

# THE RIVER

## Inner tubes, cold water and hot days

BY CAMILLA MORTENSEN

There's a big reward in Lane County for a dreary winter's worth of rain — a summer's worth of gloriously cool clear water for long floats on hot days. Maybe by July those days will come...

When the dog days of summer do arrive, it doesn't take much time or money to get an inner tube and toss it into the Willamette or McKenzie river and while away a couple hours watching the riverbanks pass by. If you've only watched tubers with envy and haven't taken the river dive yourself, here's a primer.

First things first: Get an inner tube. The Les Schwab Tires in Springfield says that it sells inner tubes for about \$22 each. Used ones are \$10, but everyone wants a used one and the tire store says it runs out as soon as it gets them in, so don't count on being able to get your tube pre-owned. If you're a UO student or a member of the UO Outdoor Program co-op you can rent a tube for \$12 from the Outdoor Program.

The UO tube rental comes with a PFD (personal flotation device) and though Oregon law doesn't require inner tubers to wear a PFD, it's a good idea, as is wearing bright colors so boaters can see you. Interestingly enough, if you lash a couple of single inner tubes together, the tubal creation is considered a boat, and boats need to have at least one life jacket for each river-rider. Float with a group, but as an unattached group.

When you're choosing your tube, the regular old car-sized inner tubes are the way to go. The hole in the middle is just the right size for letting your butt dunk in the cold water while the rest of you sunbathes (properly slathered in sunblock of course). Sad experience also says that eye or sunglasses should be held on with Croakies or even just twine. It helps to strap your hat down too. If you flip into the river (which is half the fun) then everything you wear flips in with you — and sinks.

Stay hydrated with your beverage of choice. A mesh lingerie bag goes for under \$10 most anywhere that sells laundry-type things. Put your cans or water bottle in the bag (no glass in the river, kids), tie the bag to your tube and it floats along with you, keeping things cold. The bag holds your crushed empties when you're done. Some folks bring food in a Ziploc-type bag, but chances are about 50-50 your food will stay dry.

The most complicated part of all this is the need for two cars. You leave one car at your take out, and drive the other one to the put in. At the end of your float, you shuttle back to your first car. Thanks to our twisty Oregon rivers, a two-to-three hour float really only means parking cars 10 minutes apart.

One popular float is on the Willamette River from Clearwater Park in Springfield to Island Park just down Main Street, also in Springfield. You get the benefit of being close to town, but simultaneously the float winds through farms and parks, giving you views of Pisgah and a slightly away-from-civilization feeling. The river's pretty shallow below Clearwater, and there are a lot of channels, but no major hazards.

Along the way, keep an eye out for wildlife like osprey, herons, sandpipers, red-tailed hawks or, with luck, an eagle. And yes, there are fish in the river. You may not see a Chinook or a summer steelhead, but you might see someone catch one. Fishing from an inner tube is not recommended. Sharp hooks puncture rubber.

About halfway along your trip, the Middle Fork Willamette (the one flowing by Clearwater) and the Coast Fork Willamette come together, right around Glassbar Island, which is historically a nude beach — you may view that as a hazard or a benefit; that's up to you. Pulling out at Island Park keeps you from experiencing too much city on your float and has the added benefit of saving you from getting swamped by rapids and the diversion dam just up river from the I-5 bridge.

When you're done and you stagger out of the water, don't forget to have left a few towels in your car. Finally, give yourself lots of time for your float — as Winnie the Pooh once said, "Rivers know this: There is no hurry. We shall get there some day." **EW**

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