

# Adventure CYCLIST

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## the Great Divide

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## Adventure CYCLIST

is America's only magazine dedicated to bicycle travel. It is published nine times each year by the Adventure Cycling Association, a nonprofit service organization for recreational bicyclists. Individual membership costs \$40 yearly to U.S. addresses and includes a subscription to *Adventure Cyclist* and discounts on Adventure Cycling maps. For more information about Adventure Cycling Association and *Adventure Cyclist* magazine, visit [adventurecycling.org](http://adventurecycling.org) or call (800) 755-2453.

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*Adventure Cyclist* accepts stories, articles, and photographs for publication from various sources. We publish stories about bicycle travel and other recreational cycling subjects but do not cover competitive cycling. If you are interested in submitting a story or article to *Adventure Cyclist*, please visit us online at [adventurecycling.org/adventure-cyclist/adventure-cyclist-submissions](http://adventurecycling.org/adventure-cyclist/adventure-cyclist-submissions) for further information and guidelines.

### CURRENT ISSUE NOTES:

"In 1968, when I was 22, I flew across the Atlantic with my bike for a three-and-half-month meander around central Europe. In Holland I found a crowded storybook landscape, with canals, tiny houses, windmills and fields of tulips. I was entranced. In this issue, you will find Auke-Bonne van der Weide's story. He came from Holland to ride the Great Divide Route. Like me, he is dazzled by a landscape so different than that of his homeland. The huge empty spaces are a revelation. And isn't it interesting that the bicycle is the perfect vehicle for exploring both of these completely opposite worlds?"

— Greg Siple  
Art Director, *Adventure Cyclist*

**OUR COVER:** Cyclists on the Great Divide Mountain Bike Route near Grants, New Mexico. **Photo by Auke-Bonne van der Weide**

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# Oregon sets the bar high for

State agencies from transportation to tourism work together for the benefit of bicycling



by Dan D'Ambrosio

**O**ne way to judge the Oregon Department of Transportation's (ODOT) progressive attitude toward cyclists is to take a look at a recent fiasco that played out on the popular Oregon Coast Bike Route on Highway 101.

As BikePortland.org reported this summer, Jeff Smith, a "veteran Portland Bureau of Transportation employee and a bike touring enthusiast" was riding the coast in August when he came across a 25-mile stretch of road between Yachats and Florence that left him "gobsmacked."

What Smith found was a shoulder

*Sheila Lyons (far left) leads a meeting about Oregon's Scenic Bikeways in Salem, Oregon.*

with a ridge of asphalt running squarely down its middle, left by a repaving job that extended only halfway across the shoulder, apparently in an effort to save money. Not good for cyclists, who had to ride a tightrope on one side of the ridge or the other to avoid catching it and perhaps losing control.

Smith fired off an email to ODOT's Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator Sheila Lyons and others, saying in part, "This represents a condition that, I'm very sorry to say, was the rule rather than the exception. Where there was a three- or four-inch shoulder, the new

paving went to about one-and-a-half to two inches over the fog line, leaving an edge that was very inconveniently in the middle of the shoulder. To make matters worse, the edge between the new and old asphalt often appeared to be abrupt enough that I didn't want to ride over it or anywhere near it. Again, this was not an isolated occurrence; it went on intermittently for many miles."

Smith included a photo of the offending shoulder in his email to Lyons. He pointed out the Oregon Coast route is one of the premier cycling destinations in the country, adding that "after

# cycling



RUSS ROCA

experiencing this, I wonder how many riders come away with the feeling that it's been completely overhyped and underserved."

The response, from ODOT Northwest Region Manager Sonny Chickering, was nearly immediate, coming just eight hours after Smith sent his email, thanking him for bringing the problem to Chickering's attention so it could be "reviewed, discussed, and addressed."

Smith sent his complaining email on August 22. On September 4, an ODOT crew lined up by Chickering — "composed of this region's most skilled employees and equipment" — had repaved

about half of the shoulder identified as "nonconforming." Chickering said he expected to have the remaining work done in about a week. Only the weather was holding his crew up.

"Thank you for your continuing patience as we construct and complete this important project," Chickering said.

How's that for responding to cyclists' needs?

