

Don't let winter keep you off your bike

By **ROGER PHILLIPS**
Idaho Statesman

BOISE, Idaho — I used to think winter mountain biking was a stunt you did once to say you've done it. That was before I learned to enjoy the unique feel of frozen trails, and I am rarely alone out there.

Lots of other folks are riding trails or running during winter, and there's no reason you can't join them.

As you can imagine, it's more challenging than riding on a 75-degree day when you can throw on a pair of riding shorts and a T-shirt and hit the trails.

It takes more effort, but don't worry, you won't freeze to death during an hour-long mountain bike ride; just dress for it and pay attention to trail conditions.

On your first winter ride, you're more likely to overdress and overheat because it's easy to put on too many layers.

Expect to be a little cool (usually at the start) and a little hot at some point during a ride, usually while climbing. The challenge is finding the happy medium so your clothes don't get sweaty, clammy and chilly.

We're all a little different, so what keeps me comfortable may not work for you, but here's my basic kit:

A pair of tights (or synthetic long johns), padded cycling shorts and maybe knee warmers.

A good mid-weight base layer, a fleece mid layer and breathable jacket is enough to keep your core warm. A vest adds insurance.

Zippers are your friend. You will want to dump heat if you get hot. Breathable is usually more valuable than waterproof, and wind resistance is a plus.

Protect your feet, head and hands, which are most vulnerable to the cold. I wear a lightweight beanie that covers my ears and easily fits under my helmet. Others prefer a balaclava that covers the whole head and neck.

Finding the right gloves is tricky, and personal preference will dictate what works because some people have better circulation than others.

I have cold hands, and the best gloves I've found are The North Face "Apex" gloves, which have the right combination of warmth, breathability and still allow manual dexterity.

Cross country ski gloves also



AP Photo/Idaho Statesman, Roger Phillips

Roger Phillips rides down a snowy trail near Eagle, Idaho, Jan. 2 in this self portrait. Regular mountain bikes can be ridden on trails with hard-packed snow. Dropping tire pressure by about 5 pounds improves traction.

work well.

Thick gloves can make your hands sweat and make it difficult to operate the shifters and brakes, while thin gloves may let your hands get cold and numb, which is worse.

I wear my biking shoes and neoprene shoe covers. Mid-weight wool socks keep my feet toasty inside.

Plan to experiment with different clothing combinations and tailor them to the temperature and conditions. For example, it's easier to stay warm on a clear day because you absorb a lot of heat from the sun.

A rule of thumb is every 10 to 15 degrees colder, add a layer or thicker insulation.

Now you're ready for the trails. First, let's dispel a common misconception. You're not riding on an ice rink. Trails will be different than they are in spring and summer, but that's not a bad thing.

Ideal conditions for me: a cold (well-below freezing), sunny day because the trails will stay frozen, which means better traction and less chance of encountering mud.

Traction tends to be more con-

sistent early in the morning before the sun hits the trail. It will surprise you how quickly conditions change (and rarely for the better) when the sun comes out and the air temperature gets above freezing.

Direct sunlight on the trail means softer, slicker and muddier trail conditions.

Snow has many different characteristics that are constantly changing. Fresh snow is tough to ride, so wait until people have hiked on them for a few days.

Cold, hard-packed snow provides surprisingly good traction. It's similar to summer, when trails are rock hard with a thin layer of dust or sand on top.

Sometimes the snow is smooth, and other times it gets pocked and bumpy like cobble. You're likely to encounter both on any given ride.

Watch out for glaze ice, which is common where snow has thawed and refrozen. Obviously, it's slick. Don't hesitate to get off and walk if the traction looks sketchy.

Some small patches of trail can get muddy where there's direct sunlight, even on days when the temperature is below freezing.

If you encounter a muddy spot,

ride through it, not around it. If you start encountering lots of muddy spots, or long stretches of mud, it's the wrong day to be on the trails. Turn around and go back.

Riding in winter will help you become a better rider because you have to be more focused on pedaling, braking and cornering.

You may want to use flat pedals rather than clipless pedals, but I use my same riding shoes year round because I like consistency.

