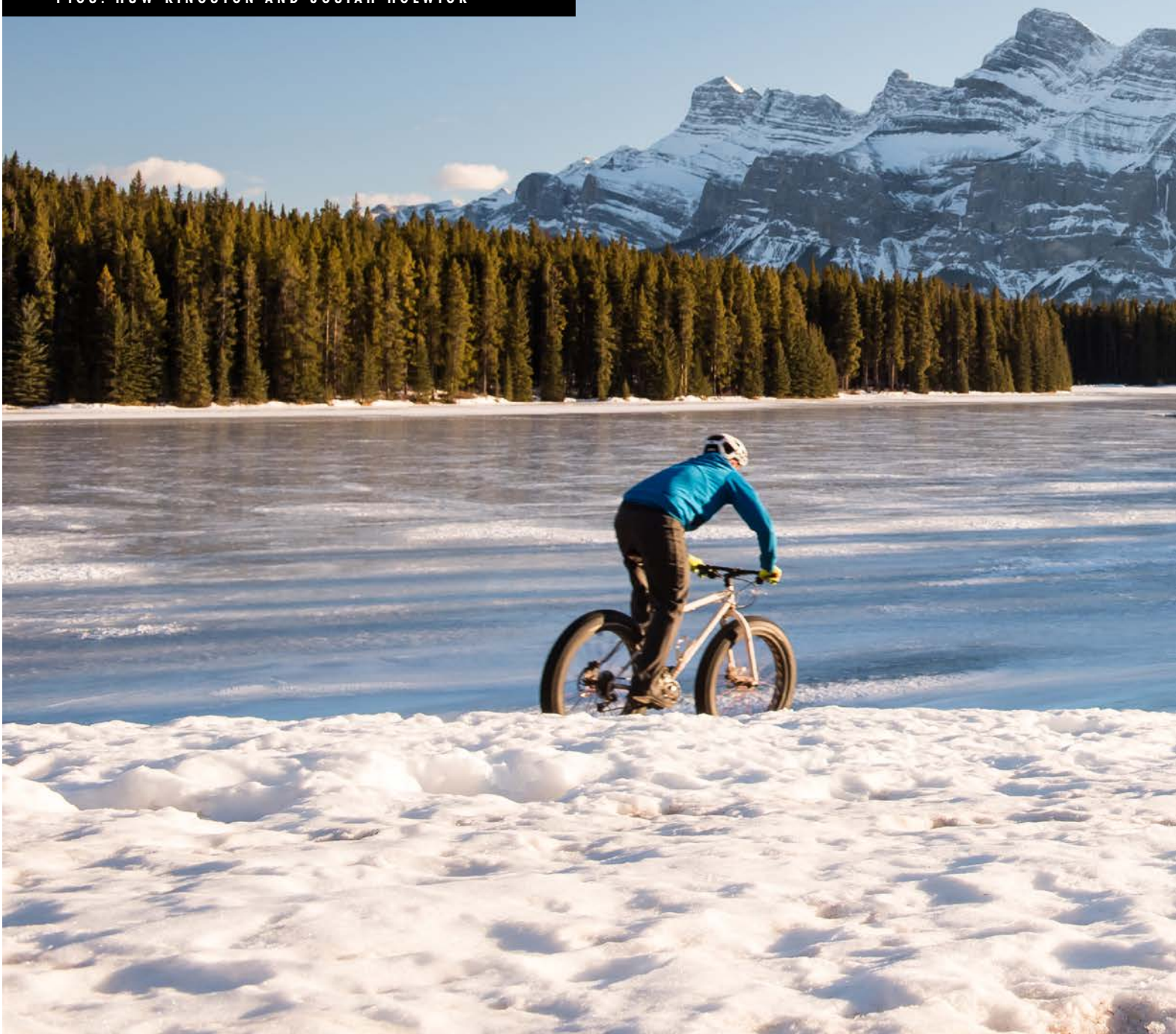


# THE OBESITY CYCLIST

*THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION GIVES HIS VIEW ON E-MTBS AND THEIR PLACE IN THE SPORT AFTER AN EVENTFUL CANADIAN SOJOURN.*

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Fat biking in Banff.





**They say the Welsh can sing.** For decades I'd happily sung songs to the wind, whether from the saddle of a bike, the seat of a kayak or sliding on skis. I made up words and tunes that probably had no real rhythm at all. I sang across deserts, oceans and mountains and it all seemed quite acceptable, quite normal. At least to me.

