

The Age of Adventure, Part 1

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Think adventure travel is just for the young? People into their 90s are still hiking, backpacking, climbing mountains, scuba diving and more. Here's some good-as-gold gear that will help keep you active well into your golden years.



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During one of our hikes to the bottom of the Grand Canyon early in our journey we had the pleasure of meeting "Meadow Ed," a fixture and legend on the Appalachian Trail. We're here to tell you, he's no spring chicken—yet he still sleeps on the ground, cooks viddles on a porta-stove he's fashioned out of a tin can and does far more hard hiking in six months than we do all year long.

And he's not alone out there. This year, Tamae Watanabe of Japan became the oldest woman to summit Mount Everest. She's 73. Canadian Jean Beliveau began an 11-year-walk around the world when he was 45. He finished this year after walking more than 75,000 kilometres through 64 countries. Recently, an 83-year-old woman signed up for a tandem sky dive, nearly slipped out of her harness in mid-air and says she's still in search of her next adventure. And then there's Keith Wright, the 95-year-old backpacker from Australia (of course) who just refuses to quit.



Welcome to the “agequake”

According to the Outdoor Industry Association, there are 81 million baby boomers, age 46 to 65, in the United States alone. That’s 26 percent of the U.S. population. Globally, there are about 1.6 billion baby boomers entering their senior years right now. Based on current global demographic trends, researchers at A.T. Kearny predict that there will be more people over 60 than under 15 on the planet by 2047. This trend has been dubbed an “agequake.”

Medical advances, a lifetime of activity and the general sense of “entering the best years of our lives” means that more and more oldsters don’t consider golf an adventure activity. According to the Outdoor Foundation, about 50 percent of men aged 51-55 take part in adrenaline-packed activities. Participation drops to 45 percent for men aged 56-60 but then actually *rises* again among men aged 61-65. (We don’t know why these researchers didn’t study aging women, but they didn’t.)

Makers of outdoor gear, tools and accessories are offering more and more products to keep aging adventurers out there. And here are some of our favourites.

Dirigo kayaks

Johnson Outdoors reportedly brought in a panel of aging adventurers, and picked their brains about what they wanted and needed in a kayak. Result? The [Dirigo line of kayaks](#), which boast thigh braces and other features that make sitting more comfortable (from US\$599.99).

Thule Hullavator kayak loading system

Loading a kayak onto the roof rack of a vehicle is hard for anyone. For older kayakers it can be impossible. That’s why Thule developed the [Hullavator](#) (US\$589.95), which attaches to the rack on top of your car and lifts the kayak up for you.



Petzl Tikka Plus 2 headlamp

Although this [headlamp](#) was not specifically designed for the aging adventurer, it's become a favourite because the buttons are easier to use than those found on most headlamps, the battery pack is easier to open and it puts out 70 lumens of light in five different lighting modes—making it easier to see in all kinds of situations (US\$28).

Costa del Mar bifocal sunglasses

Prescription sunglasses are nothing new. Prescription high-performance sunglasses made specifically for outdoor adventures are. [Costa del Mar sunglasses](#) are hand-crafted and feature lenses that are particularly suited to on-water adventures because they cut glare and increase surface and in-water visibility. Those same lenses can be ground with single vision, bi-focal or progressive lenses in keeping with the company slogan "see what's out there."

Mountainsmith Nomad trekking pole

New for 2012, this lightweight aluminum, shock-absorbing [trekking pole](#) has a T-handle design that makes it easier to grip securely while navigating the trail (US\$24.95). My fit, active 60-something parents have been skeptical about trekking poles, but they used a Nomad during a recent hike over the hilly, rocky trails of Pinnacles National Monument in California and now they're sold. "Within a mile or so hiking up to the Condor Lookout Point we were beginning to like the pole," says my mom. "It really helped me with my balance and strength issues. It gave me a lot of confidence. The pole was easy to adjust and your dad, who did not like the grip at first, thought it was comfortable by the end of the day."

Look for [Karen Catchpole and Eric Mohl's Just Add Adventure! series](#) every Wednesday and Friday all summer long on Travel + Escape!

KAREN CATCHPOLE AND ERIC MOHL OF THE TRANS-AMERICAS JOURNEY



In April of 2006, journalist Karen Catchpole and photographer Eric Mohl left their jobs and apartment in New York City and embarked on the [Trans-Americas Journey](#), a 200,000-mile working road trip through all 23 countries in North, Central and South America. After many years on the road they are still nowhere near their goal of Tierra del Fuego at the tip of South America where the road literally ends. Until then, their slow and steady overland exploration of The Americas continues.

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