

A backcountry mountain bike route across Oregon

By MARK MORICAL
The (Bend) Bulletin

Oregon is teeming with adventure-seeking cyclists, so the idea of biking across the state is not a new one.

But the idea of off-road biking across the state on a route that is more than half singletrack is a new one.

It is called the Oregon Timber Trail, and it has some mountain bikers and long-distance bikepackers giddy with excitement at the prospect of attempting part of the 670-mile route from south of Lakeview north to Hood River, or all of it.

The route is entirely pre-existing trails or roads and is made up of about 50 percent singletrack, 40 percent dirt roads and 10 percent pavement, according to project manager Gabriel Tiller. The trail is organized into four tiers from south to north: the Fremont Tier, Willamette Tier, Deschutes Tier and Hood Tier. The route, which includes 66,000 feet of elevation gain, carefully avoids wilderness areas and other trails on which bikes are not permitted.

"These are all areas that we should have been exploring and riding our bikes, but we haven't had a catalyst yet," says Bend's Adam Craig. "Now we have that."

Craig, a former Olympic and pro mountain biker, was part of a recent trail stewardship outing that cleared miles and miles of downed trees on the Fremont Tier.

He says it is likely that he will eventually become the Deschutes Tier stewardship coordinator, organizing trail work on that stretch of the OTT.

The Deschutes Tier cuts through Central Oregon on some familiar and perhaps not-so-familiar trails and roads, passing by several Cascade lakes, Mount Bachelor, Tam McArthur Rim, the communities of Sisters and Camp Sherman, and the old Santiam Wagon Road.

The OTT is a partnership among Travel Oregon, the U.S. Forest Service and the Portland-based expedition company Limberlost, founded by Tiller.

The idea started with Travel Oregon, the state's tourism commission, which hired trail planning expert Chris Bernhardt in 2015 to create the route alignment and concept. Bernhardt brought on Tiller to help perfect the route and organize trail work.

Tiller and Harry Dalgaard, a tourism program manager with Travel Oregon, spent nearly a year meeting with more than 40 trail-user groups and working closely with the Forest Service and the



Leslie Kehmeier/Submitted photo

A mountain biker on the Hood Tier of the Oregon Timber Trail.

Bureau of Land Management to make the OTT a reality.

"When I got involved it was a rough list of trails that might connect somehow," Tiller says, "I sort of dug deeper, mapped all those connections out, and figured out what other trails we needed on there. We wanted to figure out this alignment, create the route, and sort of build that momentum of users and potential users in the state and across the country."

The OTT was inspired by the 2,650-mile Pacific Crest Trail, which is not open to bikes, and other long-distance trails on which cycling is allowed, such as the 800-mile Arizona Trail and the 2,800-mile Great Divide mountain bike route that cuts through the Rocky Mountains from Canada to Mexico.

"This is the first one to really be developed with the focus on mountain biking and backcountry mountain biking," Tiller says. "But this is going to be open to all (nonmotorized) uses. Equestrians and hikers can use the trail, too."

While a general map and more information currently can be found at oregontimbertrail.org, the route guide and detailed maps have yet to be released, as they are still being reviewed.

"The route guide is written and pretty much signed off on, but we're just waiting to get a thumbs up from all the different groups," Tiller says. "There's a lot of stakeholders involved in the whole process."

Tiller adds that the goal is to have



Leslie Kehmeier/Submitted photo

The Fremont National Recreation Trail makes up a large chunk of the Oregon Timber Trail

the detailed maps and route guide online by the end of the month, so those who want to ride the trail this year can start by mid-July.

The OTT is being introduced just as bikepacking is increasing in popularity. Bikepacking involves cycling over long distances and over an extended period of time while camping each night. The estimated time to complete the entire OTT for a bikepacker is 20 to 30 days.

Another popular bikepacking route in Oregon is the 364-mile Oregon Outback, a route of mostly gravel roads that cuts through the High Desert from Klamath Falls to the confluence of the Deschutes and Columbia rivers.

"It's sort of a burgeoning sport," Tiller says of bikepacking. "People have been camping with their bikes for a long time, but for whatever reason it's sort of real hot right now, this bikepacking trend. I expect it to continue to be popular, because it's gotten a lot easier recently, just with a lot of changes in gear technology. You're able to pack lighter and camp more comfortably. It really opens up a lot of doors. To me, it's unique when compared to hiking or backpacking, in that you can cover a lot more distance a lot quicker, and end up seeing a lot more diversity of landscape."

