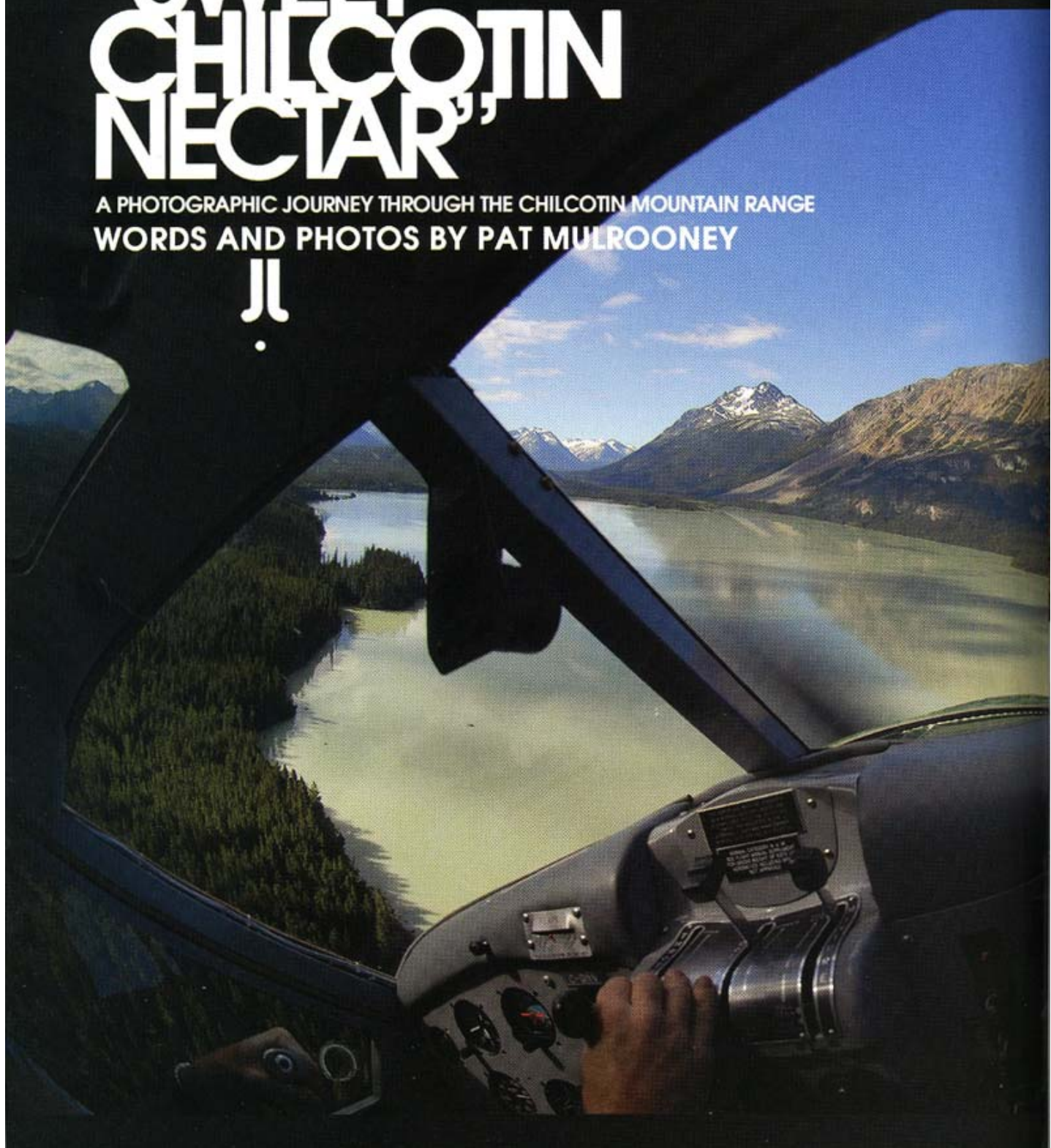


EPICS. 20

"SWEET CHILCOTIN NECTAR"

A PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNEY THROUGH THE CHILCOTIN MOUNTAIN RANGE
WORDS AND PHOTOS BY PAT MULROONEY

||
.







Sweet Chilcotin Nectar

Back-Country Report by Pat Mulrooney

Location: South Chilcotins, Coast Mountains, B.C.

