



Oh Canada!

JOIN SANNY, MARK AND MJ AS THEY TAKE ON AN
EPIC, MOUNTAIN BIKERS' CANADIAN ROAD TRIP.

WORDS SANNY PHOTOGRAPHY MARK AND SANNY

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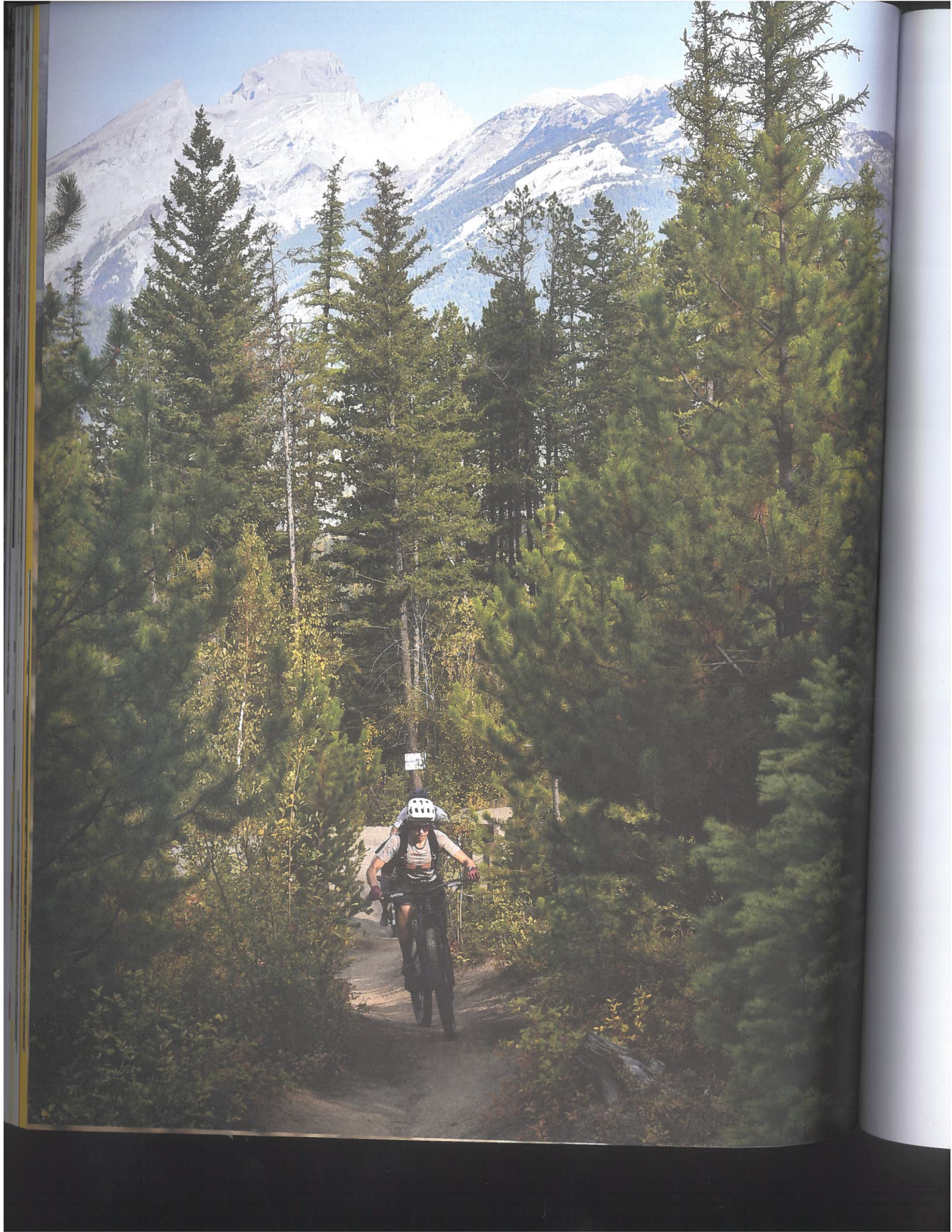
Ask the average mountain biker to say what Canadian mountain biking brings to mind and Whistler will almost certainly feature near or at the very top of the list. Having spent several days riding both the park and the natural trails there, it is easy to understand why it has become something of a honeypot for riders the world over; it's definitely worth an extended visit.

