



# Biking the Steens Mountain Loop

Rod's Trails



# Steens Mountain Loop Trip Report

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## Where is Steens Mountain?

**Steens Mountain** is a large [fault-block mountain](#) in the southeastern part of Oregon. Located in Harney County, it stretches some 50 miles (80 km) long north to south, and rises from alongside the [Alvord Desert](#) at elevation of about 4,200 feet (1,300 m) to a summit elevation of 9,733 feet (2,967 m). While I might call it a mountain range, it is really just a single mountain, not a range.

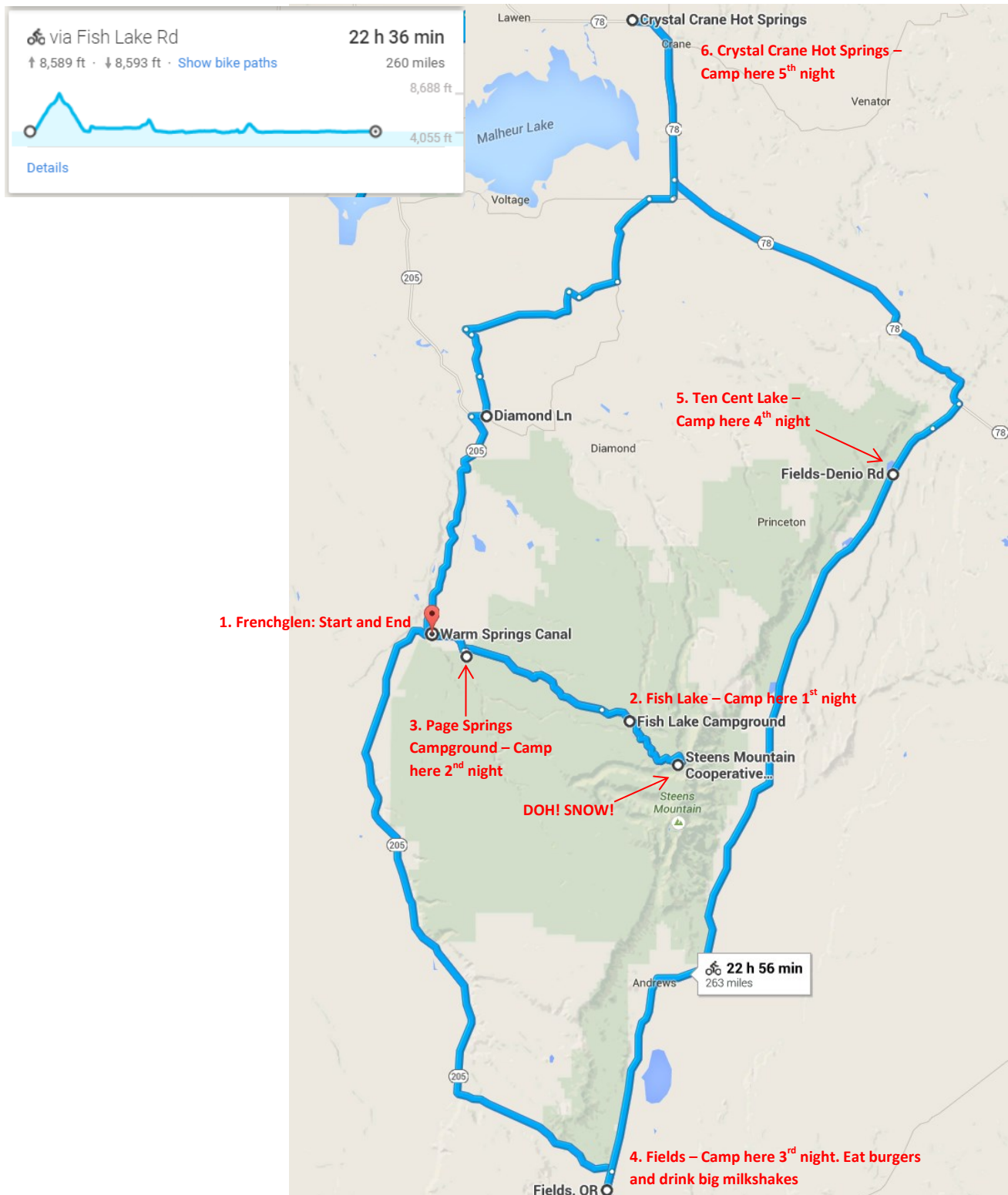


**The Objective:** Ride, counter-clockwise, the route below: starting at Frenchglen, over Steens Mountain, to Fields, Mann Lake, Crystal Crane Hot Springs and then back to Frenchglen. About 260 miles in five days. This ride is one of the top rated bikepacking rides in Oregon per [Oregon Bikepacking: Steens Mountain Route](#)<sup>1</sup>. So, for my first bikepacking (not touring) ride with Miss-T<sup>2</sup>, a girl bike<sup>3</sup>, I figured this would be the one to do.





**The Reality:** Ride, counter-clockwise, the route below: starting at Frenchglen, head out on original plan and make it to Fish Lake, ride and walk to a rocky outcropping about 9,000 feet through snow, turn around and go back to Frenchglen with a night-over at Page Springs Campground (have a fire and drink beer), then to Fields, pass up Mann Lake and its bounty of water and ride to the near-dry lakes of Ten Cent Lake, then Crystal Crane Hot Springs and back to Frenchglen. About 263 miles in six days.