Dates: June 28, 29, 30 2006

Party: Zdenek Manhal, Mike Tigges, Lee Lau, Pat Mulrooney

Details: Mountain Bike trip from Taseko Lake to Tyaughton Lake with fly-in access.

For the past four years I've talked about doing this trip and spent countless hours studying maps, trying to figure out the best route through this relatively untouched corner of BC wilderness. The biggest challenge, though, is finding like-minded friends who are willing to wander off the beaten track, knowing that they're very likely committing to hours of bushwhacking, in the hopes of finding a new, unexplored route. On trips like this there's bound to be pain and suffering. The route is rarely straightforward or clear and there's always a small chance that you'll get blindingly lost! My main concern was finding out if the terrain would actually be ride-able.

Our crew for this epic adventure was prepared for all of the above. Our group consisted of myself, Zdenek Manhal, Mike Tigges, and Lee Lau, all guys who'd spent fair amount of time in the backcountry and knew what they were getting into. I'd learned on previous trips that they're all highly motivated and wouldn't get shaken up if the going got tough.

Day One:

There aren't many better ways to start your day than on a lofty flight over the South Chilcotins with Dale Douglas of Tyax Air. En-route to our drop-off point, he flew us over the unfamiliar terrain and potentially difficult-to-navigate sections. This proved to be a valuable exercise for our first day of travel, since our plan was to ride unsupported from Taseko to Tyaughton Lake in three days and two nights.

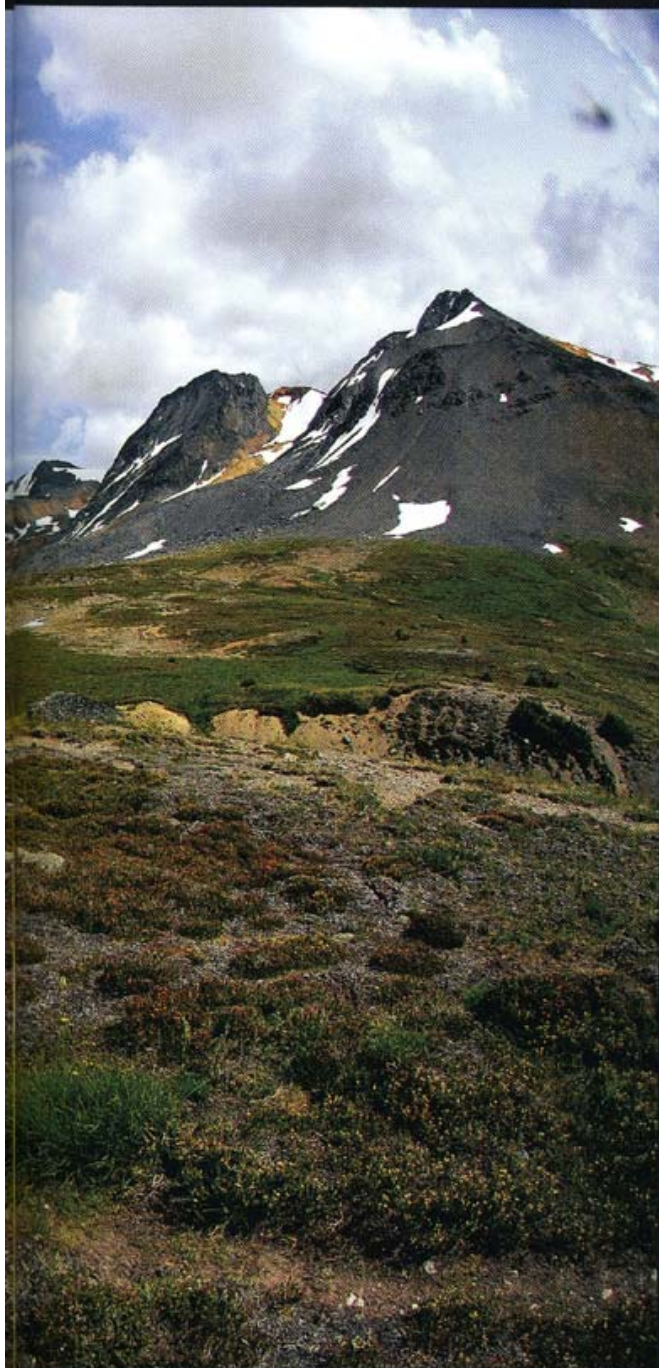
After Dale dropped us off, we began a ride into some of the most incredible terrain my tires have ever touched. From Taseko Lake, we followed an old mine road that crossed countless, waist-deep high creeks, until we crossed Battlement Creek and the beginning of the first climb. Climbing up into the alpine presented a panoramic views of the Taseko River Valley.

