

# A KOOTENAY SUMMER CYCLING SAMPLER

From the backroads around Nelson to the rail beds near Kimberley, check these B.C. cycling routes off your must-ride list.

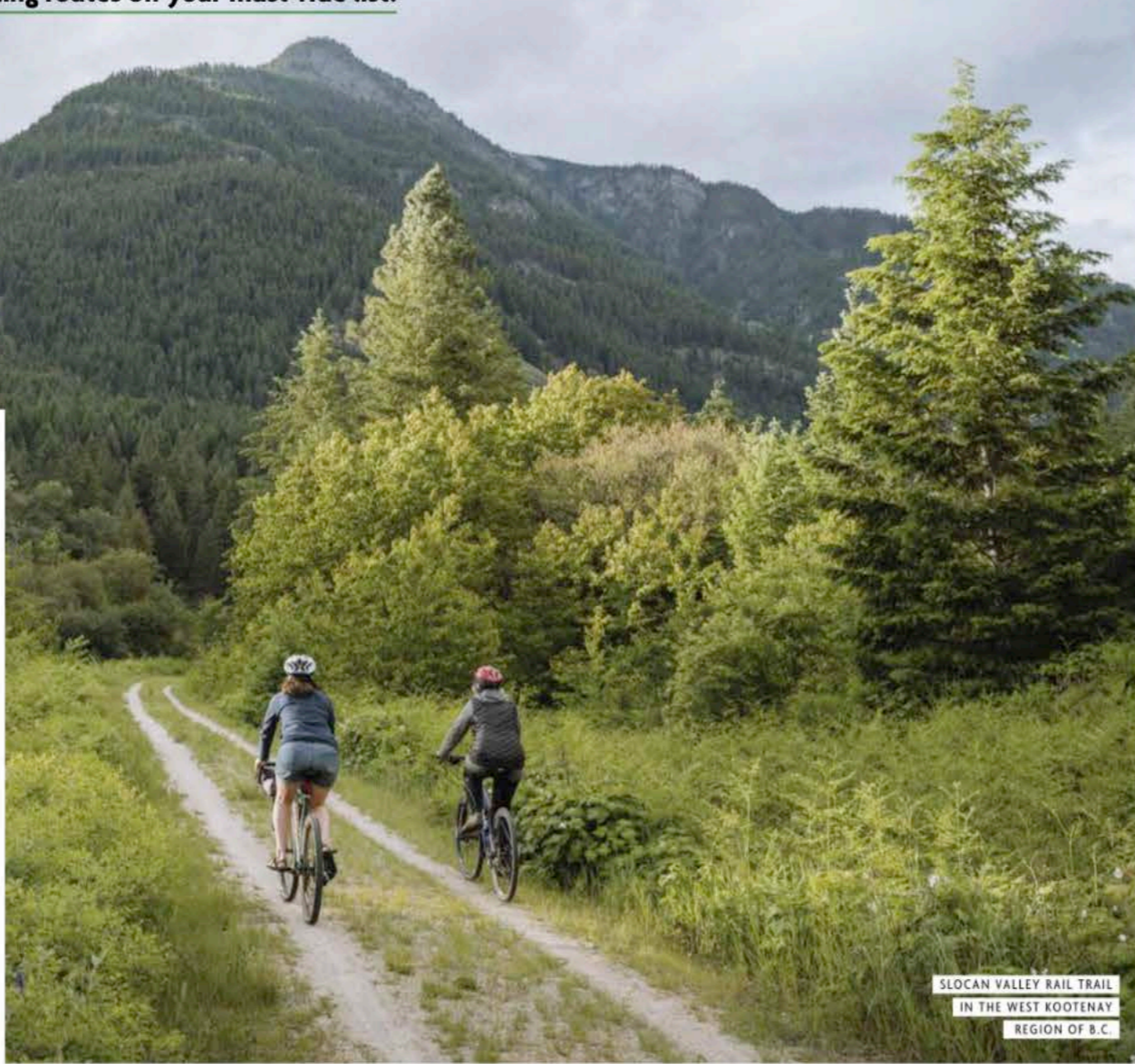
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ith four major mountain ranges — the Rockies, Purcells, Selkirks and Monashees — the area known as

The Kootenays is fast becoming a destination for cyclists of all stripes. Whether it's on pavement, rail trails, gravel roads or mountain tracks, there's a lot to explore on two wheels in this B.C. region.

In June of last year, my partner and I spent a week riding a number of beautiful back roads and rail trails (cycling terrain created on former train tracks), mostly in the West Kootenays around the Nelson area, and then stopped in Kimberley in the East Kootenays to sample another rail trail before heading back to Calgary. For this type of riding, my trusty touring bike served me well, but I did rent a gravel bike for two of the rides. A sturdy hybrid or e-bike would also work for any of the five rides of varying lengths and difficulty covered here in this Kootenay cycling "sampler."

