

FAT TIRES: Alaskan innovation is now big in Sisters Country

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and build five lightweight bikes for competition. These bikes were very successful for a few years, but since the wheels were low in profile with two inner tubes per tire, it was almost impossible to lower the tire pressures and increase the size of the tire footprint when snow conditions were soft.

The current fat-tire bike design arrived on the scene in 2005, when Surley Bikes released the Pugsley frame for worldwide distribution. The immediate popularity of the Surley bikes soon brought other manufacturers to the market. The current wide fat-tire design on these bikes, with one inner tube per wheel, allows riders to lower tire pressures for a large tire footprint in soft snow.

Long-distance races in the snow continued to evolve.

Race organizer Dan Bull combined all the human-powered race disciplines into one race and the Iditasport was born. At the starting line competitors were asked to declare their "weapon." Were they using a bicycle, just their feet (on foot or snowshoes) or using skis? For a while there was even a triathlon division. The combined event turned out to be very successful and exciting formula. There were races within races, and with hard-packed trail conditions cyclist usually won overall. With softer trail conditions skiers had the advantage.

With time Iditasport has given way to other events along the Iditarod Trail. The Susitna 100 now offers 50-kilometer and 100-mile races. The Iditarod Invitational offers its 350-mile race from the Anchorage area to McGrath, and competitors who successfully complete this "short" race are



PHOTO PROVIDED

Fatbikes can take on even soft snow conditions. They're catching on in Sisters Country.

eligible to race the full 1,000 miles to Nome the following year.

Fat-tire bicycles have become hugely popular in Alaska, and large numbers of multiple-sport human-powered races are now offered all over the state, and they are spreading to the Lower 48. To stage these races a cooperative working relationship between fat-tired mountain bikes and snowmobiles is needed, so trails can be packed and competitors can be supported by snowmobiles during the events.

In Sisters Country, fat-tire competition is also taking off. Blazin Saddles and Black Butte Ranch will stage

the Cow Patty Crit #2 on Saturday, February 7, starting at noon. Even sooner on the calendar is the Desert Orthopedics Great Nordeen 15-kilometer fat-tire race on January 31, starting at 9 a.m. from Sunrise Lodge at Mt. Bachelor and descending to Wanoga Snow Park.

The fat-tire popularity is now widespread all over the world. In Antarctica, during the 2013/2014 season, Maria Leijerstam became the first to ride a fat-tire tricycle to the South Pole. Shortly thereafter Daniel P. Burton rode a regular fat-tire bicycle to the pole.

Fat-tire bikes are also becoming very popular for recreational riding. Many

trails can be ridden safely in the fall, winter and spring seasons, when skinny mountain bike tires would damage trails. On the soft, sandy high-desert areas east of Sisters, fat-tire bikes can also ride without bogging down.

Bjarne Holm moved to Sisters a year and a half ago after living in Alaska for 43 years. For close to three decades he has participated in and helped organize long-distance winter cycling competition in Alaska. Holm is a professional geologist, and for 22 years he also taught science and math in secondary schools. He is now a board member of the Sisters Trails Alliance.

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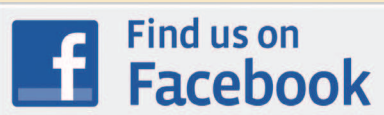
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