

Route Talk *Classic* 2019

Day 1 – Oakridge to Rainbow

TAKE ME TO THE BRIDGE

After reluctantly leaving the outdoorsy paradise of Oakridge (and probably vowing to return some day soon), you'll ride past the Office Covered Bridge at Westfir. This scarlet beauty is Oregon's longest covered bridge and something unique to this part of the country, and apparently Madison County, Iowa.

Beyond the bridge, the route will soon deposit riders onto the Aufderheide Scenic Byway or the far less exotically-named Forest Service Road 19. The Aufderheide is a gentle climb through the forest, following the Middle Fork of the Willamette River to lunch at the summit at Box Canyon.

You will really have to earn your lunch today (eat the cookie first!) because the last 2 miles before the summit come with an 8% grade that looks tougher than it really is. Once you arrive at lunch, the remainder of the day consists of 26 miles of speedy, swoopy downhill! Tuck this little thought away in the back of your mind during the climb and you'll do just fine.

Heading downhill from lunch and Box Canyon, the route follows the South Fork of the McKenzie River past Terwilliger/Cougar Hot Springs (clothing optional, wink wink) and Cougar Reservoir towards our stopping point in Rainbow. During today's fast descents, please remember to be considerate of other riders' comfort levels. Give everyone some space and tap the brakes when necessary.

Once you reach Cougar Dam, there will be a short, steep downhill with the McKenzie River at the bottom. As a perfect covered bridge bookend to the day, you will cross the Belknap Covered Bridge just before the finish.

Tonight we'll be camping on the edge of the Tokatee Golf Course, consistently ranked as a "Best Course in Oregon" by Golf Digest. When exiting your tent in the morning remember, if someone yells "Fore!", duck!*

*Disclaimer: The range will be closed and no one will actually be hitting golf balls at campers.

Day 2 – Rainbow to Tumalo

SISTERLY LOVE

Today's ride starts out on Highway 126, and much like a sports coat in the 80's, it has nice wide shoulders. You'll pass through McKenzie Bridge (the community) and past the Forest Service's McKenzie Bridge Ranger Station before turning onto Highway 242 at around mile 8.

Up until now, the road will have been pretty flat. Once on the Old McKenzie Highway, we start gaining altitude. This climb is pretty much up and up, followed by a little more up, until we reach the summit of the Cascades at Dee Wright Observatory. If you look closely during the switchbacks, there is one spot where you can look down and see at least 3 switchbacks just below. This climb is a gentle incline at 5-6% and you've laughed in the face of much tougher hills in your day, so it shouldn't be overly-difficult. And once you reach the top, have a little rest and a snack and take in the view – you've earned it.

Speaking of the view, from up here you can see lava flows and obsidian on both sides of the road as well as spectacular views of the Three Sisters. Riders will also experience a unique phenomenon near the summit where they travel through 3 counties in the space of one mile.

Between the summit and Sisters, there are 15 switchback-free miles of downhill. There are a few sharp corners and rough road spots to keep an eye out for, but besides that it can be a really fun, speedy descent. At mile 33, you'll arrive at Windy Point Viewpoint. If the weather is not cooperating, this area can be a little, well, windy. If you're prone to getting chilly, this would be a good place to add another layer.

Lunch will be served in a shady city park in the community of Sisters. From Sisters, it's only 22.4 mostly flat miles to the finish in Tumalo. We'll be riding country roads with very little traffic, (with the exception of a couple of brief segments on Highway 20 and Highway 126) and on the [Twin Bridges Scenic Bikeway](#).

*Gravel Option: The gravel option is a sweet 15.4 miles that starts in Sisters and rejoins the main route on Tumalo Reservoir Road. The beginning portion has a bit of loose aggregate but the payoff is spectacular views and relative solitude. Interesting fact: Tumalo Reservoir is perhaps Oregon's greatest irrigational blunder – the dam was built but giant sink holes and porous bedrock couldn't hold the water.

Day 3 – Tumalo to La Pine

SCENIC OVERLOAD

Today's adventure begins in Tumalo State Park, a sunny 330-acre chunk of heaven on the banks of the Deschutes River. As you warm up your legs and fill your lungs with the sweet smell of dew-fed sage and juniper, you'll ride past Shevlin Park on quiet country roads on your way to the outdoor playland that is Bend, Oregon.

