

Gravel Riding: The Convergence of Forest and Bike

BY STEVE SCHULZ

New to gravel riding? Many are. This is a growing class of bicycling that is bringing riders to forestland and forest roads. Gravel bikes and gravel events are the fastest growing sectors in the cycling industry, along with electric bikes.



Gravel riding has soared in popularity and is different from road and trail riding. It is perceived as safer and more relaxed than road riding because there are generally fewer vehicles on unpaved roads and vehicles are traveling slower. It is also more social. Riders can ride side by side and carry on conversations in a way not possible on busy paved roads or trails. Of course, there is the scenery; everyone likes traveling through forestland.

Navigation can be tricky, but modern technology has changed that. GPS systems and route-finding products (such as RidewithGPS) help riders find and follow routes. These products are downloaded onto phones and GPS devices before the ride to help riders navigate real time.

Riders expect a range of surfaces for these rides. Some gravel roads are smooth, fine rock similar to riding on pavement. Others are loose rock or dirt surfaces that can be much more challenging. This is part of the experience and riders expect variation and challenges.

A variety of bicycles and equipment are used for gravel riding. The best are similar to road bikes, but some have suspension and most run wider, tubeless tires. One rider reports riding 800 miles on shocking gravel roads in Tasmania without one single flat using tubeless tires. At the other end of the spectrum are regular mountain bikes. Many beginners just use their regular mountain bikes—that is—until they get hooked and start looking for a dedicated gravel bike.

Forestland roads are very popular for gravel riders. In general, they are well maintained, have significant length, and are in close proximity to population centers. Riders are exploring these roads and posting routes on route-finding sites. The Timber Logjam is an example of this. The described 58-mile ride starts at Stub Stewart State Park where there is a bike repair station and a bathroom. The ride then advertises, “Other than these two lovely service locations, the rest of the route will rip off your derailleur, get you lost, eaten by cougars, and challenged by the backcountry locals. If that sounds good, ride on!”

Cycle Oregon has started hosting gravel rides in addition to their other signature events, such as the week-long Classic. For those unfamiliar with Cycle Oregon, it is a nonprofit event organization that has been supporting rural communities for over three decades. Proceeds from events are invested in the Cycle Oregon Fund, held at the Oregon Community Foundation. Since the fund's inception in 1996, over 300 grants totaling over \$2.2 million have been awarded to rural communities and projects. The annual impact to Oregon alone from Cycle Oregon events is approximately \$1.8 million, with an overall economic impact of over \$5.5 million. In addition to its Classic and GRAVEL events, other Cycle Oregon events include Joyride, an event for women, and WEEKENDER, an all ages and abilities weekend event (this event is skipping 2019 but will be back in the future).

GRAVEL

Last October, Cycle Oregon partnered with the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) and the Tillamook



PHOTO COURTESY OF CYCLE OREGON

Riders enjoy the challenge and beauty of the Tillamook State Forest roads near Timber, Ore.

Forest Heritage Trust to host a three-day event—GRAVEL—centered at Reehers Camp in the Tillamook State Forest. For three days riders camped at the campground and rode various routes on the Tillamook State Forest and Hampton Family Forests. Hosted rides were divided into different skill levels. Cycle Oregon worked closely with Hampton and ODF officials to ensure the best, safest, and lowest-impact experience for not only the cyclists, but for others recreating in the event area.

Hampton Family Forests was an active partner in hosting the GRAVEL event. Their foresters were onsite to make sure everything went smoothly (and to cheer on riders). There were concerns over fire risk in early October, but luckily the fall rains arrived in time and mitigated the fire risk.

More broadly, Hampton manages lands for timber production, but also provides a variety of other benefits, including recreational opportunities. Hunting and fishing opportunities have always been a draw, but mountain biking and gravel riding are growing in popularity on their landscapes.

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CENTRAL OREGON COMMUNITY COLLEGE



Bend, Oregon

State Societies Host Successful Annual Meetings

April was a busy month for our state societies.

The hosting North Olympic Chapter of Washington State SAF kicked off the month with their April 3-5 meeting in Port Angeles under the theme of Forest and Watershed Restoration. The one-day indoor meeting and second-day field trip drew 97 participants, including 14 students and SAF National President John McNulty. Speakers addressed the theme from multiple forestland ownership perspectives. Don Hanley received the Forester of the Year award and special recognition was given to Chuck Lorenz for his many years of service as treasurer. The Southwest Washington Chapter took home the Chapter of the Year award.

On April 17-19, more than 130 participants gathered in Lebanon's Boulder Falls Convention for Oregon SAF's annual meeting hosted by the Marys Peak Chapter. The meeting's focus was on Forest Management: Emerging Challenges, New Solutions, and Telling Our Story, and sparked lively discussions. The indoor part of the meeting concluded with the traditional awards banquet where many accomplishments were celebrated. Three energizing field trips provided options for meeting-



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANDY PERLEBERG

South Puget Sound Chapter Member Don Hanley was chosen as the 2019 WSSAF Forester of the Year. He chairs the WSSAF Golden Members Appreciation luncheon and is an active SAF member.

goers. Nineteen students participated and SAF National Vice President and Marys Peak Chapter Member Tammy Cushing moderated a session.

The Alaska Society held its meeting in Anchorage on April 24-26. Host Cook Inlet Chapter planned an excellent program around the theme of State of the Forest that focused on current and historic spruce beetle outbreaks and the latest in bioenergy technology. Over 60 participants attended, including SAF

CEO Terry Baker.

A full slate of awards was presented. Taya Much received the Young Forester of the Year award; Kevin Meany was recognized as the Field Forester of the Year; and Jeremy Douse was honored as Forester of the Year. REI was recognized with a Service to Forestry award, and the Dixon Entrance Chapter was awarded the Chapter of the Year.



Jeremy Douse is Alaska SAF's Forester of the Year.

Congratulations on successful meetings that showed members they belong to a vibrant professional society. ♦

Gravel Riding

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Hampton has a network of nearly 800 miles of forest road in Oregon alone and most are open for free, day-use access except during periods of high fire danger. They do ask that visitors respect their forest work and the environment, stay clear of active harvest areas, and always stay mindful of fire danger.

Like all forms of forest recreation, landowners can expect visitors to follow posted signs and regulations. Gravel riding visitors are generally very low impact—passing through the forest on established roads and gone by nightfall. They pose low risk of vandalism, fire starts, or interruption of forest activities. They enjoy the forests and share their stories back home. If you see them, stop and have a conversation. Help them understand the forests they are riding through and the work you do to manage forests. These visitors are a growing part of the fabric of Oregon life and an opportunity to share your forestland with the greater population. ♦

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PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVE CAFFERATA

Oregon SAF celebrated the service and commitment of many gifted individuals to the forestry profession during the annual awards banquet. Shown left to right: Brennan Garrelts, Young Forester Leadership award; Meghan Tuttle, OSAF chair; Anthony Davis, Tough Tree award; Clay Baumgartner and Reynold Gardner, Forestry Appreciation awards; Steve Pilkerton, Presidential Field Forester for District 2; Caity Wind, Mount Hood Community College Student award; Dan Newton representing Weyerhaeuser Company, Heritage award; Carlos Gonzalez-Benecke, Oregon State University, Research award; Quinton BigKnife, OSU Student award; Bob Alverts, Lifetime Achievement award; and Tim Keith and Norm Michaels, OSAF Awards Committee co-chairs. Not shown: Mark Morgans, Forester of the Year award.