James Good, the owner of Good Bike Co. in Prineville, is on the

board for the Oregon Timber Trail and is an experienced bikepacker who offers clinics at his shop. The Oregon Outback route passes through Prineville and the Ochoco National Forest.

While the OTT does not pass through Prineville, Good is still excited about the route and hopes to ride it by next year.

"I think it's incredible," Good says. "Why not, right? A lot of the bikepacking focus is gravel. This is a little more specific mountain biking since you're on singletrack. This is pretty unique, and a rare opportunity as well. There's not too many trails like that."

The four tiers of the trail are sort of natural breaking points, according to Tiller.

The Fremont Tier includes the 175-mile Fremont National Recreation Trail and sprawling views from Winter Rim.

"We opened up some trail there that hadn't been open for 10 years, so now you can actually ride from Paisley up all the way to the top of Winter Rim," Tiller says. "That's been really unused because it had so many trees down. But I feel like that's going to become a really iconic place for people to visit down there."

The Willamette Tier includes the Middle Fork Willamette Trail to Oakridge, and trails that require a strenuous climb up Bunchgrass Ridge toward Waldo Lake.

The Deschutes Tier includes lightly used trails from Waldo to Cultus Lake, then the route passes Lava Lake before circling around Mount Bachelor on the Edison-Lava Trail. The route also uses the Dinah-Moe-Humm Trail, and it crosses Cascade Lakes Highway from Wanoga Sno-park to Swampy Lakes Sno-park just a few miles southwest of Bend. From the Swampy Lakes area, the route connects to Road 370 near Todd Lake then goes up and over the Cascade Range and down into Sisters. The routes passes through the Suttle Lake and Camp Sherman areas and then on to the old Santiam Wagon Road.

The Hood Tier features an old trail system through the foothills of Mount Jefferson and the Surveyor's Ridge Trail before the route descends into the town of Hood River.

"It's a cool opportunity to connect together a bunch of existing trails and scenic stopovers," Craig says. "I like the fact that they're including a bunch of history of the region in the whole project and route book. I think it's a really good opportunity for people just to see some pieces of Oregon that they wouldn't normally see."

BLOOMIN' BLUES

What a time for wildflowers

By BRUCE BARNES
For the East Oregonian

I've been on the Ruckel Ridge road every year except maybe one for at least the past 30 years. It has always seemed to me to be the best place for viewing wildflowers within a day's drive of Pendleton.

A former botany professor at the University of Oregon once included it in a list of the seven best places for wildflowers in the state. Nine days ago, I was absolutely astounded as I drove the length of the ridge with a group of friends I'm sure the continued cool spring weather with frequent rains combined for the effect, but it was beyond anyone's expectation.

The road from the Interstate 84 Mt. Emily exit to the ridge road had many impressive displays of flowers. We made many stops and it was apparent that every plant we saw was showing robust growth compared to past years. Annual plants that grow from seeds each year were far more abundant than usual, and the perennials and shrubs displayed more growth and more blooms than expected.

Once we reached the intersection with the ridge road and turned north, we began the dozen mile or so drive along the ridge with one stunning display of flowers after another. About the time we reached the ridge it also began a light rain which continued most of the way, though we mostly ignored the inconvenience. At the highest elevations were early spring flowers including anemone, glacier

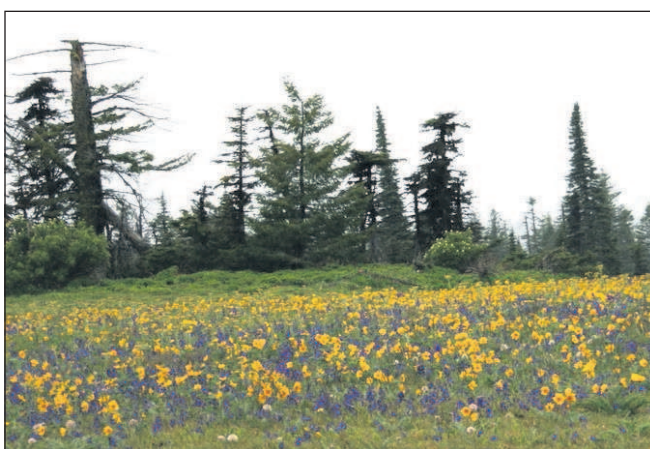


Photo by Bruce Barnes

The meadows of Ruckel Ridge are blooming with more vibrancy and variety than it has in years.