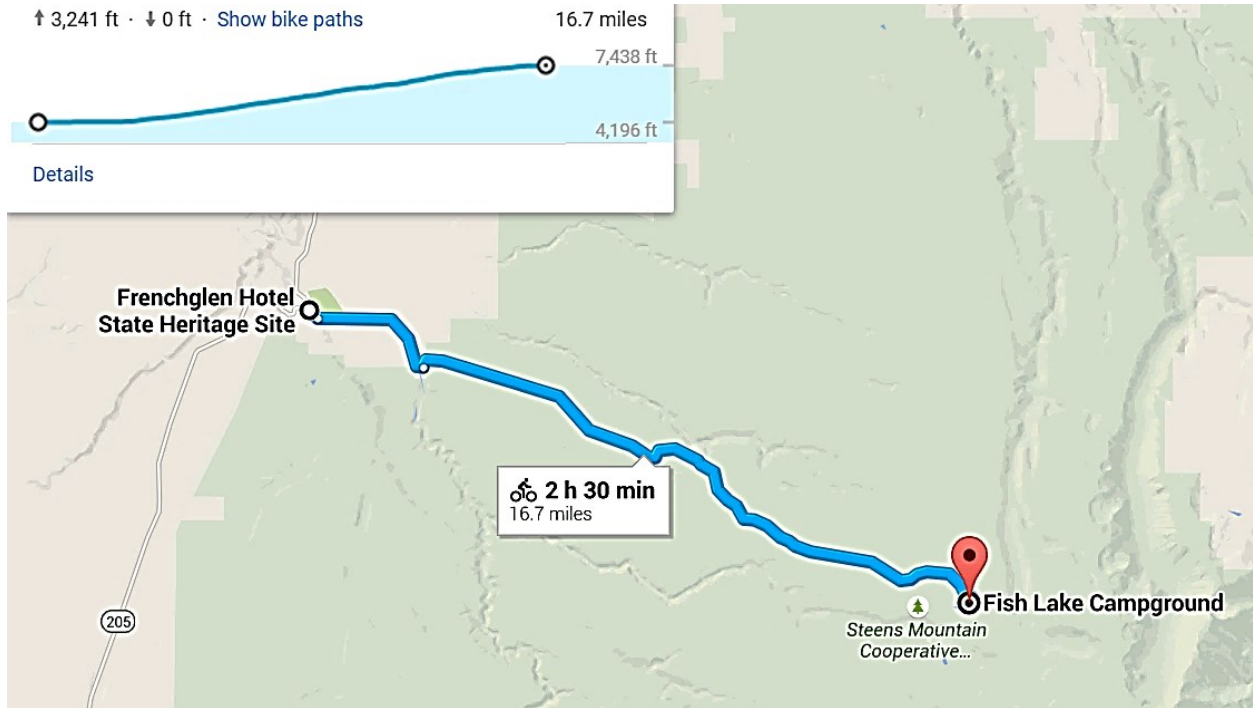
Sunday, 5/24/2015: Frenchglen to Fish Lake	6
Frenchglen hotel guy	6
Stubble-faced guy	6
Steens Mountain is open guy	6
Steens Mountain is open guy's wife	6
Birder 1 and Birder 2	7
Monday, 5/25: Fish Lake to 9000 feet and back to Page Springs Campground (Frenchglen)	10
Four Older Ladies	11
Younger man, Younger Woman and Older Man	12
Mom at the Gate	12
Daughter #1 of the Mom at the Gate	12
Daughter #2 of the Mom at the Gate	13
Quiet Dad at the Gate	13
Birder 1 and Birder 2	13
A day in the snow	13
9000 feet	15
The ride down	17
Tuesday, 5/26: Page Springs Campground (Frenchglen) up BAH and then up another BAH to Fields	18
Good-natured Cruel Joke Guy	19
Cycle Oregon Map Maker	20
Grill is Closing Guy	21
Fields Station Owner	21
Fields Station Cook	21
Little Girl with Crush on Pete	21
105 Mile Woman	22
105 Mile Dudette	22
105 Mile Dude	22
Guy Burying Dad's Ashes	22
Friend of Guy Burying Dad's Ashes	22
Along the way to Fields Station	23
Wednesday, 5/27: Fields past Mann Lake, past Juniper Lake (dry), Fifteen Cent Lake (almost dry) to Ten Cent Lake (looks dry, but wait...)	24
Fields Station Unhappy Cook	24

Fields Station Unhappy Cook's Husband	25
Little Blonde-haired Kid with Glasses	25
Old Men in House	25
Bored Man and Woman at Café Bar	25
Cowboy in a Truck	25
The Alvord Desert	27
Thursday, 5/28: Ten Cent Lake to Crystal Crane (very) Hot Springs	32
Staff Woman	33
Dianne	33
Woman and Two Men Chatting	33
Sad Guy from Bend	33
Kid from Kentucky	34
Biker Guy	34
Vick	34
Friday, 5/29: Crystal Crane (very) Hot Springs to Frenchglen and then Home	36
Waitresses at Fire	36
Steens Mountain Area Drivers	36
The End	38





## Sunday, 5/24/2015: Frenchglen to Fish Lake



*Google maps says 16.7 miles. Add in riding around Fish Lake looking for a campsite and my weaving from one side of the road to another to keep from falling off my bike, and my speedometer comes up with 18 miles. 18 is the accurate number – trust me on this.*

We arrived at Frenchglen around 3:00 PM or so on Sunday afternoon. After getting our bearings – finding a bathroom, stretching and getting a general sense of where we were after a six-hour drive – I started chatting people up and got conflicting reports on whether Steens Mountain Road was open all the way to the top and down the south side.

