



24-hour PARTY PEOPLE

Tight and white in the land of the constant light – strange things are done under the midnight sun...

'No Lights allowed'. It's not often that you see a rule like that for a 24-hour mountain biking festival, but then Whitehorse isn't an ordinary MTB race location. Sitting pretty just under the curve of the Arctic Circle, this small Canadian city is perpetually bathed in the glow of a summer sun that never seriously sets.

A magnet for adventurous types for decades, the Yukon Territory is vast, but you don't have to go far to find some quality riding conditions. There are over 800km of mountain bike trails within Whitehorse city limits alone. OK, so city limits are pretty generous here, but still, local pedallers are perched upon an embarrassment of rideable riches, and much of their backyard playground consists of world-class cross-country singletrack.

Whitehorse has played host to the 24 Hours of Light MTB Festival for the last nine years. The action takes place on Mt McIntyre, on the city's doorstep, and the event is contested by a mixture of serious solo racers, teams of endurance enthusiasts and groups of fun-loving fat tyre fans.

By his own admission, Sylvain Turcott – co-owner of Whitehorse's Boréale Mountain Biking company and a mountain biking guide by day – fell squarely into the latter group for the festival. After all, it's hard to be taken too seriously in a pair of skimpy white undies.

"Our team was called the Tightly Whities," he explains. "There was eight of us, and all we wore while riding was a pair of tight white underpants. After each successfully completed lap, the rider would hang up his soiled tightly whities." Nice.

Sylvain's partner, Marsha Cameron, a member of

the executive committee of Whitehorse MTB Club and co-organiser of the 24 Hours Festival, says the sport has exploded in popularity around Whitehorse in recent years.

"When I came back a couple of years ago, I discovered that everyone was mountain biking," she explains. "The singletrack around here goes on forever, but it's been a bit of a local secret until now. Word is slowly getting out though."

And yet, in the five hours that we're out on the tracks around Grey Mountain a couple of days after the festival, we see not a single soul in the saddle besides ourselves – a group of four: myself, Sylvain, Phil and Dominic (pictured right).

Dominic Poirier is something of a legend. Not only is he happy to relive his Tightly Whitey day at the drop of a hat, but he also emerges intact and unflustered from one of the most spectacular crashes I've seen in ages, after tumbling from a 2-metre-high wooden ladder bridge.

Phil, an experienced rider, has made the 10-hour (each way) trip from Fairbanks in Alaska, specifically to taste test these trails over two days. Word really is getting out, and these tight and technical tracks – boasting berms, jumps, ladder bridges, log rolls, drop-offs, see-saws and spectacular views – do not disappoint.

The myriad routes range from skirting the banks of the Yukon River to hurtling through dense bush to going past historical sites from the Klondike gold rush. It's no wonder that people are finally looking beyond the trails of Vancouver, to a place further north, under the midnight sun, where you can ride around 24/7... in your undies if you like.

STORY + IMAGES Pat Kinsella



The 24 Hours of Light MTB festival turns 10 next year. For more details on how to enter and to see what all the fuss is about around the trails of Whitehorse, check out 24hoursoflight.ca. Boréale Mountain Biking offer super bike-friendly accommodation (in Mongolian Yurts) and guided mountain bike adventures in the area – see borealebiking.ca for more. For film footage direct from the Whitehorse trails, check out OE TV on outer-edge.com.au.