However, Canada exists on a scale that, for us as Europeans, is hard to comprehend. It is truly vast, both geographically and culturally. For me, my last trip left me hungry to more properly explore some of the less celebrated parts of the country.

Looking out the aircraft window at the vast expanse of pan-flat prairie which felt like it went on forever, our long-haul flight passed in what felt like the blink of a very relaxed eye; my time filled with good old Canadian hospitality and several shows from a certain fruit-based entertainment provider.

A road trip needs good company and I felt lucky to be joined on this little adventure by Mark of this parish and friend of the mag/ultimate trip organiser, Mark Almond aka 'MJ'.

After a fitful, jetlag-fuelled sleep, we loaded up (saddled up?) our massive Ford F150 truck and made our way down the gloriously scenic Highway 22 that is the Cowboy Trail. Starting in the flats of Calgary and passing through ranch land, it offers the traveller the opportunity to take part in western-themed experiences and get their Yellowstone jones on. However, we had an appointment with the Rocky Mountains and as the countryside went from flat, to rolling, to ever more pointy and tree-lined, our anticipation grew. We were on a road trip and no mistake; our first destination, Fernie beckoned. As we passed through increasingly impressive scenery and even happened upon the largest truck ever built (trust me, it's worth stopping for), we were three middle-aged men who were almost bouncing in anticipation of what adventures lay before us.





Fabulous Fernie.

THE FIRST STOP ON THE CANADIAN
TOUR FOR OUR THREE PALS WAS FERNIE,
NESTLED IN THE EAST KOOTENAY REGION
OF SOUTH-EASTERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Nestling in the heart of the Elk Valley, Fernie is the only city in Canada that is fully encircled by the Rockies. Step out of your hotel room and the scale of the surrounding landscape is almost overwhelming. From the 2,210m Mount Fernie and the Three Sisters to the north, to Fernie Ridge in the east and then to Morrissey Ridge and the Lizard Range in the south, you can almost taste the adventures that await you. I've spent a lot of time in the Alps and the Dolomites, but the sheer scale of the Rockies has to be seen to be believed. With its mix of cedar, spruce, balsam and fir trees, ancient rainforest and exposed rocky peaks, I was giddy with excitement at the prospect of what the riding had to offer.

Let's ride!

Ready to ride, we took a short spin along to Gearhub Sports (home to some genuinely classic old Rocky Mountain bikes on the walls) to meet our guide, Alina of local guiding company Ridetheory. We all immediately warmed to her; her natural enthusiasm and desire to show us some of the signature trails in Fernie really shone through.

Our plan was simple – over the two days available, we would ride the three trails that make up the Fernie Brewing Company's 'Trail to Ale' Challenge. Ridden within 24 hours, you can ride, run or walk the route, and if you complete the 40-odd km challenge (with over the best part of 1,400m of ascent) with selfies taken at the start, finish and three summit signs, you earn yourself a free drink and sticker. It's the perfect excuse for an adventure and to sample three very distinct trails.

Hyperventilation extension

Starting dreamily beneath the gradually goldening leaves of silver birch with a classic North American barn to the left, Hyperventilation is a switchbacked climb that gently wends its way through the treeline as it rises from the Montane Blue trailhead. As we rode ever upwards, Alina waxed lyrical about the riding in Fernie and the community that has grown up around the outdoor lifestyle. Although built on the back of coal extraction, something that is still a major employer in the area, with some 90% of the output destined for China for the production of high-grade steel, the area is famed for the quality of the powder skiing on offer and the variety and sheer number of mountain bike and hiking trails.

With a population just a little over half that of Peebles, but with some 400km of trails on the doorstep, it positively dwarfs the entire network of the 7stanes trails. It's truly astonishing that such a small town can pack such a massive punch. Even locals who live here year-round struggle to ride all the trails in a season. As Alina chatted, I concentrated on keeping my heart rate down and my answers short while Mark and MJ opted to take a more relaxed approach to the ascent.

