



# Yukon adventure

Join *MBUK* on an epic journey through mountain biking's next Mecca – but try to keep it secret...

Words Mike Jones, Andreas Hestler Pics Derek Crowe

**P**aging Curtis Saunders!" the loudspeaker at Vancouver International Airport boomed out. Things were getting tense. We were due to depart to the Yukon, the land of the endless sun, but our third rider was missing! Worry turned to panic: the check-in for our flight was due to close in just two minutes.

Mike had half of Curtis's gear – including his bike – but Curtis was nowhere to be seen. Where was he? Had he made his morning connection?

Had he already checked in? Was he lying in a ditch somewhere?

Just as we were about to give up, we received a reply to our page. Our delinquent third rider had been loafing casually at the gate having checked in early, sans bike! Fortunately, we were able to get his gear and bike onto the plane with no hassle and the trip was a go. We were off to discover the North.

The Yukon is a cold, desolate, hard place of lifeless indifference and swarming bugs, all in a world of permafrost, »





# THE RIDE AT GREY MOUNTAIN WAS ONE OF THE BEST EPICS WE'VE EVER DONE

The Yukon river was an incredible backdrop



One of the Yukon's more 'Indiana Jones' moments



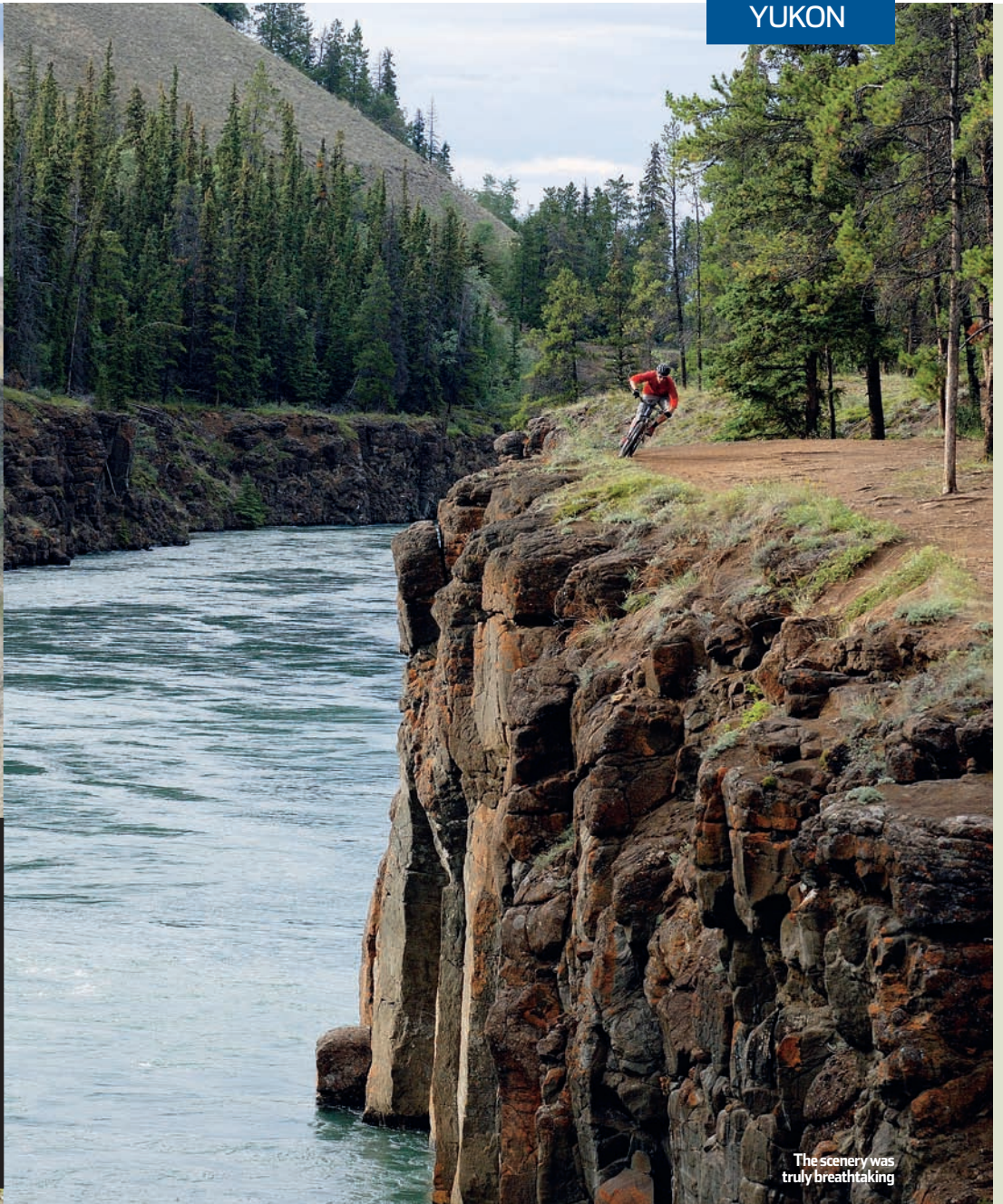
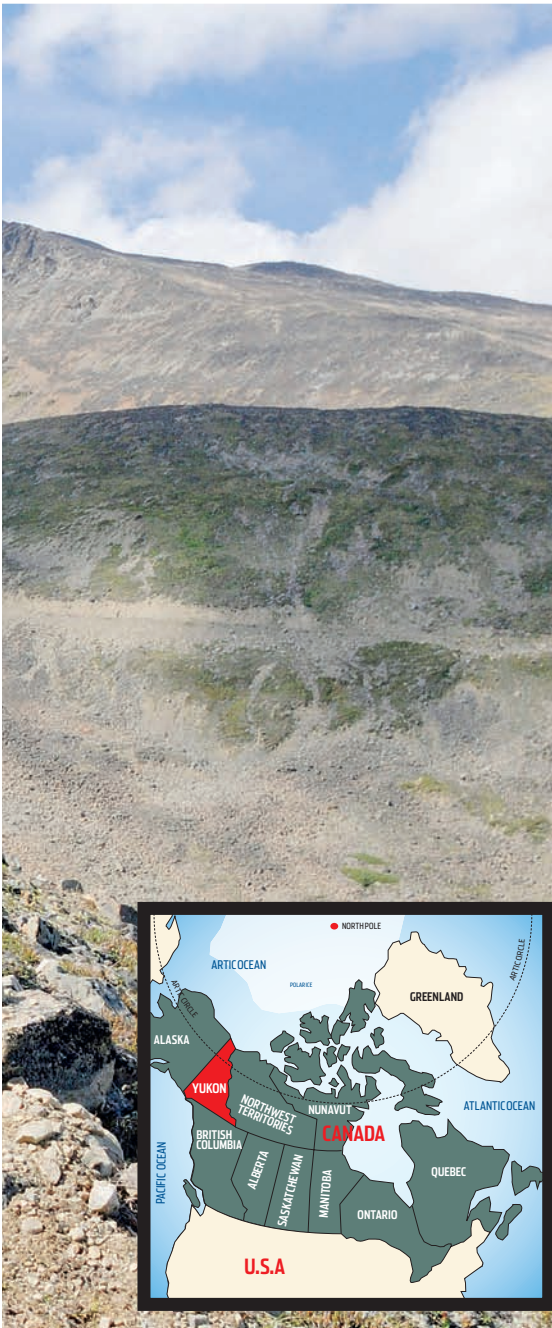
Mike takes a ride in the ore buckets of the Mountain Hero Tramway



