocky coves and the moody Atlantic as company.

What: The developed section of the East Coast Trail stretches 265 well-marked, mapped and serviced kilometres. The organization that manages the trail plans to add a further 275 km, including the 25 km of coast between Cape St. Francis and Portugal Cove. There's already a route along this mostly undeveloped chunk, but it's unmarked and rugged. Hikers are warned it, "should only be attempted by experienced remote wilderness hikers."

Difficulty: Hard. Rugged terrain and navigation.

Time: Two to three days.

Logistics: Talk to the East Coast Trail Association to find out more about this section and other parts of the future trail.

Resources: eastcoasttrail.ca



14
The stunning East Coast Trail, Newfoundland & Labrador.

NOVA SCOTIA

15

Better than Peggy's Cove

Where: Paddling the protected Atlantic Coast just outside of Halifax.

Why: White granite cliffs, coastal barrens and the chance to see whales, all less than 40 minutes from the Maritimes' biggest city.

What: Often overlooked for Peggy's Cove, the coast between Halifax

and Bayside is wilder, emptier and more interesting. While there's plenty of beauty to soak in, the highlight is between Sambro and Prospect, where two parks, plenty of islands and too many inlets make the scenic coast feel more remote than it is.

Difficulty: Easy to hard, depending on distance paddled and sea and weather conditions.

Time: A few hours to three days.

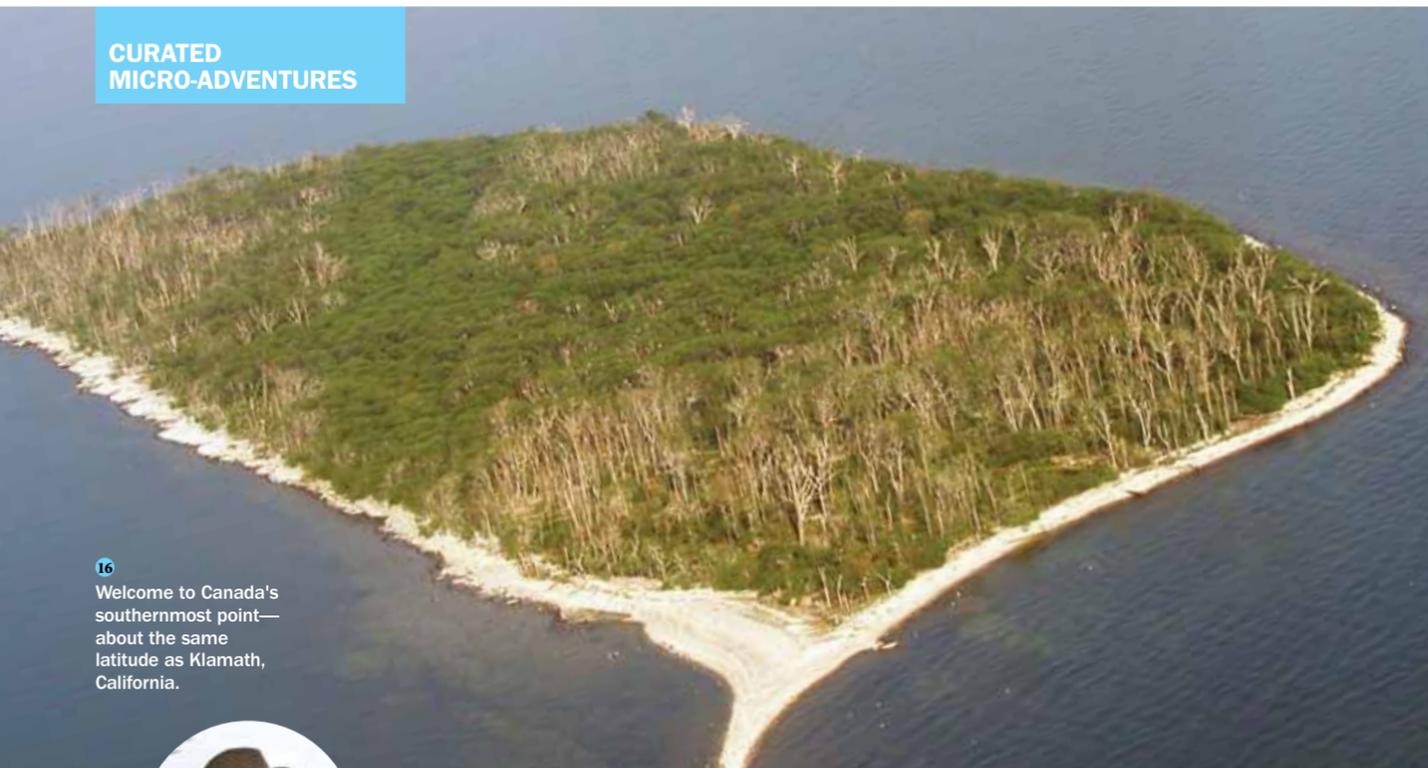
Logistics: Most of the towns have good put-ins and take-outs and are linked on good roads.

