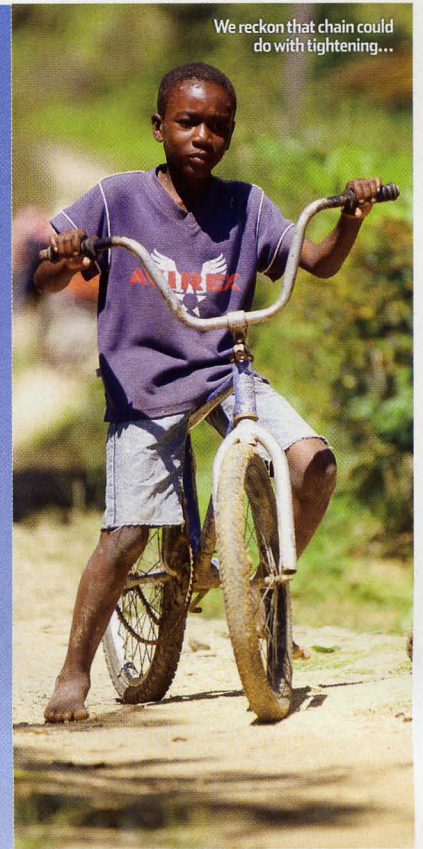




Some people had a very unique riding style...



We reckon that chain could do with tightening...



Cool. runnings

Rocks, roots, reggae and rum!
We're at the 10th annual Jamaica Fat Tyre Festival – does mountain biking get any cooler than this?

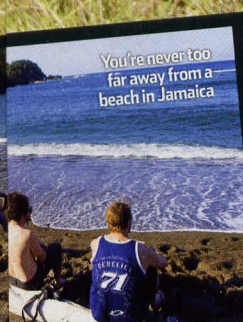
Words and Pics Ian Hylands

February in Cleveland – where I live – is cold, wet and not the least bit like summer. So while everyone else in the North American freeride scene was getting ready for the B-I-K-E event at Ray's MTB Indoor Park, I gathered a group of friends and we headed somewhere warm to ride our bikes. Where, you ask? The Jamaican Fat Tyre Festival in the sunny Caribbean...

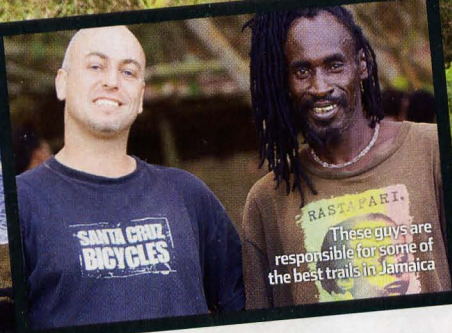
The event was celebrating its 10th anniversary, and this year's crew of pros included returning stars Cam McCaul, Kyle Ebbett and Kathy Pruitt, and newcomer Thomas Vanderham.

The 10th anniversary was also the second year that the festival was held in and around Ocho Rios on the north coast of the country, having previously been held in Negril, which is over on the west coast.

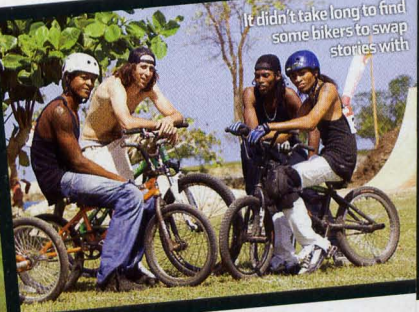
The festival is now organised by the Saint Mary Off-Road Cycling Association (SMORBA). It's a five-day event that's open to anyone who wants to experience the riding and culture that Jamaica has to offer, and in my humble opinion it's the perfect solution to the winter riding blues. »



You're never too far away from a beach in Jamaica



These guys are responsible for some of the best trails in Jamaica



It didn't take long to find some bikers to swap stories with



It's hard not to smile when you're riding in somewhere like this



Bikes are a big part of life in Jamaica, but most of the bicycles we saw weren't fit for trail riding. Jamaicans call them Rambo bikes and they use them for everything. It's a common sight to see a guy in sandals going way too fast down a hill with no brakes, usually carrying something big and heavy. Trails are a way of life in Jamaica as well, but hardly any were designed for riding bikes on – they use them to get from their houses to their farms or the beach.

