

SIMBS

South Island Mountain Bike Society

Once a sub-culture on Vancouver Island, mountain biking has quickly become a major attraction. Originating in the mid 80's, the sport has seen an 80% increase in participation over the last 10 years. With its ideal landscape and a climate that allows year-round cycling, the island has gained international recognition as a venue for professionals. Listing the names of all the world-class riders maintaining local residences would render this article into an extensive index. Most members of the Canadian national teams (representing both mountain and street bike racers) call the island home and local riders number between 5 and 10 thousand.

Some of the credit for the island's international hype goes to a natural tour recognized throughout the mountain biking world. Starting on the mainland's Sunshine Coast, the trail continues in Victoria, progresses to Sooke, Jordan River, on to the Comox Valley, (including Mount Washington, where lifts are open to bikers from June until October), and to Port Alberni before crossing back over the pond to Whistler.

Lorien Arnold, owner and operator of Sooke Cycles, leads the group of enthusiasts supporting Sooke as the fastest growing area dedicated to mountain biking. Sooke has gained global notoriety as the northern gateway to the island's cycling tour, drawing riders from all corners of the world. CRD's newly acquired Harbour View Park is earmarked to become the next park legally approved for mountain biking. Cyclists seeking recommendations on local routes and rides are encouraged to drop in at Sooke Cycles.

Victoria's prime offering and most well known location for technical riding is Mount Work-Hartland park, the only CRD park currently deemed legal for riding. The trails attract nearly 90,000 visitors annually. Maintained and operated by SIMBS (South Island Mountain Bike Society), the site hosts a segment of the Island Cup Race Series known as the "Down and Dirty at the Dump" race. Hartland would easily become more highly recognized and host to more major events if blessed with additional spectator and parking capacity, issues SIMBS is currently advocating. SIMBS offers information on the area, including trail maintenance instruction and site maps, sold at almost every bike shop in town.

The finals of the Island Cup Race Series take place at Mount Washington in August. The cross-country final, a grueling event of endurance and dedication, is scheduled on the 13th, and the most popular spectator event, the downhill, on the 14th. For the downhill, a timed race, competitors sport body armor and under their own free will, not only descend impossible slopes but do the unthinkable. They pedal, hard.



Photos: James Brown



sooke cycle



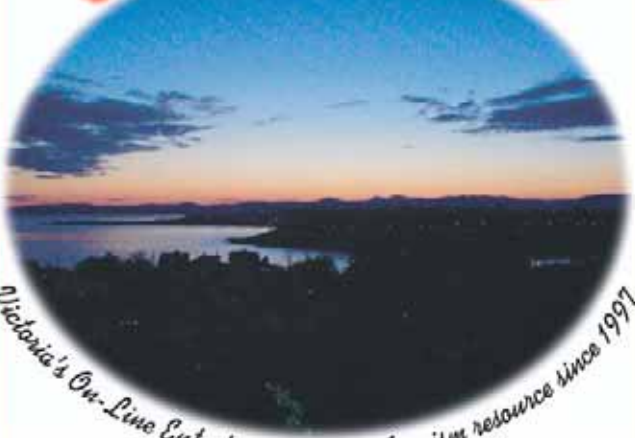
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As ideal a location for amateurs as it is for professionals, the island is a hot bed for training. Suitable for all ages, mountain biking is a great sport for families. "Suqoi" offers a two-day women's dirt camp with small group instruction, group rides and gear demos. If you're looking for something for the kids, check out "Sprockids" ([HYPERLINK "http://www.canadian-cycling.com/sprockids" www.canadian-cycling.com/sprockids](http://www.canadian-cycling.com/sprockids)), offered at the Seapark Recreation Center in Sooke. Their course focuses on the four main elements of cycling: safety, etiquette, riding, and bike maintenance. Teaching proper nutrition, hydration, pedal stroking, climbing/descending and "laying the bike down" (a.k.a. crashing properly), the course builds self-confidence, endurance, athletic ability, decision-making skills and respect for nature. For adults already involved in the sport and wishing to do more, there's the Canadian Mountain Bike Instructor Certificate. With the increased popularity in the sport, there is a demand for certified trainers, presenting an opportunity to further your involvement while encouraging others. For more information, see www.wcsmb.com (West Coast School of Mountain Biking).

We live in one of the world's best venues for mountain biking. So whether you're young or old, pro or just interested, consider mountain biking as a hobby or as an opportunity to become involved in sporting events. Don't pass up the chance to be part of something in which the island is leading the world. Gear up.



STRAIGHT UP CYCLES LTD.

**2652 QUADRA STREET
VICTORIA, BC V8T 4E3**

**TEL: (250) 480-1944
FAX: (250) 480-1945**



GARY FISHER

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