

CYCLING OREGON

Cycle Oregon's weeklong ride takes bikers to Eastern Oregon BY NICK POUST



CYCLE OREGON'S 2012 TENT CITY IN KLAMATH FALLS

MICHAEL MCCULLOUGH

In its 26th year, the annual bike ride Cycle Oregon is as popular as ever and, come Sept. 7, riders will pedal their way through Eastern Oregon in the crisp fall air. Mountainous views and vast, lush valleys await 2,200 bikers on the 380- to 505-mile route that features John Day and Steens Mountain.

Ingrid Nylen is one of the organizers of the annual ride, and though her job is time-consuming, she gets the most out of the effect the ride can have on bikers young and old.

"I always like seeing someone who has set this as a goal who has never done anything like this," she says, "and it's always a good feeling to see someone succeed and accomplish something they didn't think they could do."

John Varnado, 65, felt that sense of accomplishment during the 1997 Cycle Oregon — his first of six thus far. "We rode from Nyssa on the Snake River to Yachats on the coast, border-to-border," he says. "I had a huge amount of trepidation about whether I could ride 500-plus miles in a

week. So completing my first one was a thrill."

The Portland native will be participating in the upcoming Cycle Oregon and is excited to ride to Steens Mountain, something he missed out on when the brigade of cyclists last visited. In doing so, he will climb up the Strawberry Mountains looming east of John Day, descend through the forests and highlands near Burns, soak in the beautiful scenery the slopes of Steens provide, coast down into ranch country and leisurely ride past a variety of creeks and streams on his way to Seneca and back to John Day.

A great deal of preparation is needed to make sure Varnado and others enjoy such a monumental, eclectic and scenic bike ride. And it is no easy task for Nylen and her fellow organizers: Porta-Potties need to be acquired, as do kitchen trucks, shower trucks, a stage and all of the biking supplies necessary for any situation. Then, on top of all that, there's the selection of the route. As can be imagined, the decision is made well in advance.

"We started last fall," she says. "The route we've usually chosen and even test-rode a year ahead of time. A year and a half to two years [before] we'll have it in mind. It's like a little mini moving city."

That moving city, Nylen says, often outnumbers the populations of the towns they ride through. She says they enjoy watching bikers zoom past. "Generally, they love it," she says.

And, this being the seven-day trek's 26th year, Cycle Oregon has covered most of Oregon already, so it is creative and makes variations to previous routes. In 2001, the trip to Steens Mountain — marred by news of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks — was similar but not identical to this year's ride; among other changes, day seven's trek from the town of Seneca to John Day is entirely new.

And that means a new adventure for Varnado and the many others anticipating another beautiful and enjoyable ride amidst all Oregon has to offer. ■



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