



DESTINATION: PEMBERTON

Chad Hendron.
Photo: Sterling Lorence

THIS FORMER FARM TOWN HAS FOUND A NEW MOUNTAIN BIKE ECONOMY

DRIVE BOTH CARS TO THE BOTTOM. Park one of them and pile into the other. Drive to the top. Descend your brains out through steep forests surrounded by enchanting views. Drive back to the top. Drive both cars to the bottom. Repeat. This was, more or less, the only way to ride Pemberton years ago—the descents were plentiful, but trails going up were few and far between. Nothing against shuttling, but this meant a lot of time off the bike.

This all changed recently when the Canadian government decided to use money from its economic stimulus package to build trails. Pemberton received \$60,000 from the government and raised another \$60,000 for a total of \$120,000 to spend mostly on trail building—because that’s the kind of place Pemberton is.

The town, just north of Whistler, is nestled in a valley surrounded by high peaks that rise more than 8,000 feet above sea level. Pemberton’s awe-inspiring landscape sits at the edge of two climate zones—the coastal temperate rainforest and the dry, subalpine internal plateau—which makes for mile upon mile of deliciously loamy forest singletrack with plenty of granite boulders, steep chutes and small rocks and roots.

Even better, the town receives less rain than Whistler, and the riding season is longer. When trails in Whistler are too wet to ride, or covered in snow, many locals make the 20-mile drive north to Pemberton. For years, the town was popular mostly with downhill shuttlers and freeriders. Many of the trails, like Meat Grinder, were etched into the soft dirt and descended straight down the steep slopes. Some had stunts and moves designed for long-travel bikes. Only recently, fueled by the development of light-yet-capable all-mountain bikes, Pemberton’s trail network has begun to include sinuous singletrack. The transformation has been rapid and dramatic, but the area still was lacking in signature climbs.

So when the Canadian government came calling, Pemberton snatched as much trail-building funds as it could and set out building new trails so riders could pedal to the summit of local mountains. Specifically, riders used economic stimulus money to extend the Happy trail climb to the Waco Connector, then to Nimby, then to Let It Go, and finally up two more trails temporarily named the Middle and Upper trails. Combined, these trails climb more than 4,000 vertical feet,

entirely on singletrack. Even with all the climbing, the terrain still demands a long-legged bike—most locals prefer 6-inch-travel bikes for the area.

But let’s not forget, this is British Columbia. Not every penny would be spent on trails that climbed. The *magnum opus* of Pemberton’s stimulus-package trails is the aptly named Stimulus trail, which offers a grab bag of flowing-yet-technical features as it rolls over slick granite rocks and perfectly shaped dirt. It’s a gem-studded ribbon of downhill singletrack that starts from the top of Let It Go (at the old paraglide launch pad).

The trail was built with heavy influences from five of the area’s premier trail builders and follows a rocky spur into the valley, with well-sculpted corners that require only minimal speed-scrubbing. From top to bottom, it covers 2.7 miles and drops roughly 1,000 vertical feet. Combined with the new extension to the Happy/Nimby climbs, it creates an incredible all-mountain ride and a classic trail for this burgeoning destination. —RYAN LABAR

INSIDE LINE: The best time to ride Pemberton is between May and October—especially after it rains. The Pemberton Bike Company is the only shop in town, but it’s a good one. Next to the bike shop is the Pony restaurant, which offers beer and good pre- and post-ride eats. The area is sprinkled with bed-and-breakfasts for lodging. For more information go to pembertontrails.com.