Big sky scenery

Cresting a rise, the entire valley opened up in front of us. Alina took great delight in pointing out the ski area to our left and over towards the rainforest trails on Mount Fernie that we would be riding the next day. It might have been late September, but the weather was positively summer-like. Sweat was pouring off us like some kind of human salt shower.

With much of the climbing done, we pressed on for the final rise to the summit proper. Overlooking Castle Mountain and Coal Creek, our talk soon turned from awestruck amazement at our surroundings to all manner of things, such as the jokes of Jimmy Carr and Yoda. Fair to say that we were a happy bunch as we soaked in the scenery, but you want to know about the descent – and what a descent! Entirely man-made, it snakes through the trees and out into a section of slightly exposed open clearing before darting back through the trees as it zigs and zags its way down the mountainside. Although classed as a Black Diamond trail, nothing on it felt steep or difficult. Flow was very much the order of the day.



No need to be rude, eh?

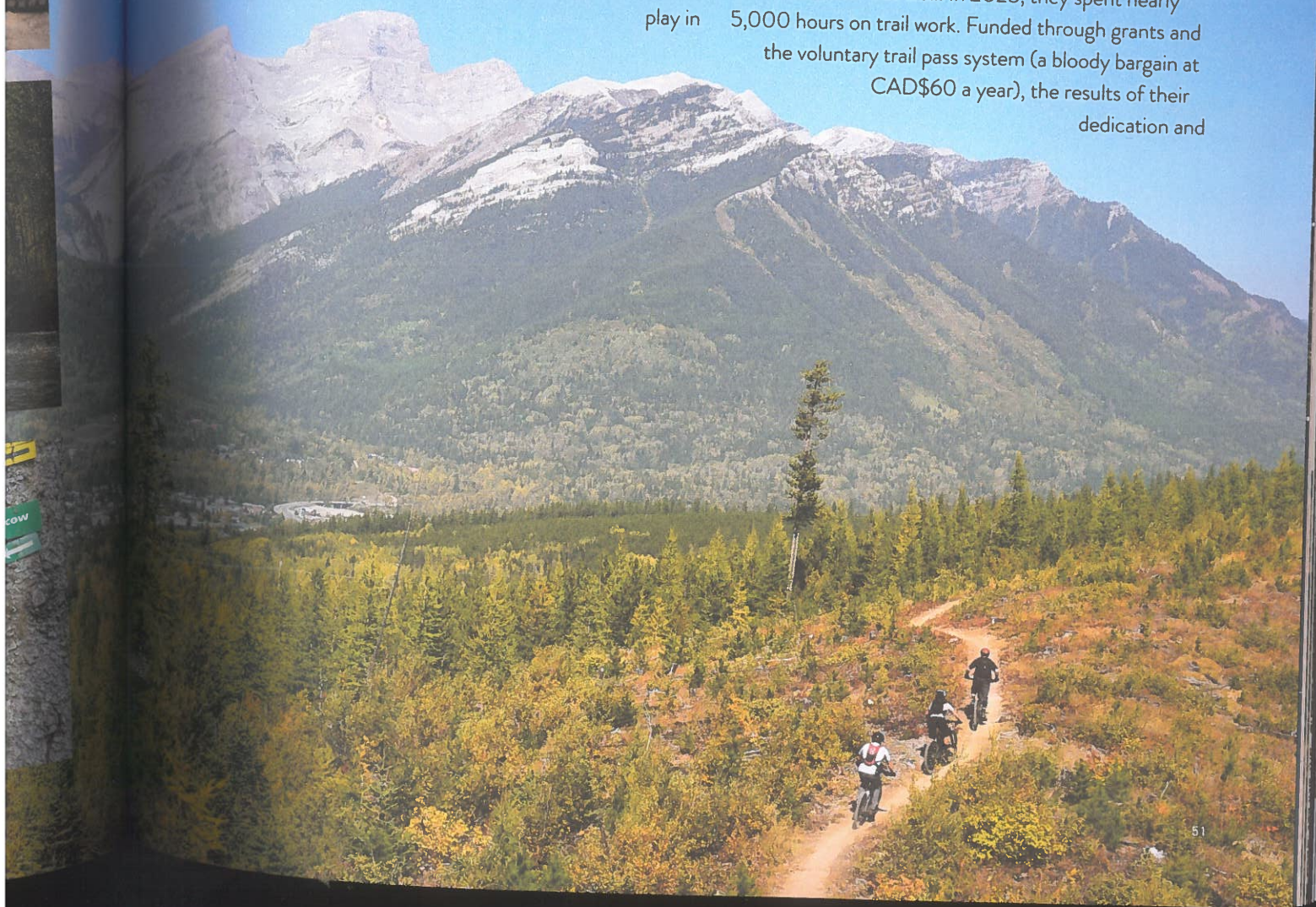
Mindful of the potential for an encounter with the local wildlife, we made a point of whooping and hollering as we rode. I say it was for the bears, but to be honest, I reckon we would have done that anyway. At one point, I was conscious that something big was in the trees higher above me, but not keen for a close encounter, I kept on trucking with a 'Hey bear!' in my wake.