Resources: novascotia.com



15
The coastline between Halifax and Peggy's Cove is noted for white granite and few crowds.

CURATED
MICRO-ADVENTURES

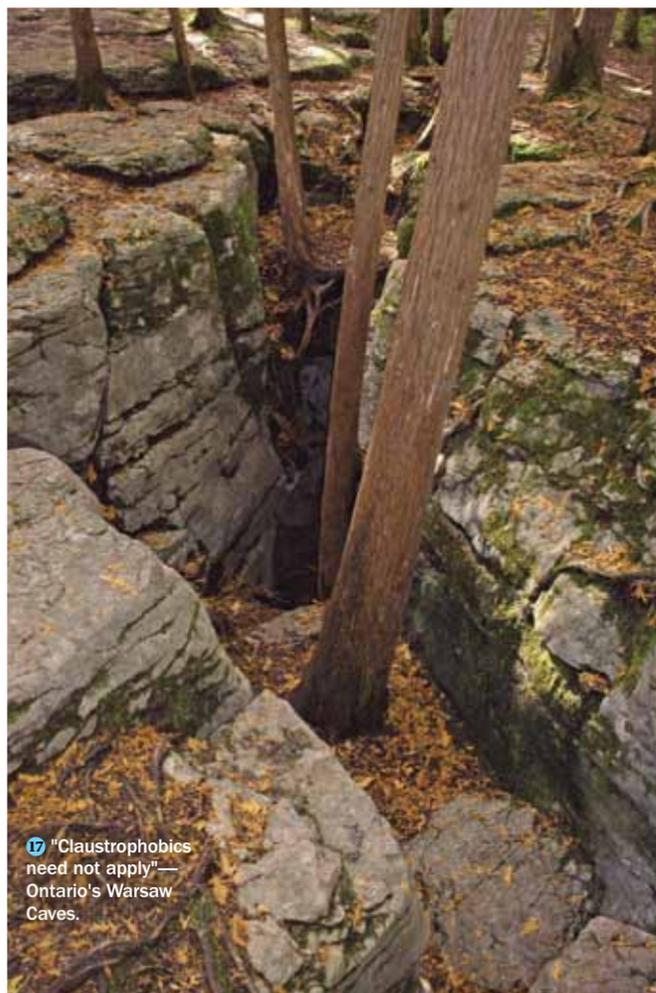


16
Welcome to Canada's southernmost point—about the same latitude as Klamath, California.



Adam Shoalts: Paddle to our Southern Point

Who: A Canadian Indiana Jones: archeologist, historian, anthropologist and explorer of unknown rivers, waterfalls and petroglyphs.
Where: Not Point Pelee or Pelee Island—Middle Island in Lake Erie (Ontario).
Why: Because you can't get more south and still be in Canada—the actual border is 150 metres offshore.