I drop my tire pressure by about 5 psi to get better traction. If you're using inner tubes, winter riding is a good excuse to convert to tubeless because you can run lower air pressure and not have pinch flats.

Think smooth over speed. Pedal in a smooth, steady cadence to avoid spinning out on snow and ice. Keep your body loose and your eyes focused as far up the trail as you can.

Keep your body centered over the bike. If your tires start to slip, you want to counter it. If you're not centered on the bike, that's harder to do. Same with cornering. As much as is feasible, lean your bike into corners, not your whole body.

Use a combination of front and

SNOW REPORT

Spout Springs
Tollgate, Ore.
CLOSED DUE TO WARM WEATHER, RAIN

Anthony Lakes
North Powder, Ore.
New snow: none
Base depth: 49"
Conditions: Clear, light winds

Ski Bluewood
Dayton, Wash.
New snow: none
Base depth: 28"
Conditions: Machine packed and groomed

Mt. Hood Meadows
Government Camp, Ore.
New snow: none
Base depth: 30"
Conditions: Warm, light wind

rear brakes to slow down before a corner, but as you're entering it, lay off the front brake so your front tire doesn't wash out. When in doubt, use more rear brake than front (which is opposite of riding on dry trails).

Avoid the edges of the trail. The 3-foot wide trail you're used to riding might be about 18-24 inches of packed snow with soft edges. Those edges have poor traction.

Keep an eye out for other trail users. Traction can be surprisingly good on hard-packed snow and even crusty ice, but your stopping distance still increases. Remember, it's also harder for hikers and other riders to step off the trail because the surface is slick.

Stay in control and enjoy the scenery. You're not going to set any speed records, and you shouldn't try. It's too risky to yourself and others.

Winter is a bonus time to maintain your cycling fitness, but it defeats the purpose if you crash and injure yourself.

I prefer shorter loops so I can figure out what sections have the best traction and conditions and stick to those during winter.

I may ride a few trails several times, and mix them up by riding in one direction and then in the reverse direction.

Despite my long-winded explanation, don't overthink it. It's just bike riding.

Go for it, and enjoy yourself.

Study launched on restoring salmon to upper Columbia River

By **NICHOLAS K. GERANIOS**
Associated Press

SPOKANE, Wash. — Indian tribes from Washington and Idaho who live near the upper Columbia River are beginning a study of whether salmon runs can be restored above Grand Coulee Dam, which blocked those runs more than 70 years ago.

The tribes want to study what it would take to restore salmon runs to the 100 river miles between the dam, the nation's greatest producer of hydropower, and the U.S.-Canadian border.

The study proposal was released this week by the Upper Columbia United Tribes, which represents the Colville, Spokane, Coeur d'Alene, Kalispel and Kootenai tribes of Idaho and Washington.

"Grand Coulee Dam should have been built with fish passage," said John Osborn of Spokane, a leader of the local Sierra Club chapter who supports the return of the salmon. "Justice and stewardship compel us to return salmon to these rivers."

D.R. Michel, executive director for the Upper Columbia United Tribes, said the return of salmon would restore tribal cultural and religious experiences, plus provide new revenues for the tribes.

"Since time immemorial, the creator gave all the Columbia River Basin tribes the responsibility to protect the water, fish and wildlife within their geographic areas," the study proposal said.

The loss of salmon runs damaged the tribes' "spiritual connection and identity," the proposal said. "The removal of an iconic species from the ecosystem greatly impacted forest growth, water quality, Native American culture and



AP Photo/ Redding Record Searchlight, Damon Arthur

In this photo taken in Dec. 2014, a Chinook salmon is swimming in Salt Creek, a tributary to the Sacramento River near Redding, Calif.

the entire food chain."

Salmon runs on the upper Columbia and its tributaries were blocked first by Grand Coulee Dam, which was built in the 1930s, and later by Chief Joseph Dam, which was built downstream in the 1950s. Both dams were built without fish ladders, and killed a 10,000-year-old Native American fishery.

The tribes have sent the study proposal to the Northwest Power and Conservation Council in Portland. The tribes will collect comments over the next 30 days before deciding how to proceed.