The rocks and woodwork of Montana Mountain

Dust flies as Mike Jones rails the berm on the Tincup trail





The scenery was truly breathtaking



tundra and ice. We'd all heard about the bugs, swarms of deadly evil gnats, mosquitos and black flies crawling up our noses and into our ears. There are many rumours that circulate about the Canadian north and we weren't too sure what to expect.

What we learned was that the rumours are wrong. Take everything you might think about northern Canada, warm it up, tone it down and then forget about it. These rumours must have been made by savvy locals intent on keeping this place a secret. Summer in the Yukon is actually warm, glowing and sunny, with hundreds of miles of amazing singletrack, sand dunes, hoodoos and vast mountain peaks, all coupled with an awesome sense of hospitality with relaxed and laidback locals. In short, a hidden paradise they'd like to keep hidden, so don't tell anybody else...

### Trail history

The Yukon is the size of California, but with a population of about 32,000 people, of which 24,000 live in

the capital city of Whitehorse in the south-west corner. There's a lot of room for outdoor recreation and the people here have a history of building trails. We quickly discovered that Whitehorse is home to approximately 750km of soon-to-be-mapped, flowy, fast single- and doubletrack.

Built on the banks of the Yukon River, Whitehorse is situated near the halfway point along the route thousands followed to the famed goldfields of Dawson City during the Klondike Gold Rush of the late 1800s. The town is named after the river rapids that looked like a team of rearing white horses, turning the river into a torrent of raging froth. Early explorers and prospectors would typically flip their boats in these rapids, losing all of their belongings. They needed to restock their supplies, so the town of Whitehorse was born.