**Frenchglen hotel guy** said we could park the truck “this side of the elm tree” as if it was the most common thing in the world. Not the friendliest guy in the world, but no really unfriendly. I think he was just busy. Wearing Oregon Ducks hat – I didn’t tell him I was a Buckeye; otherwise, if it got out, we might have not been able to get parking anywhere. Even I know when to keep my mouth shut...sometimes.

**Stubble-faced guy:** had the look of a knowledgeable outdoors person, my age. He asked where we were going. I told him Steens Mountain loop. He inferred we were crazy – yeah, I’ve heard that before – and told us it was snowed in, that the road was not open. “Just look at the mountain top. It’s all snow up there.” There was definitely more white than dark up there. Should have listened to him, I guess.

**Steens Mountain is open guy:** Right after talking to Stubble-faced guy, this guy came over and said that Steens Mountain loop was open; he had traveled it just today all the way to the locked gate from the other side – no problem. He took out a map and showed us where he had traveled, where gates were, etc. He sounded even more authoritative than Stubble-faced guy. We listened to him.

**Steens Mountain is open guy’s wife:** quieter, but just as authoritative – “Oh yes, it’s open all the way, no problem.”

**Birder 1 and Birder 2:** Two really nice guys that were birding. Birding was at its peak over the Memorial Day weekend and hundreds of people were out looking for birds. These two guys saw our bikes and were very interested in what we were doing. Birder 1 had once gone up to Fish Lake and then back on his bike. He was very upset that the road was wash-boarded because he couldn't go back down the mountain fast. Birder 2 was taller and quieter than Birder 1. Both seemed to be a couple years older than I, maybe 65. They asked all kinds of questions and were genuinely interested in our trip. I finally had to nicely cut them off, "Well, I guess we better start riding," to get them to finally let us go.

We started out from Frenchglen on a gravel road – Cool! We were finally bikepacking. The first three miles were flat with only a few potholes and loose gravel areas, just enough to give us the sensation of roughing it on our bikes – Sweet. Then, right after the Page Springs Campground turnoff, we started uphill, on gravel, in the sun...for 15 miles – Ouch! This was REAL bikepacking, I suppose. Our destination for the night was Fish Lake. From there we would make the final push to the summit tomorrow morning, another ten miles. Gary and Pete averaged maybe six miles an hour. I managed, maybe, 4.5. They graciously waited for me at the tops of major climbs – *Wasn't the whole thing a major climb? Sure felt like it.* Just put it in granny gear and pedal.

We pulled into Fish Lake and found a campsite around 7:30 or so. Now that I have my Golden Pass we only had to pay \$4.00 for the campsite (usually \$8.00). Is that why those two 26-year-olds let me go along with them? Cheap date?



Gary



Pete

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Rod

We are ready to ride. And the route certainly looks easy







Potential Selfie of the Year (left) simply because – HOW DID HE DO THAT?

And we discover that 18 miles of gradual up on gravel is not so “easy enough” after all.



Steady....



Steady....

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We finally make it to Fish Lake and find a camp. There are fire pits but we had no wood. Next time, I will make one of the boys carry a few logs 😊.

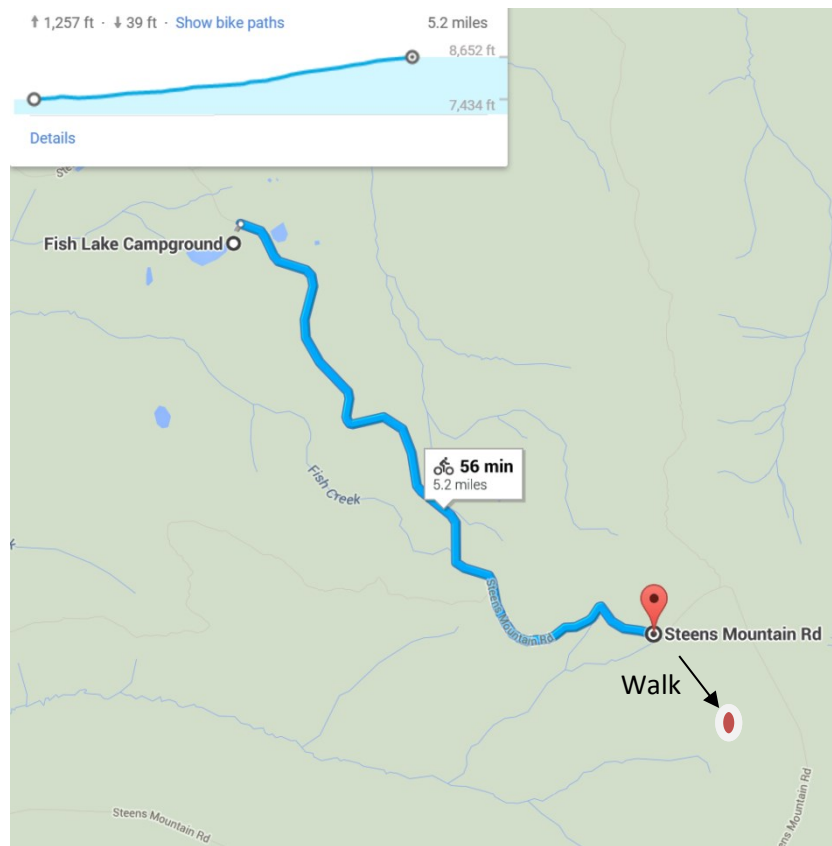
A beautiful sunset rewards our efforts, we eat our gruel and it's time for the sack.



