Hollis Brake (left) and Jerry Hauptmann riding fat bikes on the PJ Way trail within Buzzard Gulch. (Courtesy photo)

Typical fat bike. Note the large (5 inch wide) tires, wide rims and single chainring. The bike is geared low to help the rider climb better with the larger tires. (Courtesy photo)

Fat Biking at Buzzard Gulch

Outdoors

By Laurie Brandt

I recently rode fat bikes with Hollis Brake and Jerry Hauptmann of Cascade Bicycles at Buzzard Gulch. I rode one of the shop's "fatties" or snow bikes, as some people call them, which are basically mountain bikes with fat tires.

The rims, hubs, fork and rear triangle are all wider to accommodate the larger tire, but everything else is essentially the same as a mountain bike. The wider tires allowed us to ride on snow with great traction and stability.

Fat bikes are the new rage in cycling, and after my ride at Buzzard Gulch, I see why. These bikes are fun to ride and a nice alternative sport when it's cold out and there's snow on the ground. I'll share some information about fatties and a how to get started.

Fat bikes generally have 4- to 5-inch wide tires instead of the typical 2- to 2.5-inch tires. The knobs are large but more widely spaced than knobs on a standard mountain bike.

The tires can be run with tubes or tubeless, but the pressures are very low -- less than 10 psi. This allows for lots of cushioning of the ride and great traction.

The bike I rode, which was one of the specialized bikes in Cascade's rental fleet, has a rigid fork, single front chainring (i.e. no front derailleur), flat pedals (not clipless) and weighed just over 30 pounds. A suspension fork and rear suspension are generally not needed, and they just add extra weight.

Fat bikes start at around $1,000 and can be used on dry terrain, too.

These bikes work best when the snow surface is packed, such as on a road or trail that has been packed by cars, snowmobile or snowshoes. They don't work well in soft snow, trails with only footsteps or narrow paths.

They shouldn't be used on ski trails or other areas groomed for non-wheeled travel. In fact, some Nordic ski areas have experienced conflicts with fat bikers who insist on riding groomed surfaces that are damaged by fat bike tires when the snow is too soft.

My best advice as to when and where it is appropriate to fat bike is to stay out of ski tracks, off of groomed ski trails unless the snow is very firm, and off of surfaces that are signed for "no wheeled vehicles."

Keep in mind that conditions can change while you are out riding, meaning they could start out cold and firm and then turn to "mashed potatoes" as it warms up. We just need to be mindful of other users, and we don't want to be regarded as a user group that goes wherever we want to go just because we can and wrecks the experiences of others.

One of the best places to fat bike near Montrose, other than on snow-packed roads, is at Buzzard Gulch. This nonmotorized trail system is on BLM land about a 10-minute drive southwest of town. It is best accessed from Spring Canyon Road via Popular Road and Dave Wood Road. It is great for fat biking because it has gentle to moderate terrain and numerous drainages and sloping uplands.

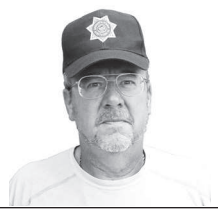
Recently, some of the Cascade Bicycles staff and their riding friends have been packing the lower trails at Buzzard Gulch with snowshoes and a small wooden drag loaded with rocks. This effort has created a nice base that makes riding bikes possible. Contact Hollis if you would like to help pack trail or rent a fat bike to try it.

If you go

The main trailhead for Buzzard Gulch is located on Spring Canyon Road, roughly three-tenths of a mile north of Popular Road and just less than a mile west of Dave Wood Road. Wear warm gloves, headband or hats under your helmet, layers of clothing appropriate for cold weather riding, and cold weather boots and socks. Hands and feet are likely to be the coldest, so be prepared. Insulated boots with good tread are very helpful when hiking the bike are necessary. Take water and food in a pack.

Laurie Brandt is a former professional mountain bike racer, mother of two middle school girls and professional geologist for DOWL. She can be reached at lbrandt@dowl.com.

Hypothermia: Cold can kill you



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

One of the biggest threats an outdoor enthusiast can face is hypothermia. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an average of 1,301 people die annually from hypothermia. It has become so serious that most states include instruction on its treatment and prevention in their hunter education courses.

Such things as wind and moisture can accelerate hypothermia. Wind can penetrate the clothing and push heat away from the body. Wind also causes evaporation on exposed skin, amplifying the cold. Being wet, from perspiration or weather conditions, can accelerate hypothermia at an alarming rate.

