

THE SCENE

48 HOURS

Extend or Get a Jump on the Season in Cranbrook

An extensive trail network and the Southern B.C. Interior clime offer many months of top riding

by **Tim Banfield**

Several years ago, I rarely heard of people from Calgary and Canmore going to Cranbrook. B.C., to ride. Now, most weekends in the late fall and spring, I often have one or two friends heading to the singletrack in the Southern Interior when our local riding is shut down because of weather or because trails that haven't thawed from the winter snows yet. The Cranbrook area is often one of the first locations in Canada where you can ride early in the season.

I went to Cranbrook for a quick visit to see what all the hype was about and was not disappointed. To the northeast of the city, there's Cranbrook Community Forest. It's 2,000 hectares of Crown land with close to 100 trails



Photo: Tim Banfield

running roughly 170 km. I took on fast, flowy routes, such as Roller Coaster, Green Chicken and More Poultry. More advanced trails with technical features, such as Stunty, offer excellent views of Cranbrook. From town, it's a quick ride to the trailhead, so instead of packing a lunch, you can pop back into the city for a meal or a treat in between sessions. Afterwards, the après-bike scene is quite strong.

What to ride

If you have 48 hours to spend in Cranbrook, start the day off at Hot Shots Cafe for coffee and a morning breakfast burrito. If you are in a rush, no worries—ordering ahead on the website is easy. While you are online, open Ride with GPS and upload the Around Moyie Mtn route to your cycling computer. The 47.5-km loop starts at the south end of town and features 978 m of elevation gain as it heads around Cranbrook Mountain on a mix of gravel and paved trails. The route trends upward for 25 km, and then you are treated with a predominantly downhill run until you make it back to town. Depending on what time you start the loop, you should be back to your car around noon. Grab lunch or a frozen yogurt at Twisted Peaks, and then drive to the Community Forest parking area at the College of the Rockies.

For a longer cross country style route in the large trail network, put together a loop that starts with Going Up, The Bumps, Hobgoblin and finish back at the car on Roller Coaster, which is one of the area's premier trails with flowy turns, high-speed rollers and a mini jump line. Depending on the trails you take to link everything up, you'll cover a minimum of 18 km and 509 m of elevation gain.

After a great day of riding around Cranbrook Mountain and some afternoon fun in the Community Forest, go to the Fire Hall Kitchen and Tap. There is usually a large selection of riders there in the evening. If you can't find parking nearby and are worried about your bike, bring it with you and place it on the bike rack on the patio.

For your second day of riding, make your way to the Isadore Canyon Trailhead on the west side of the Community Forest near Highway 3. Start on Pilset and head for Larry. Then merge with the Windy Bluff Trail. These sections will take you to the top of one of the most fun trails in Cranbrook called Stunty. With unique rock rolls and technical wood features, Stunty is an excellent freeride route. Then, take Upper Coaster to the top of Green Chicken. Follow Green Chicken into More Poultry for fun, flowy black-diamond riding. This circuit will be 12.7 km with 377 m of elevation gain, sampling some of the best riding in the area.

"With unique rock rolls and technical wood features, Stunty is an excellent freeride route."

Next, drive north to the Eager Lookout Trailhead. Begin riding on R2DTour and the Padawan adaptive trail. The views of Mount Fischer and the surrounding mountain range are superb, especially the times of year when there is still snow in the peaks. After finishing this loop, increase the difficulty with a run on Chewbacca Rocka. These loops will total 17.6 km and 360 m of elevation gain. If







you are visiting Cranbrook from the east, this spot is also the most convenient trailhead from which to make your departure for your trip home.

Currently, a few new trails are being created in Cranbrook. College of the Rockies is installing a new short jump trail and wall ride in the Community Forest that brings you back down to the campus area. The Community Forest trail plan also proposes four new routes to be constructed at the Eager Lookout area—two machine-built green trails and two handbuilt blues. It will add up to a little less than 20 km of new singletrack in the already extensive, and fantastic, network of trails.



The Details

How to get there

Cranbrook is the local hub for riding in the Southern B.C. Interior. It's a little more than an hour's drive to Fernie and about four hours to Calgary. Cranbrook is usually one of the first places to have mountain biking options in Canada because of its warmer temperatures and dry climate. If you don't live within driving distance, the international airport in town is always an option.

Where to stay

There are a couple of places to camp in Cranbrook, including Regency Park RV Resort and Campground, not far from the Community Forest. If that place is full, you can head to several sites just outside town, such as Moyie Lake Provincial Park, Jimsmith Lake Provincial Park and the Fort Steele Campground. If a hotel is your thing, the Prestige Rocky Mountain Resort is in a central location.

Where to eat

Cranbrook has changed in the past several years with the downtown core becoming quite a trendy location. There are fantastic spots to grab a coffee before riding and restaurants for the après-bike scene. For a morning coffee, check out Hot Shots Cafe (*hotshotscafe.ca*). Once you come off the trails, head to the Fire Hall Kitchen and Tap (*firehallcbk.ca*). Go for the Hobo burger; it's excellent. The Fire Hall even has its own mountain bike jersey if you want a souvenir from your trip. Are you traveling with kids? Then grab the Little Dirtbag Sliders. One dollar from each sale of this dish helps support underprivileged kids to attend Blue Lake Camp.

Some other standout fuelling options are the Heid Out Restaurant and Brewery (*theheidout.ca*) and the Himalayan Spice Bistro (*himalayanspicebistro.com*) nearby. For a treat, grab some frozen yogurt at Twisted Peaks (*twistedpeaks.ca*).

Where to shop

For things bike-related, check out Northstar Bicycle Co. (*northstarbicycle.ca*) near the Community Forest or Gerick Sports (*gericksports.com*).

Photos: Tim Banfield