

FATTIRED MOUNTAIN BIKES OPEN A NEW WORLD OF RIDING POSSIBILITIES

## Big tires help bridge the seasons

The shoulder seasons, between winter fun and summer splendor, offer a variety of challenges to those striving for outdoor adventure. The unpredictable weather, increased precipitation and shortened days set the scene for cyclists to get stuck in the dark and rut up and destroy trails with regular mountain bike riding. The answer to this predicament is simple — discover the fat bike.

Fat bikes have evolved over time to address the issue of cycling on a soft surface. The original two main areas of innovation for the fat bike were located in Alaska and New Mexico. In Alaska, the impetus was the idea of following the Iditarod sled race with a 210-mile bicycle race on the same course. In New Mexico, the problem to be solved was for sand dune tours. Both surfaces required a way to disperse the weight of the bike and rider in such a way as to receive sufficient traction and float to cover ground efficiently. An era of welded frames and side-by-side tires followed ending in the early 2000s with the acceptance of a new bicycle style sporting a minimum tire width of 3.8 inches — the fat bike.

Since fat bikes became mainstream in 2005 the research and development surrounding them has taken off. The huge tires have been lightened by strategic cut-outs on the inner rims and the frame geometry has been redesigned to address long distant travel or mountain bike fun. Grooming apparatus to pack a trail using a snow machine, snow bike or human powered skiing and snowshoeing have been the subject of numerous internet forums and friendly garage wars. Ski areas and trail systems have embraced, rejected, ignored and finally accepted fat bikes are here to stay.

In Eastern Oregon, the pull of skiing is strong but when the weather refuses to cooperate it is time to think outside of the box. Like the dunes of the south and tundra of the north, the local freeze thaw cycle resulting in needle ice and light dustings of snow make it difficult to mountain bike with a standard bike. The resulting mix of ice crystals and mud respond very well to the low PSI and adventurous spirit of the fat biker. Those looking to explore the trails need to remember a handful of things to be successful.



Photo by Mavis Hartz

Fat tires with low air pressure help mountain bikes navigate slippery terrain, and without damaging fragile soils.



### THE NEXT RIDE

MAVIS HARTZ

Rule number one: Do not leave behind a rut. Ruts in the mud gather moisture and end up making a big sticky mess that can last years. Ruts in a packed snow trail freeze, making it difficult, if not impossible, to enjoy that same route later without regrooming or more snow pack being added. To alleviate leaving ruts behind use a fat bike and run a low tire pressure, around 1 to 5 PSI. The softer the surface and lighter the rider the lower PSI is needed. Begin your ride with a higher PSI and adjust it as needed to get the perfect balance. Be smart about when to ride. Early and late day rides sport cooler temperatures for the ground resulting in less mud and rut making possibilities.

Rule number two: Do not die. Winter is a time with less margin for error.

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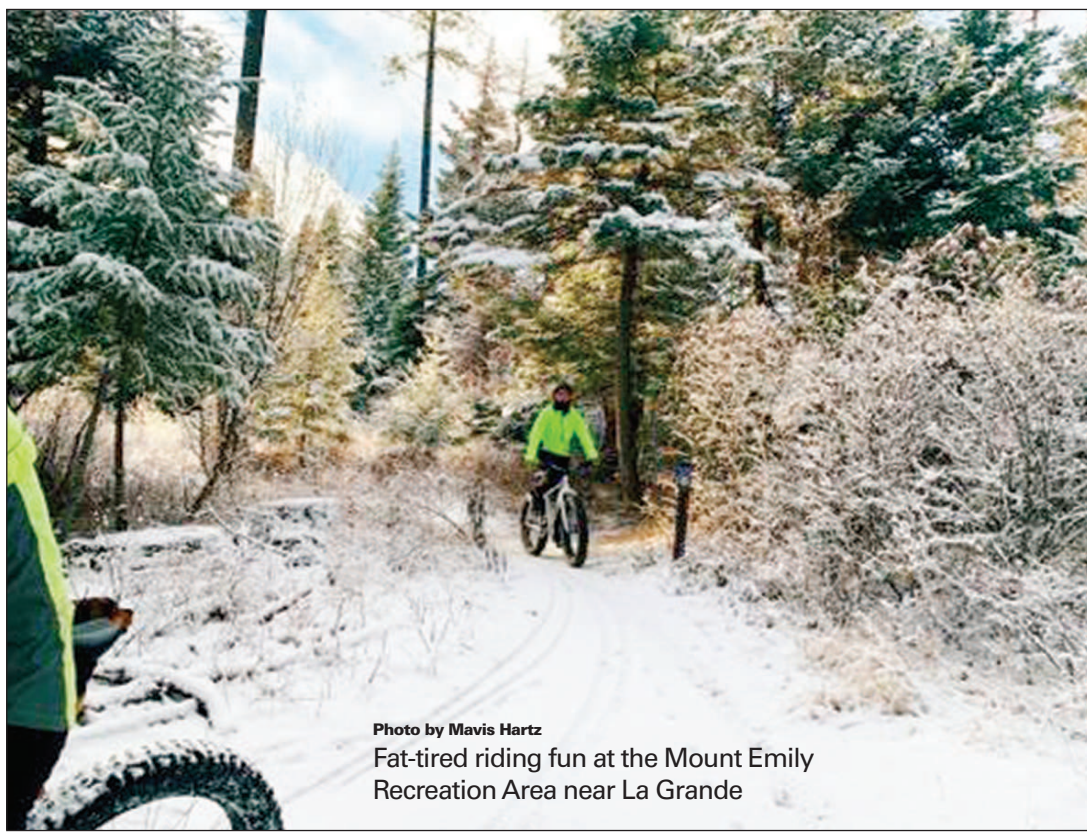