Hitting a recently clear-felled section, Alina felt the need to apologise for the trail as if there was something inferior about it. Quite to the contrary – the open aspect made for a great contrast to the tree-lined stuff and was equally as enjoyable. No complaints from me, that's for sure, and we were all grinning from ear to ear as we made our way back into town along the curiously named Easy Beaver trail. Bidding farewell to Alina, we retired to the Brickhouse for lunch with Christine from Tourism Fernie for what can only be described as a belly burster.

It was great to learn about the history of Fernie, how the outdoor lifestyle is at the heart of the community and the key role it has to play in

making Fernie what it is. We then met up with Rick Weiss of the volunteer-led Coal Creek Heritage Society (CCHS). Created in 2020 to manage and maintain the 50km of privately owned trails in the Montane and Ridgemont area of Fernie we'd ridden that morning, the Heritage Society is a brilliant example of how to build relationships with landowners. We listened intently as Rick told us how he and his group of volunteers meet up weekly in order to keep the trail network up and running. Even in the depths of winter, their work doesn't stop as they groom trails for fat bikes. Having retired to Fernie from Calgary, his enthusiasm and drive to give back to the community was remarkable.

Later, we met with Ben Martin and Mel Wigglesworth of the Fernie Trails Alliance (FTA), a registered charity that works with landowners, member clubs and recreation groups in order to maintain and enhance the trail network in the valley. A team of volunteers and two staff members, they are responsible for some 370km of trail. In 2023, they spent nearly 5,000 hours on trail work. Funded through grants and the voluntary trail pass system (a bloody bargain at CAD\$60 a year), the results of their dedication and



commitment are there for every user to see and enjoy. If you find yourself in Fernie, make sure you use the QR codes on the Trail Map to donate to the CCHS and purchase a Trail Pass from the FTA as every penny they receive makes a difference.

More, more, more!

We met Alina for a gentle spin along the valley floor towards Mount Fernie. Trail two was to be Project 9. We'd been warned by a couple of locals that the climb was a stone-cold pain in the petunias. "Four pillars of pain," was one comment. However, I tried not to let that bother me as we spun our way along broad fire road; the sunlight creating a glorious, dappled effect through the trees, the leaves on the turn for autumn's chill embrace. Starting with Lazy Lizard, Rick's favourite trail in the area, it was an easy start to the ascent.

Upward we went, the much-anticipated sections of 'steep death' being dispatched relatively easily. To be honest, they weren't anywhere near as tough or as long as I had anticipated, but the top was still a welcome sight. Breaking briefly for a snack and to observe the steep chute option, which none of us took, we were soon heading down the trail at a fair old lick. If you've seen pictures of North Shore riding with massive tree stumps and exposed roots, you have a fair idea of what to expect. We were constantly in motion as we made our way through the twists and turns of the trail, the odd jump or kicker there for a little added spice. The further we got down, the rockier it became, while by the end we were on smooth flow trails. It had come and gone in what felt like a flash, but boy, was it good fun. Not content to finish on fire road, Alina took us down the wonderfully named Purple Monkey Dishwasher. If this were at home, it would be my favourite trail – bags of easy flow with only a short spin to get back to the top.