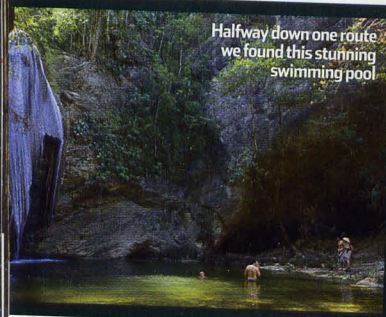
Jamaica is incredibly hilly – its highest point, Blue Mountain Peak, is 7,400ft – and there are plenty of trails that start at the top of a hill and go right to the bottom. There are also a lot of trails that wind around the mountains to who knows where. Luckily, we had Andy Giles, SMORBA's main bike rider and trail builder, with us to show us a few nice trails that he's cleaned up for the festival. He and 'Natty' Grant – a Rasta dude who doesn't actually ride a mountain bike but is a dab hand with a machete – have worked hard at building and cleaning trails after last year's hurricane.

Day one – Ochi/Oracabessa

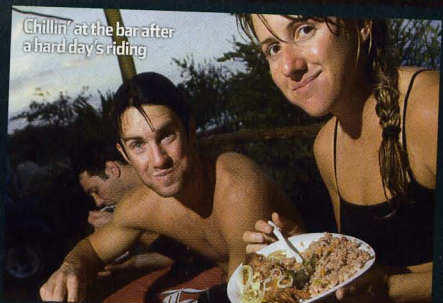
The first ride of the festival started at the top of Murphy Hill, where the assembled riders were suffering slightly with hangovers from too much rum at the welcome party the night before. The singletrack wound its way down the hill and ended several miles from our hotel. It was an awesome ride with sections of greasy green marl, slippery roots and baby-heads, all covered in slippery bamboo leaves. It was a great way to start the trip.

That afternoon we shuttled out to Oracabessa for a long XC ride to the top »

JAMAICA IS INCREDIBLY HILLY – ITS HIGHEST POINT IS 7,400FT



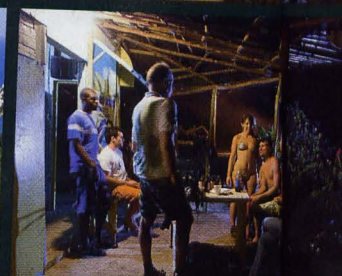
Halfway down one route we found this stunning swimming pool



Chillin' at the bar after a hard day's riding



Beautiful beaches surround the Jamaican trails





There's been a lot of repair work since last year's hurricane



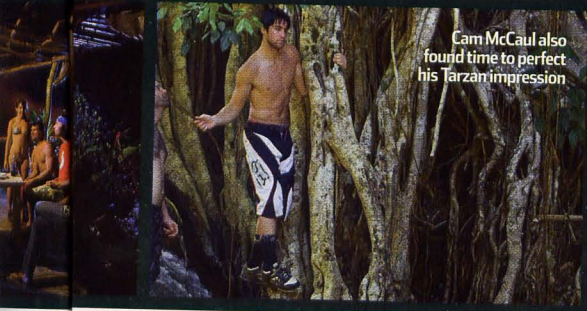
The locals in Jamaica are some of the friendliest you'll find



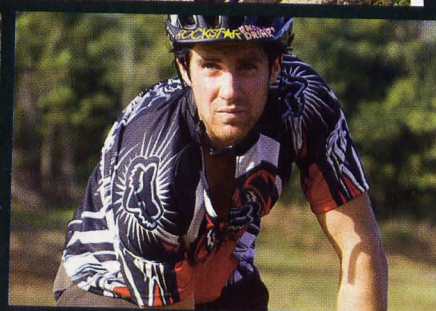
MTB IN JAMAICA Island hopping

The Jamaica Fat Tyre Festival is run by the Saint Mary Off Road Cycling Association (SMORBA), a non-profit organisation that is affiliated to the International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA). The organisation is actively engaged in locating, building and also maintaining cycling

opportunities on Jamaica's famed north coast. The Fat Tyre Festival held is their flagship event – profits go towards Bicycling Works!, a project that promotes local ownership of the emerging mountain biking sector. For more information on the group, visit www.smorba.com.



Cam McCaul also found time to perfect his Tarzan impression



FATTYRE FESTIVAL AT A GLANCE WHAT, WHEN, WHERE

The festival is held on the north coast of Jamaica, near the town of Ocho Rios. This year it took place from 5-10 February and it rolled out like this...