Photo by Mavis Hartz  
Fat-tired riding fun at the Mount Emily Recreation Area near La Grande

## The Colorful Chukar



Photo by Jim Ward

Chukars are native to India and Pakistan. The first successful releases in Oregon took place in the early 1950s. The birds did well in the dry, rimrock country of Eastern Oregon and filled a niche that few other game birds did well in. The non-native, and very aggressive cheatgrass spread across much of the same country and chukars were one of the few species that actually benefited. As with most game birds wet springs and harsh winters can have a very negative affect on chukar populations. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has conducted annual census routes since the early 70s. In the Snake River and Burnt River drainages, 44 birds were counted for each 10 miles of travel in 1973. In the 1995 census, 10 birds per 10 miles were counted on the same route and in 2019, the count yielded 28 birds.

## Deep freeze doesn't mean fishing season is finished

Hunting season is pretty much over but before you spend your hard-earned money on counseling

to ward off the winter depression, take heart, you can still get outdoors and ice fish!

This article is geared toward the ice fisherman with little to no knowledge. To begin, if you aren't geared for the cold you won't even get a hook below the ice. My first trip to a high mountain lake was rough. We hit the lake and drug everything out on the ice. My buddy had a collapsible hut he was setting up. Before he could drive down the first stake a big wind kicked up and he would of taken off across the lake but we all grabbed the sides while he was stuck inside.

In the meantime, unnoticed, our 5-gallon buckets with all of our gear had blown all the way across the lake. The only thing that saved us was a barbed wire fence on the other side that had caught our gear. A little humorous aside. A company had given me a big sausage tray for Christmas. Scattered all the way across the lake were slices of sausage and frozen cherry tomatoes.

If you're new, you probably won't have a hut so use a five-gallon bucket to carry your gear. Or a sled is better. Wear base layers, your warmest boots, gloves etc. Take hand warmers.

I've never fallen through the ice but am always nervous about it. You can use your sled

to get someone out of a hole. It disperses your weight. Take a thick rope so you can throw it to someone. Tie a foot-long stick to the end so you can throw it out to them and they have

something to grab. (When you throw it, don't hit them in the head!) Take a thermos of hot coffee and food to keep you warm.

### WHERE TO FISH?

You don't want to just randomly go out on a lake and drill a hole and sit there all day. You wouldn't do that in your boat, would you? At least when fishing in a boat or on foot you can easily move around. Not so with ice fishing, every time you move you have to drill new holes. So do your research before you go and see where the hotspots are. Or unfortunately like all fishing, follow the crowds.

### GEAR

Just starting, you probably don't want to invest in a power auger so buy a hand auger. Before drilling, kick all the snow away. You'll want a dipper so you can dip out the crushed ice and also to keep the hole from freezing up. If you discover the ice is less than 4 inches thick — SCATTER!

For rods you'll want something short. There are the old tip-up rods and they also make miniature rod/reel combos for ice fishing.



### BASE CAMP

TOM CLAYCOMB

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