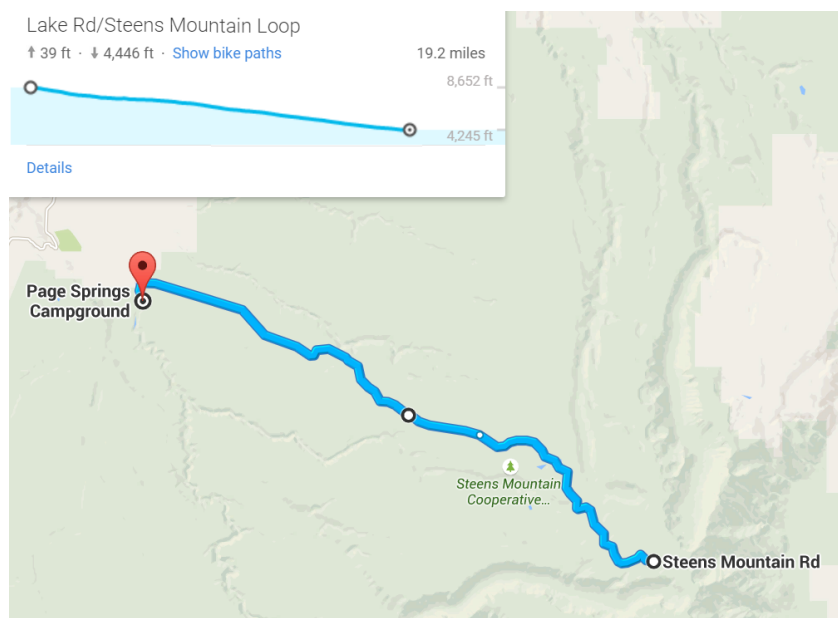


## Monday, 5/25: Fish Lake to 9000 feet and back to Page Springs Campground (Frenchglen)

*Ride (and walk) **UP** for 5 miles.*



*And to get back, turn around and ride down the hill (be careful of ruts and just a little wash-boarding) for over 20 miles to Page Springs Campground – Nice.*



Monday morning we figured to ride to the top of Steens Mountain and down the south side of the mountain and then into Fields – a total of something like 81 miles. Ha ha. Such rookies! We started later than we wanted – some people deciding that it was better to sleep in than ride :-P. Around 10:00 we started out for the Summit.

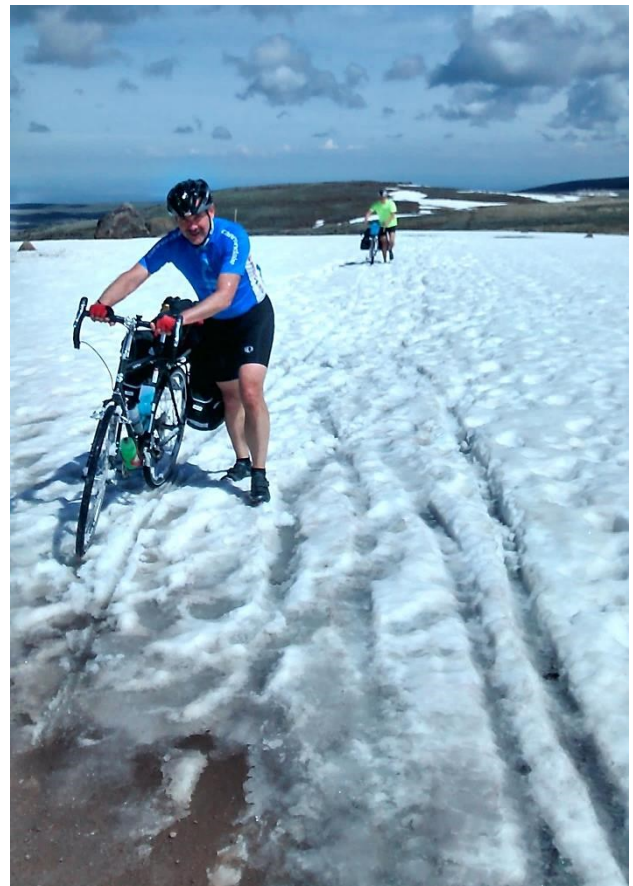
As expected, we reached a locked gate – no problem; push our bikes around it. There were several cars parked at the gate. People were hiking the road. We met several people coming down and even some going up. The hill was gradual and grueling, but we figured only another five miles (maybe an hour) until the summit, assuming we could ride to the summit – bad assumption.

A mile or so after the gate, we started running into snow drifts that partially covered the road. We road past the first couple but then the snow blocked our way by covering the road completely. I guess some bikes can handle snow – ours couldn't. We hiked through the snow, pushing our bikes. Bike shoes are not conducive to snow hiking and our – at least *my* – feet got cold. Ice caked around the wheels and spokes, making for good photo ops. Finally, we reached a point where we could see the road curve around towards the 9,733 foot peak...covered in snow. We debated our next move, decided that it would be silly to try to push the bikes through the snow for an unknown number of miles. We figured we could salvage our failed summit attempt a little bit by pushing the bikes through an open field, park them and hike a bit...in tennis shoes – say “cold feet.”

**Four Older Ladies:** Ladies about my age (maybe 50ish) slowly hiking up the trail beyond the locked gate. We passed them on our bikes and then coming back down the mountain while we pushed our bikes through the snow. They were all friendly and one (**Outdoor-smart Older**



Morning at Fish Lake. Miss-T (name of my new Surly LHT) is packed and ready. Gary has a bit more packing to do.



I don't think even big fat fatties (those are tires) could work on this snow.



