



{1} steep switchbacks

{2} exposed ridgeline

{3} fast, technical descent

climb out of red mtn.

{4}

more climbing

{5}

{6} wide-open descents

{7} one wild ride

{07}

TRAIL OF THE YEAR

FROM LUNG-BUSTING SWITCHBACK CLIMBS TO EXPOSED RIDGELINE SINGLETRACK AND ENDLESS FOREST DESCENTS, THE 20-MILE-LONG SEVEN SUMMITS TRAIL OFFERS IT ALL. HERE'S A BLOW-BY-BLOW ACCOUNT OF THE SEVEN BEST PARTS OF OUR TRAIL OF THE YEAR.

BY MITCHELL SCOTT

PLEASURE AND PAIN. THESE ARE TWO OF THE MOST CRITICAL elements in a great ride, and no trail combines them better than the Seven Summits. The trail smacks riders with 4,500 feet of climbing and more than 7,000 feet of descending on some of the most rugged and beautiful terrain in North America.

Seven Summits lies just outside the mountain hamlet of Rossland,

British Columbia, and the 20 miles of point-to-point singletrack crests—you guessed it—seven mountain summits as it weaves and dips along the scenic ridges of the Rossland Range.

Conceived in 1999 as a way to increase the region's summer tourism, the trail was finally carved into earth by the Kootenay Columbia Trails Society in the summer of 2004 at a cost of \$100,000. Although technically

a multi-use trail, the Seven Summits was built entirely by mountain bikers, and has the flow to prove it. With astounding views, a railer of a final descent, and numerous bail-out options for those not prepared to tackle the whole ride—which can take anywhere from six to eight hours—the certified IMBA Epic is attracting riders from around the world. It is a mountain bike success story of the highest order.

"The success of the trail has far exceeded our expectations," says Kim Dean, director of the Kootenay Columbia Trails Society. "Businesses in town are definitely noticing an increase in mountain bike tourists to Rossland. It's become the world-class amenity we originally envisioned."

But ultimately, it's the ride—and that addictive combination of pleasure and pain—that keeps mountain bikers coming back for more. >

DEREK FRANKOWSKI

{07} TRAIL OF THE YEAR

> {1} From a kiosk just off Highway 3B at the trail's northern terminus, riders immediately dive into a 1.5-mile section of fresh singletrack completed this summer. For the next 5 miles, riders huff and puff through a pine and fir forest, grinding up technical switchbacks. After nearly 2,000 feet, the trees thin, yielding stunning 360-degree views of Old Glory, the highest peak in the Rossland Range.

> {2} From this prominent ridge top, the trail continues to climb. After 6.5 miles it reaches its highest point, 7,230 feet. But the climbing is far from over. The next 1.5 miles are some of the most spectacular as the trail sweeps west of Mt. Plewman, overlooking the mighty Columbia River to the east. What follows is a short jaunt across one of the trail's most expensive sections, a 200-yard-long stretch that crosses the steep east face of Unnecessary Peak and cost \$8,000 dollars to build. From there, riders can drop the Plewman trail if they wish, a 2,500-foot bomber descent back to the highway.

> {3} For the next 5 miles the trail follows a broad ridgeline bustling with alpine flowers. A long, fast, technical descent ends with a lengthy, steep, side-hill climb to a saddle between Mt. Kirkup and Grey Mountain before continuing up to the southwest shoulder of Grey. Now comes the first spoonful of pleasure, seven ripping switchbacks descending to Red Mountain Resort.

> {4} Pain quickly returns. Twelve miles in, the granny gear comes calling as the trail climbs Red Mountain's Lone Squaw ski run. Red Mountain's managers played a crucial role developing the Seven



HANS REY. PHOTOS: DEREK FRANKOWSKI

{07} TRAIL OF THE YEAR

CINDY KOO, PHOTO: RYAN CREARY

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Summits by helping the trails society work through its environmental-impact assessment, as well as allowing the trail to travel through the resort itself.

> {5} After leaving the resort, the trail spirals up White Wolf Ridge, testing riders with 12 steep switchbacks. It continues through steep alpine ridges, working toward Record Notch, elevation 6,460 feet. From there, two rocky switchbacks lead to the seventh and final summit. At 15 miles in, it's a good point to take a break, soak in the incredible views and fuel the furnace. There's still a long way to go.

> {6} Finally, a hard-earned, long-awaited descent. Tight switchbacks roar down the west side of Record Ridge, leading to a long traverse through open trees and clearings. Speed increases as the trail rips through vast meadows and drops back into forest. A few short, technical climbs remain, but the trail really begins to flow here. A few more switchbacks dive through grassy meadows guarded by old-growth pines before the trail transitions onto patches of bedrock—these are the smoothest sections of the entire ride. Twenty miles from the start, riders reach the finish line at Old Cascade Highway. But for those who left some gas in the tank, there's one final kicker.

> {7} The Seven Summits conveniently ends where another Rossland classic, the Dewdney trail, begins. The 100-year-old route offers 3 miles of wide-open descending and has been adopted by Rossland's downhill set. It is the perfect end to a day of pleasure and pain hammering over seven summits. ▣

More information: rosslandtrails.ca/sevensummits.htm

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MIKE WHEATER, PHOTOS: RICH WHEATER

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