While in Whitehorse we did four main rides, including the trails right in the city limits, to which we were able to ride right from our hotel. The trails in town also included hoodoos and clay

## THE RIDERS AND CREW A WHO'S WHO OF THE YUKON POSSE

### ANDREAS HESTLER (AKA DRE)

**Age:** 37  
**Sponsors:** Rocky Mountain Bikes, Shimano, Marzocchi, Sombrio, Ryders Eyewear, Red Truck Beer  
Andreas got his first mountain bike in 1986, began racing in 1989 and hasn't looked back since. He's won five Canadian National Titles, attended the 1996 Olympics, spent nearly a decade on the World Cup Circuit and scored five consecutive wins at the Trans Rockies. Dre searches the world for more daring-do and epic-ness. "I know it's out there, I just need to find it," he says.

### MIKE JONES

**Age:** 31  
**Sponsors:** Marin Bikes,

Kenda Tires, Fox Suspension, Dangerboy, Clif Bar, Oakley, Hayes, WTB, e.thirteen, ODI  
Mike's been racing for more than 10 years and is the former Canadian National Downhill Champion and a five-time national team member. Today Mike coaches, conducts ride and skills camps around North America, works on product research and development, and searches the world for new mountain biking adventures.

### CURTIS SAUNDERS

**Age:** 27  
**Sponsors:** Marin Bikes, Sombrio  
Born in Comox Valley, British Columbia, Curtis has been racing bikes

since 1990 and has raced elite DH and expert XC. His life goal, he says, is to "stop working a real job as soon as possible and pursue my real-life calling: becoming a professional recreator." His favourite thing about the Yukon trip was how welcoming and generous the people were.

### DEREK CROWE

**Age:** 33  
Born and raised in the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia, Derek has been racing mountain bikes since 1990 in both Elite XC and Expert DH. Now he says he's "over the hill and coaching/lying about the good old days!" He's been living in the Yukon and earning a crust with his camera since 2000.

# THE YUKON HAS SO MUCH TO OFFER AND WE HAVE ONLY SCRATCHED THE SURFACE

## YUKON BOUND GETTING THERE

### Flights

The best way to get to the Yukon is from Vancouver. It's just a two-hour flight north to the small and friendly Whitehorse Airport. Air North - [www.flyairnorth.com](http://www.flyairnorth.com) - is the airline of choice.

### Where to stay

In Whitehorse, try the Yukon Inn (tel: 001 867 667 2527, [www.yukoninn.com](http://www.yukoninn.com)). There are hoodoos right behind the hotel and great rides right from the door of the hotel. In Carcross, the Spirit Lake Lodge is the best bet for accommodation (tel: 001 867 821 4337, [spiritlake@excite.com](mailto:spiritlake@excite.com)). It's a short drive into Carcross from the lodge.

### Guiding and trail information

Cycle Sport, Whitehorse's local bike shop, also has a fantastic coffee shop (tel: 001 867 668 7559). Guiding services and referrals can also be found by contacting Chris Milner, a serious shredder and a great personality. You can reach him for guiding information on 001 867 393 4554 or 001 867 334 2457, or by email at [chrismilner@northwestel.net](mailto:chrismilner@northwestel.net). For information on the trails and riding or Project Singletrack in Carcross, contact Jane Koepke (tel: 001 867 456 4025 or email her at [jane@northwestel.net](mailto:jane@northwestel.net)).

More info from [www.travel yukon.com](http://www.travel yukon.com)



## EPIC RIDE GREY MOUNTAIN: ANDREAS' PERSPECTIVE

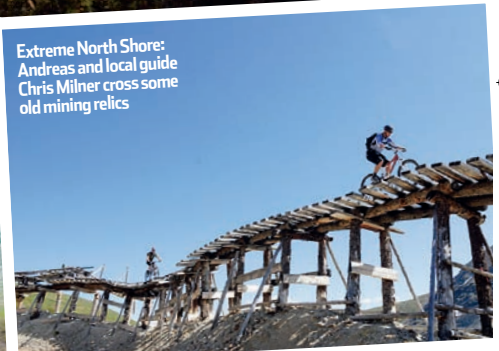
Grey Mountain dominates the skyline of Whitehorse and from the top there's a 360-degree panorama, with views of the city and the Yukon River. Seeing a 4,000ft descent stretched out before you takes your breath away.