Here on Canada's High Rockies Trail my songs seemed forced and unnatural. "Make lots of noise on the trail," I'd been told. 'Sing, shout, sing,' I'd read. This all to forewarn any bears in the area. So I sang as I rode on this, my first visit to Canada, my first time riding a fat-bike.

Scared as I am of animals - I'll walk across the road to avoid a poodle - I think it somewhat energising when we're in the outdoors and not top of the food chain. As with Australia, Canada has it in spades - grizzly bears, polar bears, wolves, cougars, moose and more. Much as I love NZ (and I really, really do) it's a little mundane at times knowing nothing is going to take you down, eat or poison you.

"Got you a nice new Trek Farley," said Tyson, the owner of Rebound Cycle in Canmore. An imposing figure, I reckoned he would could easily go at least a couple of rounds with a grizzly. I was in the Rockies in late autumn and Tyson was getting his hire fleet ready for the winter snows. Fat-bikes would seem to have two main uses - riding snow and riding sand. I just wished they'd been around when I was pushing and pulling 2-inch tyres across the Australian deserts.

From the shop it was a short ride to the Canmore Nordic Centre where a huge network of MTB trails took off from very flash trailhead facilities. All courtesy of Canmore being the Nordic skiing venue for the 1988 Winter Olympics. In winter it still provides world class ski facilities and indeed on one trail I found the way ahead blocked by huge mounds of snow. Rather unbelievably they store snow from the previous season under a thick cover of sawdust right through the summer months. All so they can start building an early snow-base in the autumn.

As I hauled my fat-bike over the mountain of old snow, I was reminded of what I saw one time while ski touring through Zanskar in the Indian Himalaya. We came across a village surrounded by snowy fields where soil had been scattered over the top of the snow. In springtime the villagers consult the oracles as to whether they believe there will be another major snowfall. If not, then piles of soil kept on the edge of the fields are dug out and scattered across the snow. The dark colour heats up during the day and melts the snow underneath. In this way the fields are cleared of snow quicker in order







**Left:** Huw Kingston takes a rest on the High Rockies Trail, Spray Valley, Kananaskis.

**Below Left:** Fat bikes in their element in Banff.

**Below:** Moraine Lake Reflections.

“Looping around on the singletrack, the 4.5inch tyres on the Farley bounced off everything. It was all rather fun right down to my favourite sign that instructed me at one junction to ‘Bear Left’.”

to plant potatoes for the very short summer growing season of the Himalaya.

Looping around on the singletrack, the 4.5inch tyres on the Farley bounced off everything. It was all rather fun right down to my favourite sign that instructed me at one junction to ‘Bear Left’. When I did climb a little higher, the fat-bike brushed off any snow on the trail with disdain.

Well satisfied I raced, as fast as both fat tyres and legs would allow, through Canmore to make it to the Sheepdog Brewery before closing. “Leave your bike in here,” instructed the Head Brewer, pointing to the brewing room. That done I headed to the upstairs bar for a glass of the fittingly named Long Travel Ale.

As I rode back through the streets to very comfortable digs at the Falcon Crest Hotel, I thought, on this Canadian Thanksgiving night, of all the families starting to tuck into dinners of maple bacon glazed turkey and pumpkin pie. It got me thinking about the obesity crisis

sweeping so much of our world. Much to do with diet, perhaps more to lack of exercise. Cycling has long been recognised as one of the best forms of exercise for health and weight control. But where are we heading as an activity?

A few days before I found myself on the Farley, I’d been with a bunch of travel journo and adventure travel industry types around Banff and Lake Louise. We’d had a brilliant week being looked after like kings by the locals – trekking, climbing and more. On the last day, with a few hours spare, I suggested a mountain bike ride. Our hosts organised bikes and half a dozen of us met, ready to ride, in the hotel lobby. “Ahem, I’ve just got a message from the bike hire place,” said local tourism honcho Ryan “The bikes they’ve got for us are E-fat-bikes. Everyone OK with that?” I almost spat out my coffee.

I’ve written in opposition to E-bikes, had endless bar-side and trail-side conversations about them and had, to date, avoided riding





**Clockwise from left:**  
Fresh snow can make any bike a fat bike.

E-fatbikes crunching the snow in Banff.

Are E-bikes turning mountain biking on it's head?



## STAY AND PLAY

The nearest airport to Banff and Canmore is Calgary which has international flights to Europe and US as well as regular connecting flights around Canada including to Vancouver which is the easiest place to get to from Australia.