5 February

Registration party at festival HQ, John Crow's Tavern with rum flowing like water...

6 February

Shuttle to the top of Murphy Hill with a blistering ride downhill to Dunn's River Falls. Head to Oracabessa to ride trails around Hamilton Mountain. Evening festivities at Conscious Corner Bar.

7 February

Rural rides around Robin's Bay.

8 February

Trek to Pimento Hill for relaxed singletrack and downhill rides, with a few jumps thrown in for good measure.

9 February

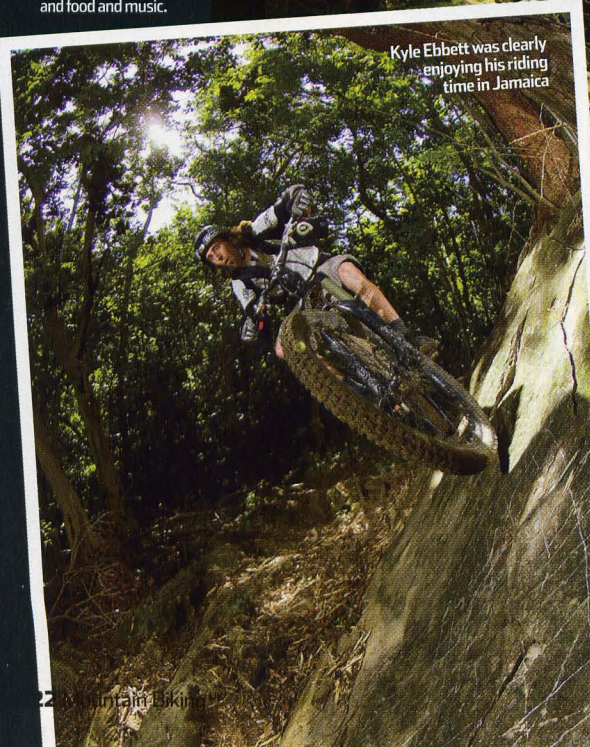
Time for a rest day – if you call white river tubing resting.

10 February

The grand finale – the Jamaica Bicycle Bash on James Bond Beach. It features a five mile 'Rambo' race, the crazy 'Rambolympics' relay race, a 'Big man, liddle bike' race, build-a-bike race, a stunt bike challenge, dirt, trials and street demos, kids rides and food and music.



Kyle Ebbett was clearly enjoying his riding time in Jamaica



ALMOST EVERY RIDE ENDED AT OR BESIDE A BEACH

of Hamilton Mountain. The ride seemed to be uphill most of the way but somehow ended up at Rio Nuevo beach and the Conscious Corner Bar back at sea level. If I was only allowed to say one really good thing about the Fat Tyre Festival it's this: almost every ride ends at or beside a beach with an incredible meal prepared by locals, and always accompanied by plenty of beer and rum.

And what could be better after a long ride than a cold one and great food sat by a stunning beach on a hot day?

Day two – Robin's Bay

The next day we gathered to shuttle back out to Oracabessa, this time for a ride that was only partly uphill. We stopped near the top at Natty Grant's house for fresh coconut, sugarcane and »

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THE SINGLETRACK RIDE DOWN THE CARLETON PASS WAS AWESOME



THE FANTASTIC FOUR A slice of island life



Cam McCaul
“The Jamaica trip is the one time in the whole year that I get the chance to go on a trip that’s just all

about going on bike rides. At the Jamaica Fat Tyre Festival there is an epic ride planned every single day, and each ride will make you wonder why you’ve never heard of a pro mountain biker from Jamaica. The terrain is off the hook with ocean views thrown in to garnish the experience.

“The Jamaica Bicycle Bash is all about bringing out hordes of exuberant Jamaicans on a Sunday afternoon to celebrate their bicycles. Combining demonstrations by some impressive local talent with some dirt jump demos by us, a lot of people were exposed to some sweet riding that will spark an already thriving interest of cycling on the island. Maybe it won’t be long until we see a pro cyclist coming out of Jamaica!”



