

What Makes an Adventure Advanced? It's Probably Not What You Think

 explore-mag.com/what-makes-an-adventure-advanced-its-probably-not-what-you-think

Fiona Tapp

July 4, 2026

explore™



Photo by Tourism Vancouver Island, Jordan Dyck

From first-time abseils to post-injury hikes, the real measure of challenge isn't altitude or distance—it's how far you push your own limits.

We tend to define adventure by numbers: elevation gained, kilometres covered, technical grades achieved, fastest known time (FKT). But those markers miss something essential. Rating an adventure as beginner, moderate or “advanced” isn't something that can be fixed. It shifts depending on where you are in life, what your body is capable of on that day and how far you're willing, or able, to stretch beyond that.

This is why *explore* magazine rarely [rates hikes by difficulty](#)—it's just too personal, individual and subjective.

So how can we define an advanced adventure in Canada?

According to *explore* magazine, at its core, an advanced adventure asks more of you than you expected to give.

What an Advanced Adventure Means to Me



Every weekend, my family and I embark on micro adventures. Sometimes they amount to little more than a stroll somewhere new, but on other weekends, we have explored nearby caves, taken a llama for a walk and even snorkelled in the St. Lawrence to see a shipwreck.

I am planning on taking my 12-year-old son abseiling for the first time this summer, and that will be advanced for him, even if it's a modest drop by anyone else's standards. Right now, an injury has taken running (or even walking) off the table for me, so anytime spent outside, carefully planned, feels like its own kind of challenge and its own kind of reward.

My husband has one arm, which means kayaking is never entirely straightforward, but when we circle Mazinaw Lake at Bon Echo Provincial Park and edge close enough to see the pictographs, that feels advanced in a way no distance marker could ever capture.

The Hidden Metrics of Challenge



That doesn't mean anything can be labelled "advanced" without context. Some environments demand more, regardless of who you are. In Canada, especially, the landscape itself often sets the terms.

Four factors tend to shape whether an experience crosses into truly challenging territory:

- **Terrain complexity** can turn a straightforward outing into something far more demanding. Roots, mud, loose rock, steep scrambles; even without technical climbing, footing matters.
- **Weather volatility** adds another layer. Conditions can shift quickly, particularly in coastal, alpine or northern regions, turning a manageable route into something unpredictable.
- **Remoteness** raises the stakes. The farther you are from roads or infrastructure, the more you rely on your own preparation and judgment.
- **Rescue access**, often overlooked, changes everything. When help is far away or difficult to reach, decision-making becomes part of the challenge.

Even a relatively short or "moderate" route can feel advanced when one or more of these factors are in play.

Where Canada Gets Objectively "Advanced"

Some places make those conditions impossible to ignore.

West Coast Trail



Photo by Destination BC Abby Cooper

Often described as a rite of passage, the West Coast Trail challenges hikers in ways that go far beyond distance. Ladders climb steep cliff faces. Boardwalks give way to deep mud. Tides dictate when certain sections are even passable. Add in coastal weather that can shift without warning, and the experience becomes as much mental as physical.

For some, it's the ultimate multi-day trek. For others, it's their first real test of endurance and adaptability. Either way, it rarely feels easy.

Torngat Mountains National Park



Photo by Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism Barrett MacKay Photo

In the far north of Labrador, the Torngat Mountains offer a more traditional version of “advanced.” There are no marked trails. The terrain is raw and glacial. The weather can change rapidly and polar bear encounters are a real consideration.

This is fly-in wilderness, where self-sufficiency isn’t optional. You need more than just physical ability. Situational awareness, preparation and resilience in an environment that doesn’t bend to convenience are all essential.

Nahanni National Park Reserve



Photo by Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism Barrett MacKay Photo

The Nahanni is often experienced by canoe or raft, following powerful river systems through deep canyons and past thundering waterfalls. It's vast, remote and logistically complicated.

Here, it demands commitment to planning, teamwork and navigation in a place where the margin for error is small and the rewards feel correspondingly large.

Gros Morne National Park (Long Range Traverse)