Fernie had set a very high bar



Pork-themed goodness

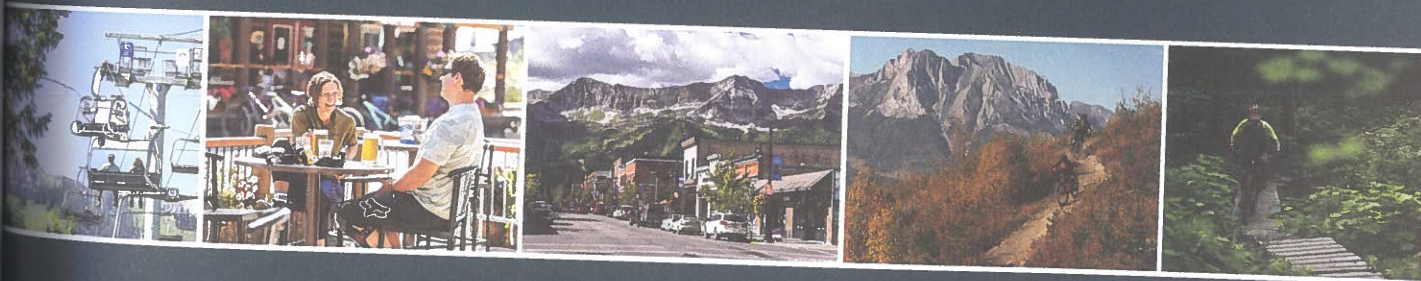
With one trail left in the challenge, we retraced our pedal strokes along the valley before following Elk River to the foot of Mount Proctor. Arguably the easiest of the three climbs, Swine Flu is a classic switchback climb that closely mimics the likes of the trails at Glentress. The only noticeably steep section comes at the very end of the climb, where the trail pops you out at a magnificent viewpoint, with a red painted steel pig sculpture for company that denotes the start of the descent. As a way to finish the challenge, Swine Flu was a gem – a mix of berms, small drops, high bankings and roots mixed up in a package that positively begs you to go just that little bit faster. As an introduction to Fernie riding, it rounded off our adventure perfectly, while the free drink at the Fernie Brewing Company felt like the icing on the cake. It's definitely somewhere you could happily spend an hour or two post-ride relaxing over a libation or three. As a way to start a Canadian road trip, Fernie had set a very high bar. 🍷

Bike in the Canadian Rockies, Fernie Style.



Photo by Nick Nault

400+ kms of trails - accessible from the heart of town!
Chair Lift Access Bike Park at Fernie Alpine Resort | Dirt Jumps & Skills Park
Race Events, Camps, Clinics & Guided Tours



Located in the Canadian Rocky Mountains of southeast British Columbia, Fernie is known for its expansive mountain biking trail network and cool local vibe, with trails accessible from May to October. Direct flights available to the Calgary International Airport (YYC), followed by a scenic 3-hour drive by rental car or shuttle service.

8 Unique Trail Riding Networks • Classic XC & Downhill Trails • Local Bike Shops for Rentals & Gear



RideFernie.com
#ferniestoke

Contact your preferred tour operator
or travel agent and book your trip
to Fernie!

Getting There

Caveat: All prices here are indicative only and based on September 2026.



Flights

We flew Air Canada from Heathrow to Calgary direct (see p70).

Return flights from **£850** economy, including one checked bag. Bike carriage **CAD\$50** one way.

Getting to the resorts once you land

Car hire

Canada is very much a car culture and for our ten-day trip, we were able to hire a frankly enormous Ford F150 six-seater pickup truck for just over **£330** through Enterprise, before adding on the cost of additional drivers. Fuel costs were half the price of the UK, meaning that we only spent about **£150 on fuel** for the entire trip, which involved four reasonably lengthy drives between the resorts we stayed at.

