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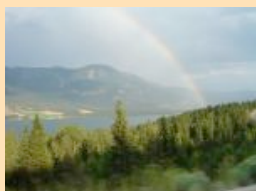
## East Meets West

[March 23, 2007]

*The ESFR Crew Hits Up Fernie Fat Tire Adventures – Win a FREE trip!*



**Source:** Johanna Haas



Winter has been in full effect in Canada until recently, with temperatures reaching 20 below in many places, and as I a biker, I've heard it all: ripping around in circles in an empty basement; track stands on the back of the sofa; even lying flat on your back with your legs in the air and feet on the pedals, practicing tailwhips or no footers upside down and stationary. When it's too cold to ride outdoors, unless you're lucky enough to live close to an indoor park, either you freeze your cajones and do it anyway, or you tend to go a little nuts. And if you're anything like me, your mind is already dreaming of where and what to ride as soon as the ice thaws this spring...

The good news is, ESFR took a trip out West this past summer and thinks it has just the way to make those dreams come true. So if you can't ride, at least sit back, stroke that little mouse on your desk, and scroll through a story of biking bliss.

We at ESFR had heard the name Fernie Fat Tire Adventures (FFTA) before, and were intrigued by it, so when they invited us out to come report on one of their "Best of the West" DH tours, we were stoked. The tour group would leave from Fernie, B.C., which is just across the border from Alberta, and spend the next 6 days hitting up some of the best riding in the Kootenays, a section of the Canadian Rockies that's so beautiful and tempting to ride that, according to one of our guides and FFTA owners, when people call in to work sick, they get razzed for having "Kootenay Fever".



### Day 1

FFTA offers guests the option of being picked up from Calgary airport and put up at their lodge the evening before Day 1, but since ESFR had just driven its rental van straight across the country (unlimited kilometers guarantee put to the ultimate test!), we met the group at

Fernie Alpine Resort (FAR) in the morning. The group included 3 guides called Rich, "Fast Eddie", and Kim, 3 burly brothers + 1 burly friend from Pennsylvania, 1 guy from Quebec who was travelling with the group but riding XC, 1 guy from Ontario who would soon be known only as Johnny Freeride, and 2 other freeriders from Ontario.

We rode mostly on our own for the first day – really do-it-yourself style. The guides would point us down suitable trails when asked, but mainly let us do our own thing.

FAR itself was beautiful, nestled in the green mountainside with colourful flowers blooming around the deck of the lodge. It had a small community feel, with tons of friendly people, and in terms of riding, it had everything from super-steep, dry and slidey terrain to stunts to berms and jumps...even after a full 10 days of riding in BC, including at the almighty Whistler, this place remains one of my favourites for overall atmosphere and variety.



When we were finally tuckered out for the day, we drove a short 5 minutes to FFTA's lodge for dinner, where I learned that I had the distinction of being the first-ever female guest on a DH tour. Now, after a solid day of riding, pretty much any food tastes great, but trust me, as someone who prides herself on being a foodie, when I tell you that dinner was a quasi-gourmet affair. That particular evening, we were served steak and potatoes, complete with sauces and salads, but throughout the trip, we would continue to enjoy extravagant spreads that included various salads, chili, homemade breakfast burritos, deli-style sandwiches with fresh cold cuts and cheese, and eggs benedict. There was also always an unlimited supply of granola bars to stock your hydrapack and, although it was not included in the cost of the tour, there was always excellent BC brew to be found in local corner stores.

## Day 2

The FFTA lodge was extremely comfortable, but maybe more ideal for winter weather, with windows that opened only slightly. This afforded us one very poor night's sleep, but when we mentioned it to our guides, they immediately brought us an electric fan for the next night, which made a huge difference.

Otherwise, we spent another day riding FAR, eating more great food prepared by FFTA staff, and becoming ever more intimately acquainted with BC's beverage offerings.

