



# Jubilee 50<sup>th</sup> Tour

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## CANADA up close and personal

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*Klaus Gattner moved to Canada in 1994 with a dream of bringing European tourists to the Southern Interior of B.C. to experience the rugged wilderness on two wheels. Fourteen years later Gattner has embarked on a milestone – the 50<sup>th</sup> tour of West Canada Bike Tours.*

By Colin Payne  
Nelson Daily News Staff

**K**laus Gattner moved to British Columbia from Germany in 1994 with a dream – to start a wilderness cycle touring business catering specifically to German-speaking Europeans.

On Monday, Gattner celebrated his success, as West Canada Bike Tours started pedaling its Jubilee 50<sup>th</sup> ride on the Rails to Trails network spanning Southern B.C.

Gattner became a landed immigrant in Canada in 1994 – a decision made after his first wilderness cycling trip that took him from San Diego, California to Anchorage, Alaska.

The trip brought him through much of British Columbia, where Gattner said “*fell in love with the panoramic mountain views and serene vastness of this province.*”



*West Canada Bike Tours exposes European tourists to some of Canada's best natural beauty.*



## *European Guests stay in array of accommodations*

Soon after arriving, Gattner learned of the conversion of the Kettle Valley Railway to the Rails to Trails network, and set out to ride the 750 kilometre length of trails.

It was on that trip that West Canada Bike Tours was born, Gattner said.

When it first started out back in 1997, Gattner had a total of seven clients throughout the summer. But this year Gattner said he expects to see more than 50 people making the long flight from Europe to partake in the cycling adventure.

Though bike touring has long been popular in Europe, Gattner said the sport has grown immensely in recent years.

“There’s a huge potential,” he said. *“Bike touring has been extremely popular in German-speaking Europe over the past few years. It has become an extremely popular recreational hobby.”*



*One of the most recent groups to pedal the route stop in the Boundary country for a photo.*

“Since most of the clients live in heavily congested areas, they enjoy the wilderness experience they get with us.”

And a wilderness experience it is – taking the cyclists over the often-rugged rail beds that make up the Galena Trail, the Slocan Trail, the Columbia & Western Railway and the Kettle Valley Railway.

Starting in the Slocan Valley, the tour route goes through Castlegar, Grand Forks, Rock Creek, Penticton, Summerland, Princeton and ends in Hope. Along the way guests stay in accommodations ranging from remote cabins with no running water, to luxury resorts in the Okanagan.

“Our route goes through areas that are generally thinly populated and have little tourist infrastructure,” Gattner said. “We generally don’t meet anyone on the trail for several days.

“(Our guests) get a taste of what it’s like to live rurally and to experience open-hearted Canadian hospitality. They get to see a part of Southern B.C. that the vast majority of tourists never get to see.”

Over the course of two or three weeks trips, along with sightings of various wildlife native to the area, Gattner says his guests have opportunities to learn about the natural and human history of the areas they travel through.

This includes a guided desert tour near Osoyoos by the Nk’Mip Desert and Heritage Centre where guests learn about local plant life as well as the Nk’Mip Indian way of life before European contact. Other highlights include visits to historical sites such as Myra Canyon Provincial Park.

Even after twelve years, Gattner still guides each of the trips himself. And with the assistance of another guide, cook Vitya Hermanek, Doug The Bike Guy, and other support staff, he provides his guests with a fully catered bike touring experience.

After 50 trips down the same trail it would be easy to get bored. But Gattner said he still “genuinely enjoys the ever-new and ever-so-lovely sights and sound of the B.C. wilds. And then, of course, to share this terrific outdoor experience with like-minded people on their holidays can’t get boring.”

And as a longtime cyclist now in his fifties, Gattner still keeps active in his personal pursuits – spending plenty of time touring on his bike in far-flung places.

He even regularly pedals the 32 kilometre trip back and forth from his home in South Slocan to Nelson to run errands.

To learn more about West Canada Bike Tours, contact Klaus Gattner by telephone at (250) 359-5032, or by e-mail at [klaus.gattner@kanada-bike.com](mailto:klaus.gattner@kanada-bike.com).