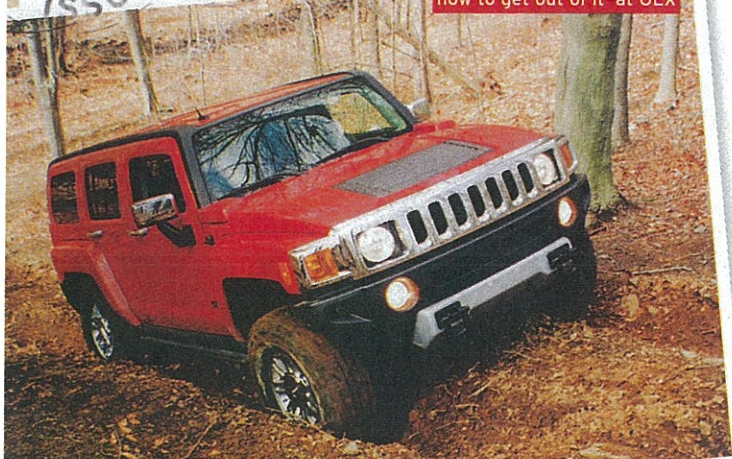


Stuck in a rut—and learning
how to get out of it—at OEX



Close to Home

Drive Anywhere. But Slowly.

Just 120 miles north of Manhattan, in East Haddam, Connecticut, there's a 90-acre stretch of rugged woodland where professional explorers learn to drive the wild. At **Overland Experts (OEX)**, one of the country's premier off-roading schools, founder Bruce Elfstrom teaches Navy SEALs and Army Rangers, safari leaders and research scientists—to say nothing of average Joes and weekend warriors—all they need to know about “nature-preserving momentum.” That's the method whereby drivers maneuver slowly in low gear, leaving as little trace as possible on the terrain. This is no simple task, especially when piloting one of the school's 15-foot-long, 4,800-pound Hummer H3 Alphas.

A former biology professor, Elfstrom perfected his method in the remotest areas of Iceland, Namibia, and Mongolia, and he makes a patient teacher. “Learning to fail safely, without damage,” he says, “allows us to try again with increasing aggression.”

During a recent lesson I shifted the Hummer into reverse and a tiny video screen popped out of the rearview mirror, providing a camera's-eye glimpse of what lay behind me: just as many rocks, trees, steep grades, and slippery slopes as there were ahead. OEX employs certain tricks (slightly deflating the tires to increase surface contact and angling side mirrors to reflect the rear wheels) to make things easier, but the driving is still tough. The main enemy is a spinning tire, which will suck power from the other wheels and also dig a hole, scarring the ground and stranding the car. It's very slow going. “Most of the time,” says Elfstrom, “if you go faster than I jog, it's way too fast.”

One- and two-day lessons start at \$750; nine-day expeditions abroad are from \$3,500 a person. The next trip departs for Iceland on September 13 (overlandexperts.com).

—F.V.



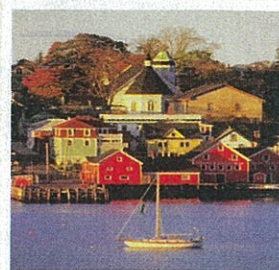
Expert Intelligence

La Crème du Canada

As founder of the luxe adventure outfitter Butterfield & Robinson and a native of the province of New Brunswick, **George Butterfield** knows more about active travel and the Canadian backcountry than just about anyone else. We asked the Toronto resident to share his favorite trekking trips up north.

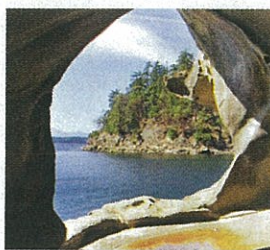
Sea Kayaking in Lunenburg Nova Scotia

Of Canada's three beautiful maritime provinces, I'm partial to Nova Scotia, especially the coastal town of Lunenburg, where we have a family home. The sea kayaking just doesn't get better than this, with endless miles of protected inner shores and vast, open waters. Stay at one of the Victorian-style B&Bs—the **Lunenburg Inn** (\$155-\$195; lunenburginn.com), for example—and dine at **Fleur de Sel** (902-640-2121).



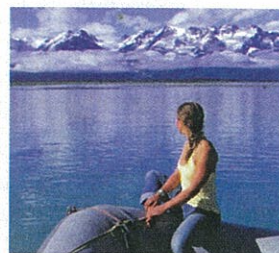
Hiking in the Gulf Islands British Columbia

About a half-hour flight from Vancouver, this archipelago is a secret find. The hike up Mount Galiano, on the island of Galiano, provides astounding views all the way to the Olympic Peninsula. My favorite retreats are **Brentwood Bay Lodge & Spa** in Victoria (\$385-\$690; brentwoodbaylodge.com) and **Sooke Harbour House** in Sooke (\$425-\$630; sookeharbourhouse.com).



Rafting in Tatshenshini Yukon Territory

I recently went to Whitehorse, in the Yukon—have a drink at the **Capital Hotel** (867-667-2565)—and rafted down the Tatshenshini River to see the province's untamed areas and pristine national parks. We spied peaks with hanging glaciers rising 8,000 feet, as well as wolves, Dall sheep, mountain goats, black bears, grizzlies, and even the occasional golden eagle.



Flying Above the Great Northern Peninsula, Newfoundland

The peninsula offers rugged coastline, dramatic fjords, icebergs, whale sightings, and thousands of waterways. Stay at the **Quirpon Lighthouse Inn** on Quirpon Island (\$320-\$370; linkumtours.com) and arrive by floatplane from the Humber River. The trip takes passengers over Gros Morne National Park—a World Heritage site—but keeps them low enough to spot moose and caribou.



Biking the Eastern Townships Québec

About 90 minutes east of Montréal, the bucolic Eastern Townships are almost unknown outside Québec. A 30-mile ride goes from Knowlton to **Manoir Hovey** in North Hatley: a stunning place to spend the night (\$150-\$435 a person; hoveymanor.com). Stop by antiques stores and lunch at **Les Pêchés de Pinocchio** in Magog (lespechesdepinocchio.com) and sample cider at the **Abbaye Saint-Benoît** (st-benoit-du-lac.com).

