

Mid-Valley Bicycle Club

Loop Tour Primer

What is Loop Tour?

Loop Tour is an annual bicycle camping trip sponsored by the Mid-Valley Bicycle Club. It is planned by and open only to members of the club. Loop Tour is a historically important event for the club. The first Loop Tour took place in 1976 and was an integral part of the formation of the Mid-Valley Wheelmen. (The club's name was changed to the Mid-Valley Bicycle Club in the early 1990's.)

How long is Loop Tour?

Most Loop Tours are 400-500 miles long and ridden over a period of 9 days. This is quite different from riding once or twice a week; one needs to be in good physical condition before the tour begins.

When is Loop Tour?

Each year the same route is typically offered twice. The dates are typically the third or fourth week of June and the first week of August, although this does vary from year to year. Dates are typically announced in or before the January newsletter.

How should I prepare?

Read this guide and talk about it with people who have completed past Loop Tours.

Do some riding with a load. Legend has it that in the early days one was expected to demonstrate readiness by riding up Mary's Peak with a full load. While this is no longer a requirement, it is not a bad concept. Many experienced Loop Tourists start riding several months before Loop Tour; during the last month before the tour, they can often be seen carrying panniers with increasing loads on Wednesday or Saturday club rides.

Participate in a Pre-Loop Tour campout. One is fairly regularly offered in early June. It is usually a Saturday night, often at Alsea Falls. It is a great way to test your readiness while there is still time to address any issues that may arise.

What route will be ridden this year?

Each year the route for the coming summer is established (hopefully) by early January and published in the club newsletter. We have many routes that have each been done several times, and new routes are irregularly added. Several of the routes begin and end in Corvallis.

Do I have to carry my own gear?

Most riders carry all of their own gear. The club has some racks and panniers available for rent to allow people to get some experience before investing in their own equipment. Contact the Loop Tour committee if you are interested in renting panniers. Also, a gear-sag option is offered for those riders unable to carry their gear. This option is primarily intended to allow less-strong riders to ride at a pace similar to loaded riders.

The capacity of the sag vehicle is limited; it is allocated by the order in which paid or complimentary registrations requesting the sag option are received. Complimentary sagging of gear is offered to riders 65 years of age or older and to riders 14 years of age or younger; but this must be specifically requested at the time of registration.

The Loop Tour Planning Committee has periodically considered offering one tour with no sag vehicle. This may not be the best thing for a first time bicycle tourist. Be sure to verify that the tour you sign up for is the right one for you.

What can I have sagged?

The general rule is that the sag vehicle will carry only the amount of gear that would be carried on a bicycle; so multi-burner stoves, giant tents and other car-camping paraphernalia are not appropriate for an individual. Whether for an individual or a family, it is important that your gear be placed in pannier-sized bags, as large duffel bags are difficult to pack into vehicles and to handle. Be sure to have nametags on each item both to avoid confusion with other people's gear and to allow your gear to be identified by others in the case of an emergency.

The sag driver has the final say in what may or may not be carried; it is Loop Tour policy that every who is having their gear sagged talk to the sag driver at least a week BEFORE the tour to discuss unusual situations and to make plans for getting the gear to the sag driver before the start of the trip.

What happens if during the day I need something that is being sagged?

You may quite possibly be out of luck. Each day everyone should carry everything that will be needed during the ride. This includes change-of-weather clothing, tools, spare parts, water, snacks (maybe even a complete lunch, depending on the route), money, etc. Similarly, if you purchase something during the day (e.g. food for dinner), you should anticipate carrying that to camp yourself. It may be possible to make other arrangements with the sag driver—the key is to talk to the sag driver ahead of time.

When can I register?

The registration form is typically published in the February or March newsletter. Since Loop Tour is open only to club members, you must use a registration form (or photocopy) from the newsletter. More often than not, registration gets cut off when the ride is full rather than on a set date. Early registration is suggested, as capacity is limited. The Loop Tour committee will not guarantee or 'save a place' even for stalwart club members—the receipt of both the completely filled-out form and the fees determines registration order.

How much does Loop Tour cost?

Registration was raised to \$55 for adults (half price for children) in 2003 in response to increasing fees for camping.

Gear sag is available for an additional \$40 for adults. Seniors (65 and older) and children (14 and younger) may have free sag on a space-available basis. Be sure to send in your registration early! Sag capacity depends the capacity of the vehicle available to the volunteer who is sagging a particular Loop Tour.

It is safe to estimate that fees will be considerably less than half of the cost of Loop Tour. The cost of camping gear, racks, and panniers can boggle the imagination. In any event, you will spend more on food than on registration. Historically, the registration fees have covered one group dinner. However, this is subject to change depending on the route and inflation in the cost of other Loop Tour expenses.