Photo by Bruce Barnes

The number and vivid colors of wildflowers can be astounding.

lilies and waterleaf, mixed in with cutleaf balsamroot, eriogonum and larkspur. At other places large open swaths of flowers which show up every year were choked with blooms, including the woody penstemon and mule's ears.

I should note here that stunning displays can be seen on this road every year, but this was beyond anything I've seen ever — anywhere. Listing the dozens of plant species in bloom would be pointless.

Several of us took lots of pictures, and I'm sure many will come out well, but the best of photos with the best cameras cannot do justice to being there and getting the full effect of turning around and seeing acres of beauty.

If you don't get out to see what's blooming in the Blues any other time this summer, go now and spend a day driving the forest service road 31, the Ruckel Ridge road. It may be many years before we see anything like it again.

BRIEFLY

Plan to protect salmon backfires as cormorants flee

ASTORIA (AP) — A plan to protect young salmon by killing double-crested cormorants on an island in the Columbia River has backfired after the birds fled the area halfway through their nesting season.

Two dead cormorants and 14 cracked eggs are the only recent evidence that the birds have tried to return to nesting grounds on East Sand Island since abandoning nests in May, *The Daily Astorian* reported.

This is the second time in two years that the birds have abandoned the island in the middle of their nesting season.

The Army Corps of Engineers kills the birds to reduce predation on runs of threatened and endangered juvenile salmon.

The Corps has put a hold on killing the birds until it is clear if the colony will re-establish itself on the island.

Last year, the agency's contractors killed nearly 3,000 adult birds and destroyed 1,092 nests despite the birds leaving the island and returning at the end of June.

The Corps' goal is to cut the island's population of cormorants in half by 2018.

Conservation groups, however, believe the plan is harming the colony of birds.

"It's very possible that the combination of eagle predation activity and lethal control activity being conducted by the federal agencies are acting in a cumulative manner to put pressure on this colony," Bob Sallinger, conservation

director for the Audubon Society of Portland, wrote in a letter to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "While the colony may have been able to withstand the pressure of eagles alone, the added impacts of pervasive shooting, egg oiling and other elevated human activities has significantly increased the scope, scale, frequency and intensity of threats to the cormorants."

Lawsuit against Cascade-Siskiyou monument expansion delayed

SALEM (AP) — A federal judge has given the Trump administration more time to review federal monument designations made by previous presidents before it responds to a lawsuit brought by two timber companies against the expansion of a monument in southern Oregon, according to court documents viewed Monday.

Judge Mark D. Clarke ruled that all pending deadlines are stayed while Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke "conducts his review of the designation for the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument," according to the court records.

President Donald Trump in April called for the review of 27 national monuments established by three former presidents. Zinke is to issue a final report in late August for all the monuments.

Clarke said in his ruling on June 13 that all parties in the Oregon lawsuit should submit a joint status report on Sept. 23. His ruling was reported earlier

Monday by Oregon Public Broadcasting.

Murphy Co. and Murphy Timber Investments LLC challenged the legality of President Barack Obama's adding of about 48,000 acres to the monument in southwestern Oregon to protect its biodiversity. The companies say the move reduces the supply of timber sold and jeopardizes their log supply.

In directing Zinke to review the designation of dozens of national monuments on federal lands, including Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument, Trump it "a massive federal land grab" by previous administrations.

Man dies after boat overturns on Oregon lake

DETROIT (AP) — Authorities say a 72-year-old man who was hospitalized after an aluminum boat capsized on Detroit Lake has died.

The Marion County Sheriff's Office says two men and a woman were thrown into the water Wednesday after one of them stood up, causing the 15-foot boat to overturn.

Other boaters came to their aid, and an off-duty firefighter performed CPR on Chester Correll of Corvallis until a rescue helicopter arrived. Authorities say he died Wednesday evening at a hospital.

The sheriff's office says he had been fishing with family when the incident occurred.

The sheriff's office says nobody aboard the capsized boat was wearing a life jacket.