



A SLEEPER HIT

Climb on board as the railriders roll into Tillamook

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It was one of those invitations I couldn't refuse — the chance to be one of the first people to ride a stretch of disused train tracks in rail cars built according to what Oregon Coast Railriders owner Kim Metlin described as a “severely modified internet design.”

When I first heard about it, a grainy black and white film starting playing in my head of two men standing on a handcar, pumping their arms furiously as they tried to go faster than an oncoming train. The railriders, by contrast, are pedal powered and because no trains share the tracks, will never need to be propelled at breakneck speed.

“People ask if it's safe,” said Tillamook County Commissioner Mark Labhart. “They have this idea that a train is going to come along unexpected-

ly, but there are no trains operating on these tracks, period.”

This particular chance to ride the rails was due to Drew Carney of KGW's “Out & About,” coming to do a live broadcast before the Railriders business opened to the public on Memorial Day weekend. As it's a morning program, we assembled at 4:30 a.m. in Bay City, just north of Tillamook. Though the sky was

still dark, the mood was light because, other than the TV people and me, all the day's riders either owned, worked for or had a part in making the venture into a reality. Among them, Commissioner Labhart, who had stumbled upon the Metlins' original rail riding business in Joseph, a small town on the eastern edge of Oregon.

“I thought this would be a tremendous opportunity for

the coast,” Labhart said. “To get the Metlins on board, we put together a ‘red carpet’ team consisting of people from Tillamook County, the Port of Tillamook Bay, the Oregon Coast Scenic Railroad, Visit Tillamook Coast, the chamber and the City of Bay City. Many people have worked to get this to happen out here, but it took off in Joseph, and I know it will take off here, especially since we have this beautiful

coastline. We did a test run earlier and people were honking, waving and even pulling over to ask how they

could do it too.”

Although there are similar projects in other countries, the Metlins run the only such rail riding opportunities in the Western U.S. “I can't figure out why,” Labhart said. “It's such a great way to use discontinued railroad tracks.”

The coast route takes riders from the Fish Peddler Restaurant in Bay City into north Tillamook near the Blue Heron Cheese Factory, and includes classic bridges and the rare opportunity to see the back of the Tillamook Cheese Factory.

The route is 11 miles roundtrip, and takes about two hours. Because each car holds four people, there are opportunities to peddle a lot or to simply sit back, enjoy the ride and let your friends and family do all the work. There are no major hills on the route, so different fitness levels and ages can get involved.

You can even ride one while filming live television, as Carney and his cameraman discovered.

“We do lots of different stories but rarely get to do something this active and fun,” Carney said after the ride. “We loved this.”

I checked in with Metlin after the opening weekend to see how it went.

“It was super,” he said,



KGW's Drew Carney (rear) is joined by Railriders guide Nate Bell (left) and Susan Moreland of Visit Tillamook Coast for an early morning jaunt along the track



“Maybe better than super. We sold out both Saturday and Sunday. So it's a good idea for people to call before coming out to make sure we have room.”

Oregon Coast Railriders
excursions run Thursdays

through Mondays and leave at 9 a.m., noon and 3 p.m. Tickets are \$20 for adults and \$10 for kids under 12. Riders should arrive a half hour before the take off time. For reservations, call 541-519-3891. For more information, go to ocrailriders.com