Can I get a refund?

As a club-sponsored event, there is no desire to penalize anyone who has to change his or her plans in an emergency. On the other hand, Loop Tour is run on an extremely tight budget and many of the expenditures are committed long before the tour begins; changing the number of participants even months before a tour can play havoc with the budget. There is also the issue of someone's registrations having been refused because the tour was thought to be full. To keep this complex issue from becoming a matter of opinion, a policy has been defined:

A full refund is available at any time if a replacement rider is identified who then registers and pays the appropriate fees. People on the "wait list" are to be given first priority as replacements.

In any other case, cancellations less than 2 weeks before the start of a tour result in NO REFUND. Cancellations less than a month before the start result in a 50% refund. Cancellations more than a month in advance result in 100% refund.

What is included in the registration fee?

A route description is provided and camping fees at designated sites are paid. A sag vehicle is available for emergencies (see additional notes). One group meal (usually a dinner) has typically been provided, although this is a prime target in the event of budget shortfalls. The minimum number of campsites needed to accommodate the group at maximum allowed capacity per site are provided; this can get cozy.

What is not included in the registration fee?

Meals are not provided, with the possible exception of the one group meal. We do not cover medical or mechanical expenses. We do not cover ambulance or any other transportation fees. We do not cover lodging or campground 'upgrades'. We do not cover entry fees to attractions. If we camp in or pass through a park that has entry fees separate from the camping fees, you will need to pay your own entry fee when you arrive. (Park entry fees for cyclists are not a typical situation other than at national parks, e.g. Crater Lake.)

What should I expect of the sag driver and vehicle?

The sag drivers are not paid; they volunteer their time to help make your Loop Tour enjoyable. We rely on the judgment of the sag driver to deal with the many unique situations that arise. The sag driver will attempt to deal with emergencies in the best way possible at the time. Sag drivers are typically not EMT's or even first aid certified. We have avoided creating a specific policy regarding the use of the sag vehicle for transporting participants; this is left to the judgment of the driver.

The sag is NOT there to sweep the route or bring in tired riders. It is up to you to get to the next campground.

Carrying gear from campground to campground for those who have made such arrangements is secondary to dealing with emergencies. One of the potential problems with having your gear sagged is that an emergency on the part of someone else could result in significant inconvenience to you. Your gear could end up a hundred miles away in a hospital parking lot.

The sag vehicle carries water to 'dry' campgrounds; also often carried are a floor pump, an assortment of tools, some white gas, and a first aid kit. At the discretion of the sag driver, random mid-ride snacks or water stops may be provided, especially on hot days and days with a lot of climbing. (You should not rely on this except as specifically promised by the sag driver during the tour.) The sag vehicle often carries an assortment of beverages; an honor-payment can is then available. Some sag vehicles carry coolers; you may want to talk to your sag driver regarding availability and guidelines for use of a cooler.

What if I need to leave the tour before the end?

It is important that you notify the sag driver if you are leaving the tour either permanently or to spend a night other than with the group. In the case of a medical emergency, the sag vehicle may transport you from camp to the nearest medical facility. Once delivered to a medical facility or in any other cases of early departure, you may need to arrange your own transportation home or back to the tour. As usual, the best thing is to talk to the sag driver as early as possible.

What about mechanical problems?

The best way of dealing with mechanical problems is to avoid them. Be sure that your bicycle is in good working order before starting the tour. Mechanical support is not guaranteed. Several of our routes do not pass by any bike shops. It is entirely possible that a fairly minor problem could end your ride. At the very least, you should always carry the parts and tools needed for on the road tire repairs. While the sag vehicle carries a pump, some tools and a few spare parts, these will be available on the road only in the random chance that the sag vehicle encounters you after you have the breakdown. You can only count on using the supplies from the sag vehicle only in camp; even then, these tools and parts may or may not meet your specific needs. You should carry spare parts unique to your bicycle (e.g. long cables for tandems, small tires for recumbents, etc).

Often another Loop Tour rider will be able to help you out. Some real creativity has been demonstrated during past Loop tours. But this is not something you should build your plans on.

What's the general daily routine?

