

**CATHY WURZER:** It's part of our new series called Winter Play. We're turning the winter doldrums on its head in a celebration of all things snow and cold. We sent our reporters out around the state to revel in the weather that makes living in Minnesota so unique. And the first story in that series comes from Kirsti Marohn, who's based out of our Collegeville bureau. Thanks for being here.

**KIRSTI MAROHN:** Hi, Cathy, it's great to be here.

**CATHY WURZER:** Well, congratulations. You went winter fat tire biking, something I have never done. So I know there are a few people like me who are not familiar with a fat tire bike.

**KIRSTI MAROHN:** Tell us about it. Sure, well, first of all, the bikes are a little bit different. So they have bigger frames and bigger tires, hence the name. And I mean really big tires. So a road bike typically has tires that are maybe like an inch wide. A fat tire bike has tires that are typically like four inches wide.

And then they also have these metal studs, usually. That help give you more traction. And those come in really-- in handy because when you're riding on the snow and ice, they really give you some extra traction and grip, especially when you're on off road trails.

**CATHY WURZER:** All right, and I'm curious about meeting-- how you decided to do this. I know you met up with two guys at the bike shop. So we're going to-- we're going to talk a little bit about that. We're going to meet them first.

**MATT SUNDQUIST:** This is your first ride?

**KIRSTI MAROHN:** This is my first ride. I've been out here one time mountain biking.

**MATT SUNDQUIST:** It's beautiful out there. And it's groomed nice and wide. So I think you'll like it.

**MIKE HAWKINS:** It's a great way to introduce yourself to mountain biking, for sure. With those wider trails, you build confidence. The next thing you know, you're out riding the main unit and having a lot of fun.

**MATT SUNDQUIST:** Buying more bikes--

**MIKE HAWKINS:** Buying more bikes, yeah.

**CATHY WURZER:** That sounds pretty busy in that shot.

**KIRSTI MAROHN:** Yeah, it was. That's Matt Sundquist and Mike Hawkins. And they're part of this group called Gravel Grinders. They ride in the Brainerd Lakes area all year round. And so they met up with me and agreed to take me out for my first ride.

**CATHY** OK, and it sounds like this is growing in popularity just based on who I hear in the background there.

**WURZER:**

**KIRSTI** Yeah, that's right. We started out, we met in a bike shop called Cycle. It's in downtown Ironton. And they got me set up with a bike. And it's kind of a hub, where a lot of people who are into off-road biking meet up. And so that's where we started out.

**CATHY** OK, I'm sorry, and where is this exactly for folks--

**WURZER:**

**KIRSTI** So that was an Ironton, which is-- so it's right on the edge of the Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area. And that is one of the premier fat tire biking spots in Minnesota, or even in the upper midwest. And it's just east of Brainerd. They've got about 40 miles of groomed trails for winter biking.

**CATHY** OK, so you saddled up. And you got on the bike and got on the trail. So we're going to listen to that.

**WURZER:**

**KIRSTI** The trees are all covered with snow. It's just really beautiful. The edges of the trail are really soft. So you really want to stay in the middle. If you get too far off to the edge, you kind of sink down.

**CATHY** It's pretty. It's definitely pretty up there. I can hear you breathing hard, Kirsti. What was that like?

**WURZER:**

**KIRSTI** Yes, the whole ride was just not at all what I expected. I thought it would be really cold and kind of scary. But you know, actually, once you got going, it wasn't cold. I mean, you really warm up pretty quickly. And yeah, the scenery is just beautiful. I mean, you're riding through the woods. There's sunlight on the snow. And the trees are all covered with snow and kind of bent over. And you're pedaling by these frozen lakes. And it's just really quiet and really peaceful.

You could hear my warning there. I was. I was doing OK. I mean, you could hear-- the worst part, I guess, was the first couple of times we went down a hill, that was a little scary. But you know what? Actually, you're not riding very fast. And the snow kind of cushions everything. So it's really a smooth ride. I mean, much smoother than mountain biking over a rocky trail.

And then you also keep the tire pressure really low on the tires, less than 10 PSI. If you're a biker, you kind of know, that's really low. Sometimes as low as like 2 or 3 PSI. So that kind of gives you flotation. So you can travel over the snow without leaving a deep rut in the trail.

**CATHY** OK, all right, I was going to say. You've got to be doing pretty-- you sound like you're just zipping right through the snow. And that's not an issue for you at all. But you are, as I say, you're working hard. How would you describe this as a workout?

