

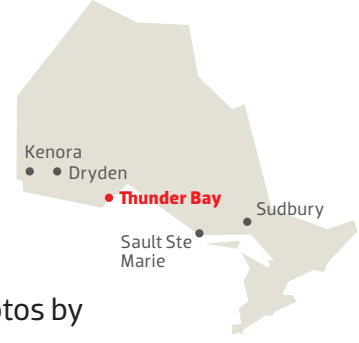


THE SCENE

48 HOURS

Thunder Bay's Mountain Biking Haven

The network in Trowbridge Forest has been growing. This fall, the country's top marathon riders will pay it a visit. You should, too



story and photos by **Tim Banfield**



LEFT, BELOW AND OPPOSITE
Trowbridge Falls trails

BOTTOM
Kinsmen Park mountain bike skills park

In Canmore, B.C., where I live, it feels like there are many expats from Thunder Bay, Ont. From them, I've heard about the great riding and climbing in their hometown, and finally checked it out this past fall. The heart of Thunder Bay mountain biking lies at the Trowbridge Forest trail system northeast of the city. Its 32 km of singletrack and 15 km of doubletrack trails have been a popular location for hiking and cross-country skiing. With the addition of a bike skills park and flow trails throughout the past three years, Trowbridge Forest is now a mountain bike destination. The flow trails—built by the Blacksheep Mountain Bike Club—are fast and fluid, with berms, rollers and jumps that compare to sections of trail you'd usually find out west.





Planning your two days in Thunder Bay

If you have 48 hours to ride in Thunder Bay, you should focus on Trowbridge. Begin your day at St. Paul Roastery downtown, grab a coffee and a baked good from Swell Bakery next door. Get to the bakery early because it's popular and routinely sells out. The doors close once everything is gone.

The main parking area for Trowbridge Forest is at the north end, near the Kinsmen Bike Park. Start in the bike park itself, and then head across the bridge that leads to the singletrack on the other side of Current River. Most of the riding centres around a mesa that provides some gain for the ups and great rides down. Take Conveyor Belt, a machine built climb track that switches up the

mesa and connects you with many other trails in the system. Since Conveyor Belt is a green trail, it provides an easy way up and is a great morning warm-up before jumping on some steeper lines.

From Conveyor Belt, grab Hydro Connector and head to Drift, which is a great introduction to the latest flow trails. Rip through a series of sweeping turns and gentle rollers in open forest that lets you see the berms ahead. It's just steep enough to make things fun, but nothing too crazy. You can cruise through, and then head back to the top of the mesa.

Find your way to Mesaround and cruise along the top of the mesa over Canadian Shield rock to get to the top of the next lines. Scary Canary, as the name suggests, not for the faint of heart. As you roll in the first section of the trail, it's a tight singletrack with jumps leading into sharp corners that require some attention.

Since you have the downhill component of the day going, you'll next have to grab Lift Access and head back up to the top to do it all again. Ride Magma Day. It delivers in spades for those looking for a bit more challenge. This trail features a steeper gradient and more technical features, including tight turns, fun berms and jumps. One section with several berms linked in a row stood out for me. Since it's a downhill-only trail, you can let it rip and not worry about uphill traffic. This one is worth riding several times; I was always smiling at the end of each lap.

At the end of your day, hit the jumps or the pump track back at the bike park before packing up. For some post-ride grub, I recommend Beefcakes Burger Factory, which is a mere 3 km away. In the evening, make sure to check out some more of Thunder Bay's restaurants. The foodie scene is quite good.

For your second day in T-Bay, head to the same parking spot at Trowbridge for a more downhill-flavoured day. Warm-up in the bike park once again. Next, head straight for Lift Access. I suggest you revisit Magma Day. You'll enjoy the trail even more as it's your second time on it. Head back up to Lift Access and hit Look Out!, which will take you toward the original trail system known as Shuniah Mines, where some of the trails take you over tailing piles. Pedal over to Rocky Road. Its 250 m take you on a descent that brings you back to the base of a small cliff line. The trail is predominantly rock for its entire length with



cedar bridges and berms. It's slow and technical, requiring a lot of attention. Good luck putting the whole thing together your first time without a dab.

In contrast to Rocky Road, The Vein—the crown jewel of the new bike trails—features a series of big jumps, one after the other, tucked away in the forest with berms and several rollers that are possible to double. This trail is worth sessioning if you are a fan of jump lines.

