

Highlands Fat Bike Series

ALLEGHENY MOUNTAINS
OF MARYLAND & WEST VIRGINIA

Yes, We Ride Bikes in the Cold!

Written by: **Sarah Myers**

Photography provided by **Highlands Fat Bike Series**

The Highlands Fat Bike Series is what happens when you mix snow, singletrack, and a cycling-obsessed community that refuses to let winter be an “off-season.” It’s part race, part reunion, and part excuse to play outside when the thermometer says otherwise. Riders show up with four-to-five-inch tires aired-down soft, pogies wind blockers on their handlebars, and the kind of optimism you only see with Type 2 adventure enthusiasts.

Produced by Sarah Myers of the Deep Creek Adventure Bureau and Zach Adams of Trail Labs, the series ties together the West Virginia and Maryland geography known as the Allegheny Highlands or Allegheny Mountains.

“Most of my summer is spent building trails, so winter is when I finally get to slow down and ride them myself. Fat biking gives me the chance to reconnect with cycling and enjoy the trails,” said Zach.

Fat biking uses extra-wide tires at low pressure on a mountain bike frame to float over snow. Think of it as the snowshoe of bicycles: more traction, more stability, more ways to keep moving when the snow depth would stop a typical bike. While your summer cross-country course aims for consistency, a winter course in the mountains changes by the hour. Sun, shade, wind, overnight temps and other riders turn the same race course into different trails lap to lap.

The result? A course that rewards strength and patience. Riders who stay light on the bars and keep momentum do well. Those who over-brake on the ice or plow straight through soft “sugar” learn quickly why tire pressure and body position matter as much as leg strength.



Sharon Seling masters her fat bike in several inches of fresh snow.

The five-race series held last winter delivered packed, frozen trails, a soft snow base, and the ultimate fun finale at party-central White Grass Ski Touring Center in Davis, WV.

The first race of the series was held in Job, WV, where riders battled frozen ground slicked with light rain, making for a cold and gritty start to the series. Then, in McHenry, MD, a soft snow base never reached freezing temperatures and turned the course into a draining test of traction and stamina. Canaan Valley, WV, served the best snowy conditions of the series. Next to last, the event at Herrington Manor State Park, MD, melted snow left behind icy luge-like tracks from cross-country skiers creating unpredictable and technical sections that the riders adored.

Ed Stanley, a new fat bike rider from Cumberland, MD, embraced fat biking at the McHenry race. “I enjoyed the fat tire bike experience. I have never done anything like that before, I have ridden gravel bikes and on the GAP Trail extensively. I will definitely be riding a fat tire bike again,” Ed shared.



Top left: Sarah Kaiser (front) and Mary Giordano ride fat bikes in Herrington Manor State Park.

Top right: Zach Adams catches fat bike air.

Left: A pack of riders start in legitimate blizzard conditions of an active snow and 30 mph winds.



Shoutout to everyone who makes the Highlands Fat Bike Series more than just a race. At the aid stations, it's bacon, hot drinks, and encouragement that keep riders moving. At the finish, it's shivers turning into smiles over shared pizza that make the cold worth it. It's the energy and camaraderie that brings riders back year after year.

These races don't happen without local support. The local shops keep bikes rolling, volunteers

There's a particular electricity at a winter cycling start line. Helmet liners pulled low. Buffs up. Goggles down. Someone's doing arm swings to stay warm. Someone else is testing tire pressure one last time. One favorite memory is the rolling start at the Lions Club race in McHenry where the pack of about 50 riders spun through the slushy start in legitimate blizzard conditions of an active snow and 30 mph winds. It's truly something special.

From the start, riders spread out. Some discover confidence early, others recalibrate after that first slippery washout. The race rewards quick learners. By the second lap, the cautious are riding smoother, and the bold are realizing where caution pays off. By the third lap those interested in placing in the top few are jockeying for position while the adventurers are focused on digging deep to just get it done.

stoke the fires, land managers open access, and sponsors cover the details like timing services, fencing, promotions, and banners. Add in fans ringing cowbells, spectator dogs in sweaters, and a post-race scene that feels like a winter tailgate, you can see what this series is really about. It's racing at the core but it's also community, celebration, and insight into the best of what the Allegheny Highlands has to offer.

The Highlands Fat Bike Series is the official winter race circuit in Western Maryland, but riders are out all season long. At Herrington Manor State Park, fat bike rentals make it easy for anyone to try, and group rides pop up whenever the conditions line up. Night riding is part of the fun, too, since it gets dark so early riders regularly roll under the stars. Experienced veterans coach newcomers

and women's participation continues to grow thanks to beginner-friendly outings and a welcoming, supportive atmosphere.

Thanks to everyone who came out and made the Highlands Fat Bike Series such a blast. Whether you raced for the podium, finished with a smile, or just came to cheer, you're part of what makes this community so special.

Follow Deep Creek Adventure Bureau on Facebook or Instagram to stay connected and see what's coming next. Starting with snowy singletrack and adding spring trail rides and year-round Thursday Womens+ Casual Mountain Bike Rides, we're building opportunities to ride, explore, and celebrate the region's incredible outdoor assets.

"Give fat biking or mountain biking a try; it just might become your new favorite hobby," said Myers. "I have so much respect for those who are willing to get out of their comfort zone and try something new. That first ride is about rediscovering strength, experiencing joy, and becoming part of a community. Let's Ride!"

www.highlandsfatbikeseries.com

Fat Bike Advice:

Tire Pressure: Lower than you think. Start high, air down in half-psi steps until the casing smudges but doesn't fold in corners. 5–8 lbs of pressure is not too low.

Stay Loose: Let the front wheel wander a bit. Fighting every wiggle only makes the bike slide more.

Look Ahead: Eyes up as your body and front wheel follow your eyes.

Brake Early: Scrub speed before corners, release through the turn, and trust the tires.

Pick Your Line: When snow gets chewed up, the best traction is often just off the main groove. Or, stay in the track created by the rider in front of you.

Rent: Rent before you buy. Locally, Herrington Manor State Park rents fat bikes.

Layers: Layer smart. Start cool—sweat turns to chill fast.

Bring Backups: Extra gloves, socks, and a buff will make you glad you packed them. Also, a change of clothes for when the chill just soaks through.

Pace: Pick your wave as riding with your pace group makes the race smoother.

Ask questions: Other riders are generous with advice.



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