Pick one or try 'em all!



SLOCAN VALLEY RAIL TRAIL  
IN THE WEST KOOTENAY  
REGION OF B.C.

PHOTO (LEFT) BY HILD & FOREST; (RIGHT) BY ALEX BERENYI

BY VALERIE BERENYI



THE WRITER ON THE NELSON  
FOODIE 50 ROUTE TOWARD  
CASTLEGAR.

## 1 THE NELSON FOODIE 50 (WITH OPTIONAL LEG TO CASTLEGAR) ▲

**Distance** 50 km return

This road ride from groovy, historic Nelson meanders along the quiet, scenic, secondary roads that lead to one of the best hidden gems in the Kootenays, the Frog Peak Cafe & Guesthouse.

Start at the southeast light-industrial end of Nelson on Government Road, which becomes Granite Road. It's a steady climb for about 15 kilometres, past modest houses, with dense woods and pretty mountain views along the nicely paved, lightly trafficked road. Turn left onto Blewett Road; further along, a sharp hairpin turn takes you down (and down, and down) to cross the Kootenay River canal and hydro dam. Blewett Road ends at Highway 6, requiring a short ride along the busy highway before you turn into the Slocan Valley Rail Trail trailhead parking lot. From here, it's four km on a paved, car-free bike path to the Frog Peak Cafe.

Located at the 25-km mark from Nelson, the café is in a restored 1896 heritage building, with a big patio and shaded gardens. The menu offers lots of options for refuelling, from a brie and turkey panini paired with daily-made soup, to a scrumptious sushi bowl. Excellent coffee boosts the ride back to Nelson.

There's the option to ride another 25 km toward Castlegar, along Pass Creek Road, which starts just across Highway 6 from the café. Pass Creek Road winds leisurely through the

Krestova area, a rural community settled by Doukhobor families who'd originally immigrated from Russia and Ukraine at the turn of the last century.

In the 1950s, Krestova saw much unrest when a Doukhobor group called the Sons of Freedom held nude protests and burned their own homes as acts of civil disobedience. That resulted in fines, convictions and hundreds of children from Sons of Freedom families being forcibly removed and placed in institutions. In February 2024, a formal apology was given from the B.C. government to Sons of Freedom Doukhobors and their families.

Today, Krestova is a sleepy area dotted with houses, farms and pastures. A few homesteads are blighted with wrecked vehicles and other debris, but mostly the scenery along this 21.5-km stretch is beautiful and bucolic.

A right turn onto Robson Access Road, and another right again on Broadwater Road, leads to the Tudor-style Lion's Head Smoke & Brew Pub, popular with local cyclists. Its wide veranda is the perfect place to wrap up an outdoor adventure with a cold craft beer and a platter of applewood-smoked meats.

From the Lion's Head, you can arrange a shuttle back to Nelson with John Bowden, the owner of Kootenay Cycling Adventures ([kootenaycyclingadventures.com](http://kootenaycyclingadventures.com)), while the strong of leg and heart can ride back under their own steam, turning the day into a 100-km out-and-back with 658 metres of elevation gain.



**2 THE SLOCAN VALLEY RAIL TRAIL, SOUTH TO NORTH**

**Distance 52 km one way**

This spectacular rail trail through the Slocan Valley can be ridden from south to north or vice versa — or, do both directions with an overnigher, starting from the Slocan Valley Rail Trail (SVRT) trailhead off Highway 6 near the Dam Restaurant & Bar at the south end and riding north to the village of Slocan along the winding Slocan River.