"Oregon is really great for a state that doesn't have a statewide bicycle advocacy organization holding them to the fire," said Ginny Sullivan, Adventure Cycling Association's director of travel initiatives. "What's so impressive is how responsive and quick they've been. It's been less than a month since the complaint came in about the coastal route. They said 'We will get back to you in a week and they actually did.' Two weeks later, half of it was fixed, and they would have had the whole thing repaired, but the weather turned bad."

## Money for bikers and walkers

Oregon established a bicycle and pedestrian program in its transportation department in 1971, requiring that whenever a roadway was constructed or reconstructed, bikeways or walkways would be provided, according to Sheila Lyons. Lyons said the 1971 law also provided a mechanism to track funding coming from all the revenue the state collects for transportation, which today is in the range of \$500 million to \$600 million.

"We're required to spend a minimum of one percent on bikeways and walkways, that's a state law," Lyons said. "So that means we'll spend a minimum of \$5 million to \$6 million."

But over the 40-plus years of its existence, Oregon's bike/ped law has been implemented "sporadically," Lyons said.

"Some areas paid attention, and others didn't," she said.

A watershed moment came in 1991 when Portland built a new basketball arena and tried to ignore its obligation to build bike lanes on the streets that were being reconfigured around the stadium.

"That's when the Bicycle Transportation Alliance was born," Lyons said. "The Alliance sued the city and won on appeal. That really raised the issue and

legitimized the provision of bike lanes. It made other agencies pay attention, and bike advocates started picking up on other fronts."

Lyons points to Corvallis as a city where bicycle advocacy gained momentum as a result of the Portland lawsuit. In a recent American Community Survey, Corvallis came out on top on the journey-to-work question as the number one bike-to-work city in the country, with between nine and 11 percent of its 50,000 residents riding to work.

"Corvallis hands out an annual citizen-attitude survey that showed two-thirds of residents say they use bike trails," Lyons said. "We think there's a huge percentage of the population who ride occasionally."

## Tipping the scales

Although Portland gets a lot of positive press in cycling circles, and deservedly so, Ginny Sullivan says a lot of credit should go to Oregon's state agencies.

"Portland is seen as a bicycle mecca for commuters, but really the State of Oregon and the ODOT, Oregon Parks and Recreation, Oregon Tourism, all those agencies with the help of advocates and the cycling community have really been able to tip the scale for cyclists," Sullivan said. "Instead of operating in silos, they're working together."

A good example of what Sullivan is talking about is Oregon's relatively new scenic bikeways program. Alexandra Phillips, bicycle recreation coordinator for Oregon Parks and Recreation, invented the program together with Travel Oregon and ODOT when she was hired five years ago.

"We basically figured out, first of all, that we wanted to get state-designated scenic recreational bikeways," Phillips said. "We had to figure out what makes something more scenic than something else."

Along with Phillips, a committee of 11 people from ODOT, city and county tourism departments, and Cycle Oregon (the immensely popular annual week-long ride that visits a different part of the state each year) make those decisions.

Phillips said the committee isn't only looking at rural routes but also city



and town rides, breaking up attributes into two categories — “natural” and “human-made.” To score highly in the natural category, a ride has to represent a diversity of geographic features. Diversity is prized in the human-made category as well, with farms, buildings, and even reservoirs taken into account. Buildings shouldn’t be “drab.”

“Then we also look at road conditions and we look at the shoulders, but there don’t have to be shoulders if there are low traffic conditions,” Phillips said.

Rides are categorized as extreme, challenging, moderate, or family-friendly, based on factors such as elevation gain, traffic, and services.

“Some people love to be in the middle of nowhere, but we wouldn’t call that family-friendly,” Phillips said.

The entire route-selection process begins at the local level.

“We don’t go out and pick a route,” Phillips said. “Locals apply because they know the back roads. They send in routes, and we go out and rate them.”

To rate the routes, Phillips and her fellow committee members ride them. That’s an administrative rule, in fact.

“We have to ride them,” Phillips said. “Any cyclist knows it looks really different behind a windshield.”