Before reaching Iron Pass (2281m) we encountered a Grizzly bear family of a mother and three cubs and shortly afterwards, and a little higher up, we spotted a rare blonde male grizzly. As you can imagine, we were really anxious to give the bears some well deserved space.

After laying low awhile to allow the male Grizzly plenty of time to move on, we began our first decent of the trip past a small pocket glacier. Unfortunately, the single-track down to Grant Creek was soon interrupted by an almost impenetrable, two-hour bushwhack through slide alder. It's during these types of sections that you learn if the guys you're traveling with really are your friends!

At one point Zdenek pushed away the thick green alder leaves enough to catch a glimpse of my face and said, "Patrick, if some of my other friends were here with us they would not be my friends after this trip." He then smiled and kept pushing through.

It's also worth noting that Lee's legs bled more from that bushwhack than any mountain biker's legs have ever bled before. Fortunately, after that adventure, we sailed smoothly to our first night's camp at Big Creek near Lorna Lake; the site offered us front row seating to the Glaciers of Warner Pass. Our first day was a ten-hour success with 1500m of climbing and 1000m of decent.



Day Two:

After a rainy but reasonably warm night, we set off into more familiar terrain. Zdenek and I had both been in this part of the range before, so we had a better idea of where we were headed from this point forward.

Almost immediately we entered a vortex of thick bush, again following Big Creek to its junction with Lorna Lake. This quickly changed to an epic two-hour push up through talus rock to the spectacular Lorna Pass (2300m). The lunar-like landscape near the top offered incredible views of the rarely visited Cluckata Ridge and the Dil-Dil Plateau to the north.

From there, we slapped some big grins on our faces in preparation for the almost endless descent down to Tyaughton Creek via the sweetest single-track of all time. After another hour following the creek and the valley bottom through the lush aspen forest, we reached the junction with the Deer pass trail. With the morning's unexpected bushwhack session we had to abort our plan to take this high alpine route as the daylight hours were falling away quickly.