**Lady)** seemed to be the leader. Outdoor-smart Older Lady told us that we could bike in about 20 miles from the southern loop entrance. I asked her “how far” and she looked at me like I was an idiot (perhaps I was). I mean, “how far from Frenchglen?” She answered, “I just said it was 20 miles.” I thought she was going to beat me up, so I dropped it.

Rather than taking the road to what we perceived to be a pretty good destination – an outcropping of rock at about 9,000 feet – we pushed through a gradually inclining snow- and brush-striped hillside to the outcropping. Sometimes the snow reached up to mid-calf and by the time we reached our destination, our feet were soaked and cold. But our previous perceptions were right on; it was a good destination. We lunched, took pictures of the scenery and thousands of Lady Bugs – must be a breeding opportunity for them high on those rocks – and simply enjoyed the high solitude.

**Younger man, Younger Woman and Older Man:** On our way down Steens, while still walking from our rocky outcropping summit, we met three folks: Younger (maybe 50ish) man and woman and an older man (maybe my age, maybe 45) walking up. We chatted and they were curious where we had been – yes, they had seen our bikes and they were still there. We told them “that outcropping right up there.” We further told them they could get there by following our tracks – easy. They seemed pretty excited about going up but while we were back at our bikes getting ready to leave, the older man came hiking back down. Later, on our ride down the mountain, we saw him lying on a big rock beside the road with his hands behind his head, seemingly very happy with being alone and not worrying one bit about climbing the mountain. I guess he had “been there, done that” or something similar. He smiled and waved when we passed, seemingly quite content with where he was.

Back at the bikes, we quickly put on dry biking shoes, helmeted up and jumped on – 20 miles, all downhill – sweet. Back at the gate we met a family and chatted (Mom, Daughters and Dad at the Gate). Turns out that one of the daughters was going to Williams this coming fall – small world!

It took no more than an hour to ride down what had taken us at least six hours of hard climbing and hiking to get up. We zoomed into Frenchglen, got beer in our cooler drove the truck back to [Page Springs Campground](#) and had a great night drinking beer and cooking our meals over a campfire rather than our backpacking stoves. I slept in the bed of the truck – cozy.

**Mom at the Gate:** When we reached the gate on our way back down the mountain, there were several cars parked there. We stopped for a few minutes and a lady asked if we had come from the other side. No, we wish. She was with her family. We started chatting, she asking us questions about our ride, etc. I asked about her and her family, as is my way. The boys were with me and one thing led to another. I am not sure how, but it came around that they had some relations or whatnot in Boston. I asked if they knew where Williamstown was, that this one, Gary, had gone to Williams and the other one, Pete, was an Amherst guy. The lady said, “Are you joking me? My daughter (in the back seat, not wanting to come out and say hello – I think afraid to show herself to the two handsome young men) is going to Williams next year.”

**Daughter #1 of the Mom at the Gate:** The Daughter of the Mom at the Gate poked her head out and said hello, having heard the conversation. She is going to run and might be on the ski team. She met the coaches and Gary told them about the coaches. He knew them when at Williams. I think Chelsea (Gary’s former roommate) is the ski coach. It was like old home week. When we left them, Pete said that it was good that she got into her “safety school.” Funny.

**Daughter #2 of the Mom at the Gate:** The Mom at the Gate had another daughter with her. She was pretty quiet and, perhaps, not fully functional – I wasn't sure. She was a "hiker" according to her mom. She walked over to the side of the road and sat down while we talked. But after a bit she came back and, perhaps because we were nice guys, started talking. She likes to hike. That is what she does. I guess she was maybe 15.

**Quiet Dad at the Gate:** The Dad at the Gate was pretty quiet and talked to his friends in another car. Once he heard about the Williams connection, he came over and chatted.

**Birder 1 and Birder 2:** So, yeah, when we finished the run down the hill and back into Frenchglen to get the truck, Birders 1 and 2 went by in their car, saw us, turned around and came back to chat. Birder 1 said they were curious as to how the ride up Steens had been. Gary and Pete went to get beer in the cooler while I chatted. They had just returned from Fields and said that it was worth the ride for the Burgers and shakes. Birder 2 was much more vocal this time. I felt like it was old home day and was getting to know these guys pretty well – should have got their names. I asked about snakes and they said there were all kinds of them on the road, some alive and most squished. The boys returned with the beer in the cooler and the Birders asked if it had fermented stuff in it and that it should. Not sure if beer is fermented, but we all agreed that beer would be great after climbing that mountain. I asked them if they had to go back to work and they said they were retired, looked at each other, and Birder 1 said they retired last January. They were happy doing neat stuff together.

### *A day in the snow*



Pete at the locked gate on the road to Steens Summit.



The road started getting snowy. We pushed around a few of the patches.



You just don't see this on your bike every day.

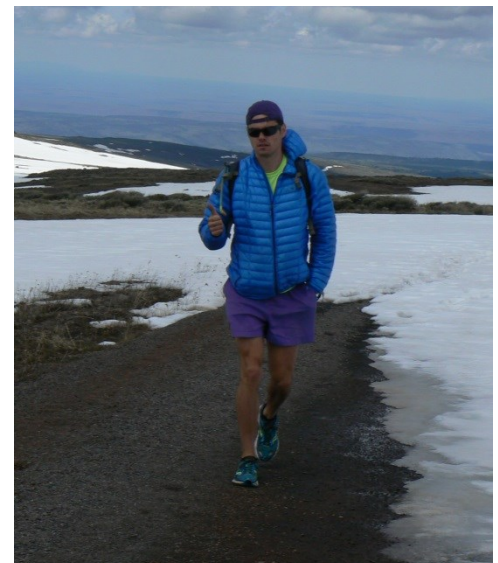


Growing right up there at 8500 feet with the snow





We definitely did not plan this! But, undaunted by the snow, cold, wind and the fact that the only hiking shoes we had were running shoes, we parked our bikes and trekked our way to “that rock outcropping” just up “that valley.”