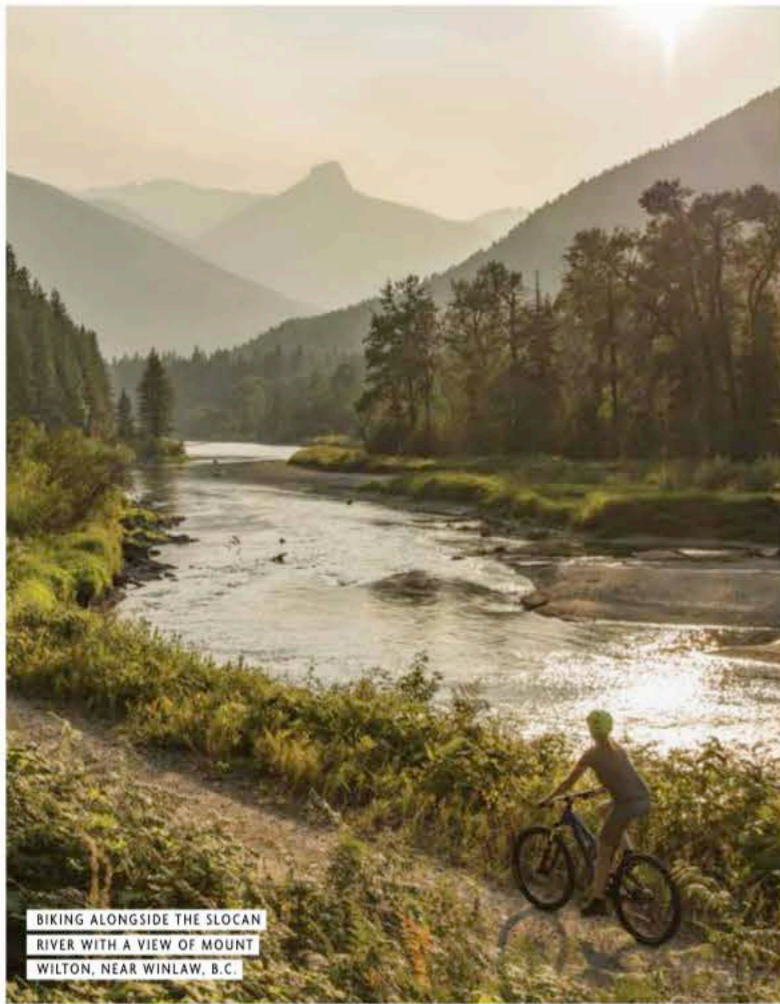
Built during a silver-mining boom in the late 1890s, the last train on this railroad ran in 1993. Once the rails, ties and bridges were removed, volunteers worked with the B.C. government to build a non-motorized recreational corridor. It's an ongoing process (sometimes, you come across heavy equipment operators laying fresh gravel) so the surface of the SVRT varies, from short paved sections, to fine or coarsely crushed gravel. Some stretches are like a country lane, with grass, buttercups and daisies growing up the middle. Ferns, cedars and bulrushes flourish in the damp, shaded sections. The grade is gentle, with little elevation gain, allowing users to look up and enjoy dramatic views of the river and Selkirk Mountains. And no cars!

It's an isolated area, with old ranches and tiny villages sprinkled here and there; expect to encounter only a handful of other cyclists on the trail. Along the way are picnic areas with outhouses, spots for a dip in the river and several parking lots for access (no need to ride the whole 52 km). At the 30-km mark, stop for lunch in sleepy Winlaw where Mama Sita's Cafe serves burgers, Mexican and Canadian fare, and good espresso.

A leisurely ride takes about four hours and ends in the village of Slocan. Once a booming resource city at the toe of Slocan Lake, it's now home to just 379 residents, with a lovely beach and close proximity to magnificent Valhalla Provincial Park.

It's easy to spot the bright yellow Slocan City Hotel, a renovated 1950s-era hardware store that reopened in 2022 as a five-room eco-boutique hotel, restaurant and live music venue with a Wild West-cum-New Orleans vibe.

John E. Pettigrew, a.k.a. Johnny Tornado, a noted blues guitarist, is the hotel proprietor and occasional chef. He serves up a tasty Greek salad and pizza with salami, prosciutto, four cheeses and mushrooms. If there's no live music on offer, you'll probably be happy to crash early.



BIKING ALONGSIDE THE SLOCAN RIVER WITH A VIEW OF MOUNT WILTON, NEAR WINLAW, B.C.

**3 SLOCAN VALLEY RAIL TRAIL, NORTH TO SOUTH (OPTIONAL PERRYS BACK ROAD DETOUR) ▲**

**Distance 55.5 km one way**

One of the most popular day rides offered by Nelson-based Kootenay Cycling Adventures starts in the village of Slocan. Owner John Bowden drops off clients and their rental bikes before they ride south to the Frog Peak Cafe. It's slightly downhill in this direction, which makes the trip even dreamier.

If you opt to spend the night in Slocan, prime yourself first thing in the morning with excellent cappuccino and wedges of roasted veggie quiche on the front porch of tiny Flaca's Bakery & Bistro. Just down the street is the well-stocked Slocan Village Market, perfect for grabbing picnic fare before jumping back on the Slocan Valley Rail Trail.

To see some new sights, Bowden recommends a detour: cycling 13 km south on the SVRT and then turning right onto Perrys Back Road, which parallels the west side of the Slocan River. It's a great suggestion (most Calgarians would kill for such a beautiful, quiet country road, sans pickups and semi-trucks.) In fact, there's almost no traffic as the paved road rolls through green forest and past well-appointed acreages. A couple of steep climbs — one of which might have you off your seat and pushing your bike — also make for thrilling downhill.

