

The following is an excerpt from *Mountain Biking La Grande, Oregon*, a book scheduled to be released February 2006. This work is written by local authors Mark Larson and Brian Sather.

## Winter Riding

The La Grande area is notorious for harsh winters. Many of the rides in this book close early in the year due to snowfall—but don't let that be the end of your riding season. Rather than ride indoors on the monotonous trainer, throw on some winter clothes and hit the snow pack.

Lower elevation routes often stay clear and rideable even when the snow level lowers. For example, the Archery Range system is sometimes open through December. However, when the big storms dump snow on the valley floor, just wait a day or so for the cold air to settle in and the county snow plows to get to the interior farm roads. Once plowed, these roads provide excellent smooth surfaces for mountain bike riding. The key is for the temperatures to stay below freezing so the snow stays firm. High pressure systems will often settle over the valley and provide stable, albeit cold, conditions for days on end.

The key to safety is staying on these farm roads only, completely away from auto traffic on the paved roads. La Grande area residents are accustomed to driving on ice and snow, and to prove this, they travel as fast as possible regardless of the conditions. This creates a dangerous situation for a mountain biker. On the other hand, the farm roads have very little traffic and offer better surfaces than main roads.

Studded tires are recommended but not essential for winter riding. These tires allow you to travel on both ice and snow with little concern for hitting the deck. In fact, with studded tires you are more stable on ice than the loose gravel and dirt. Even without studs, riders can travel fast on snow pack, but must be wary of ice spots particularly when crossing intersections and other high traffic areas. To add traction, run tires at a very low pressure.

Proper clothing is essential. It is important to stay warm, but even more important to stay dry. Use breathable fabrics and manually vent as needed during the ride to keep excess sweat from building up. Moisture is the most dangerous contributor to hypothermia. Proper footwear and good gloves, along with a backup pair of gloves, are very important.

Mittens or windproof shells work well over a pair of lightweight gloves. Just keep in mind that you will likely experience a wide range of temperatures during your ride so bring ample clothing.

It is very important to stay hydrated to avoid hypothermia. Unfortunately, the cold will freeze your water. To control this, start the ride with

warm water and lower the freezing temperature by adding salt or an energy drink mix. Bottles or hydrations packs can also be stored under a jacket to stave off freezing.

Other winter riding gear is important, such as a good pair of sunglasses and sunscreen to protect against sun ray reflection on the snow. Wear clothes that contrast the snow. For precautionary measures, carry extra chemical hot packs and ride with a partner. Also, realize that the sun sets very early in La Grande, and it will begin getting dark around 3 pm during the winter months. Bring a headlight, and perhaps more importantly a blinking red taillight, for vision and protection.