The body's normal temperature is 98.6 degrees. The medical condition known as hypothermia occurs when the body's core temperature drops below 95 degrees. When the temperature reaches 92 degrees and below, it is considered immediately life threatening.

When looking for symptoms in a person, watch for the "umbles." Does the person stumble, fumble, mumble or grumble? Any of these could show changes in their motor coordination and levels of consciousness. For mild hypothermia a person would start shivering and could have trouble doing complex motor functions such as skiing or snowshoeing, but could still walk and talk.

During moderate hypothermia the shivering will become more violent. They could have slurred speech and display irrational behavior; such as taking off clothes as if unaware they are cold.

The next phase is severe hypothermia, which is immediately life threatening. Here the person will have pale skin, dilated pupils and a decreasing pulse rate. The shivering will occur in waves, violent then pause. The pauses will get longer until the shivering ceases because the heat output from burning glycogen in the muscles is not sufficient.

A person will fall to the ground, no longer able to walk, and curl into the fetal position. Muscle rigidity will develop as the blood flow reduces because of the lactic acid and CO2 buildup in the muscles. As the core temperature drops, death is imminent.

Assessing the degree of hypothermia can be done easily in the field. If the shivering can be stopped voluntarily, it is mild hypothermia. If the shivering cannot be stopped voluntarily, suspect moderate to severe hypothermia.

Ask the person a question that requires a higher level of reasoning, such as counting backwards from 100 by 9s. If the person has hypothermia, they will not be able to do it.

Outdoored.com is a great resource for information on the field treatment of hypothermia. If the hypothermia is mild to moderate start re-warming the patient immediately by trying to trap the body heat generated by shivering. Give them something to eat and drink. Be certain to remove any wet clothing.

If the person does not show immediate signs of improvement, evacuate them to a medical facility, as they have moderate to severe hypothermia.

You will want to package the patient and apply heat, concentrating on the thorax. Medical heat packs work best for this. Give them nothing by mouth and keep the airway open.

Be aware that moving a person in severe hypothermia can cause the heart to stop. It is best to leave the evacuation to trained medical personnel. While waiting for rescuers, you can put two warm people, one on either side of the patient, inside the wrap you have around them. This puts much additional body heat directly to the patient.

Like every danger we face in the outdoors, prevention is the best treatment. Dress warmly and in layers. Add a layer or two when inactive and remove them when you are physically active.

Never allow perspiration to build up, as you will become cold later. Address your cold feeling early, before it becomes a problem. Keep your body full of good foods and water as you burn many extra calories in the cold.

Being aware of the dangers faced in the backcountry, and preventing them, makes the time spent there much more enjoyable. You don't want to turn a fun outing into a disaster. Until next time, see you on the trail.

Mark Rackay is a freelance writer who serves as a Director for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the Posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org.

No shed antler collecting until March 15

In order to minimize disturbance to wildlife during the winter months, shed antler collecting is prohibited in the Gunnison Basin until March 15.

After that date, collectors must be aware of regulations for this activity established by Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

"Special regulations have been in place for several years, so anyone planning to collect antlers should call our office and check to be certain they understand the rules," said J Wenum, area wildlife manager in Gunnison.

Those who violate the regulations can be fined $70, be assessed five penalty points against their hunting and fishing privileges and antlers collected will be confiscated. Harassing wildlife is also illegal under state statute and can result in additional fines.

Winter is a difficult time for wildlife; human activity can cause significant stress on animals, especially big game. Deer often lose up to 30 percent of their body weight during the winter. If they are forced to move, they burn the extra calories they need to get them through the winter.

In the Gunnison Basin in big game management units 54, 55, 551, 66 and 67, there are the special regulations that are in place to prevent disturbance of animals on public lands:

Collection of shed antlers is prohibited on public lands within those units from Jan. 1 through March 14. From March 15 through May 15, shed antler collection is prohibited from legal sunset to 10 a.m.

Collectors are advised to consult official sunset tables and to obtain accurate maps of the area. Anyone who has questions about the regulations can contact the Colorado Parks and Wildlife office in Gunnison at (970) 641-7060. Members of the public who see people violating the closure should call the Gunnison office.

Collectors and other recreationists also should be aware that to protect Gunnison sage-grouse leks, the BLM and Gunnison County close roads throughout the basin to motorized travel during the winter and early spring.