

THE BACKYARD BACKCOUNTRY

Finding Foreign in the Familiar

Words and Photos by Danielle Baker



In the modern age of globalization, of social media feeds saturated with far-flung expeditions, the definition of “adventure” has changed. A true adventure, we’re told, requires plane rides or elaborate travel plans, to places hundreds of miles and thousands of dollars away. To experience something new we need to leave and go someplace, some “elsewhere,” where the exotic is lurking to blow our minds.

But what if we don’t have to go anywhere to find fresh views? Claire Buchar, Jaime Hill and I set out on a trip this summer to answer that question: “How far off the map can you go in your own backyard?”

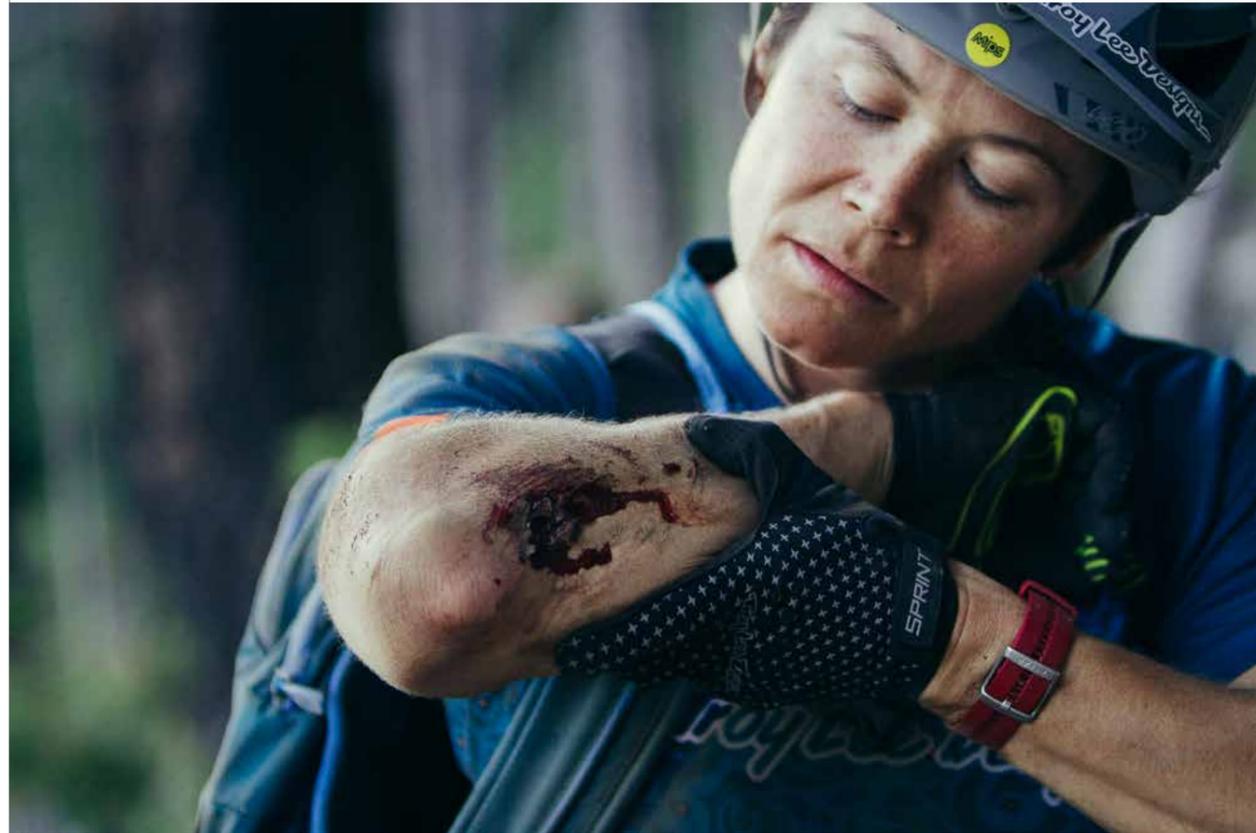
For jet-setting athletes like Claire and Jaime, the simplicity of an out-the-front-door trip is actually a novelty; for folks who spend their summers balancing hectic schedules of going “elsewhere” for racing and coaching, staying home is a welcome reprieve. And so, with three free days to play with, we sat down and sketched out a rough plan: Pedal over 45 miles and gain 8,600 feet of elevation, pushing into some new-to-us zones. And not once would we be more than an hour drive from home.

