

BY ALEX VAN TOL

BORN TO BE WILD

VANCOUVER ISLAND HAS GOT ADVENTURES TO CHALLENGE YOU AND GET YOUR BLOOD PUMPING

MOMAR – the Atmosphere Mind Over Mountain Adventure Race – is North America's largest multisport event. Intrigued? Sign up now and start training – the race is on September 20.

If you spent the latter half of the 1990s glued to Mark Burnett's *Eco-Challenge* adventure racing series on OLN (and inexplicably longed for a Subaru Outback as a result), this article is for you.



Not a weekend warrior? Even if bushwhacking through thick forest or rappelling down cliffs is your idea of a really, really bad time, there's no shortage of softer-edged outdoor pursuits to tickle your fancy here on Vancouver Island.

First off, let's distinguish between the qualifiers "extreme" and "adventure." While years ago, adventure racing and ultra marathoning would be thought of as extreme, that's no longer the case. "Today, extreme would refer to things like the Red Bull Rampage, free climbing, base jumping in squirrel suits, and longboarding down hills... things where there is a massive risk associated with the sport or activity," says Norm Thibault, owner of Frontrunners Nanaimo and an, uh... adventure athlete himself. Ironman, the BC Bike Race, and even adventure racing aren't considered extreme in the least these days, because the risk to participants is low.

Even if hardcore is going mainstream, we've got a round up of fantastic Island activities to inspire your spirit of adventure and, if you choose, give you the opportunity to flex your competition muscle.

ADVENTURE WITH A SIDE OF BADASS

You want gnarly, we got gnarly. From mud-spattered obstacle races on the sides of mountains to an entire day of running uphill and downhill... and uphill... and downhill... there's adventure aplenty for your weekend warrior soul.

Let's start with the duchess of all adventure experiences: the adventure race. While not as roaringly popular as in the early 2000s (adventure racing lost momentum when Mark Burnett ditched *Eco-Challenge* and started pouring his energy into *Survivor*), one of the nation's best and, at 15 years, longest-standing races is held every year right here on Vancouver Island. The Atmosphere Mind Over Mountain Adventure Race (MOMAR) takes place in Cumberland and is the biggest multisport race in North America.

MOMAR (slated for September 20, 2014) is a one-day event, populated mostly by the 30-50 set — although organizers have seen seniors hopping logs in previous years. You choose a 30km- or a 50km-course and work with a team of two or four to complete a series of navigation-based legs that involve hiking, biking, and paddling. "It's checkpoint-based," explains race organizer Bryan Tasaka. "You're given a map 90 minutes before the start of the race." The winning team is the one that collects all the checkpoints and finishes in the fastest time.

For those who were born on two wheels, cyclocross is one of the fastest-growing extreme sports (sorry, adventure sports), and, unlike adventure racing, it's accessible to anyone because the short courses don't demand much training. Cross On The Rock is Vancouver Island's own cyclocross series, attracting competitors from ages 8-72 so far. Norm Thibault is the race series organizer and sets different categories of courses. "It's 35 minutes to an hour of laps over a closed course that varies

between two and three kilometres," says Thibault. "There are elements you have to dismount for, and there's always a sketchy feature that's challenging." Cyclocross courses might involve sand sections, BMX tracks — even stairs. The season is short and comes in the fall, so you're already pretty fit from your summer in the sun.

The BC Bike Race is an exhilarating single-track, mountain-bike race that covers seven days — and much of the western part of B.C. Days one and two happen on Vancouver Island, between Victoria and Campbell River, before shifting over to the mainland and finishing up in Whistler. "People come from all over the world to race on some of the best single-track riding in the world," says Wendy Simms, five-time national cyclocross champion and two-time winner of the women's solo BC Bike Race. "Vancouver Island is known around the world for having some of the best

terrain for mountain biking." Check the Island Cup Mountain Bike Racing Series, too — there are cross-country, downhill, endurance, and marathon races to be hammered. And the Mud Run Ride will get you nice and dirty while you run and ride.

Trail running is accessible and affordable to most, and Vancouver Island boasts a surfeit of racing routes. The Frontrunners GutBuster race series offers races all summer long in Victoria, Ladysmith, Duncan, and Mount Washington. Choose between short and long courses, or go straight up at the GutBuster Ascent event, held at Mount Washington in August.

While events like GutBuster and the Mudd, Sweat and Tears obstacle course are short races, longer trail runs like ultra marathons are picking up steam. Don't let the long distance (50 km) spook you — it's a different kind of race entirely than the standard 42.2-km marathon that runners do on pavement. "In trail races, the terrain is varied," says Victoria acupuncturist and ultra marathoner Fiona Peters. "You use different muscles, so they don't all get fatigued at once." Time is less of a factor in an ultra, too, says Peters. "I'm not ever really going to win a race. It's not why I'm there. It's about me and my challenge," says Peters,

Left: MOMAR — the Atmosphere Mind Over Mountain Adventure Race is a multisport challenge that includes kayaking, trekking, mountain biking, and running.

Centre: Cross On The Rock is described as "grassroots" cyclocross racing and features a variety of options at different levels.