What: Take a ferry to Pelee Island, head to Fish Point Nature Reserve at its southern end and beeline by kayak four kilometres to Middle Island, part of Point Pelee National Park. "This is definitely not for the faint of heart, given the severity of the storms on Lake Erie and how fast they pick up," says Shoalts. Middle Island has an interesting history (First Nations, slavery, smuggling) and rare Carolinian forest, prickly pear cactus and plenty of cormorants, he adds.
Difficulty: Moderate; long crossing with potentially dangerous weather.
Time: Two hours, one-way.
Logistics: Pelee Island ferry service runs from April through December.
Resources: ontarioferries.com; pelee.org; pc.gc.ca/pelee; adamshoalts.com



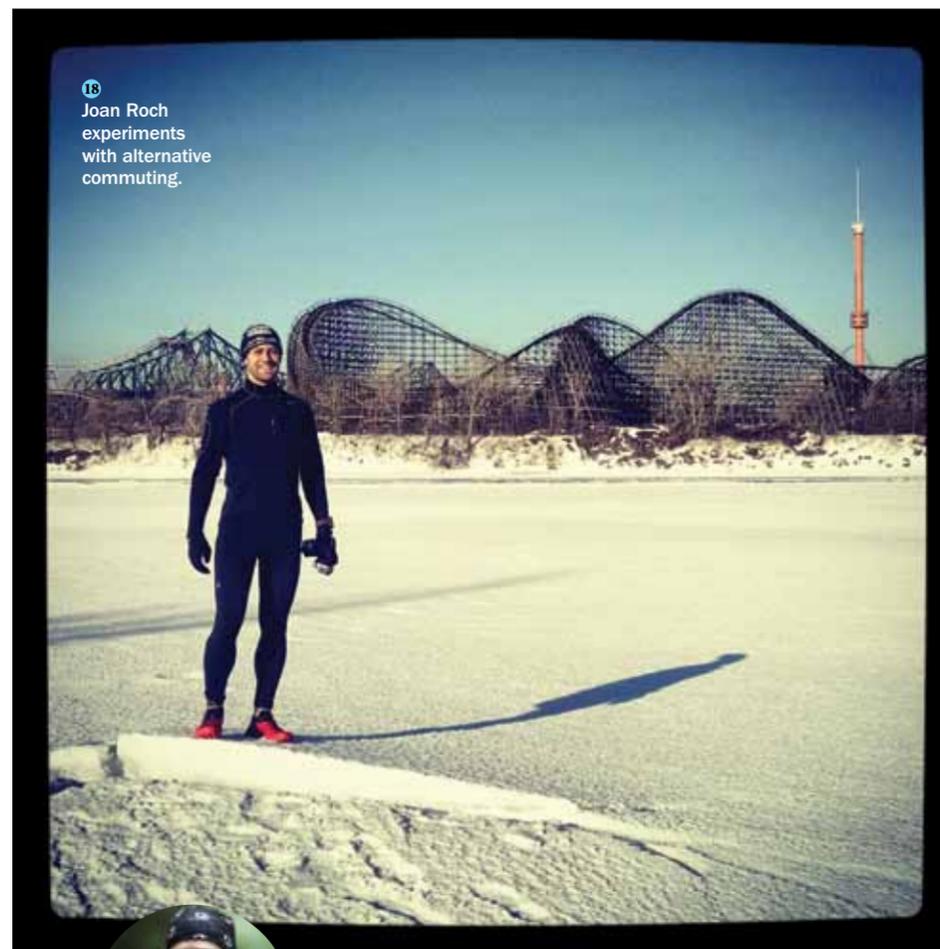
17 "Claustrophobics need not apply"—Ontario's Warsaw Caves.