The journey would launch from Jamie and I’s hometown of Squamish, with the 15-mile round-trip to Elfin Lakes. The next day we would con-

nect a decommissioned logging road to the tip of Indian Arm, a fjord making up the northernmost branch of Burrard Inlet and the Port of Vancouver. Our friends Phil and Liette Mowatt live in a boat access-only house near the end of Indian Arm, and planned to meet us where the road dead-ended at the ocean. After overnighing with them, we would continue our travels with a boat ride into Vancouver and a Harbour Air floatplane ride to Green Lake, wrapping up the trip with some classic valley trails and ending at Claire’s home in Whistler.

Some mementos are worth keeping...even if they were given at gunpoint, and resulted in community service and a 90-day ban from your favorite playground. Original Hick Huckster Brian Tunstill and his trail building tickets from 2003. Photo: Sarah Tunstill.

After an intense season of qualifiers and injuries, Jill was the sole American woman to qualify for BMX at the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing. She came in third, adding a bronze medal to the USA's count, finishing behind France's Anne-Caroline Chausson (center) and Laëtitia Le Corguillé (left).



One of the requirements of any adventure is flexibility, and we embraced the vast amounts of gravel road pedalling the trip would require, simply because it would take us further, faster. It would also be a departure from usual daily routes, a shuffle that would create a little of its own unknown.

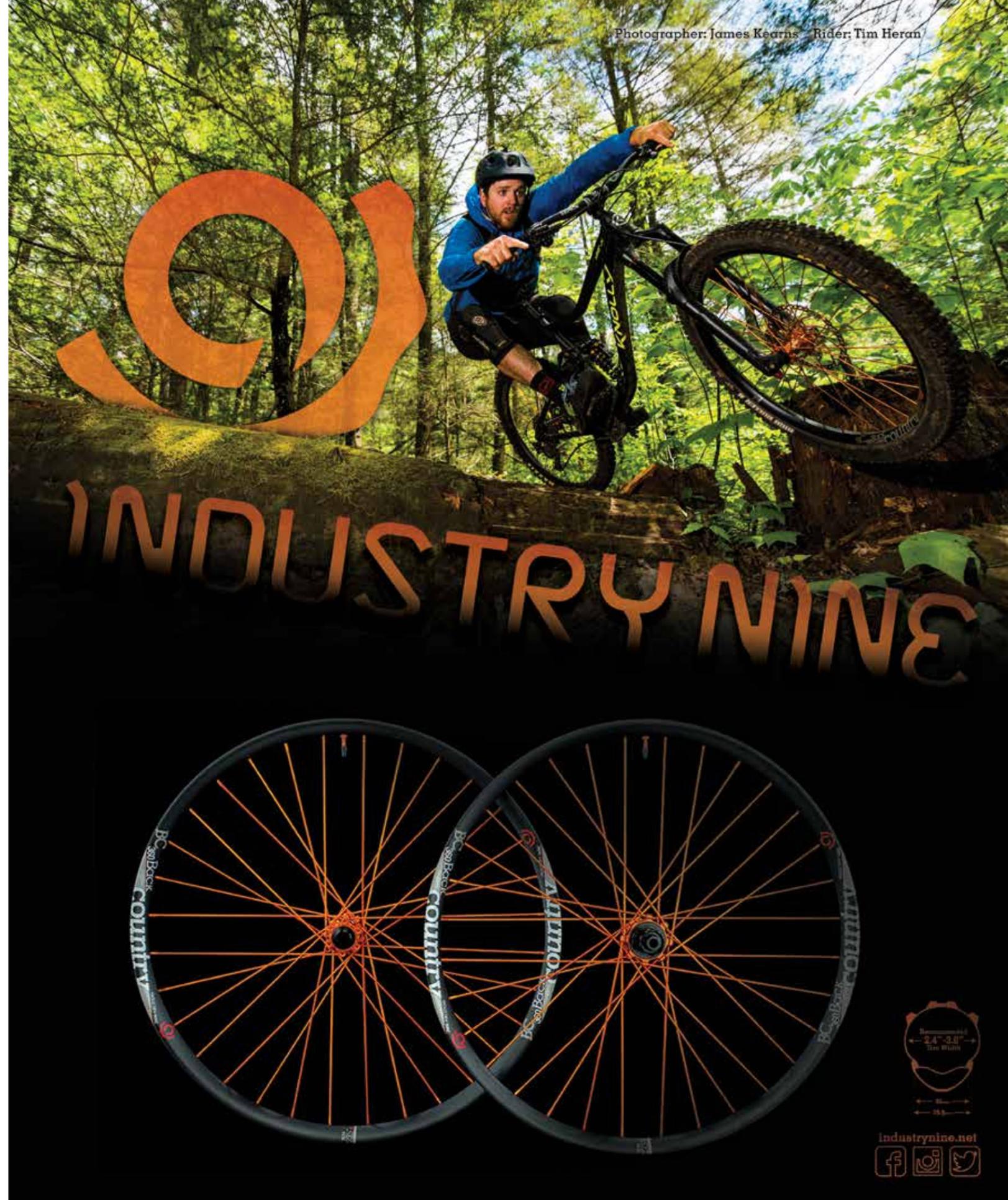
Within the first few hours we found ourselves facing everything from meat-eating swarms of blackflies to carpets of butterflies, under a backdrop of dwarfing alpine views. Each turned seemed to bring a different panoramic of vast mountain ranges, and along the way we paused to swim in glacial lakes and drink from rushing streams. It's incredible the new things you'll notice, even on familiar trails. It just takes slowing down enough to pay attention.

