



Annika Broden-Riddington photo



High-flying at the Whistler Mountain Bike Park Pete Brennan photo

## One Giant leap for wheelkind

By Brian Raiser

The air was hot and dusty. After a moment with the wind in our faces, we had cooled down enough to strike up a conversation with our temporary travel companion. Taking a long pull on his water bottle, he stared thoughtfully at his surroundings and you could sense his brain was just pulling out of memory lane. "Remember when riding a bike was all about getting away, checking your supplies, ensuring you had enough food, tools and safety equipment to get you through the day? Just you and the rest of the rabble you convinced to join you for the next five hours in the bush. The blood pumped as your legs and brain accepted its fate only because it knew, soon enough, you'd be rewarded by the sweetest of two wheel nectar, the juicy downhill."

Taking on a sly grin he continued "Now? Well now, everything has changed." As if to prove his point, the conversation was sharply cut off as we quickly approached the summit which meant lifting our posteriors off the foam mats and onto our bikes. Without so much as a huff, we had climbed over 4,000 vertical feet in minutes.

### Welcome to the Whistler bike park, where everything changed.

Fast becoming one of North America's mountain biking Mecca's, the Whistler Bike Park is nothing short of addicting. Or, more accurately, the juice box convenience by which the park dispenses the most amazing adrenaline fueled trails, has riders of all abilities wanting more. In less time than it takes to change a flat, you can easily be perched on the verge of over 200 kilometers of lift-serviced, gravity fueled descending trails.

Don't let the extreme façade fool you; the park isn't just for the "I can still bounce" teenager. In fact the bike park offers something for every level of rider. There are several beginner trails featuring gentle, banked cruiser runs all the while gliding through the breathtaking coastal forest.

Then when you inevitably feel more adventurous there's tight and twisty single track. Perfect for those wanting a little excitement while staying within the realm of perceived sanity.

Then of course there's the trails built for the super humans. The riders who look like extras from a high school's adaptation of Mad Max. Little to no skin is exposed as these riders adorn full face helmet, spine protector, arm armor, gloves, plus knee and shin pads. All this perched upon a 40 pound bike that suspiciously looks like it's lacking a motor. These adrenaline junkies of the highest order have several death defying, sanity questioning trails to choose from. Each featuring everything from steep rock faces, gnarly, root strewn lines, drop offs of all descriptions plus more surprises around every burmed corner.

99 NORTH MAGAZINE 12 SUMMER/FALL 2003

Last year local freeride poster boy Richie Schley specifically designed a trail for the park that has a bit of everything. Rocky, rooty single-track, rock drops, slick rock, wooden ramps, gap jumps, table top booters, not to mention the signature "Schley Drop" - a 12 foot step down jump coming off a wooden ladder to a dirt landing.

However, there is but one Holy Grail trail that keeps the big boys and girls all coming back. The crown jewel run that is A-Line. To some the 'A' stands for addicting, to others it's amazing, and most I'm sure would simply call it asinine, but as far as the big bike riders are concerned, it's absolutely brilliant. The most beautiful, rhythmic flow of tabletops, hip jumps, and deep burms that, when hit just right, is the closest thing to flying on two wheels.

For those seeking the famous 'north shore' flavor of riding the park also offers skill centres. Rated from beginner to intermediate, these areas offer every level of rider the opportunity to test their balance on bountiful bridgework. For the beginner there are several stunts that are carefully built close to ground level for riders just learning to clear obstacles and ride the plank. For those of a more intermediate notion the blue zone steps it up a notch by raising, narrowing and tightening all of the classic bridgework elements.

Then for those who want nothing but the nuttiest, there's the Dangerous Dan inspired double black skills centre. This is not for the faint-of-heart. Tightrope walkers would cringe at the dazzling display of North Shore-style obstacles definitely reserved for those of an experienced nature.

And for those who simply would rather sit back and watch the two wheel flying circus, there are plenty of patios with great views of all the action. With record turnout each consecutive year, and raves from around the world, the Whistler Bike Park looks to be an industry leader that is here to stay. Constantly pushing the limits, while remaining accessible, the park remains on the forefront of the relatively new revolution that is downhill mountain biking.



Annika Broden-Riddington photo

Now if you'll excuse me, I believe there's room for one more on the gondola. 🍷