Bike Shops & Bike Hire

Fernie

GearHub Sports, Straight Line Bicycles, Ski Base and Fernie Bike Park all offer high-end rentals. James of Straight Line Bicycles gets a special mention for providing exceptional service when MJ went in to buy a new helmet. Typical hire prices: High-end MTB **CAD\$500/week** (**£280 at time of printing**). **CAD\$120/day**. High-end eMTB **CAD\$600/week** or **CAD\$100/day**.

Rossland

For such a small town, Rossland has two terrific bike shops: Rossland Outdoor and Revolution Cycles. Both offer rental options as well as sales and repair. Revolution Cycles gets two thumbs up for pointing us in the direction of the Seven Summits trail and lending us a set of lights, despite never having met us before.

Revelstoke

Matt from Wandering Wheels guide services (our guide on the first day) provides rentals through the Cycle Logic shop. We had the pleasure of riding some top-end Transition Relay eMTBs. eMTB **CAD\$165/day** or **CAD\$715/5 days**. MTB – Transition Scout **CAD\$125/day** or **CAD\$510/5days**

Quinn, Harry and the team at the bike rental shop in Revelstoke Resort provided Specialized Levos for **CAD\$185/day** and DH bikes for **CAD\$185/day**

Guiding Companies

Fernie

Operating out of Fernie, Kimberley and Cranbrook, **Ridetheory** offers mountain and gravel bike tours, private coaching, summer camps, women's only and social rides. Alina

was our guide over two days and had us laughing the whole time. Just don't try to keep up with her on the climbs and hold a conversation at the same time. Chances are you will lose! ridetheory.ca

Rossland

Pete of **Kootenay Mountain Biking** was our ex-pat guide who introduced us to the delights of Rossland. They offer a whole host of options such as bike-and-stay packages, skills lessons for individuals or groups, guided tours and shuttle uplift. We found the shuttle service to be an excellent way of accessing some brilliant trails if your time is limited, and with the IMBA Epic Seven Summits trail one of the options available, you have a very good reason to make use of their services when you visit.

Revelstoke

Based out of the Cycle Logic shop in Revelstoke, **Wandering Wheels** did a sterling job of showing us some of the frankly stunning natural trails on the ridgeline above the city. Matt has an astonishing level of backcountry knowledge. Wandering Wheels guiding options are comprehensive, offering everything from day tours through to multi-day adventures and full-on travel packages with accommodation included. When chatting with Matt, we learned that he operates in areas as far afield as Peru, Nepal and the Yukon, with the icing on the cake being the option of going heli-biking if you want to be super fancy.

Where to stay Fernie

We stayed at the **Red Tree Lodge** in Fernie, which was well set up for our biking needs. The staff were welcoming and friendly. Our comfortable room was spotlessly clean, while the provision of a kitchen, secure bike storage, indoor swimming pool, hot tub, sauna, movie room, heated boot room, WiFi and complimentary light breakfast made it an excellent base for our stay.

Price guide: From around £130/night

Rossland

The recently renovated rooms of the **Flying Steamshovel** have a Scandi-chic charm and supremely comfortable beds. The gastropub downstairs was excellent with a great range of beers on draught.

Price guide: From around £160/night

Revelstoke

Swiss Chalet Motel was a treat for us as we each had our own room with two massive beds in case we went all Princess and the Pea. Having only ever seen motels in the movies, we were impressed by the excellent standard of the accommodation.

Price guide: From around £100/night

Adding it all up

A DIY trip for seven nights in Fernie for two, including economy flights, accommodation, car hire and fuel, plus bike hire would cost approximately **£3,900**. (Approx. £400 less if taking a bike rather than hiring).

Our ten-day road trip through Fernie, Rossland and Revelstoke would need a budget of approximately **£3,800 for two** with your own bikes or **£4,300 with rentals** in each resort, including Yellow Jersey insurance cover.

Not included: Food, tips, airport parking and UK transfers. If taking your own bikes, you'd also need Yellow Jersey insurance cover (see page 61).