George Kourounis: Go Deep

Who: The Canadian-born host and co-creator of *Angry Planet* also runs storm-chasing tours and documents extreme weather.
Where: Warsaw Caves Conservation Area, northeast of Peterborough, Ontario.
Why: Exploring caves that aren't on the map.
What: "There are [caves] there that require some real exploration to find," says Kourounis. "That's the appeal." You can start with the seven on the map and then wander, looking for other openings in the convoluted topography, full of unusual sinkholes, caverns and rockmills. Be prepared with helmets, headlamps, a partner and gear that you don't mind getting filthy—because you will. There's a campground right at the park.
Difficulty: Moderate to hard; confined spaces. "Claustrophobics need not apply," he says.
Time: Couple of hours to all day.
Logistics: Drive two hours from Toronto on good highways.
Resources: warsawcaves.com; stormchaser.ca

FROM TOP: Wikimedia Commons; Ontario Region Conservation Authority



18
Joan Roch experiments with alternative commuting.



Joan Roch: Running with the Boats

Who: One of Canada's top endurance runners and Montreal native.
Where: The frozen St. Lawrence River between Old Montreal and the south shore.
Why: Running on the ice "feels like you've just landed on another planet," says Roch.
What: Roch stumbled on this new medium when the Jacques-Cartier Bridge was closed last winter, forcing him onto the ice to get to work. On subsequent runs, "I explored a bit further upstream and downstream, having fun leaving the marina as the boats do, or running all the way to the locks," he says. He suggests being creative with routes.
Difficulty: Moderate. Obviously slippery conditions, watch for open water and thin ice.
Time: 30 minutes to several hours.
Logistics: Check with the Coast Guard or Environment Canada for ice conditions before heading out.
Resources: marineinfo.gc.ca; ec.gc.ca/glaces-ice; joanroch.me

FROM TOP: Joan Roch; Ray Zahab

Ray Zahab: Gatineau Gutbuster

Who: Ottawa-based ultra-champ, expedition runner and founder of Impossible2Possible.
Where: The 200 km of trails in Ottawa's Gatineau Park.
Why: "Spectacular wilderness on the edge of the nation's capital," and one of the best fall leaf shows on Earth.
What: Running with overnight gear, set out on the Trans Canada Trail, right across the river from Parliament Hill. "You start in a total urban area and then slowly the park gets more wild," Zahab says. Aim for the campground at Lac Philippe, maybe detouring on to the King Mountain Loop for lofty views. Total distance is anywhere from 30 to 100 km. On day two, explore into the wild Lac La Peche area of the park. "There are gorgeous beaches, technical trails and even caves," he says. As a finale, chug into Wakefield and recover at the Wakefield Mill Inn & Spa.
Difficulty: Brutal (running with overnight gear!).
Time: Two to three days.
Logistics: Organize a car pick up in Wakefield.
Resources: ncc-ccn.gc.ca; wakefieldmill.com; rayzahab.com ▶



19
Ray Zahab (left) running in Gatineau Park.

CURATED MICRO-ADVENTURES



20 Sarah Hueniken, hanging around in Canmore.



Sarah Hueniken: Canmore Four Corners

Who: Alpine guide and one of the world's top mixed and ice climbers.
Where: Peak-bagging from her home in Canmore, Alberta.