Since the program began in 2008, Phillips has compiled 11 state-designated routes covering more than 800



Traveling cyclists enjoy one of the numerous hiker-biker campsites in Oregon.

miles. So far, none of the routes are in the southern part of Oregon or on the coast. The routes are concentrated in far eastern Oregon and the Willamette Valley with five routes near Bend.

Phillips accepts applications for routes every other year, getting eight applications this spring. She and her committee decided to rate only four of those eight routes. The routes that were cut were ditched for various reasons, including repetition — the route being a derivation of a route that’s already recommended.

Another route didn’t make the cut because it wasn’t accompanied by the necessary paperwork.

“It’s a beautiful route, but the application needs to have letters of support from every road jurisdiction,” Phillips said. “They weren’t able to secure a final letter. There has to be strong support.”

Phillips is also working with state parks planners and managers on expanding and improving Oregon’s hiker-biker sites, which are very popular with touring cyclists.

“We have 24 of them, not in every park but about half the parks that have camping,” Phillips said. “It’s \$5 per night per person, no reservations, no vehicles, arrive by foot or bike. It’s a great resource for cyclists.”

There are 14 on the Oregon coast, Phillips said, and most have showers. Some even have electrical outlets to charge cell phones. The improvements Phillips is spearheading include more of those outlets, along with food lockers, “because there are raccoons and other things on the coast,” and cyclists don’t have a secure place to store food.

“The initial funding for a lot of the program was a seed grant from Cycle Oregon of \$50,000,” Phillips said. “That went a long way, but now we’re actually at the point where we’re establishing the program’s own budget. It’s very small, but it’s exciting to have a budget.”



A cyclist waits for her riding partner at one of the many Scenic Bikeway turn signs.

## A ripple effect

Sheila Lyons says the ripple effect of the scenic bikeways program has been felt throughout Oregon's cycling community. The program cemented an ongoing partnership among ODOT, Travel Oregon, and Cycle Oregon.

"The offshoot of that is that some key players have taken a strong interest in bike tourism," Lyons said.

Travel Oregon hired a respected consultant to determine the economic impact of bicycle tourism in Oregon. The number — \$400 million annually — was released in April.

"That was completely unknown, a surprise to everybody that has strengthened the role of bicycle touring and interest in Adventure Cycling Association routes," Lyons said.

Four Adventure Cycling routes — the TransAmerica and Lewis & Clark trails and the Pacific Coast and Sierra Cascades routes — make use of Oregon's roadways.

"People have long come to Oregon to ride the coast route and the TransAm," Lyons said.

Even before the \$400 million number made the rounds this spring, ODOT recognized that Oregonians wanted alternatives to driving their cars so, a year or two ago, they announced it was no longer a highway agency, but was now a transportation agency, with a multimodal focus that includes paying attention to rail, cycling, and walking, as well as driving.

"What's happening now in Oregon is that bicycling and walking are becoming institutionalized as legitimate forms of travel and transportation that need to be paid attention to," Lyons said. "This is a sea change, and it's going to be monumental. I really hope I live long enough to look back and say, 'Wow, look at what we accomplished.'"

The sea change hasn't been limited to Oregon, according to Ginny Sullivan of Adventure Cycling. Sullivan says other states have done their own economic impact studies for bicycle touring, with differing results using differing factors, but are all positive for bicyclists.

Wisconsin figured the impact at \$533 million annually from out-of-state


visitors. Iowa pegged it at \$1 million per day. Vermont says it sees \$83 million annually from bicycle tourism and Minnesota puts the number at \$427 million from recreational cycling.

The list goes on with New Jersey, Quebec, North Carolina, Maine, Illinois, and Florida attributing hundreds of millions of dollars collectively to cycling. The latest to join the club, said Sullivan, was Arizona, which recently came up with a number of \$88 million annually for bike tours, bike events, and tourism.


By bringing its various state agencies together to work cooperatively for the benefit of cyclists, Sullivan said, Oregon has set an example for other states to follow.

"What they've done is motivate Washington, Minnesota, Iowa, Michigan, Arizona, and others, to elevate their game," Sullivan said. "All those good pro-biking states have said, 'If Oregon can do it, why can't we?'" **AC**

*Dan D'Ambrosio is a staff writer covering business for the Burlington Free Press in Burlington, Vermont.*

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