

The Skinny on Cycling  
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7-21-07 Central Indiana Bicycling Association

Summer camp revisited.

I look down at my cyclometer and it reads thirty-nine miles per hour. My hands are loosely gripping my brakes and on my right is a deep mountain gorge, slightly blurred in my peripheral vision. As I slowly and deeply inhale the mossy fragrance of the Pacific Northwest, I'm startled by a strained tenor voice wailing on my left.

Keep your eyes on the road,  
your hands upon the wheel.  
Keep your eyes on the road,  
your hands upon the wheel.  
Yeah, we're goin' to the roadhouse,  
Gonna have a real...good time!

Passing me on my left and screaming out a passable rendition of Jim Morrison's famous song "Roadhouse" is Seth, a just-turned-fifty Silicon Valley hippy who ran away from Brooklyn years ago. Ahead of me, smirking and shaking her head with a knowing grin, is Claudia, a dental hygienist from Connecticut, clad in Lycra and nestling herself into the drops to get just another ounce or two of speed as we careen down the side of Mt. Hood into the Columbia River Gorge.

My friends, you've just stepped into Heaven. At this moment, I'm soaking up the best day of cycling I've ever experienced. I'm on my second grant-funded cycling tour and the weather is perfect. We've spent nearly seventy miles on a remote mountain road and only a few cars have passed us all day. The blacktop is perfect and, with the exception of Seth's only slightly-less-charming-than-Pavarotti's crooning, this moment could not possibly get any better.

Only four days before, I found myself unpacking my bags in a park just outside of Portland, Oregon. As with my earlier touring experience in Texas this spring, I didn't know anyone. However, this time, I was looking forward to meeting people. I was confident in my cycling skills and, although I had never spent any time cycling in "real" mountains before, I knew that there were nearly one hundred cyclists in this group. Surely there would be at least a few who were a little on the slow side, like me. I also knew that Kathy from Adventure Cycling was the cook on this trip. When Kathy is cooking, meals are like eating at a five star restaurant, but with plastic forks and Chinette plates.

The first person I met was Brad, who became known as "Single Speed" or, in some cases, "The Uni-cogger". Brad's about my age and is obviously an athlete. Over our first meal together, he informed me that he'd be doing this trip on a

single speed to kick off his new fitness routine. He wanted to lose a little weight and he felt that riding four hundred miles in the Cascade Mountains would get the weight loss ball rolling for sure. We were soon joined by Kevin, an auditor from North Carolina. Kevin's soft spoken southern drawl and gentle manner betrayed the party animal we found him to be later that week. After dinner, during the map meeting, I got the chance to meet Velda from St. Paul who took some time from her job as a computer programmer to see this part of the country by bicycle. Velda's the kind of person you instantly like and trust. There were a lot of other people on this tour, but this was the group that I will remember for years to come.

I've learned that a good bicycle tour is a lot like summer camp when you were a kid. You don't know anyone when you get there but, by the end of the week, you have a whole new set of best friends. It's also kind of bittersweet because, despite the promises of staying in touch and exchanged email addresses and phone numbers, you know that this is a one time shot with this particular group. Everyone would soon be reabsorbed into their lives and jobs, and this week will live on only in shared photographs and a wrinkled cycling tour brochure stuffed in among other cherished mementos.

There were no catastrophic events on this tour. No one was badly hurt. Nearly everyone finished the tour and, except for some sore legs, nobody complained about anything. By the third day of the tour, we found ourselves asking "What day is it again?" Some thought Tuesday, others were sure it was Wednesday. Nobody really cared. Someone asked about cell phone coverage—we'd been without it for hours and nobody noticed. We all slept well at night and every morning, we knew that all we had to do that day was pack up camp, enjoy a hearty breakfast and clip in for some great cycling, amazing scenery and lots of well-meaning banter with these close friends whom we had only met days before. We all had become strangely connected at a very deep level.

Now my cyclometer reads forty-two miles per hour and I think I smell a little rubber as I let off the brakes, drift a little toward the inside of the curve and start to hammer the pedals just a little more. Claudia's starting to drop us and I hear Seth creeping up behind me.

...Well, I woke up this morning  
And I got myself a beer.  
The future's uncertain  
And the end is always near.

Let it roll, baby, roll....

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Wade Wingler, the author of “The Skinny on Cycling” is the father of one adorable little girl, the husband of a beautiful & talented librarian, a Yogi and an avid cyclist. His web site, [www.HowILost100Pounds.com](http://www.HowILost100Pounds.com) features common sense advice on losing weight without suffering and improving your cycling through healthy living.