TEAM LAUGHING DOG: “We’re just a bunch of normal guys.”
By Vic Armijo

It’s likely that more than a few RAAM multi-rider teams began in much the same way as Team Laughing Dog Brewing; team member Mel Dick describes that founding moment, “One night sitting around the campfire after a long day’s ride and after having probably too many beers we started talking about ‘Hey, let’s do the Race Across America next year.’ And everybody said ‘Yeah, okay, I’m in.’ and the next morning we all woke up realized what we’d committed to!”

This extreme game of “I double-dog dare ya,” indeed came to fruition a year later at RAAM 2011, albeit with just two of the original campfire four—one had other commitments develop and Dick suffered injuries in a cycling tumble just prior to RAAM. Along the way they picked up their title sponsor, appropriately enough Laughing Dog Brewing, a microbrewery located near Sand Point, Idaho, the team’s hometown. It was through the brewery that the team also found a cause for their RAAM assault when it was discovered that an employee there had a child with Autism. Through their efforts $95,000 was raised to benefit families in their area that have been touched by Autism.
FOUNDING MEMBER
While Mel Dick was among the original “campfire four” that first committed themselves to RAAM RAAM 2013 will be his first time getting to ride.

Last year the original four sat out RAAM, although some did crew for a 4-rider women’s team that competed as Team Laughing Dog Brewing. Dick related “It was a group of ladies all from Sand Point, Idaho, all friends with the biking community. We asked them if they wanted to ride and we helped them do the fund raising and crewed for them.”

For RAAM 2013 the team will be made up of the original “campfire four,” Jacob Syer, Mel Dick, Dean Kyriakos and Alan Lemire. “And this year we have a different cause,” Dick related, “Cystinosis. It’s a little-known disease. Your body doesn’t process the amino acid cystine. So it accumulates in the body and your liver goes bad and you have to take medicine every six hours. A lot of people with it never live past childhood. There are only about 500 people in the United States that have it and about 2,000 people worldwide. There’s a little boy named Hank that lives in Sand Point that has it and his grandfather was on our crew in 2011. It’s referred to as an orphan disease—it’s one of those that are so limited that it doesn’t get a lot research.” To help that cause the team does 24-cycling and ski events to raise funds for “24 Hours for Hank,” a foundation set up to benefit their local child victim.
SLIGHTLY LESS SNOW
Team member Al Lemire some months ago when local riding conditions were somewhat warmer.

While the team is extraordinary when it come to their causes, on the road they’re actually quite ordinary, or so says Dick, “We’re just a bunch of normal guys. None of us is even close to what you would call a big-time cyclist.” Indeed, the team is a prime example of how the RAAM multi-rider teams provide means for normal cycling enthusiasts to have first-hand experiences in this wondrous event, “We all have a lot of good memories of things that the group did in the race and leading up to the race.”

Another good memory was formed in that first year in 2011 when the owner of the brewery, Fred Colby, flew in a waited for the team at the finish line in Annapolis with an ice chest of his finest brews, “I think they got in at one or two o’clock.” Dick recalled, “He couldn’t be there last year, but he has plans of participating in 2014, he wants to put together an 8-man team and he wants to ride. He’s a big guy but when he gets going on the flats he flies.” And as with all true adventures RAAM isn’t always fun, “Last year going through Kansas we had 50 mile an hour headwinds and crosswinds that about blew us all off the road. All that after having a van break down on the second day in Arizona. In fact I just got that van back to Idaho from Arizona three weeks ago (mid-January 2013).”

“Normal guys” or not, they’re not taking their RAAM effort lightly, “We’d like to be somewhat competitive,” Dick said, “We’ll probably do seven to eight days. The men’s team in 2011 did it in six days and nine hours I think and last year’s women’s team did it just over eight days.” To post a respectable time is extra challenging considering what winter means in that corner of Idaho, “It’s either raining or snowing and the temperature is in the 20’s.” Dick said, which is why he spent two months training in Tucson, Arizona. Meanwhile back home his teammates managed to keep pedaling by resorting to “Fat Bikes,” mountain bikes with big, fat tires that are nearly five inches wide to allow them to...
be ridden on snow-covered trails and cross-country ski routes, “That’s kind of the craze in Northern Idaho and Montana,” Dick said.

Team Laughing Dog Brewery member Jacob Syer pedals his “fat bike” over The trails of Northern Idaho.

The logistic side is well in hand too, “Part of the crew from 2011 is back this year,” Dick explained, “Some of them crewed last year. So we have a half dozen crew members this year that have either crewed it or ridden it. We’ve got a practice ride scheduled in May; we have two very experienced co-crew chiefs. They were there the past two years.” Dennis Luce and Kirk Johnson. “They're very familiar with the logistics side of it at pretty much take care of everything for us now. Us riders won’t have to worry about much.” We have a very experienced RV crew out of Bend, Oregon. They’ve not done RAAM but they’ve supported us in some other events and we’re very comfortable with them as well.”

To have put together such a great effort from such a small town is admirable, “Sand Point is only about 7,000 people, and that this is going to be our third team made up of riders from our local community, that’s pretty impressive,” Dick observed, “We have a pretty outdoorsy, recreationally minded community. It’s a ski resort community it has a great big lake. A small community like that will rally behind someone who’s trying to do something crazy like this.”

Crazy? Nah, at least not any more than any of the other riders or teams. Good luck to the Laughing Dogs, your faithful RAAM reporter will be looking for them in Annapolis…and for their sponsor and his ice chest of “motivation.”