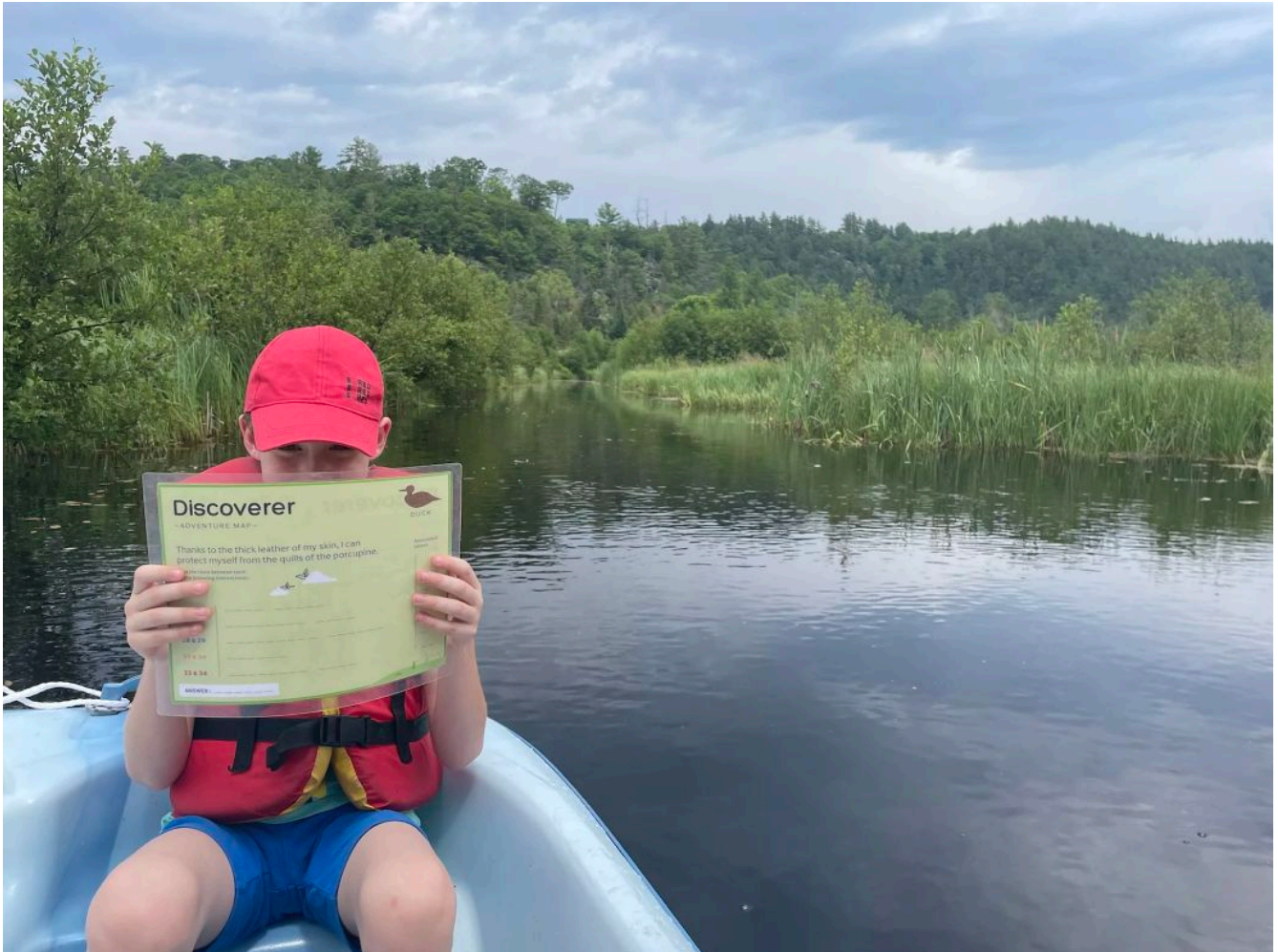


Photo by Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism

The Long Range Traverse strips hiking back to its essentials. There are no marked trails across much of the route, just a rugged plateau, shifting weather and the need to navigate carefully.

Fog can roll in quickly, obscuring landmarks. Distances become harder to judge. Progress slows. It's not technical in the traditional sense, but it demands focus and confidence and that alone can make it feel advanced.

Finding Your Own Edge



“Advanced” doesn’t have to mean extreme, but there is often an element of challenge involved.

That edge looks different for everyone. It might be staying in a cold lake a minute longer than feels comfortable. Trying a new activity that pushes you into unfamiliar territory. Returning to something you once found easy and learning how to approach it differently.

It might also mean recognizing when conditions—terrain, weather, distance — elevate something beyond what you’re ready for, and adjusting accordingly. There’s a kind of confidence in that, too.



In the end, the most advanced adventure isn't the one with the highest elevation gain or the most impressive statistics. It's the one that shifts something, your confidence, your perspective, your sense of what you're capable of.

Sometimes that happens on a remote Arctic expedition. Sometimes it happens on a quiet stretch of water, paddling a little farther than you thought you could.

Either way, the measure is the same: not how far you went, but how far you stretched yourself.

GET YOUR

FREE

E-BOOK TODAY!



"Advanced" doesn't have to mean extreme, but there is often an element of challenge involved."

The Newsletter for Canadians Who Actually Go Outside

Join over 70,000 readers getting trail conditions, gear analysis and industry news—written by the team behind Canada’s longest-running outdoor magazine.

By providing us your email, you will be signed up to receive emails from Explore and agree to our Privacy Policy and Terms & Conditions.

READ MORE: [Adventure](#), [Fitness](#), [Skills](#)



RECOMMENDED FOR YOU



[Adventure](#), [Editors' Picks](#), [Skills](#)

[Skydiving Gone Wrong: What I Learned After Passing Out Mid-Air](#)

The nearer I got to the ground, the quicker I seemed to be falling.



[Adventure](#), [Editors' Picks](#), [Skills](#)

How to Take Breathtaking Photos of Fall Colours

Your Instagram page and your living room wall will thank you for the masterpieces!



[Editors' Picks](#), [environment](#), [Skills](#)

[Ancient Cultures Were Better at Sustainability Than We Are. Here's How](#)

In an age increasingly reliant on technology, it's easy to forget the survival skills that kept our ancestors alive for millennia.



[Adventure](#), [Editors' Picks](#), [Skills](#)

[Axe in Hand: Book Review and Interview with Author Nicole Coenen](#)

This new outdoorsy handbook by Canadian content creator Nicole Coenen will have you sharpening your skills.



[Hiking](#), [Skills](#), [Trails](#)

How to Survive if You Get Lost in the Backcountry

While many focus on physical training for outdoor adventures, far fewer consider the mental preparation needed.



[Adventure](#), [Creative](#), [environment](#), [Skills](#)

5 Thrilling Board and Card Games That'll Propel You from Indoors to the Great Outdoors

So, you want to enjoy some outdoor adventure, but you're stuck inside due to an injury or illness?