



Two - Wheeling It

Photo courtesy Tourism Cranbrook

Winter fat biking in the Kootenays

By Hans Tammemagi

Cranbrook is the southern gateway to a natural wonderland. Highway 95 wanders northward along the Kootenay Valley, nestled between the snowcapped peaks of the Purcell Mountains to the west and the Rocky Mountains to the east. There is epic scenery, historic towns, interesting, passionate characters and a relaxed, easy-going way of life.

The region is a magnificent feast for nature lovers and outdoor enthusiasts. And activities don't slow when the crisp, clean blanket of white descends in wintertime. Instead, downhill and cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, ice climbing and hiking take to the fore.

Enthusiasts from near and far head to Kimberley Alpine Resort with 80 downhill ski runs, which lies 28 kilometres to the northwest in the Purcell Range. In the other direction (southeast), is the Fernie Alpine



Photo by Hans Tammemagi.

Resort, with 142 runs and 37 feet of snow in a season. Both resorts offer a medley of skiing, boarding, cross-country

skiing, tubing, snowshoeing and much more. For those who wish to stay closer to home, the trail-rich Community Forest and the South Star cross-country ski areas are located right on the edge of Cranbrook, offering a plethora of hiking, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing.

But amid this richness of white, a new activity has quietly emerged. Biking enthusiasts, not happy with just whizzing along old railway beds or slaloming down winding mountain trails in the spring, summer and fall, have converted the bicycle into a winter steed. How, you ask? The trick to getting a good grip on a loose, slippery surface like snow is to use fat tires (at least four inches in diameter) that are only partially inflated. Adding studs to the rubber is also an option. Indeed, this technological change has worked so well that fat-tire biking, which started about eight years ago, has now become super trendy.

In addition to set trails, fat-tire bikes

go well on any snow that has been packed — they're not good in powder — such as snowmobile or snowshoeing trails. (They're also suitable for desert sands but, of course, none exist in the Cranbrook region.)

"Fat biking," says James McKee, a fat-bike trail groomer and enthusiastic rider, "is much like Dungeons and Dragons, enjoying a popularity that verges on fervour."

Today there are about 50 fat-tire bikers in the Cranbrook area. Most belong to the Wildhorse Cycling Club. Fat bike rides can be short and intense, leaving your pulse hammering as you weave down twisting downhill trails, similar to mountain biking in summer. Or, they can be flatter and longer like summer-time road or converted rail-bed cycling.

Fat bikes, as the name suggests, are heavier, and require more effort to ride. Pedalling a fat bike is like walking in a pair of big winter boots: it takes more energy than in running shoes. Of course, the thicker the snow, the more difficult it becomes. But if you're an enthusiast, who cares?

As Nathan Siemens, one of the avid fat bikers in the Cranbrook area, says, "It's more a social thing in winter. The stops are more frequent, last longer and the whisky goes down much smoother."

But rest assured, the trails showcase the beautiful Kootenay Valley with plenty of rollers and mountain and river views.

For competitive spirits, fat bike racing is held annually at Nipika Mountain Resort, about 150 kilometres to the north. The Cross River Ripper Fat Bike Race is held there each February.





KOOTENAY GATEWAY
INFORMATION - ART - TRAVEL - ADVENTURES





LOCAL BC ART & SOUVENIR STORE

Visit us downtown Rossland
Your Adventure Starts Here!

- CONTACT US TO BOOK TRANSPORTATION & TOURS -
**TRAIL & CASTLEGAR AIRPORT SHUTTLES,
MOUNTAIN BIKE & SNOWSHOE TOURS.**

2118 Columbia Ave. Rossland | 250.362.0080
kootenaygateway.com



FIND IT HERE.



TAMARACK
CENTRE.CA

Over 35
stores & services

1500 Cranbrook Street North

Proudly managed by:  **CRESTWELL**

Cranbrook's trail network is well suited for winter bike riding. The rolling terrain and wide-spaced trees allow for easy grooming access and a wide variety of riding skill levels. Thanks to this, and James McKee, who on a voluntary basis operates a special grooming machine, Cranbrook has one of the largest groomed, winter bike-riding trail networks in western Canada. Last winter, James set a double loop trail in the South Star cross-country ski area just south of Cranbrook and two, double-loop trails in the Community Forest to the east of the city. The result is about 70 kilometres of set level track, 21 inches wide, packed solid enough to walk on, snowshoe, ski or bike.

James adds, "For a bit of flair, the grooming machine makes an attractive and distinctive corduroy pattern in the snow."

Just when you thought you could enjoy sitting by the fireplace with a hot rum toddy, along comes fat-tire biking. 🏂

GETTING THERE ➡

Pacific Coastal Airlines offers daily flights between Vancouver and Cranbrook, and Cranbrook and Kelowna, with connecting options to other destinations within their network.. See pacificcoastal.com



Tom Shypitka

Your MLA for Kootenay East

250-417-6022

tom.shypitka.MLA@leg.bc.ca

302-535 Victoria Ave., N. Cranbrook, BC

TomShypitka.ca

BOUTIQUE HERITAGE HOTEL



Only hotel in Powell River offering complimentary full hot breakfast of your choice

Save **10%** on your first night's stay
Please call or email us and mention this ad to receive discount

Free WIFI, parking & bike storage



Breakfast
Mon-Fri 7-11 AM
Sat-Sun 7-1 PM



1/2 block from
Townsite Brewing

604.483.4000

OldCourtHouseInn.ca

OldCourt@Telus.net

Live Life

IN YOUR NEW HOME



Call today! **250.737.1435**

INDEPENDENT RETIREMENT COMMUNITIES

- Wedgwood House, Duncan
- The Camelot, Victoria
- Hawthorne Place, Qualicum
- Stevenson Place, Comox



NovaPacific.ca

Licensed Strata Property Management