On that first day, as we descended back into Squamish we dipped into some of the local trails to wrap up the day, a tight, rooty and rocky finish. Under months of sun, the area's usual tackiness had been replaced with sun-parched loose earth, and halfway down Jamie washed out on a drop and landed on her elbow—hard. Jamie bravely protested our insistence that she go the hospital, until Claire put an end to the conversation with a simple statement: “Jamie, I can see inside your elbow.”

That night we ate burritos in the emergency room of the Squamish hospital. Amid the beeping machines, awkward hospital gowns and bloody discarded gloves, the attending doctor informed Jamie that there wasn't enough skin left for stitches. With

“Amid the beeping machines, awkward hospital gowns and bloody discarded gloves, the attending doctor informed Jamie that there wasn't enough skin left for stitches.”

Photographer: James Kearns Rider: Tim Heran



After an intense season of qualifiers and injuries, Jill was the sole American woman to qualify for BMX at the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing. She came in third, adding a bronze medal to the USA's count, finishing behind France's Anne-Caroline Chausson (center) and Laëtitia Le Corguillé (left).



an elbow still full of dirt, she bargained for a solution that would allow her to continue on our ride. The doctor and nurse looked at each other dubiously, but Jamie's pleading eventually won them over. They bandaged her up grudgingly and set us on our way.

By noon on our second day we had already made two wrong turns and were out of range for cell service. Our first consultation of the GPS had showed our representative blue dot happily pulsing along a wayward branch of the gravel road, headed confidently in the wrong direction. Doubling back, we corrected our errant turn and forged ahead—until we made the next wrong turn, and the next. Our anticipated 15-mile day soon ballooned to over 30.

Two hours late, we eventually made it to the dock to meet Phil in his boat. We were tired and annoyed, but also giddy with our sense of accomplishment. The frustration of each misstep had been accompanied by a strange burst of discovery, a rejuvenation of embracing the unknown. A wrong turn is a wrong turn, whether you're in a foreign country or on the backroads behind your house. And sometimes such strangeness, when in the face of the familiar, makes being lost that much more interesting.

Later that evening, after an incredible dinner, hot showers and an oceanfront soak in the hot tub, we sat in Phil and Liette's front yard watching an open-air movie among their remote little oasis. Claire leaned over and, wondering in amazement at the scene—the shower curtain-turned movie screen, the microwave popcorn served up in paper bags, and the shooting stars across the clear night sky—asked me, "How did we get here?" Before I could respond, a neighbour sitting next to me piped up and replied, "That's easy. You rode your bikes!" 🚲

“The frustration of each misstep had been accompanied by a strange burst of discovery, a rejuvenation of embracing the unknown. A wrong turn is a wrong turn, whether you're in a foreign country or on the backroads behind your house. ”

EVOC

PROTECTIVE SPORTS PACKS



R. SASCHA KLEEBERGER P. BASCHI BENDER

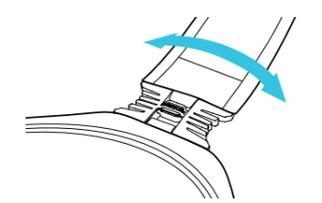
www.evocsports.com



**LITE PERFORMANCE BACKPACK
CC 10L**

The CC 10L is an extremely versatile, compact and light-weight bike backpack. Despite its clean design the pack features a large number of functional details for the most varied requirements.

BRACE LINK



Optimal adjustment of shoulder straps with the newly developed and patented BRACE LINK.