The trails around Canmore and Kananaskis are generally free of snow from May to October although in the Rockies be prepared for bad weather any time. Canmore itself is a great base for mountain biking and has hosted numerous World Cup events. A good general resource is Explore Canmore [www.explorecanmore.ca/](http://www.explorecanmore.ca/). Falcon Crest Lodge <https://www.falconcrestlodge.ca/> is a good place to stay.

If you need to hire a bike or for all bike spares and then Rebound Cycle <http://reboundcycle.com/> is your place

Details on the trails at Canmore Nordic Centre Provincial Park can be found on [www.canmorenordiccentre.ca](http://www.canmorenordiccentre.ca).

The High Rockies Trail [www.kananaskistrails.com/high-rockies-trail/](http://www.kananaskistrails.com/high-rockies-trail/) runs from Goat Creek, outside of Canmore, up the Spray Valley for some 80km. It's a grand backcountry trail, much of which is purpose built for MTB. Mount Engadine Lodge <https://mountengadine.com/> is about halfway along the trail so makes a perfect overnight stay.

For advice on staying safe among the wildlife check out WildSmart [www.biosphereinstitute.org/wildsmart](http://www.biosphereinstitute.org/wildsmart).

Don't forget to take your best singing voice!

"I'm well aware that the horse has bolted, that my voice is drowned by the whirr of those E-bike motors. The bike industry is so heavily invested in E-bikes of all types – MTB's, road bikes, commuter bikes – and the juggernaut moves on."

one. Call me a Luddite but I'd rather get the exercise. "You still have to pedal," I've been told so many times by the converted.

No doubt there are some good arguments for E-bikes. Commuting is one and indeed anything: public transport, motorbike, walking, cycling, E-biking, that removes a car from a road is a good thing. Some 'older' people could and do view E-bikes as a way of extending their riding pleasure. And lest you think this is written by some young upstart, I'm closer to 60 than any other milestone decade.

I'm well aware that the horse has bolted, that my voice is drowned by the whirr of those E-bike motors. The bike industry is so heavily invested in E-bikes of all types – MTBs, road bikes, commuter bikes - and the juggernaut moves on. We can and do all make excuses - too busy/too old/don't have time/want to ride further than my fitness allows. But we are in a time where so many people need to get more exercise than less, when the obesity crisis is one of the biggest health crises we are facing.

And so in Banff we picked up our E-fat-bikes and went riding. But it was not the ride I wanted; it turns out E-bikes are banned from riding off

road in Banff. So we pedaled assisted our way on a town tour for a couple of hours. It was a freezing morning but I certainly didn't warm up as much as I would have on a traditional bike. Indeed, I reckon I used perhaps a quarter of the energy, the calories, as I would riding such a bike. Obesity cyclists indeed.

One of the greatest satisfactions of so many in being an mountain bike event organiser for 20 years, was in seeing people set one of our events as their goal for fitness, injury recovery or weight-loss. I'll never forget the 90kg rider who rode one 110km race telling me he had been 140kg a year earlier. Recently I was blown away by a man telling me the story of turning his life around in dropping from 250kg to 110kg.

I predict that in ten years, fifteen perhaps; traditional bikes will be an oddity. The majority will ask "Why would you not ride an E-bike? Why make work for yourself?" As a result the major manufacturers will focus their attention and pricing on the mass market.

I digressed somewhat from singing to myself on the High Rockies Trail. This twisting 80km route was plenty fun, plenty hard work on the (non E) fat-bike which nonchalantly rolled over roots and squashed into berms.





Week-old snow crunched beneath rubber. Wherever the trail popped out of the forest, the spectacular Kananaskis peaks of The Rockies dominated.

Running late in the day, darkness approaching, I dropped off the trail onto a dirt road leading up the Spray Valley. Fat-bike became tank-bike as on-road riding showed up the weight and drag of such a bear of a bike. For a couple of kilometres I followed a pair of coyotes until I eventually arrived at the isolated Mount Engadine Lodge with calories burnt and toes numb from the cold. Soon though, with log fire roaring, a fine dinner in the stomach and a beer in hand, all was more than well. Isn't this why we ride, all of this? The tank emptied, the adrenaline released, the scenery seen, the tank filled, the aches, the cramps, the hot shower.

Overnight the snow bucketed down, a reminder winter was just around the corner. By dawn there was a good covering around the lodge. Coffee after coffee, pancake after pancake. I pulled on every bit of clothing I had with me and dragged myself away from the fire. Now it was my obese bike's turn to really do its stuff. 🌀

