

THE BIG CHILL

While you're cosied up in front of a fire with a copy of your favourite magazine this February, two MBUK staffers will be braving snow, frozen lakes and fermented moose wee in possibly the coldest race on earth

Words Matt Orton pics Simon Toplak



Big tyres and even bigger hand warmers are the order of the day in the Arctic Circle

THE LOWDOWN ROVANIEMI 150



This unique winter race through Northern Finland's subarctic landscape starts and finishes at Lapland's main city, Rovaniemi

LOCATION ROVANIEMI, FINLAND

DISTANCE 150KM

TIME WITHIN 42 HOURS

DATE 20-22 FEBRUARY 2014

ENTRY FEE €250

REGISTRATION BY 31 JANUARY 2014

WWW.ROVANIEMI150.COM

Snow sports and mountain biking aren't obvious bedfellows. As one season ends in the mountains, the other begins. Skis and snowboards are dusted off and bikes are stored for the winter. That was, until the recent explosion of interest in fatbikes. These freakish-looking machines with their cartoonishly large tyres are just the thing for riding through snow. And when it comes to riding bikes in snow, there's one event that stands head and shoulders above the rest – the legendary 1,000-mile Iditarod Invitational Trail, widely acknowledged as the toughest winter ultra-marathon in the world. As its name suggests, the Iditarod Invitational is limited to just 50 riders selected from qualifying races around the world. Finland's Rovaniemi 150 is one such race, offering similar snowbound challenges on a condensed 150km route – just the thing for two lads from the UK who've never raced a fatbike or even ridden in proper snow before then! »

FULL FAT OPTIONS

THE BOYS' SNOW STEEDS

IN ASSOCIATION WITH



TOM'S SARMA SHAMAN

£1,650 (frame only)

www.ison-distribution.com

If Tom's going to race, only a race bike will do. Take away the monster truck wheels and there's little to separate the Sarma Shaman from any cross-country race bike. With a carbon frame and rims, bolt-through axles front and rear, and short chainstays, it's designed to feel just like a conventional 29er.

FRAME High-modulus carbon fibre **FORK** Sarma Hoboy (rigid, carbon) **TRANSMISSION** SRAM XX1 (1x11) **BRAKES** Avid XX hydraulic discs **WHEELS** Sarma Naran 80 carbon rims, Sarma hubs (135mm front, 170mm rear), Surly Nate 26x3.8in tyres



MATT'S SURLY ICE CREAM TRUCK OPS

£2,199.99 (complete bike)

www.ison-distribution.com

The Surly's trail-ready spec and geometry give it a playful feel out of the snow but some changes may be needed to turn it into an Arctic trail tamer. There are no fancy modern luxuries here – the cable disc brakes and old-school thumbshifters may not be flashy but they'll keep things moving and stopping in freezing temperatures.

FRAME 4130 chromoly steel **FORK** Surly Ice Cream Truck (rigid, 4130 chromoly) **TRANSMISSION** Surly OD cranks, microSHIFT SL-M10 thumbshifters, Shimano SLX derailleurs (2x10) **BRAKES** Avid BB7 cable discs **WHEELS** Surly Rolling Darryl aluminium rims, Salsa hubs (150mm front, 197mm rear), Surly Nate 26x3.8in tyres

Find out more about the bikes the guys will be riding on the MBUK blog www.mbuk.com



OUR INTREPID EXPLORERS
WHO ARE MATT & TOM?



Matt Orton
MBUK's Deputy Art Editor and resident weirdy bearded, nothing catches the attention of Matt's cider-addled brain quicker than fat tyres, bendy bars, belt drives and other, similarly outlandish innovations. More at home under canvas than in a hotel, most of his holidays involve hiking Swiss alpine routes, wilderness canoeing or bike related adventures. Grrr... manly!



Tom Marvin
Our sister mag *What Mountain Bike*'s geeky tech ed spends most of his time thrashing trail bikes around the country, but he's always on the lookout for interesting races too. Having tested his mettle in the Trans Nepal and Cristalp Grand Raid, he's hoping his second Strathpuffer 24 in January will set him up well for the Rovaniemi 150.



FOLLOW THE ADVENTURE!
You can keep up to date with Matt and Tom's preparation and progress on MBUK.com as well as our Facebook and Twitter pages. And look out for more features coming soon in MBUK.

Only a hardy few have what it takes to compete here, so the start line isn't exactly crowded



Checkpoints are a vital lifeline, offering warmth and human company

"Don't be an idiot. You'll die!" That wasn't the confidence-inspiring reaction I was hoping for from my best mate when I sent him a link to the Rovaniemi 150 website. "How do you even train for that? Stick your bike in the freezer?" It would seem that racing bikes through snow on the edge of the Arctic Circle is a concept that many people find difficult to grasp, the general reaction being a quick nod and smile followed by a swift change of conversation to escape the ravings of a madman.

I've always been drawn to things that are a bit different. They need to be different for a reason though, and fatbikes are just that. After seeing a Surly Pugsley on an American bikepacking blog I was hooked. And the more I looked into them, the more comments I found on forums from people saying their fatbike was more fun than their trail bike. Wait a minute, these huge tired, rigid framed beasts could be used on trails too?

Since securing a fatbike for a long-term test for our sister mag, *What Mountain Bike*, I've spent the past year having my expectations smashed. There's been no trail that it hasn't tackled with ease, and it's left me grinning like an idiot every time. With XC rides, trail centre visits and even road commuting ticked off, it seems like the only

ESSENTIAL KIT FOR SNOW RACING



Arctic weather can be lethal, so high on our list of priorities was seeking the advice of kit experts. We met up with the guys from GO Outdoors who, with 20 years' experience, were great for helping us plan our adventure. The focus is very much on comfortable layers that will provide warmth but still allow us to move! Here's our first kit list:

- Montane Terra Thermostretch** mountain pants
- North Ridge Sprint** long-sleeve baselayer
- North Ridge Onyx** insulated gilet

- Marmot Thermo Hoody** fleece baselayer
- Rab Infinity** down jacket
- Berghaus Thermal** tights
- Montane Sabretooth** softshell jacket
- Montane Punk** balaclava
- Rab Baseline** hoodie
- Lifesystems** survival bag and blankets
- Hi Gear First Aid Kit 3**
- North Ridge Valiant 80** holdall
- Rab Andes 1000** sleeping bag
- Rab Latok Extreme** gaiters

www.goutdoors.co.uk

thing left to try is the fatbike's very reason for existing – snow riding.

I like the cold, in fact I prefer it to heat, so the thought of riding through lots of snow excites me. There are a huge number of unknowns when you're preparing for an event like this though. You aren't just competing against other people, you're competing against a challenging environment that we aren't meant to survive in. That means careful kit choice is going to be essential.

Training is going to be another key element in our prep – nothing can beat miles in the saddle and the next few months will see us racking up plenty more of these. I'm told the race will be mentally tough too – riding through miles of featureless white landscape with no signs of life can be soul destroying and bring on feelings of loneliness and isolation. Luckily, I like my own company. I also like not knowing exactly what to expect or how I'll cope. You never know what you can achieve until you try it. ⚙️

ROVANIEMI 150 - THE VITAL INFO

150km

René Fisher 1st place 2014

15h14m

-30°C
Expected temperature – it could be colder!

3 CATEGORIES
FOOT SKI BIKE

1,356m climbing
1,350m descent

Local wildlife
ELK
GREY WOLF
WOLVERINE
BROWN BEAR