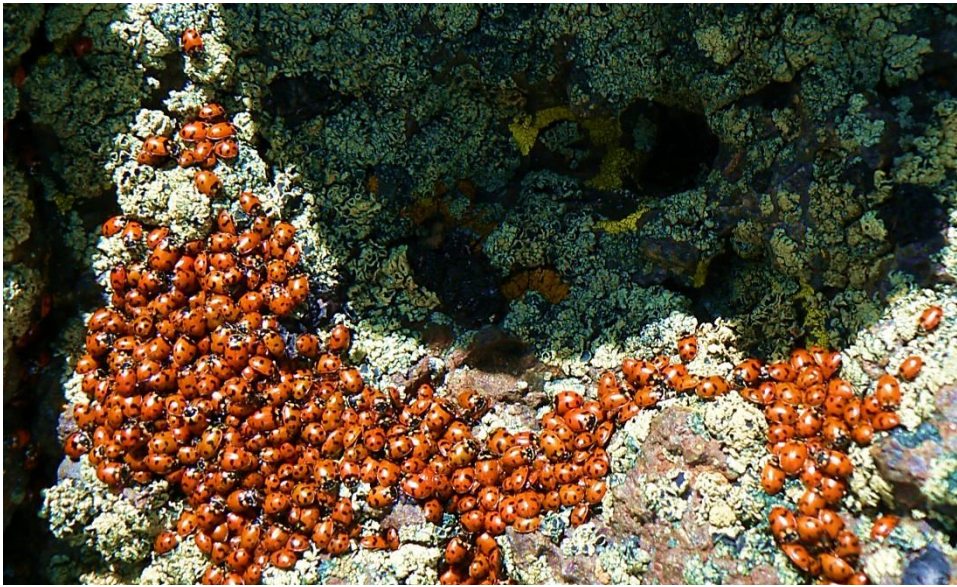
No worries



9000 feet







Yes, that is a whole batch of Lady Bugs. We found thousands of them right there with us at 9000 feet. They were all over the rocky outcropping that was surrounded by feet of snow. If there was a sunny spot, you found Lady Bugs.

Below: One of Rod's favorite pictures of the trip.





### ***The ride down***

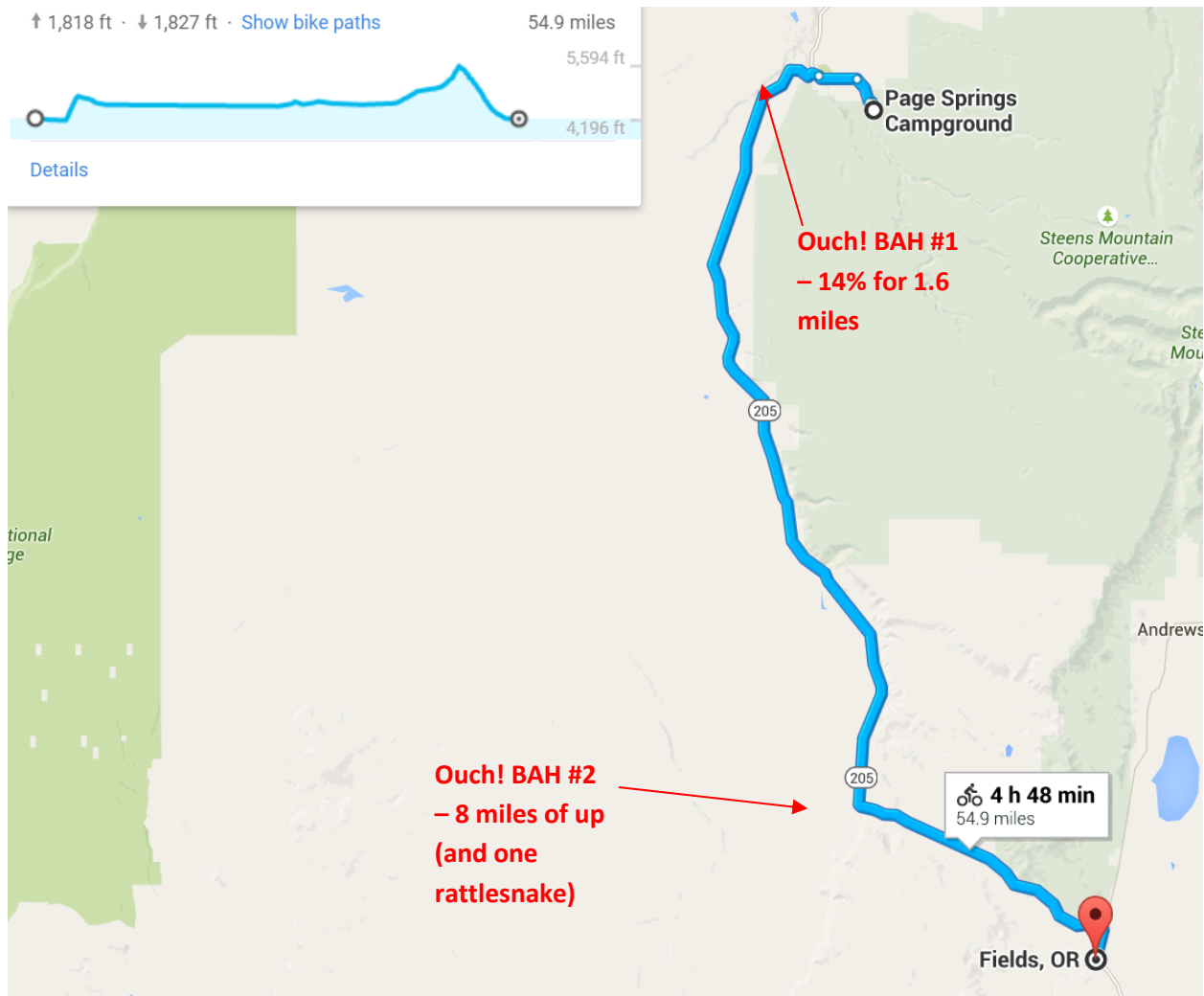
The ride down took us almost no time. All we had to do was be careful of the wash-boarding on the road (which wasn't too bad at all) and some of the thicker layers of gravel. But there were no accidents or even near misses. And at the end of the road was Page Springs Campground, a fire and, best of all combinations, Peanut M&Ms and Worthy Brewing IPA. Could life get any better than that?