Most riders will crawl into their sleeping bags between 8:30 and 10 PM because they are tired and there often isn't much going on in camp after dinner. Riders then typically get up around 6 to 6:30 AM because the sun is coming up and they are tired of being in their sleeping bags. If a cafe is nearby, some riders are likely to go there for breakfast. Even for riders who make breakfast in camp, it is fairly unusual for anyone to leave camp later than 8:30 AM. (On long, difficult days, camp may empty out by 7 AM!) Riders either carry their own snacks or lunches or buy them at a market or café depending on preference and availability. On most but not all days the ride will pass a market where food may be purchased for dinner. Some days our camps are located near restaurants and some riders will eat dinner there rather than in camp. Some participants actually enjoy freeze-dry dinners; others regularly demonstrate gourmet cooking skills.

How set is the routine?

For riders who carry their own gear there are few limitations beyond the courtesy of letting the sag driver know one's plans. Some riders are 20 miles down the road before some other people get out of their tents.

People whose gear is being sagged are constrained in setting up and breaking camp by the sag driver's schedule. The sag typically plans on leaving camp by 8:30 and attempts to get into the next camp by mid to late afternoon—earlier if it is a campsite that cannot be reserved. If you are having your gear sagged, it is very important that you talk with your sag driver before the tour to be sure that you both share the same expectations. As stated elsewhere, emergencies may cause the sag driver to unexpectedly change plans; this may result in significant inconvenience to you.

What should I bring?

First-timers often bring far too much. How much can you carry up steep hill into a strong headwind on a hot or inclement day when you are really, really tired? A sample gear list is included as Appendix A of this guide. You should plan on modifying this list based on the route, expected weather, and personal preferences. Even if you are having your gear sagged, you should consider the possibility of needing to carry your own gear if an emergency arises.

This is Oregon; one must be prepared for rain even in the dry season, although the June tour is more likely to see rain than the July/August tour. Snow has been a surprise factor during only a couple of tours, although very chilly nights are not at all uncommon in the mountains even in August. Historically, sunny, hot, or windy conditions have been bigger problems than rain.

What about food?

You are responsible for your own food with the possible exception of one group meal. Unlike backpacking, opportunities to stop at markets and cafes are a normal part of bicycle touring. You can usually buy fresh food each day, although at times one may go 2-3 days between stores. Be sure to check the route when you receive the rider packet.

Some people just ‘wing it’ while others make detailed plans. Will the meal be in camp or on the road? Will it be at a restaurant? If it is not a restaurant meal, when will the food have to be acquired—at a market along the way or brought from home?

It is not unusual for some people to form cooking groups for camp meals. This may reduce the total gear that any one person needs to carry. It may also provide for more varied or interesting meals than one might be willing to do alone. Over the years, some truly gourmet meals have been prepared in camp.

No matter what the plan, it is a good idea to carry enough food for a meal or two in the event that an emergency causes your plan to fall apart. It is typically not a good idea to carry everything you will need for the week!

What about medical emergencies?

Loop Tour is part of life—accidents happen, illness happens. On Loop Tour accidents and illness may occur in very remote and inhospitable places. Professional treatment may be many miles and/or many hours away. Even first aid may not be readily available. Telephone connections may be far away—much of Oregon does not have cell phone coverage.

People on Loop Tour do their best to help each other deal with emergencies. However, few, if any, participants or sag drivers are formally trained to deal with serious medical emergencies. Most people carry completely inadequate first aid supplies with them, if they carry any at all. (This is not a recommendation—just a fact.) Even the big first aid kit in the sag vehicle may not contain what is needed for a specific problem.

Be sure to bring any medicines that you are likely to need. Be sure that you carry information regarding any personal medical conditions or allergies that could affect treatment in the event that you are unable to communicate with the provider. Carry insurance information and instructions on how to reach emergency contacts.

If you do leave the tour, it is up to you to make arrangements for getting yourself and your gear home.

It sounds like there are a lot of potential problems; why would I want to go on Loop Tour?

This guide has focused mostly on negatives, as those are the surprises that could have the biggest impact on a first time tourist if caught unprepared. There are many reasons that Loop Tour has remained popular for over a quarter of a century, not the least of which is that many people derive great satisfaction from preparing for and then avoiding or dealing with the issues associated with life on the road.

You will meet kids, adults, seniors, families, singles. Engineers, factory workers, teachers, agricultural workers, managers, and stay-at-home moms and dads are on Loop Tours, but they are pretty hard to categorize when everyone is dealing with exactly the same issue of getting to the next camp using their own power.

Loop Tours go places and use roads that most people are unlikely to experience.

Who is the Loop Tour leader?

While the sag driver has the advantage(?) of a vehicle, there is no “tour leader” or person “in charge” during the tour. All participants and the sag driver are expected to work together to make this a safe, fun, memorable event.

Please send suggestions on how to correct or improve this primer to Dan Youngberg (daamisc@msn.com).