**KIRSTI** Well, I'd say you're physically active. I mean, certainly, I was working. My heart was was pumping. I was-- you can hear I'm breathing there pretty heavily. But not really strenuous. I mean, the hills were not very steep. And like I said, you kind of warm up quickly. But you certainly don't need to be a super athlete or anything to do the sport.

**CATHY** Whew, OK, that's good. Then I can try it. Any mishaps as you tried this new sport?

**WURZER:**

**KIRSTI** Well, you can hear my warning there that you really don't want to get too close to the edge. The center of the trail is groomed, and packed, and pretty easy riding. But if you get too close to the edge, it's very soft. And I was trying to pass a slower rider. And my bike just sort of sunk down. And I ended up in the snowbank. So I think you can hear a clip of that.

**MAROHN:** [LAUGHS]

OK, so passing is not a good idea. I love it. A snow angel.

**CATHY** You didn't get hurt.

**WURZER:**

**KIRSTI** No, not at all. I mean, it's very soft. I just sort of sunk down. And everyone in my group just laughed along with me and waited while I climbed up out of the snowbank. And then we kept riding.

**MAROHN:**

**CATHY** Now, what did you wear? I mean clothing is always important when you get out-- when you get out and exercise, but also when you're out in the bitter cold, too.

**WURZER:**

**KIRSTI** Yeah, like I said, it's a workout. So you don't want to overdress. I mean, layers are best, especially wool or a synthetic fabric, not cotton. I wore a base layer, then windproof pants and a jacket. A thin hat that could go right inside my bike helmet, and then warm gloves are definitely a must.

**MAROHN:**

Some people had goggles or sunglasses. A lot of people had like a neck gaiter to keep your your neck warm. And then some of the riders had these pogies. They're like these cuff things that go over your wrists to help keep your hands warm.

**CATHY** OK, how about your feet?

**WURZER:**

**KIRSTI** I made the mistake of wearing running shoes. And a lot of people did have winter boots, which would have been warmer. And that's about the only thing that really got cold were my toes. So I would definitely do boots and maybe even some of those hand warmers stuck inside your boots for extra warmth.

**MAROHN:**

**CATHY** Yeah, that's a good idea. All right, so I'm assuming you did not go and buy a bike. Did you rent one?

**WURZER:**

**KIRSTI** Yes, and there are a lot of places that rent them for not very much money. The place where we went was called Cycle in downtown Ironton. They charge \$40 for four hours or \$65 for a full day. And that includes a helmet. So it's pretty reasonable.

**MAROHN:**

**CATHY** That's not bad at all. So if you want to go biking somewhere else, are there other places to ride a fat tire bike in the winter besides Cuyuna?

**WURZER:**

**KIRSTI** Yeah, you can ride fat tire bikes on roads. But really, I think it's better-- it's more fun on trails. If you want to get out in nature, there's a lot of state forest roads and trails that allow biking. Some state parks also have groomed biking trails. Jay Cooke, Split Rock Lighthouse, and Fort Snelling, I know all three of those do. Also some parks in the Twin Cities have trails, Elk Creek Park Reserve in Maple Grove, Theodore Wirth in Minneapolis. One thing you should avoid is biking on trails that are groomed for snowmobiling or cross-country skiing.

**CATHY** Yes, I made that mistake snowshoeing on a cross-country ski trail. No, that doesn't work. What else should folks keep in mind if they're thinking about trying this activity?

**KIRSTI** Well, remember that just like any activity, there are risks. So make sure you always wear a helmet. Check your bike before you go to make sure it fits right and everything's working right. Stay on the trails that are suited for you your ability. And make sure you're in control at all times.

Remember that the trail conditions can vary a lot. So if it's really soft or icy, it's going to be more difficult. Riding with a group like I did is a great way to experience fat tire biking for the first time in a safe way. And it's also more fun.

**CATHY** All right, so on a scale of 1 to 10, where does fat tire biking rank in your favorite ways to play in the winter, 10 being the best?

**KIRSTI** I'd say maybe an 8. I definitely want to go back again.

**MAROHN:**

**CATHY** Good, OK. And then do you usually get out in the winter? Some people do not. They hibernate all winter long. Do you normally get out? And what do you do?

**KIRSTI** I do. I do a lot of cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. I just-- I really find that getting out in nature helps my physical and mental health. And it just makes the winter much more bearable.

**CATHY** It does. All right, Kirsti, thank you so much.

**WURZER:**

**KIRSTI** Thanks for having me.

**MAROHN:**