It was also around this point in the tour that the group was getting to know each other better. One member of our group had dubbed himself "Johnny Freeride", a moniker that stuck for the rest of the trip. And we learned that our tour guides were not only expert bikers, but also experts in sociolinguistics, introducing us to some West coast terms like "solid" and "slay it". In fact, our guides were so effective in teaching us these terms that by the end of the tour, we would be "slaying" just about everything, from tricky trails and stunts to our own lunch meat ("Hey man, that sandwich is huge – slay it!").



## Day 3

This was meant to be a rest day, but after sleeping in, the ESFR crew took advantage of the proximity of the FFTA lodge to FAR and went for a final afternoon on FAR's trails.

One of the nice things about spending this much time in one location is that it allows you to get very familiar with the trails and the terrain, and to start gaining confidence and pushing yourself to try new things. As a Quebec rider, I had never really ridden a stunt before coming to BC, and by the end of this day, I was able to ride some ladders and bridges with relative confidence. Having the time to get comfortable riding stunts at FAR was key, because there would be many more stunts to ride in the coming days!

#### Day 4



Originally, the plan had been to travel in FFTA's van to Invermere today, but there had been reports of forest fires in that area, so we played it safe and stayed in Fernie instead. Ok, maybe safe isn't the right word...for today's ride, we were picked up by a Unimog (see pic), harnessed in, and shuttled up a mountain to do the "Microwave Tower" to the

"3 Kings" ride.

The Unimog handled almost everything the rugged logging road threw at it, except the altitude. Nearly at the top, the massive vehicle's engine began to backfire, forcing the driver to stop precariously at the edge of the steep road. As the vehicle rolled backward in neutral before pulling forward again, a few of us nervously fingered the release buttons on our harnesses, and after the second or third time, we had hopped out to hike up the rest of the mountain. It's rare when you can claim that your shuttle ride up the mountain was almost as exciting as the ride down!



But in the end, the Microwave Tower beat out the Unimog for adrenaline points. This ride was challenging for even the best among our group, since the narrow trail dropped into the bowl of a mountain and continued, with some sharp switchbacks, along the exposed inner edge of the mountain. This meant that there was steep hillside both to your right and left, and with your tires on an 8-12" singletrack, one clipped pedal could put you over the edge. After the Microwave Tower, we hit 3

Kings, another locally made trail that ended with a roller-coastery smorgasbord of smooth, forested singletrack and well-built stunts. The Microwave Tower was definitely some scary stuff, but the views, the feeling of accomplishment, the unique experience, and the firsthand look at some trails created and ridden by locals made this ride one of the highlights of the tour.

When we arrived back at the lodge, we had yet another delicious meal, packed up our gear, and left for Panorama Mountain Village. As if the day hadn't been good enough already, we got to see some stunning scenery on the drive up and then soak in a hot tub in our condo complex at the base of Panorama.



## Day 5



We woke up in our cushy condo fully rested and refreshed and, after being fed well by our guides, grabbed our bikes and headed up the lift. This hill has a 4X track, a trials park, a drop park, and a few nice trails, but to this Eastern rider, there was only one run on my radar – Crazytrain. This trail has the perfect mix of flowy forest riding, short technical sections, and impeccably built stunts, the best of which is a long ramp into a wooden berm that kicks you up and back onto the trail. The super bonus of

Crazytrain is that it ends right at the top of the 4X track. After checking out what the mountain had to offer, and riding Crazytrain more times than I can remember, I was satisfied with my day of riding at Panorama and was ready to move on. As much as I enjoyed the riding, the absolute selling point of Panorama is that when you're done for the day, you can stash your bike and hit up the hot tub and water slides. Going straight from dirty descent to chlorine-clean splashing is quite possibly the best way to cap off a day of riding.

After reluctantly leaving the water park, we climbed into the van for a beautiful late-afternoon drive up to Golden, where we would camp for the night.