When one of the local senders, Joe Weber, went west to ride this past summer,



he thought The Vein was a great line to get him ready. "It was paramount in preparation for Whistler. It has a decent amount of 5 to 8 m jumps in quick succession that flow together perfectly. The Trowbridge jumps lines, ranging from green to double black, and The Vein prepared me for the massive scale of Whistler's jumps. When I first dropped into A-Line at Whistler, I was surprised to find that it felt like a bigger and much faster version of The Vein. I didn't feel that out of my depth when sending the jumps or railing the corners."

You might draw some inspiration from Weber by closing your day of riding back at the Kinsmen Bike Park to take on some of the jump lines there. Once the bike is on your rack, drive back into town and hit one of the local restaurants. If you are in a rush, Rebel Salad is a fantastic and healthy fast-food option.

The story behind the trails and bike skills park

A driving force behind the expansion of Trowbridge is the Blacksheep Mountain Bike Club. It's a dynamic, community-oriented organization with more than 500 members. In 2017, the City of Thunder Day, the club and other partners developed the Trowbridge Forest master plan project, which outlined the expansion of the trail system as well as the cost—$1.5 million. Throughout the following years, the



OPPOSITE
Trowbridge Falls Trails

LEFT
Shuniah Forty Miner, Trowbridge Falls Trails

funds came in through grants. Then, it was time to get to work.

Volunteers came together, contributing their time and resources to create a space that celebrates the sport and provides a safe and enjoyable riding experience. "Seriously, what's happened in the past 10 years is quite amazing. Still, we always knew we had something special in our surroundings," says local rider Greg Jensen.

The Blacksheep Mountain Bike Club's contributions to Thunder Bay extend beyond the trails. The group cultivates a vibrant and inclusive mountain biking culture in the area. Through organized rides, skills clinics and social events, "the flock" provides opportunities for riders of all levels to connect, learn and share their passion for mountain biking.

Top events in the Thunder Bay area

In addition to the trails, Thunder Bay is also home to the Shuniah Forty Miner festival, a mountain bike race that has become a staple in the regional racing calendar. The event features a variety of categories and distances, allowing riders of all abilities to participate and test their mettle against the clock.

Looking ahead to September 2024, Thunder Bay is set to host the 2024 cross country marathon national championships, which will bring the best riders from across the country to compete. Actually, it will be a marathon of races as the Shuniah Forty Miner is set to run in the morning of Sept. 7, while the XCM champs are to start in the afternoon. For nationals, riders will do three 30.6-km laps in Trowbridge Forest. Afterwards, once those athletes head to their homes and tell their friends about Trowbridge, Thunder Bay's primes trails are sure to grow in popularity.

"It's just steep enough to make things fun, but nothing too crazy. You can cruise through, and then head back to the top of the mesa."

How to get there

Trowbridge Forest is located in Thunder Bay, Ont. It is possible to fly to the city easily from Toronto, Ottawa or Winnipeg. If you are driving, expect around a 15-hour drive from Toronto, 16 from Ottawa and eight from Winnipeg.

Where to stay

There are numerous hotel options in Thunder Bay. The nicest one in town is the Delta (*marriott.com*) located on the water at the marina. For something almost at the trails, there's is the Trowbridge Falls Municipal Campground (*thunderbay.ca*)

Where to eat

The city has a strong restaurant scene. Check out Tomlin (*tomlinrestaurant.com*) for a menu built on local fare. There's also Sovereign Room (*sovereignroom.com*), Bight Restaurant and Bar (*bightrestaurant.ca*) and Nook (*nookthunderbay.com*). Close to the trailhead and perfect for a post-ride burger is Beefcakes Burger Factory (*beefcakesburgerfactory.com*). One standout if you are looking for a fast, healthy option is Rebel Salad (*rebelsalad.ca*). I loved this place.

Many of the coffee shops are close to the downtown core. Be sure to check out St. Paul Roastery (*stpaulroastery.ca*), Rose N Crantz Roasting Co. (*rnccoffee.ca*), Bean Fiend (*facebook.com/beanfiend*) and Swell Bakery (*swellbakery.ca*), Make sure to show up at Swell Bakery early, as the place often sells out quickly.

Where to find support

Three Thunder Bay bike shops are located relatively close to each other. There's Rollin' Thunder (*rollinthunder.ca*) on Memorial Avenue. 3Ride (*3ride.com*) is located downtown in the Goods & Co. Market, within a transformed Eaton's building that now features numerous shops that include health food, locally made art and, of course, the bike shop. It's a cool initiative for revitalizing an old space. Finally, there's Fresh Air (*freshairexperience.ca*) on Balmoral Street.