## Tuesday, 5/26: Page Springs Campground (Frenchglen) up BAH and then up another BAH to Fields

BAH = Big Ass Hill



*Two very wicked hills: the first right out of Frenchglen for 1.6 miles and 14% and the next around the 40 mile mark for 8 miles to the pass at 5,594 feet. Ouch! But a GREAT downhill into Fields – the most satisfying downhill I think I have ever ridden.*

After only a fair night's sleep – I was fighting some kind of hip/back thing that, if I bent over, I couldn't straighten up, nor could I sleep on the bad hip side – and the previous night's agreement to leave by 9:00 we drove to Frenchglen, parked the truck and were all excited about the hamburgers and shakes awaiting us just 55 miles away in Fields. I can stand on my head and gargle peanut butter for 55 miles. Let's get this show on the road!

Unfortunately, the show started off with a 1.6 mile ride up a 14% grade out of Frenchglen – *put her in granny gear and pedal*. Yes, the 18 miles of gradual up on Sunday was harder, but this is still a demanding hill for such a

short distance (4780 – 4196 = 584 feet up = Ouch!).



Gary and Pete waited for me at the top and then we coasted down the other side rode for the next 35 miles on smooth, flat pavement, and were passed by fewer cars than you can count on one hand. We salivated more with each pedal stroke the closer we got to those burgers and shakes awaiting us in Fields. It was a sweet, easy ride. But wait; didn't Gary mention something about a pass or some-such thing?



Yep, at mile 40ish, we started up a long hill that turned into a pass topping out about 8 miles later at 5594 feet (5594 - ~4500 =

For every hill you climb there is (usually) a *down*. This is the view down the other side of the first BAH. Pretty sweet.

1094ish = Double Ouch!).  Granny

gear time. I saw one little rattler crossing the road on my slow ascent; he minding his own business trying to get to the other side and me sucking air and sweating torrents. He stopped, coiled and rattled at me as I passed. I thought about taking a picture but that meant I had to stop my bike and then try to start again. No, I have enough pictures of rattlers to last a while. The boys waited at the top of the pass. And it was at the top of the pass that Gary was walking around some sage to get better views of the valley when he ran into another rattlesnake. The rattler buzzed, Gary jumped and they both cautiously backed away, neither wanting to make a fight of it.



One moment Pete is right there with me on BAH 2 and then he zooms past leaving me with my rattlesnake buddy and to become one with the hill.



**Good-natured Cruel Joke Guy:** At the top of the pass, before we coasted into Fields, a pickup truck coming up the other side stopped while I was prepping myself for the ride down. The driver rolled down his window and asked where we were headed. We talked about the loop we were doing and he was excited to do it someday. He had bikes in the back of his rig and I asked him what he had been doing. He and his buddy had been hiking



for three days around the Pueblo Trail or something like that ([Less Traveled Northwest](#)<sup>4</sup> has a good write-up on the [Pueblo Mountains Hikes](#)). Turns out they didn't need the bike because the guy at Fields let them use his jeep to get to where they were going – good people! He asked if I was heading for the Fields Station burgers and shakes. Of course I was – is there another reason to go to Fields? (Turns out there is, by the way, maybe even lots of them.) I asked if they were still open and he said they were but they had run out of ice cream and couldn't make any shakes for the rest of the day. I *gacked* and he and his buddy laughed – “just kidding.” I am not sure that was a good joke though; never joke with a man about milkshakes.



Before reaching BAH 2 we stopped for lunch just off the main road.

While the 1,000 elevation gain to the top of the pass was *challenging* – yeah, that's a good word – the ride down was – *awesome* doesn't describe it – *fantastically thrilling* or just plain down *sweet*! Going 36 miles per hour with all that weight on my bike was a bit scary, especially when a jackrabbit bounded out in front of Gary (he missed it fine); we both slowed to 32ish. We met Pete at the bottom of the hill and then coasted the flat into Fields, ready to indulge in those ½ pound hamburgers and quart-sized milkshakes everyone had been telling us about.

We arrived at Fields Station in great spirits. We parked our bikes against some picnic tables, sat and basked in the glory of a ride well done.



After all the hype about burgers and milkshakes, this is a wonderful sight. Turns out we made it just in time, unlike some others.