Kyle Ebbett
“They love bicycles in Jamaica. It’s a real way of life – stunting, commuting and art, too. Bicycles are seriously respected. ‘Wow’ is the one word that I can think of when reflecting on riding down the biggest mountain in Jamaica with freeride legend Thomas Vanderham, shred nasty Cam McCaul, and national DH champ Kathy Pruitt. It’s a place full of good spirits. You can’t have a bad time – it’s just not allowed.”



Kathy Pruitt
“This year’s festival was everything I had hoped for... technical singletrack, hot sweaty climbs to

beautiful ocean views, new exciting trails to be explored and plenty of unexpected treats along the way too. And if that wasn’t enough, I can also look back and remember all the good times we had at the John Crow’s Tavern. I was one happy girl to be living this life for one week.

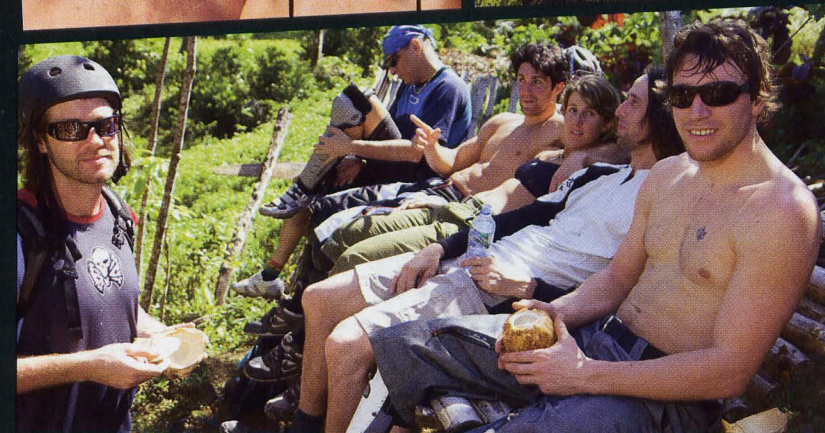
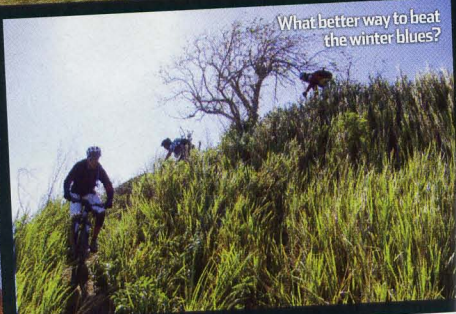
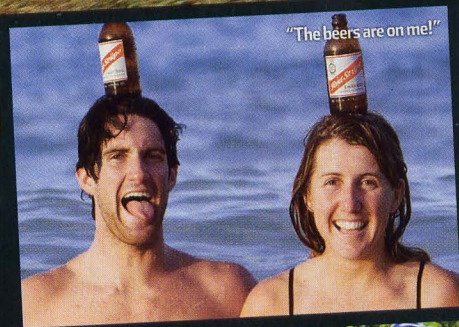
“Jamaica has all the ingredients for a magical and unforgettable mountain biking experience for me. All you have to do is feel the good vibrations of the island’s atmosphere and you’re there.”



Thomas Vanderham
“It didn’t take me very long to feel comfortable in Jamaica. The sun,

the beaches and the rum had me loving it before my bike was even taken out of the box. When we did hit the trails the riding was a mixture of uphill and technical downhill, which was perfect for some pre-season riding. Our rides took us through small villages, beautiful vistas, and even a waterfall. It was just all so perfect.

“We ended our trip with the Jamaica Bicycle Bash, a day for every kind of cyclist in Jamaica to come and ride in a few unique events. It’s always inspiring to see a passion for bikes so far away from home.”



other tasty treats. This gave us the energy we needed for the awesome singletrack ride down the Carleton Pass trail to Robin’s Bay. On the way down we stopped at beautiful Kwaaman falls for a refreshing dip in the river – it really doesn’t get any better than that.

Day three – Pimento Hill

Day three took us back to Grant’s house above Robin’s Bay, but this time we rode different trails. We shuttled John Crow’s Gully first, a short downhill trail that was a lot of fun, but a little sketchy at times thanks to those baby-heads and the slippery bamboo. Then there was a hike-a-bike up to the top of Pimento Hill

and the Pressure Drop trail, one of my favourites in Jamaica.