As you cruise through bike-friendly Bend you will undoubtedly notice a common theme—Bend loves beer. There are 21 (and counting) breweries in Bend proper and you can get a growler filled almost anywhere—including the car wash. If you ask nicely, they may make an exception and top off your water bottles for you.

Once you reach the southwestern part of town, you'll start climbing the Cascade Lakes Scenic Byway towards Mt. Bachelor. It may occur to you that you are about to pedal up a mountain, but rest assured, we kept it mellow so as not to scare anyone off. It's a 5%-ish 10-mile ascent with the payoff being unbeatable views of Mt Bachelor. Most of the landscape on this stretch can be attributed to the masterful handiwork of ancient volcanoes and glaciers.

Shortly before we reach Mt Bachelor, our route turns onto a Forest Service Road that provides a glorious 15 miles of downhill towards the resort community of Sunriver. Once in town, we follow S. Century Drive and Huntington Rd for another 14 miles of mostly flat cruising to the town of La Pine (French for The Pine) and the finish line of our first day's ride.

That's it. That's Day 3. Enjoy an evening of good music, new friends and some La Pine High Hawk hospitality as you get ready to do it all again tomorrow.

Day 4 – La Pine to Diamond Lake

GOING THE DISTANCE

After a great day on Day 3, you'll wake up well rested and ready to tackle whatever Day 4 has in store for you. Today's ride is long on miles, but short on elevation, with the only real climb coming 10 miles before the finish line.

Day 4 has us back on the amazing Cascade Lakes National Scenic Byway. If the name is any indication, we're in for some pretty spectacular views. The CLNSB, or CLH if you're into the whole brevity thing, will take us by a few shimmering Cascade lakes including Wickiup Reservoir (Oregon's second largest reservoir) and Davis Lake.

After a little R&R – resting and refueling that is – we set off in the direction of the main attraction – Crater Lake! We ride a stretch on the shoulder of Highways 58 and 97 after lunch. It is very important to remember here that even though Cycle Oregon and our good friends at the Oregon Department of Transportation and the Oregon State Police will have done our best to provide for your safety, we are still riding a stretch of major highway for a big payoff to come. Please remember the rules of the road and if you must pass another rider, do so safely. Ok? Ok. Pep talk over. Back to the route.

As we enter the homestretch, we join Highway 138 heading toward the north entrance of Crater Lake National Park...and that one little hill we mentioned earlier. It's only 6 measly miles of 5-6% grade. Piece of cake right? The tricky part about this hill is that it is one of the straightest highways in Oregon – meaning you'll be staring down the top of this hill for some time before you actually get there. After finally reaching that summit, you'll be rewarded with a pleasant 4-mile downhill to Diamond Lake and the evening's festivities.

Day 5 – Crater Lake (Layover Day)

BLUE WATERS RUN DEEP

Ah, the endless dilemma that is Day 5. You've covered a respectable amount of ground over the last four days, a point not lost on your muscles and joints, and you will have certainly earned a break. But on the other hand – Crater Lake! Riding the rim is a potentially life-altering experience (not to oversell it).

So today, you have some choices to make. You can kick back, relax and dangle your toes in the crisp, cool waters of Diamond Lake or strap those aforementioned toes back into your cycling shoes and go see Oregon's only National Park up close and personal.

Options 1 and 2 involve hanging out around camp. You can take a leisurely ride on the 11-mile paved John Dellenback bike trail that loops around Diamond Lake or you can make your way to the opposite end of the lake and rent any number of toys from the Diamond Lake Resort. Either way, you'll have all day to take in the great views of Mt. Thielsen, Mount Bailey, Diamond Peak, and the lake itself. Note: Lunch will not be served at camp today, but there are a few tasty options around the lake to try.

Option 3 (complete with a couple sub-options) is to ride back up to Crater Lake's North Entrance and from there to the rim to feast your eyes on this natural wonder. It's a steady 13-mile climb to the first viewpoint where lunch is located, and you'll rack up over 2000 feet of altitude on your way, with more than 4000 additional feet of climbing if you chose the option to do the whole Crater Lake Rim road. When you reach the Rim Drive Junction, the location of Stop 1 – Lunch – a number of sub options come into play.

Sub-option the first: You can have some lunch on the rim, turn around and ride down that mountain you just rode up and head back to camp for a total of just over 26 miles on the day.