Sample Packing List

Critical Items are in **bold type**, but every one of these items has been used on a Loop Tour.
If you haven't toured before, you really should talk to someone who has—
preferably someone whose opinion you trust.

Bicycling Clothes

Helmet (required!)
Bike Gloves, half-finger
Bike Gloves, full-finger
Bike Shorts (x2-3)
Jerseys (x2-3)
Socks (x3)
Bike Shoes, recessed cleats
Really Good Rain Jacket
Rain Pants/Tights
Helmet Rain Cover
Booties or Gore-Tex Socks
Bike Cap (under helmet)
Sweatband
Wind Jacket
Wind Vest
Knee, Leg & Arm Warmers

Off-Bike Clothes

Mid-weight Fleece Jacket,
or Insulated Vest, or Sweater
Nylon Pants with Zip -Off Legs
Camp Shirt
Underwear
Poly Shirt & Long Johns
Swim Suit
Stocking Cap, lightweight
Rain Hat
Sturdy Sandals or Camp Shoes

Personal

Prescription Eye Glasses
Bike Glasses (w/ Prescription Inserts),
Clear and Dark Lenses
Bar Soap (medium, in carrier)
Shampoo
Toothbrush, Toothpaste & Floss
Towel
Razor, Blades & Shave Cream
Comb
Washcloth
Solar Shower

Camping Stuff

Tent
Ground Cloth
Sleeping Bag (in waterproof bag)
Therma-Rest Pad
Therma-Rest Chair Thing
Space Blanket

Cooking Stuff

Stove & Fuel
Waterproof Matches
Pots, Lid & Handle
Plastic Bowl & Cup

Metal Fork & Spoon

Aluminum Foil
Measuring Dipper Cup
Coffee Cone & Filters
Scrubber & Eco-Soap
Small Wooden Spatula
Dish Towel
Water Purifier Filter

Food

Freeze-Dried Dinners
Freeze-Dried Breakfasts
Soup Packets
Hot Chocolate Packets
Ground Coffee (8 oz)
Crisco (in film can)
Salt and Pepper
Vitamins
Energy Gel or Bars
Energy Drink Mix
Helper (12 oz plastic bottle)

Miscellaneous

Bicycle (recently tuned;
new 32c tires and tubes)
Rear View Mirror
Flashlight (bike headlight?)
Tail Light
Water Bottles (x2)
Front & Rear Panniers
Wallet with ID, Cash & Plastic
Lock and Cable
Handlebar Bag
Lashing Straps (x2 +1 spare)
Daypack (for grocery shopping before
getting to camp)
Small Fanny Pack
Waterproof Stuff Sacks
Ziplock Bags(various sizes)
Maps & Compass
Chalk
Quarters for clothes washing
Clothespins
Mild Detergent (for clothes)
Book or magazine
Postage Stamps & Address List
Notebook and Pen
Camera & Film & Battery

Medicine & First Aid

Butt Butt'r
Saddle Sore Medicine
Wash & Dry Packets
Ibuprofen
Sunscreen (skin & lips)
Green Stuff (post-sunburn juice)
Anti-diarrhea Medicine

Bug Repellent
Post-sting Potion
Band-Aids
Non-stick 4x4 Sterile Pads
Tape
Moleskin
Antiseptic
Burn Dressing
Prescription Medicines

Tools

*Tools and parts are heavy; give careful
thought to what you carry.*

Good Pump

Tire Levers

Swiss Army Knife w/ corkscrew and tiny
screwdriver (**this is also for meals**)
Pressure Gauge (proper fitting)
Thin 8" Adjustable Wrench
Headset Wrench
Hex Wrenches (2.5,3,4,5,6,8mm)
Needlenose Vice Grip Pliers
Multi-bit Screwdriver
File
Cold Chisel (Dan may be the only person to
ever carry one of these)
Spoke Tool
Look Pedal Disassembly Tool
Cassette or Freewheel Remover
Crank Remover
Chain Breaker
Cone Wrenches
Sewing Kit

Parts, Etc.

Spare Tubes (x3)

Patch Kit (with fresh glue)

Folding Tire

Tyvek Tire Boots (or \$20 bills)

Spokes & Nipples (x3 each size))

Brake Cable

Shift Cable

Rear Axle with Cones & Nuts

Shimano Chain Pins

Ball Bearings (assorted)

Grease, small container

Chain Lube, small container

Duct Tape (small roll)

Baling Wire,

Nylon Zip Ties

Nuts & Screws (assorted)

Chain Links

Batteries (flashlight, computer, camera)

Tent Pole Repair Sleeve

Stove Repair Kit