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When they're not riding the trails, Boréale Mountain Biking's owners are hard at work promoting their business.

Photo: courtesy Boréale Mountain Biking



## Blazing Their Own Trail

For the owners of Boréale Mountain Biking, there's no such thing as a bad day at the office.

If there's one thing made evident by a conversation with Marsha Cameron, co-owner of Whitehorse-based Boréale Mountain Biking, it's that she really, really, loves her life. Speaking over the phone from North Vancouver, B.C., where she's just wrapped a month-long promotional tour through the United States, Cameron's voice belies none of the weariness associated with 12-hour days at trade shows and instructional clinics. In the background, her business and life partner, Sylvain Turcotte, can be heard joking with friends, talking about—what else?—mountain biking. As Cameron notes, it's a subject neither of them tire of—a shared interest they've managed to turn into their full-time job. It's no wonder Cameron sounds so happy. For her and Turcotte, life is pretty sweet.

Though Boréale Mountain Biking is just under three years old, the seeds for the company were sown when Cameron, born and raised in Whitehorse, met Turcotte, originally from Victoriaville, Que., just over six years ago, when the pair were both visiting Vancouver, B.C. Cameron, who had not yet caught the biking bug, was convinced by Turcotte to take a trail ride to Squamish, a trip that left Cameron "a little bit scared and very tired, but

mostly just totally exhilarated." That one ride changed Cameron's life forever—she found her life's passion and a person to share it with, all on one trail.

Less than one year later, Turcotte and Cameron were visiting family in Québec when they happened upon a friend's adventure-tour operation, in the Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine region of the province. There, they noticed their friend had set up raised wall tents for guests to stay in, complete with beds, linens, and other creature comforts.

"I thought it was really nice," says Cameron. "It was like camping, but you didn't need to bring anything. From there, the idea was percolating. Sylvain and I were on this two-year early-retirement-type thing, and neither of us were happy with the jobs we were doing. So we thought, yeah, let's just open our own business like this. It just evolved—mountain biking was a perfect fit, and the Yukon is an amazing spot for that."

The pair spent many hours researching the market for mountain-bike adventure tours, coming up with a unique profile of their prospective clients. While willing to get muddy on the trails, mountain-bike tourists were generally an affluent group who wanted neither the sterility of a hotel

Cameron and Turcotte set out looking for a bike-in, bike-out property in Whitehorse but at first only found lots in the industrial area—totally unsuitable for tourists seeking a quiet, wilderness retreat.

nor the extra hassle of camping. Quite certain that wall tents wouldn't cut the mustard, the pair hit on the idea of yurts—relatively portable and quick to set up, yet easily outfitted with hints of luxury.

With their vision of a yurt-filled base camp in mind, Cameron and Turcotte set out looking for a bike-in, bike-out property in Whitehorse but at first only found lots in the industrial area—totally unsuitable for tourists seeking a quiet, wilderness retreat. Eventually, they discovered their current property, an expanse of flat terrain on a hilltop near Long Lake, on the north side of the Yukon River. The area, which overlooks the city centre, was designated by the City of Whitehorse as a “Natural Open Space,” and, with some negotiations, the couple were able to strike a deal with the city to lease the land from May until September each year, with a provision that the property not be altered in any permanent way.

And so, each year, with the help of friends and family, Cameron and Turcotte spend the beginning of May setting up “Yurtville.” From the smallest yurt, which houses a toilet and shower, to guest yurts of various sizes, the process takes just under 10 days. After setup, it's three months of pure fun at Boréale, with novice, intermediate, and full-on extreme riders from all over following Cameron, Turcotte, and a small crew of instructors through some of the best mountain-biking territory in the world.

After a day's ride, guests can socialize in both French and English with their hosts, relax in privacy, or drive just 15 minutes to downtown Whitehorse. Cameron is quick to note that the City of Whitehorse has been instrumental to Boréale's success by keeping trails well-maintained, offering trail-building courses, and supporting initiatives brought forward by the Yukon's mountain-biking community.

By autumn, everything is taken down and stored in a nearby barn for the winter. “At the end of the season, all we leave behind are tire tracks,” says Cameron.

The rest of the year is spent promoting the business, visiting trade shows, and using social-media outlets, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Boréale's own blog, to attract new clients.

“The beauty of the Yukon is that there's so much wilderness here, but so few people actually choose to use it for recreation,” says Cameron, summing up her life and business philosophy. “There's world-class single-track trails here. You have people that might come through here on road trips, and they're just driving through or staying in their RVs. Just get out and get on a bike for an hour, and all of the sudden you'll have this great memory.”

*Boréale Mountain Biking is located in Whitehorse, Y.T. They can be reached at (867) 332-1722 or through their website at borealebiking.ca. Y*



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Inside the luxurious digs at “Yurtville,” Boréale's summer base camp.

Photo: Dan Barham