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whose recovery time is actually shorter after an ultra than after a regular concrete-based marathon. “It’s the experience... and being out in nature.” (Peters thinks her 50-km runs are small potatoes; a number of her friends run 50- and 100-milers.) You’ll find the Island Runners Elk/Beaver Ultra on the Island; however, there are a greater number of ultras on the Mainland (Squamish, Whistler, and the killer Frosty Mountain in Manning Park), as well as in Washington and Oregon.

A COUPLE “SOFTIES” FOR YA

Only marginally qualifying as “less extreme,” the Kusam Klimb is a North-Island hike that’s moving into its 10th year in 2014. Based in Sayward on the east coast of the Island, the 23-km loop takes you up and over

Mount H’Kusam, through jaw-dropping scenery. At anywhere from seven to nine hours to complete — and always held on the solstice — the Kusam Klimb is a true grunt.

Celebrating its 35th year in 2014, the GoodLife Fitness Victoria Marathon has something for all training levels, from a 1.25-km kids’ run to the full 42.2-km oceanside course, which many experienced racers count among the world’s best. “We have a more spectacular marathon course in Victoria than anywhere else in the world,” says Jason Sandquist, an accountant with a mid-island school district and a complete triathlon freak, having run 21 Ironmans plus a bucketful of other tris. (I spoke with him the day after he arrived home from running an Ironman 70.3 in Texas. That’s right, people. Seventy point three kilometres. No

clue what the point three is all about, and I’m not asking.)

There’s a race for every kind of athlete on Vancouver Island. “We have everything from sprint races starting in March to half irons,” says Sandquist. “And we have tremendous mountain biking opportunities here... and we can do it all year around. We don’t have an offseason.”

FOR ALL THE REST OF YOU SISSIES

Okay, we take that back. We love this stuff, too. So let’s say these are the gentler, non-competitive adventures you can bookend with an island-brewed beer.

Soft adventures abound, whether on water or land. The South Island is home to one of the best ziplining routes anywhere. Adrena LINE Zipline Adventure Tours in Sooke



People come from all over the world to run the GoodLife Fitness Victoria Marathon’s 42.2 km oceanside route. This year’s event is on Sunday, October 12.

5 steps to completing your race

CHOOSE YOUR SPORT.

There are running-based and biking-based competitions, and there are those that combine the two (with a bit of paddling thrown in for good measure). Decide how many elements you want to include in your training. If you haven’t been on a run in 10 years, an Ironman triathlon might be a stretch. A 10K race, though? You can do that.

BOOK YOUR RACE.

There. Now you’re committed — and that’s often half the battle. “Once you start telling a few people,” says kayaking instructor and author Alex Matthews, “you really do have to follow through.”

GET THE GEAR.

Generally, lighter is better, because you’re going to be carrying or pedaling it. Check with other racers to see what they use. If you’re going to be on your feet a lot, you need the right footwear. There’s zero wiggle-room when you’re talking shoes. (Well, that’s not true: you should have at least half an inch of wiggle room, at least in the toe box! But you get the picture.)

SET YOUR GOALS.

Figure out your end game: are you going to complete, compete, or kill it? This will likely depend on whether you’ve ever raced before, and whether you have something to prove — be it to yourself or to the world. Establish your training schedule accordingly.

TRAIN YOUR GUTS OUT.

At least if you’re competing in a hard-edged race like the BC Bike Race or MOMAR. Cross-training is key, even if you’re a single-sport racer: fitness all over your body makes you a better athlete overall. Eat well, before, during, and after competition. Your race website typically will have links to help you figure out your training and nutrition needs.

WHY PEOPLE DO THIS

All these insane competitions beg the question: why do people sign up for these things? Aren’t there enough challenges in life? “There are probably as many reasons as there are people,” says Thibault. Some of the reasons:

- Personal challenge
- To be part of a group or “club”
- To force yourself to train
- The satisfaction of working toward and completing a goal
- The opportunity to do a course or see a geographic locale
- To, uh... to be able to brag about it

Mudd, Sweat and Tears — an obstacle-course mud-running race



“
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(40 minutes west of Victoria) offers two hours of zipping on eight different lines and over suspension bridges that cover 100 acres. Not a bad way to spend an afternoon. (And there’s the beer.)

Short kayaking tours head out from harbours across the Island all year round; a quick Google search will dial you into what’s available in the area you’re visiting. Want something a little longer? Head to remote Kyuquot Sound, where you can take part in base-camp kayak trips. West Coast Expeditions runs trips all summer

from its Spring Island base in Kyuquot, on northwestern Vancouver Island. (They’ll shuttle you from the Comox airport.) “We have safari-style canvas tents, a camp chef, and waterfront sites,” says owner and guide Dave Pinel. Kayaking outings depend on a group’s abilities and desires but often include sheltered shoreline explorations, as well as days that are divided between exploring the water and the rugged terrain of Spring Island. (Weekend warriors, fret not that you’ll fall off your routine: Pinel says adventure athletes love running the shoreline and headland trails as part of their training. “There’s a fantastic figure-eight loop, which is great to run after a day of paddling and before dinner — excellent to get the legs and lungs working.”)

For a truly bespoke, memorable Island experience, customized adventure trips can be arranged through Hidden Places Travel. Think floatplanes, zodiac rides, forest boardwalks, private surf lessons, and crabbing from the decks of your private sailing yacht.

There you have it: a cascade of options, from the rough and rugged to the refined and relaxing. It’s an endless adventure out here. ☺

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