

Jim O'Horo Memorial Columbia Gorge Explorer FAQs

What is the cost to participate in the ride/tour?

\$20/rider pays the camping fee for all three nights. If you are not staying at one or more of the three designated sites, you need to make plans for your own reservations and pay any additional fees.

What kind of bike do I need?

We have had all sorts of bikes on the tour: road bikes, mountain bikes, folding bikes. Of course, bikes designed for loaded tours. Your bike needs to be able to be fitted for racks that can carry about 40 pounds of gear and/or pull a trailer. Your bike should be in good condition (as should you!), with up-to-date maintenance performed. For carbon fiber road bikes, especially pulling trailers, please be sure this is a manufacturer approved use of your bike. Mountain bikes can be fitted for a more comfortable touring geometry. Road bikes can certainly be used successfully. Road bikes, however, are typically geared a bit high, so the hills might be a challenge. Also, the frame, wheels, and brakes tend to be lighter and may not handle the stress.

What bike gear, and parts should I pack?

Each bike should be minimally equipped with good head and taillights. Each rider should have a minimum of two water bottles, two inner tubes, and maybe a folding spare tire. You should definitely have a patch kit, pump, and tire levers. Either you or your riding buddy should have a multi-tool or metric Allen wrenches, a spoke wrench for your bikes, a chain tool, and three spare spokes. Note that the spokes in the front wheel are probably going to be one length, the spoke on the drive side of the rear wheel a different length, and the non-drive side will be a third length. Your bike should be in good condition with up-to-date maintenance performed. One experienced bike tourist I know says that everything he carries does double duty. Me? I tend to carry duplicates in case something breaks!

What gear should I bring?

Basically, it is the same as for a back-country backpacking camping trip, except that re-supply is easier. There are many web sites to assist you. Here is a barebones list: tent, sleeping bag and pad, stove/fuel, eating/cooking supplies, bike clothing, camp clothing including shower sandals and towel, toiletries, and medications. Your headlight can double as a flashlight for nighttime. Remember this is the Pacific Northwest and it could be wet and cold, so bring layers of clothing that are waterproof, warm, and which you can absolutely keep dry. Also, bring miscellaneous items like a hat, sunglasses, portable camp chair/pad, and swimsuit. If you bring a down sleeping bag or jacket, make sure you can keep them dry. Don't even think about riding in cotton or down. If perspiration or rain gets them wet, they lose 100% of their insulating ability.

Do I need to pack four days' worth of food?

No, not for this tour. There are markets to buy food each day (although limited at Biggs) and restaurants for lunch. Traditionally, the group has breakfast more or less together on the third and fourth days at Cousins' Restaurant in The Dalles and The Bridgeside (formerly Charburger) in Cascade Locks. Most riders carry food for breakfast on the second day and also some snacks. They eat lunch or brunch on the road and buy food in one of the towns for cooking dinner in camp. Many riders pack a "cook in the bag" meal for emergencies as well as energy bars.

Where can I eat and buy food?

Because food is so readily available along this route, if you really want to travel "lightweight" it is possible to leave stove and cooking gear at home and travel with nothing more than a cup, bowl and utensils. Groceries and restaurants are available in Stevenson, Lyle, Biggs (limited), and Hood River. There is even a convenience store directly across the road from Home Valley, our first stop.

Will the group ride together?

No, but it has been our experience that riders will find other riders that ride at a pace very close to their own and thus may ride together for a while. Usually 4-8 riders in each group, which riders join and change depending on sightseeing stops, terrain, and stamina. A few veterans and/or strong riders will ride alone. Others will have a riding buddy or two that they stay with (or close to) for the whole trip. The ride leaders and members of the two participating bike clubs are sensitive about dropping riders and will provide needed guidance or assistance. You should find a tempo that is comfortable and sustainable and then find the gear combinations that will give you that. Shift as often as needed for comfort. After that, your speed will be whatever it is. Ride your ride. The trip is yours to enjoy. We strongly suggest small groups widely spaced along Washougal River Road and Highway 14. You will encounter a fair amount of traffic, so make it easy and safe for cars to pass. On day three, there is usually a strong headwind and we suggest leaving camp as early as possible in a small paceline.

What SAG is provided?

None. Absolutely none. This is designed to be a self-supported tour. It is the responsibility of each rider to have an emergency back-up in case of severe injury or mechanical failure. Gear and food (which may be purchased along the

route) is expected to be carried by bike. There will be several riders with a few tools to assist in getting you to the next town with a bike shop if further repairs are needed. Cell phone coverage is good for almost the entire route, but can be spotty at Deschutes River, but in an absolute emergency a 911 call is always available.

Are there other options besides tent camping?

Yes, there are motels on the route within 8 miles of the camping locations. You must book these yourself, and you are responsible for the additional expense. Remember, the best part of the trip is the comradeship. Do you really want to miss out on that? If you don't camp with the group, you need to notify ride leaders of your plans so that we do not send out a search party.

What precautions need to be observed if towing a trailer?

New trailers often come with the manufacturers warning "**NOT TO EXCEED 25 MPH**" which is the speed where the trailer sometimes "fishtails" causing loss of control and a crash. Keep speed under 25 mph, especially on downhill stretches with sharp curves such as the descent from Old Highway 8 or from Highway 14 to Biggs. Extra distance needs to be allowed for safe stopping. Be sure of your stopping distance and oncoming traffic (this is just as true for any bike, whether loaded or not).

Do not exceed recommended weight for the trailer. The lighter the better. Keep weight distribution heavier on the forward half. When towing a trailer, for convenience in getting to items commonly accessed during the day, a handlebar bag or rack trunk is helpful. Otherwise pack such items in a large plastic bag or appropriately sized duffel and place on top of the load in the trailer.

What about electronics?

Good question. Electronics, especially cell phones, bike computers, lights, etc., need electricity, right? Where are you going to get it? One solution, of course, is to carry batteries, but some items use a fair amount of electricity if used all day long. For headlights and tail lights, I recommend putting in fresh batteries the night before the ride starts. I run my headlight and tail lights all the time I ride, and I use my headlight as a flashlight in the campground and in the tent. I recommend carrying a set of replacement batteries (or buying them at the end of day two to be sure you have enough juice for the trip. For cell phones and GPS units, you'd need to recharge. You can get battery packs to get you through, and there are electric outlets at each campground on our route.

CAVEAT: The outlets at Home Valley are under our control and supervision, so no problem. There are, however, no outlets on our site at Deschutes River. We may be able to plead and wheedle the use of an outlet or two there, but no guarantee. At Viento, we will be sharing C loop with other campers. The only outlets are in the restrooms, and one of our party had a battery pack stolen out of the restroom while it was re-charging.

Can I use my e-bike?

My answer is "I don't know, but I would recommend against it." My reasons?

- My understanding is that electric assist bikes have limited range. All of the distances each day are over 40 miles.
- Recharging would be difficult at Home Valley and Viento due to limited electric outlets. There are no outlets near our campsites at Deschutes River.
- There are substantial hills on each day, particularly days 3 and 4.