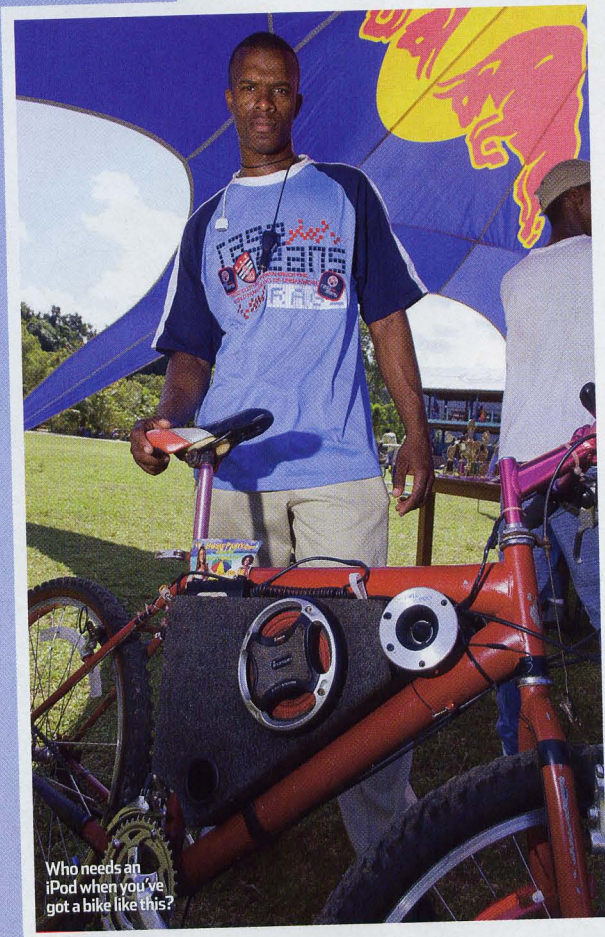
It starts at a grassy knoll overlooking the hills and the ocean and then goes pretty much downhill all the way to the beach. This is Andy and Grant’s best effort to date – they added a few small berms and jumps while they were cleaning it up last year, making it better than ever.

Day four – rest day!

The fourth day we recovered from the previous day’s riding with some leisurely tubing down the White River, compliments of Chukka Caribbean Adventures. Great fun.



PEOPLE RODE MORE THAN 40KM TO GET TO THE FESTIVAL



Who needs an iPod when you've got a bike like this?

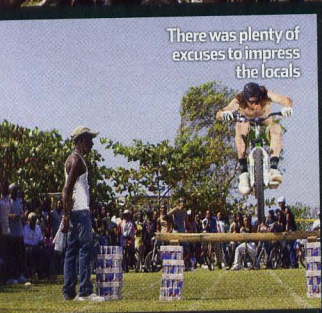
Day five – Jamaica Bicycle Bash, James Bond Beach

On the final day of the festival the Jamaica Bicycle Bash took place on James Bond Beach. Thanks to sponsorship from Red Bull there was money for ramps and dirt, so there was a true dirt jump demo and a range of other events aimed at the locals.

There was a bunnyhop contest and a three-lap, five-mile 'Rambo' race through Oracabessa. The bash also hosted the 'Rambolympics', a crazy event where cyclists had to race a lap around the field, pick up a Red Stripe case, race another lap before picking up a propane cylinder, and then race a final lap where they had to add a weed whacker to their load.

There was also an event where three mechanics raced to build a bike out of the box and then complete one lap on it to prove it was rideable. The bikes were then raffled off to the locals.

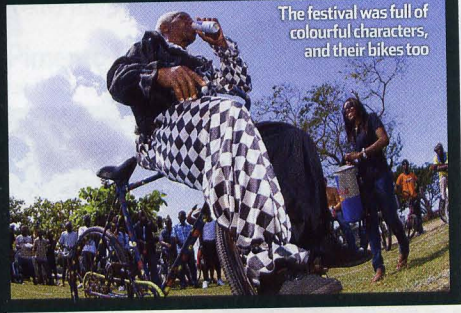
The Bicycle Bash was sponsored by Jamaican radio station Irie FM, and was so well promoted that people came from as far away as Kingston and Spanish Town – some people even rode old singlespeed bikes more than 40km to get there! All in all, this was an amazing week.



There was plenty of excuses to impress the locals



"Excuse me, do you have any German hardcore techno? No? Oh..."



The festival was full of colourful characters, and their bikes too