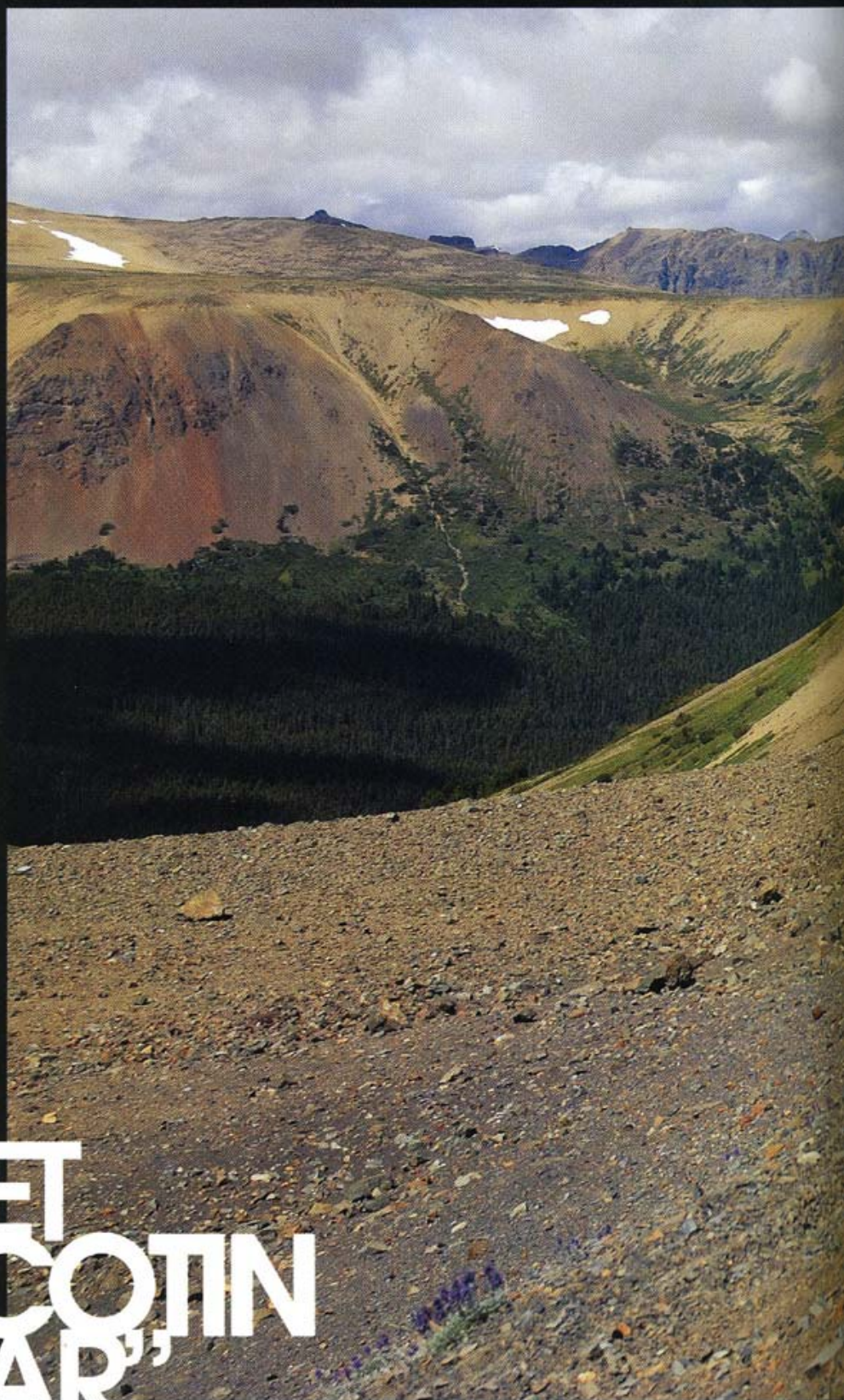
Another three hours and five waist-deep creek crossings brought us to the WD trail and our final climb of the day. This led us to our secret Grizzly proof camp spot on Spruce Lake and a well deserved swim. Zdenek and I scoped this spot out a few years earlier in search of the safest possible spot from the resident Grizzly.

I love how every time we camp there the sign on the tree reads, "CAUTION: PROBLEM GRIZZLY IN AREA." I've always wondered, "What makes a Grizzly, a problem Grizzly?"

This day took us just over nine hours with 1050m of climbing and 1350m of descending. That's more like it!







“SWEET CHILCOTIN NECTAR” JL





Day Three:

Our final day began with the two-hour calf-burning climb from Spruce Lake to the aptly named Windy Pass. Surprise! It was windy, rainy and cold. No matter how many times I'd been to this pass the views always look better each time. It was satisfying looking back as far as the eyes could see to Lorna Pass and most of the second days terrain. Luckily, I can think of no better way to warm up than railing through perfectly-sculpted single-track down to Eldorado meadows. I know I said it already, but THIS really was the sweetest single-track of all time!

After traversing through the gorgeous meadows on the High Trail and then up the final climb, we could finally look back on all the unbelievable terrain we had traveled. It was incredible to think that we'd ridden through it all with nothing but our bikes and our backpacks. The mountain bike gods were with us as we experienced no mechanicals and not even one flat tire!

The last portion of our ride was a new secret area that had recently been traded to me by a local buddy for another spot I knew a few valleys over. The view of the Dickson range and The Bridge valley were completely stunning from this spot! The final steep decent was a roller coaster of perfect berms and a vertical drop near 1400m. I'm fairly sure we were all laughing at least a full day after that one. This day we traveled 7.5 hours with 1430m of climbing and 2000m of decent. An ample amount of cold beers greeted us at the end, as we rolled into our friend's cabin on Tyaughton Lake.

There's something really satisfying about mountaineering with your bike. It's as if you were handed this perfect tool that allows you to travel up and down over complex terrain in short periods of time while having way too much fun. By foot, this journey would have easily taken over a week.

Next year were pushing it another valley out!

For more information on the area and custom guided trips contact Dale Douglas at Tyax Air. 1-888-892-9288 (Canada only) or 250-238-0177. www.tyaxair.com