Major questions include whether salmon could survive in the greatly changed habitat above the dams. Tom Karier of the power and conservation

council said researchers would have to confirm that salmon could survive before any restoration effort could begin.

While many dams on the lower Columbia and Snake rivers have fish passage facilities, engineers could not include them when the 550-foot-tall Grand Coulee Dam was designed.

In addition to generating electricity, Grand Coulee Dam provides irrigation water for hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland in the region.

The study proposal is for only the U.S. side of the border. But some of the adult fish would likely swim into Canadian waters, and that could become an issue as the two countries renegotiate the 1964 Columbia River Treaty, which governs hydropower and flood control on the river.

BRIEFLY

Navy wants to increase use of sonar buoys

SEATTLE (AP) — The U.S. Navy is seeking permits to expand sonar and other training exercises off the Pacific Coast, a proposal raising concerns from animal advocates who say that more sonar-emitting buoys would harm whales and other creatures that live in the water.

The Navy wants to deploy up to 720 sonobuoys at least 12 nautical miles off the coasts of Washington, Oregon and Northern California. The devices, about 3 feet long and 6 inches in diameter, send out sonar signals underwater so air crews can train to detect submarines.

The Navy's training range is home to endangered whales such as orcas, humpback and blue, as well as seals, sea lions and dolphins.

Critics say the noise from sonar can harass and kill whales and other marine life. They worry the Navy is expanding training exercises without also increasing efforts to reduce the impacts.

Smelt dipping season on Oregon, Washington rivers

VANCOUVER, Wash. (AP) — Fishermen will have another chance this year to dip smelt from the Cowlitz and Sandy rivers.

State fishery managers from Washington and Oregon met Wednesday in Vancouver to set the season. The fish, also known as eulachon, was listed as threatened, but managers are expecting a strong return.

The Cowlitz River will be open to recreational dip netting along the shore from 6 a.m. until noon Saturday, Feb. 7, and again Saturday, Feb. 14.

The Sandy River will be open from 6 a.m. until noon on Saturday, March 7 and again Sunday, March 15.

The states also approved a commercial fishery for smelt that will run from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. Mondays and Thursdays in February on the Columbia River downstream from the mouth of the Lewis River.

Shuttle to reduce congestion on road to Lava Butte

BEND (AP) — The Deschutes National Forest plans to test a shuttle this year to take visitors to the top of Lava Butte, the popular tourist destination 12 miles south of Bend. The 5,000-foot butte in the Newberry National Volcanic Monument offers a panoramic view of the central Oregon volcanoes.

The Bulletin reports officials hope the shuttle will reduce congestion on busy days. Tourists would not be allowed to drive up the road, but visitors could walk or ride their bikes.

Forest Service issues new policy on snowmobiles in National Forests

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — The U.S. Forest Service has issued a new policy requiring forest managers to limit where snowmobiles can go by specifically designating what areas are open, a move that could reduce the competition between skiers and machines.

The new rules take effect Feb. 27 and apply to all na-

tional forests in the U.S.

The federal agency on Wednesday published the final federal register notice for the new rules.

The change follows a 2013 federal court ruling in Boise that found the Forest Service incorrectly exempted snowmobiles from a 2005

Forest Service plan restrict-

ing wheeled cross-country

travel to designated routes. An Idaho-based back-country skier group, Winter Wildlands Alliance, filed the lawsuit amid concerns that new and more powerful snowmobiles were chewing up remote and pristine powder previously reachable only by skiers.

The new policy requires forests to publish over-snow

vehicle maps using existing designations or maps to be worked out through a public process.

Chad Sluder, president of the Sawtooth Snowmobile Club based in the central Idaho town of Bellevue, said his club of 75 members would take an active part in that process.

"We don't want to lose

any more ground, and if it comes to that we will fight it to the end," Sluder said. "It's the ongoing battle between the skiers and snowmobilers. They don't want us there and we have every right to be there."

The Forest Service estimates that nearly 4 million people use snowmobiles on national forest land. Ad-

vances in technology have made modern snowmobiles more powerful and lighter than previous generations. Modern tracks can propel the machines more efficiently through powder in steep terrain.

With those advances, skiers and snowmobilers often compete for fresh powder in the backcountry.