Ride Perrys Back Road for about 25 km to Passmore Lower Road near the village of Passmore, where you then cross a bridge and rejoin the tamer SVRT. From there, it's another 13.5 km to the Frog Peak Cafe where you can stop for a coffee before biking the remaining four km back to your vehicle at the SVRT trailhead.

PHOTO BY KARI MEDIG

THE WRITER EN ROUTE FROM PROCTER TO THE HARROP-PROCTER CABLE FERRY TERMINAL.



**4 CINNAMON BUN RIDE TO PROCTER ▲**

**Distance 16 km/70 km**

Hopping on a ferry and then cycling to the wee town of Procter for a legendary cinnamon bun is a Kootenay must-do — a scenic ride with a big payoff. Depending on time and energy level, this trip can be a short ride or a much longer one.

If you choose the short-and-sweet version, drive 27 km northeast from Nelson on Highway 3A to the Harrop-Procter Cable Ferry terminal, then park and unload your bike. The free cable ferry on the west arm of Kootenay Lake is a three-minute crossing that runs 24/7 year-round and offers delightful views of surrounding communities and birdlife.

The Harrop Procter Road on the south shore is a pretty, paved rural route, with little traffic,

especially after the few cars from the ferry zoom past. There's a hill starting out from the ferry dock, but it's an otherwise easy ride east alongside farms and acreages.

In just eight km, you'll arrive in Procter. Turn up 3rd Avenue and look for The Procter Village Café, located in a charming old schoolhouse. The bakery's cinnamon buns are the Goldilocks of buns: huge, but not too huge; soft, chewy and not too sweet; unblemished by raisins or nuts (yeah, I said it); and oh, *so fresh*. The cappuccino is divine, too. Once you're fortified with sugar and caffeine, the eight-km ride back to the ferry is over in a flash.

To really earn-and-burn the calories, serious roadies bike the 70-km out-and-back from Nelson. Or they join the official Cinnamon Bun Ride, an annual three-day event in May that raises funds to maintain the schoolhouse.



**BIKE RENTALS AND TOURS**

For road and rail trail cycling in the West Kootenay region, **Kootenay Cycling Adventures** in Nelson offers a range of fully supported or self-supported bicycle tours, including private and custom trips. High-quality bike rentals (e-bikes, too) are available with tour packages. In the East Kootenays, if you're in need of bike rentals, check out **Bootleg Bike Co.** or **Black Dog Cycle and Ski** in Kimberley, or **North Star Bicycle Company** in Cranbrook.



**WHERE TO STAY (AND EAT)**

**IN NELSON**

Originally a miners' hotel, **The Stirling All Suites Hotel** in the historic downtown area has been transformed into a stylish boutique hotel with 16 high-end contemporary but cozy apartments, all with fully equipped kitchens, in-suite laundry, Endy mattresses and other luxe touches. There's a barrel sauna and secure bike/ski lockup onsite. For off-beat cocktails and nibbles in Nelson try **Red Light Ramen**; for dinner, the Italian fare at **Marzano** is excellent.

**IN KIMBERLEY**

Drawing on its roots as a former mining company headquarters, **The Larix** is a boutique hotel that's equal parts urban chic, industrial cool and mountain retreat. It's located at the tip of the alpine town's pedestrian-only centre with its inviting mix of restaurants, pubs and shops. The Larix also has a barrel sauna and secure bike/ski lockup onsite. Nearby, **The Shed** is a good bet for beer and barbecue. And if you need cold-pressed juices and whole foods as well as fuel for your vehicle check out **Stoke Market** located inside a Centex gas station.





## 5 THE NORTH STAR RAIL TRAIL

**Distance** 52 km return

Switching gears from the West Kootenays to the eastern side of the region, the 26-km rail trail linking the towns of Kimberley and Cranbrook, packs a scenic punch. It's tucked between the Purcells and the Rocky Mountains, sprinkled with aspen and pine forest and grasslands, with sights of the St. Mary River sparkling below.

If you start at the top, in Kimberley, you don't really pedal much for the first 16 or 17 km downhill to where a bridge crosses the river and the trail begins its ascent toward Cranbrook. The paved, car-free trail is lovingly maintained, with markings for every kilometre, plus out-houses, benches and even a bike pump and tool station at

the southern trailhead. The North Star is also well used by walkers and runners. You might spot people gathering bundles of fragrant sage in meadows near the trail.

Pack a picnic and eat at one of the awe-inspiring viewpoints. If you elect to go into Cranbrook, follow the signage of the Rotary Way. The route is confusing at times, but it eventually leads into downtown. Have lunch on the patio at the Heid Out Restaurant and Brew-house, where you can refuel with tasty Buddha Bowls.

Every calorie will be appreciated as the trip into town adds an extra 10 km and the ride back to Kimberley is mostly uphill. That said, there are several access points along the trail, making it possible to park and ride short sections of the superb North Star. 🚲