Descending takes you into the alpine duff, where you can shred down with amazing, breathtaking views and steep technicals. The terrain was constantly changing and I had one amazing group of riders to share it with. From the upper trails of 'Money Shot', 'Easy Money' and 'Pay Back' to the lower trails of 'SFD' (as in Straight F'ing Down) and 'Girlfriend', we had a hoot as we doubled 'em up and drifted the corners. We were still riding at 10pm as the sun hung low with that special orange light that just draws your breath and gives you a feeling of awe. This has to be one of the top 10 rides of my life.

Andreas Hestler rides on the edge of Miles Canyon



Extreme North Shore: Andreas and local guide Chris Milner cross some old mining relics



cliffs, which reminded us of old-school Kamloops freeriding. The ride at Grey Mountain was one of the best epics we've ever done, and we also found a short but scenic ride out at Miles Canyon, an impressive cliff funnel that was the gateway to the original impassable rapids of Whitehorse.

Riding here had us pinned flat out on fast cross-country singletrack. These trails are made up of smooth, sandy, dusty dirt that begged us to carve two-wheel drifts and long floating airs while dropping over high speed rollers and ridges into the next flat-out drifting corner. Andreas rode his 6in travel Rocky Mountain Slayer SXC and Curtis and Mike were on Marin's new 5in travel Mount Vision Quad XC trail bikes. The new generation of all-mountain trail bikes makes everything from cross-country to downhill possible with one bike.

With an appetite worked up for world-class trails, we headed one hour

down the highway to the village of Carcross. It's a one-horse, one-gas-station town that boasts a colourful history and is today beginning to take centre-stage on the mountain biking world map.

### Alpine treat

Carcross is geographically fascinating. It is actually a desert climate and there are huge sand dunes, which are driven by strong winds off of the lakes. The winds, lakes and dunes also make Carcross a kite-boarding heaven. The town is completely surrounded by 5,000-6,000ft peaks, all of which are void of trees from about 3,500ft, making for amazing alpine riding. There's been a plethora of trail building in the area in the last two years as the Carcross/Tagish First Nation has funded the youth trail crew Singletrack To Success project.

Flowing the trails in Carcross was a treat. They were absolutely perfect, designed for mountain bikes, fresh and »

# THE TRAILS IN CARCROSS WERE ABSOLUTELY PERFECT



Admiring the view from the top of the Sam McGee trail



Andreas and Chris savour the singletrack



## CARCROSS/TAGISH FIRST NATION AND PROJECT SINGLETRACK

The village of Carcross is currently rekindling its trail history, which started with ancient hunting trails and continued through guiding and porter services during the gold and silver rushes. Today, more than 100 years later, in an era of self-governance, the Carcross/Tagish First Nation is recreating its trail heritage as it pursues its Singletrack To Success project, which puts local First Nation youths to work developing and building trails to create

a world-class mountain bike trail network.

We came across the crew as they were finishing their most recent trail. The group rides during work hours once a week to test the fruits of their labour. This project is benefiting the community, the youth and the people who play on these trails. It's amazing to see the people who have historical claims to this land now responsible for managing it in a sustainable, respectful way.

loamy. We ended up doing laps on a few of these trails, again and again. It's hard to say if it was the magic of the Yukon, but the riding we did here was some of the best we have done anywhere in the world.

Looming behind Carcross is the imposing sight of Montana Mountain – it just goes up and up. Our second epic ride of this week had us travel through the alpine and over this impressive monolith on the Sam McGee trail.

The history along this trail is amazing and uniquely Canadian. There are mines and old chutes everywhere, stone houses cut right into the shale slopes. How did these hardy men of the north live here and build these structures with nothing but human brawn and beasts of burden? Truly the scope of human strength and determination stands in the Yukon as a testament to not only our greed, but also our ability to build and live in the inhospitable lands of the high alpine and shale slopes.

From the top we descended down, down, down on bermed trails crafted for

riding. Here we were in the middle of nowhere and there were dialed trails carving their way underneath a 100-year-old wooden tram line, which was built with the fruitless intention of transporting ore extracted from the high mountains to the valley below.

We flowed these trails, examining the old tram and rusted machinery, to finally reach the south head of the Sam McGee hiking trail, a drop of 2,500 vertical in about 15 minutes of screaming, adrenaline-pumping awesomeness. At the bottom we chilled at the side of an emerald lake, absorbed the scenery and relished our ride.

Bring on the Yukon: beautiful, historic, full of culture, with warm, welcoming people. British Columbia, Europe, Moab and now the Yukon: after our week here we agreed every serious mountain biker needs to put this area on their to-do list. It's amazing, wild, huge, spectacular and trail-laden. The Yukon has so much to offer and we've only scratched the surface of what promises to be a new Mecca of mountain biking. We're already planning our next trip. 🌀