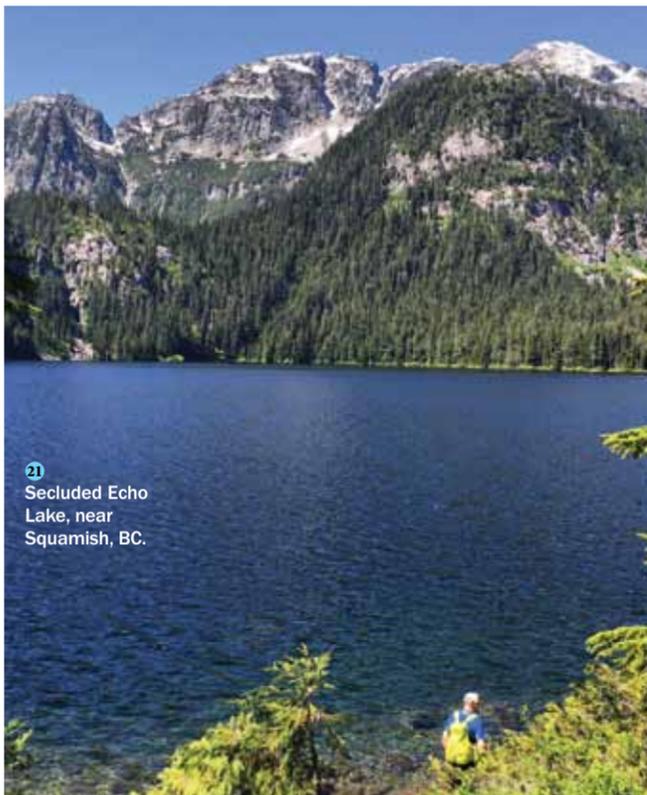
Why: Because they are there.
What: The village of Canmore is booked-in by four non-technical summits: Ha Ling Peak (2,048 metres), East End of Rundle (2,571 metres), Grotto (2,706 metres) and Lady MacDonald (2,605 metres). All are regularly climbed as day trips, but what about doing all four in a day? "It would be quite a feat," Hueniken says. Start on the north side, knocking off the bigger verticals of Grotto and Lady Mac. Then cross the valley, using the Spray Lakes Road to kill some of the climbing on Ha Ling and EEOR. "Bonus points for travelling between them on foot!" she adds. According to Hueniken, about 20 people have completed the "Canmore Quad." The first is said to be local Jack Firth—in about 20 hours. Hueniken has done it in 9:19 (exhausted following a climb the day before), and is shooting for a sub-nine-hour attempt.

Difficulty: Brutal. The official "Canmore Quad" is 53.71 kilometres and 4,791 metres of elevation (walking between trailheads) or 38 km and 3,000 metres of elevation (driving between trailheads). A few exposed sections, but mostly hiking.

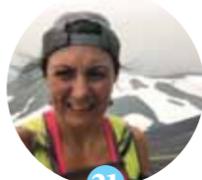
Time: 24 hours or more (unless you're Sarah Hueniken).

Logistics: Established routes and easy driving between the peaks.

Resources: trailpeak.com (descriptions of all routes); sarahhueniken.com



21 Secluded Echo Lake, near Squamish, BC.



Jen Segger: Squamish Stairmaster to Heaven

Who: Coach by day, endurance athlete by night, mom all the time, Segger's racing resume is long and illustrious.

Where: The best trail that no one hikes in Squamish, British Columbia.

Why: Waterfalls to entertain and cool on the way up to an alpine tarn full of fish.

What: Even Segger admits gaining 950 metres in 4.1 km is going to hurt, but the scramble to Echo Lake follows the waterfall-strewn descent of Monmouth Creek, offering a regular shot of cooling inspiration. And then at the lake, the view back across the estuary to the Stawamus Chief and Coast Range is world-class. But first you have to paddle across the Squamish River—Segger prefers a SUP, but a canoe will work. Bring overnight gear and camp at the lake, which is stocked with rainbow trout.

Difficulty: Hard—the trail is difficult to find and then braided and steep.

Time: Five hours to two days.

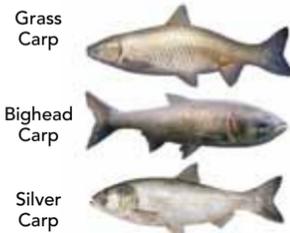
Logistics: Take the second side-road on the Squamish Dyke and paddle across the river to a group of old bridge pilings. The trail starts here.

Resources: Ask for directions at Valhalla Pure in Squamish, squamishgear.com; jensegger.com

FROM TOP: Sarah Hueniken; Jen Segger

ASIAN CARPS

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE



Asian carps aren't native to the Great Lakes. In the picture below find the changes that could happen if these fishes invade our waters.



Illustration: François Escalmeil



For answers see www.asiancarp.ca