The second sub-option, and a big reason why we have been giddy about this ride since last January is the opportunity to ride around the rim of Crater Lake. According to numerous credible sources, this is one of the prettiest, most spectacular 32 miles of bike riding on earth. It's a great ride, but you definitely have to work for it. There are no flat places on Rim Drive and you're either riding up or down hills for the majority of the 32 miles. On the plus side, there are numerous viewpoints and pull-outs (all on the right side of the road) at which to stop, catch your breath, and soak up the scenery.

After you've filled up your senses to near John Denver-ian proportions, it's a refreshing almost all-down-hill ride from Rim Drive back to camp at Diamond Lake.

Day 6 – Diamond Lake to Dorena Lake

OFF THE RAILS

Starting off from Diamond Lake it's 4 miles to Highway 138, then let that freewheel fly downhill all the way to Steamboat Creek. This lengthy downhill cruise follows the designated Wild and Scenic Umpqua River and is yet another of the beautiful stretches of National Scenic Byway we will be riding this week. Enjoy the view for a while without the distraction of sweat getting in your eyes.

If you listen carefully, you may hear rushing water—that's your first clue that you you're riding through prime waterfall country. We'll pass several waterfalls that are within a short distance from the highway. Make a mental note and save the waterfall chasing for another day because today is all about bagging those miles and getting to the picturesque shores of Dorena Lake with daylight left to burn.

After that long descent and a turn off of Highway 138 onto less traveled roads, it's time to tackle the only real climb of the day. It starts off with 10 miles of gentle climbing then gets a little more serious for about three miles with a pitch ranging from 6-10%.

What goes up must come down and after you've defeated the climb, you're rewarded with a five-mile descent with a few fairly steep brake-grabbing sections. After that, it's pretty flat road for the rest of the day.

The last ten miles of Day 6 will be ridden on the Row (rhymes with how) River Trail, which follows the shoreline of Dorena Reservoir. This National Recreation Trail is the result of a successful Rails-to-Trails project that converted the abandoned Oregon Pacific & Eastern (OP&E) rail line into this gorgeous excursion.

Our overnight camping location is past the Dorena Reservoir dam at Schwarz Park, about 5 miles from the town of Cottage Grove. Kick back in the green grass and bask in the glory of your long, but rewarding day—you've earned it!

Day 7 – Dorena Lake to Oakridge

TRAILS, TIMEBER AND TRIUMPHS

Well, this is it. Day 7. The bittersweet finale to a week full of experiences you'll be talking about for years to come. Soak it all in and savor every pedal stroke because after today, it's back to reality.

Today, we leave the sparkling, glassy waters of Dorena Lake behind and pedal our way to the town of Oakridge, nestled in the foothills of the Cascade Mountains. The first 11 miles of the day may look familiar—that's because they are the last 11 miles of yesterday's ride, only heading in the opposite direction. This will give you a chance to appreciate Dorena Lake's beauty from every angle. The Row River Trail will escort us along the banks of Dorena Lake until we are almost to our first stop at Wildwood Falls.

At around mile 19, the route enters the Umpqua National Forest. Make yourself right at home amongst the stands of Western Hemlock, Douglas Firs, Cedars and old-growth Ponderosas because most of the day will be forest riding, with the occasional stream, on lightly used US Forest Service roads.

Shortly after the second stop of the day, you'll encounter a climb—nothing major, but you will notice that you and your bike are working a little harder now. As you approach the summit, there are some steep climbing sections for three miles before you reach the (first) top of the hill at mile 36. Just take it at your own pace and fantasize about fresh legs and cool breezes.

At mile 39, you'll crest the second (and final) hilltop of the day at which time you can confidently shift from “uphill mode” to “downhill mode”. Take a minute to look to your left where you may just be able to make out Crater Lake in the distance. Hey, remember when we rode around Crater Lake? That was awesome! Now, sit back and let gravity take over as you cruise the remaining 20 downhill miles, being mindful of some steep stretches along a tree shaded road into Oakridge, where lunch and the rolling caravan of bicycle enthusiasts that is Cycle Oregon awaits your triumphant arrival.

Once back at Oakridge, you will have thus completed a most epic loop – consisting of mountains, wild rivers, ancient volcanoes, deep, blue lakes, and cascading waterfalls. You will have sweated, camped, and traded tails with somewhere around 1,500 of your new closest friends. You will have pedaled 430 miles and climbed 24,186 feet of altitude. And you will have created memories to last a lifetime, all while helping transform each of the amazing Oregon communities that we pass through.