

Ranking the world's toughest outdoor sports

By Dan Roe, *Outside*

You have no idea how tough [*insert sport*] is.

Whether we say it out loud or just repeat it to ourselves, many of us share this sentiment. As American novelist Mary McCarthy once said, "We are the hero of our own story."

That said, some activities are legitimately harder than others, and in the realm of outdoor sports, a few are in a league of their own. Take rock climbing, for instance, which requires explosive upper-body strength, problem solving, and crux-time focus. Downhill mountain bikers regularly risk shattered bones, while open-water swimmers push themselves to the limit in unforgiving conditions. Nordic skiers force their bodies deep into oxygen debt, and ultrarunners—well, you get the idea.

But how can we quantify which one is actually the toughest? Here's how: we chose five competitive sports that we feel are tough to learn, can be dangerous to perform, and require a high degree of skill and fitness.

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