## Day 6

We woke up in the morning and crawled out of our tents to find Fast Eddie preparing a pot of Hollandaise sauce and real, brewed coffee. I had experienced many firsts so far on this trip, and this was yet another – eggs benedict at a campsite. After breakfast, we shuttled up Mt. Seven. At over 4000 feet high, there's a reason that the annual race down this



mountain is called Psychosis. Our group split up for this ride – one hit the Psychosis racecourse, with its super steep, brake-melting singletrack, and the other opted for something a little mellower, but no less fun. Both groups hooked up near the bottom for a run down Snake Hill, which is, incredibly, a natural hard-packed bobsled track for bikes, and one of the most fun bits of trail I have ever ridden.



After a second run down Snake Hill, the group returned to the campsite for some sandwiches, and this is where most of us parted ways. The XC rider in our group headed off with one guide toward Banff, a couple others headed up Mt. Seven again for an optional paraglide (which they claim was outstanding, but was a little too pricey for this poor writer), and yet others hung around the campsite and played Frisbee. Although the group was still

planning another shuttle up Mt. 7 later that day, and a half-day at Kicking Horse Resort the following day, the ESFR crew had to leave early in order to make the 10-hour drive to Vancouver/Whistler in time for Slopestyle.

We left tired but happy, definitely in much better shape, with much sharpened skills, and a lot more notches in our biking belts.

## The Bottom Line

Having read the full account of the tour, you're probably either wondering, "Where do I sign up?" or "Is this kind of tour really for me?" Here's some info to help you figure it out:

The guides – The guides are all truly expert, well-rounded riders (Kim, for example, has ridden the TransRockies and will likely kick your butt both uphill and down) who can adapt to your level and will share their knowledge of all things Kootenay. It is also important to note that this is not your typical guided tour. The itinerary is pre-set, but the owners and operators are all bikers too and are pretty laid back. After all, you are the paying customer, and the guides encourage you to make it your trip. They will be happy to let you do your own thing on the resort days, but if you let them know you want more guidance, they will oblige. If you want to skip something, do more of something, or change something, they are open to it, as long as the group agrees.



The group -- The group aspect of the tour is something that may or may not appeal to you. Groups can get as large as 8 to 10 riders who might come from anywhere in the world. If you are really outgoing and love to meet new people, this may sound great to you. If you're only in it for the ride and think you can get along with just about anybody for 7 days, it may not matter. A good way to avoid the crapshoot is to sign up for the tour with at least one riding buddy, or better yet, get a small group of your biking friends in on it.



The riding – You will ride at 3 lift-accessed bike resorts, and have 3 shuttle experiences (barring forest fires, that is). The resorts are places that you could easily travel to and ride at without being part of a tour group, but the real benefit of the tour is the shuttling. You get all your transportation arranged for you and have the guides to show you through the trail networks. If you are very industrious, and/or already know some people in the area, you might be able to figure out places like Mt. 7, Microwave Tower, and 3 Kings on your own, but FFTA does a great job of taking it all off your hands and letting you focus on the riding.

The cost – The trip costs \$1495 CDN, which includes all lift tickets, accommodations, and most meals. If you were to spend a week riding in the Kootenays on your own, you could find lower-end motel rooms as cheap as about \$60 a night, but accommodations that are equivalent to what you get with FFTA will likely run around \$75 - \$125 / night, and food around \$20 / meal, not to mention lift tickets at around \$35 each, plus all transportation...well, you do the math, but it adds up. Throw in the guides' services and the shuttle experiences, and the price tag is really quite reasonable.



Overall, ESFR immensely enjoyed its trip out West, and liked what FFTA had to offer. If a worry-free super dose of concentrated biking in a variety of picturesque settings sounds like heaven to you, this very well might be the experience you've been looking for.

Fernie Fat Tire Adventures has recently changed its name to Sacred Rides, in part because it no longer just a local Fernie company, but

now also offers biking tours in Peru.

For more information and bookings, visit [www.sacredrides.com](http://www.sacredrides.com), or just to win a free trip (visit their site before April 30th!)

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