"Our toddler's a mini Indiana Jones"

As a travelling archaeologist's daughter, Amelia Simmons has packed more into two years than most adults do in a lifetime. Her father, Matt, recaps her adventures



"'Mummy's home from work,' my two-and-a-half-year old daughter, Amelia, squeals excitedly as the rumble of the all-terrain vehicle shudders into the remote hunting lodge. This is our home for a month. We're in the wilderness of the Rocky Mountains, nine hours' drive from the nearest paved road, with grizzlies prowling around outside at night.

We head out to greet my archaeologist wife, Jo. She's sporting a high-visibility vest, a respirator on her face and a hard hat. She's got bear spray dangling at her belt, too. Her eyes light up when she sees Amelia and they share a dusty hug. The scene around them is like something straight out of an Indiana Jones film – archaeologists and assistants thunder in on all-terrain-vehicles, rifles sit propped up in corners and canvas tents puff smoke from wood stoves up into the sky.

Whereas most toddlers would, by now, be settling down to a bedtime story, Jo regales Amelia with her day's encounters: a grizzly mum and her two cubs, a moose and a lynx. And, of course, there's the box of ancient artefacts she and her colleagues discovered. This is just another day when you're the daughter of a travelling archaeologist.

"She's one well-travelled toddler"

Amelia was still less than a year old when we went on our first family work trip to the Queen Charlotte Islands, an archipelago in northern British Columbia that has a population of just 5,000.

Its annual rainfall can reach 450cm and it was tough. Amelia got stomach flu in the first week and spent an entire night vomiting; we used up every sheet, blanket, and set of pyjamas we brought with us. But, despite the mishaps, it was a rewarding experience. The small towns are friendly – within a couple of days, everyone would cheerfully call, 'Hi Amelia,' as we passed, and the man at the local shop would always give her a banana or a strawberry just to see her smile.

Since that first trip, we've travelled extensively around British Columbia – to the Gulf Islands, Rocky Mountains and Fraser Canyon to name a few – and we've also explored Mexico, Alaska, and the UK. Amelia is one well-travelled toddler. ➜

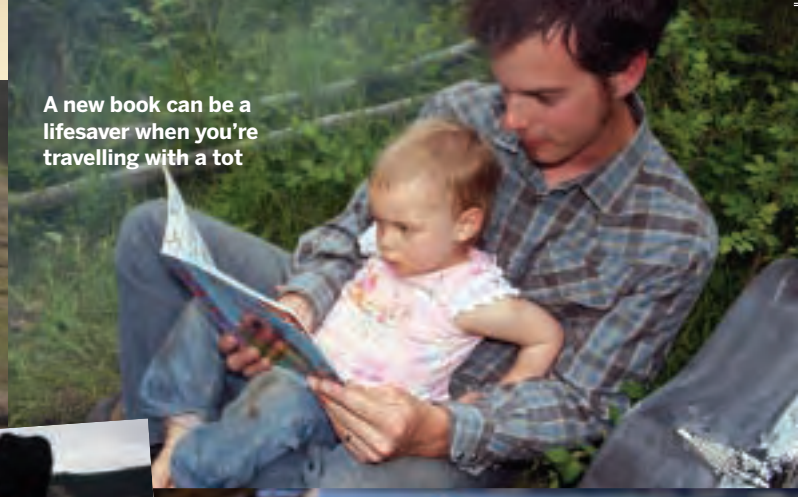




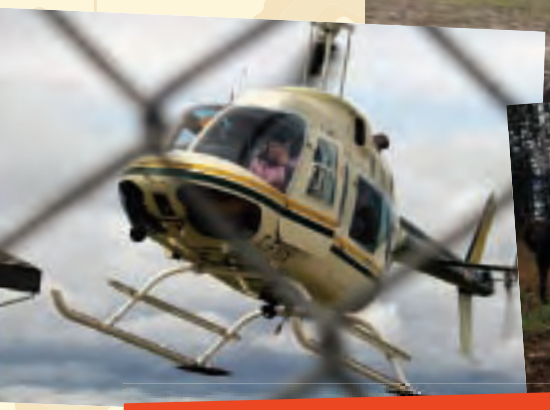
Amelia doing her best aeroplane impression (top) and collecting some artefacts of her own (below)



Amelia greets her mum Jo as she returns from work (right)



A new book can be a lifesaver when you're travelling with a tot







Collecting firewood for the camp in British Columbia

"I carry a can of bear spray on my belt and watch out for wildlife as Amelia explores"

"Things can be hard for a travelling toddler"

It's not all fun and games parenting a child while constantly on the road, though. With almost no routine to speak of, Amelia has her ups and downs. Leaving friends for months at a time can be hard for a toddler to take, as can dropping swimming lessons to head off on the next adventure. Then there's the travel itself. Whether going by car, boat, or plane (or all of the above in some cases), keeping her occupied is never an easy task. By trial and error we've developed a system to keep her happy on the road. For example, to make sure 'Bunny', Amelia's one indispensable stuffed animal, doesn't disappear into the bottomless pile of backpacks, he's tied to a shoelace that is, in turn, attached to the car seat. (We learned this the hard way on a particularly long drive, during which we had to stop and search several times.)

"We head out together to explore"

Granted, parenting with our lifestyle can be a challenge, but isn't all parenting? The important thing to us is our little family stays together, wherever we end up. And Amelia is turning out to be an amazing kid. While her mum's at work, she and I typically set out on foot together to explore wherever we find ourselves. I carry a can of bear spray on my belt and keep a watchful eye out for wildlife, while she brings a camera and a pair of wellies.

We've collected shells and rocks on remote beaches and played drums made from seaweed in driftwood houses. In the coastal rainforest, giant leaves became blankets and pine cones became footballs. Amelia has already visited ancient villages, touched long-abandoned totem poles, held 10,000-year-old arrowheads, climbed mountains, stood on a frozen lake in June, and seen porpoises, eagles, whales, ospreys, moose and snakes. A friend once caught a hummingbird in his hat and brought it over to Amelia in his hands. Moments like these, I hope, will never leave her – I know they'll never leave me.

"She loves to collect artefacts"

And move over, Harrison Ford – Amelia is showing signs of becoming the next Indiana Jones. Whenever we're out walking now, even if it's only in a city park, she'll pick up a rock, a bit of gravel or something else, put it in her pocket and look serious. 'It's an artefact for Mummy. OK?' she'll say.

Amelia also gets to sit with her mum and help her to sort through the artefacts she brings home, with Amelia letting out a fascinated, knowing 'Ooh!' when she's handed a 5,000-year-old stone tool.

We're expecting our second child soon and Amelia has promised to teach her new sibling all about archaeology, travelling and wildlife. She's going to make a great teacher." PP

MATT'S TOP TOT TRAVEL TIPS

- **Bring a few things associated with home so you can create a comfortable, familiar space anywhere you might be staying. Never forget that one special stuffed animal she just can't live without!**
- **Pick up a few new books, games, workbooks, sticker books or other easy-to-pack diversions your tot doesn't know about. When things start to get rough, break one out.**
- **Pack for the weather you expect. Then pack for other weather you don't expect. There's nothing worse than a cold, wet toddler, and even if there's only a slim chance of rain, it's best to be ready.**
- **Find something exciting to look forward to at your destination and tell your child all about it. That way, if she's flagging a bit en route, you can use it as a motivator, and she'll be happy and excited when you arrive.**
- **Let her pack a bag herself. It gives her a sense of control and it sets up the trip better than anything you can say to prepare her.**

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