

# BIKING TO BREWERIES

Oregon's countryside offers beautiful views and brews BY DASH PAULSON



BIKING TO AGRARIAN ALES NEAR COBURG

PHOTO BY TRASK BEDORTHA

It's no secret that beer has added to Oregon's economy by billions of dollars — total economic impact from the beer industry is \$2.83 billion in 2014, according to the Oregon Brewers Guild — but another local industry is picking up speed, as well. "Oregon is on the cusp of a big expansion in biking," says Nick Meltzer, project manager for the Community Service Center at the University of Oregon.

For his master's degree, Meltzer wrote a 45-page study on the impact of mountain biking in the small community of Oakridge and found the activity was boosting the local economy in a big way. The key was that bicyclists had access to other activities besides biking — beer, for example.

As cycling has blossomed into a major recreation sector for Oregonians and tourists alike, a handful of breweries outside Eugene cater to those who love both bikes and brews.

Across the hillsides to the south and east lies Oakridge, once the "heart of the timber empire." Now, Oakridge has deemed itself home to the best mountain biking in the Northwest.

"Mountain bikers are a different tribe" from road cyclists, says Benjamin Beamer, a partner with the Brewers Union Local 180, a pub in Oakridge. "For bikers, it's really about meeting people and talking, so the Brewers Union really gives a focus for that, a place where the tribes come together."

Brewers Union is a true English pub. They brew and serve using Imperial measurements and only make cask-conditioned, small-batch ales. For beer fans, it's an oasis. A few of its current taps are the NightingAle, the Guv, the Summat and The Young Harry Porter.

Outside the pub, Oakridge's gorgeous alpine trails await. Come summer Brewers Union and other local breweries sponsor the annual Mountain Bike Oregon in July and August, bringing together craft brews, demo bikes and three days of biking.

Meanwhile, on a 25-acre chili farm 15 miles north of Eugene, Agrarian Ales beckons countryside bikers to enjoy a post-ride sip.

"We have the same challenges the wineries have," says Todd Perlmeter, general manager for Agrarian Ales, "but this year has been insane. We're getting tons of people."

The brewery, only a few miles from the Willamette Valley Scenic Bikeway, is open Friday through Sunday, and business varies by season and weather. This year has been good, Perlmeter says, adding that the tasting room sees about 15 to 20 bicyclists swing by per day. Riders who make it out to the farm can expect a baker's dozen of unique beers on tap.

"We grow our own hops and use our own hops exclusively," Perlmeter says, and he says they are the only brewery in the country to do so. Those brews include chili beers like Chili Corn Lager and off-kilter brews like The Harry Oyster Stout made with 480 oysters thrown into the mash.

Agrarian Ales also offers beanbag toss, live music, a horseshoe throw and an ample number of picnic tables to accommodate tired bikers who need a rest from the heat and hurry. And, of course, an ample selection of beer.

"I think you'll see biking paired with a lot of activities like breweries or wineries in the future," Meltzer says. "It brings people in." ■

*For Agrarian Ales, take the river bike path to Green Acres Rd., then take Crescent Ave. to Coburg Rd. across the McKenzie River and through Coburg. Continue on Coburg Rd. through countryside, then take Powerline Rd. and turn left at Crossroads Ln. East.*

*For Brewers Union Local 180, you can take LTD's Diamond Express for \$5 from Eugene to Oakridge. The bus can carry three bikes per trip. By car, take OR-58 to Crestview St. in Oakridge. Brewers Union is on E. 1st St.*

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