**Cycle Oregon Map Maker:** I was just going into Fields Station Café when a big guy with a black Silver Anniversary Cycle Oregon T-shirt walked out. That is the same T-shirt as mine. I asked him if he did the ride and he said yes. In fact, he has done all but three of them. Cool. He said he made the maps (didn't plan the routes) for the yearly Cycle Oregon ride. We chatted for a while and he offered to get a map for me of a ride (or something) from his motorcycle when *Grill is Closing Guy* got my attention.

**Grill is Closing Guy:** A short, worn, stubble-faced guy came out of Fields Station while I was talking to *Cycle Oregon Map Maker* and told me that we looked like we were here for the burgers and shakes. If so, we better hurry because the grill closes in 15 minutes. He was pretty cheery and told us he had passed us back on the road, climbing the pass, and figured we would want a burger and shake after all that climbing. He was right. I excused myself from the Cycle Oregon Map Maker, yelled at the boys to get a move on and went inside Fields Station.

**Fields Station Owner:** An older lady (maybe my age? 40-ish) stood behind the “first” counter in the café. In fact, it was not the counter to the café at all, but perhaps the bar? Anyway, I asked if the steps down with the big sign over it that read, CAFÉ, led to where the café was. She looked at me, smiled as if conversing with a simpleton – perhaps she was – and told me, “look up darlin’”. I blushed stupidly and walked into the café. Later, I chatted with her about all the work they had had to do over the last week because of all the birders and Memorial Day visitors. When I paid up, she even shook my hand. I never got her name.

**Fields Station Cook:** Wow! No wonder they close the grill at 4:15. When we entered the café, it was hot down there. The cook, a younger woman with a constant smile and good demeanor, worked from 10:00 or so every day on that grill (or the other one did – the *Fields Station Unhappy Cook*). She took our orders and *Little Girl with Crush on Pete* brought out our *huge* milkshakes – perhaps the best I ever had. Gary and I got chocolate and Pete got something with Oreo sprinkles, I think, and it had extra sprinkles. The shakes and ½ pound burgers were awesome, to say the least. I would ride all the way from Frenchglen again (even up the two BAHs) for that chow. I would hate to ride all that way plus another 55 miles or so and just miss.

After eating, we talked with several people and lamented our camping options: “anywhere over there under the trees is fine,” Fields Station Cook told us. That would have been fine, but it looked like rain and we didn’t want to pitch tents in the rain. We were getting used to the whole easy camping thing (bikepacking is NOT backpacking). The Field Station Owner offered the partly constructed rooms beside the usual rented rooms. We took it. “Just watch out for the mice.” While we didn’t see anything mouse-like during the night, I know those thumps, jumps and crashes couldn’t be made by mice unless mice in Fields are the size of possums. If so, I would hate to see one of their rats. Still, beggars couldn’t be choosers and we settled in for a good night’s sleep. After a couple of hours, those “mice” settled right down and all was quiet. We slept dry and well.

**Little Girl with Crush on Pete:** This is the little girl that gave Pete extra sprinkles. She is maybe 10 or 11 years old. She smiled at Pete sweetly and acted, what is the word, coy? It was cute how she tried to play hard to get. The morning that we left, I paid for breakfast. Little Girl with Crush on Pete was behind the counter. I asked if she could run the Visa card. She said sure, tried it and then nice Fields Station Cook came out and told her, “You are a long way off from doing that one.” Took the card and did the



Waiting for our burgers, we enjoy the monster shakes. Well-deserved after a great ride.



swiping. Fortunately, Pete wasn't around to see Little Girl's embarrassment.

**105 Mile Woman:** We were in the café eating our burgers and shakes when an exhausted looking woman pulled up on a bike. It was about 4:30 – 15 minutes past grill close time. She came rushing in and Fields Station Owner told her that the grill was closed – no burgers. “Fu%\$#!” said 105 Mile Woman. “I thought it closed at 4:30,” she nearly cried. “I have a couple of friends behind me and we rode 105 miles just for these burgers.” While sad, Fields Station Owner didn't budge. “Sorry, the grill is closed.” The boys and I took our meals outside to finish them. A little later, 105 Mile Woman came out with a pint of beer and big bag of chips. She had calmed down and we talked. She and her friends (who still hadn't shown up) rode 105 miles from Crystal Crane Hot Springs that day and really were looking forward to the burgers. Her friends would be sad. We chatted and it turned out that she had been a bicycle delivery person here in Portland for 10 years, raced bikes with her friend, 105 Mile Dudette, and mainly did stuff to make a living with bikes. She was nice. First impressions didn't seem to pan out (th “Fu%\$#!” statement). She was just frustrated at not getting to eat those burgers and shakes after riding 105 miles.

**105 Mile Dudette:** After a good 45 minutes from when *105 Mile Woman* rode into fields, 105 Mile Dudette and her husband, 105 Mile Dude rode in (so burgers would have been cold anyway). She and husband are Oregon State Fans. I admitted I was a Buckeye and they thanked me. I said, “You're welcome.” She is a racer and creative director for a major car rack company. Cool.

**105 Mile Dude:** Nice guy. Quiet. The next morning, he ordered breakfast and *Fields Station Mean Cook* was at the grill. She sorta bitched at him. He and *105 Mile Dudette* tried to cancel their order after waiting 40 minutes for eggs. *Fields Station Mean Cook* sorta bitched again and told them they would still have to pay for it. It was not pretty and I think if they were to write a review of Fields Station, it might not be very good.

**Guy Burying Dad's Ashes:** There was a guy that was burying his dad's ashes at his dad's favorite elk hunting place. He and his friend, Friend of Guy Burying Dad's Ashes, sat on the front porch of Fields Station and chatted. I tried to talk to them, but they were not real talkative. We did manage to talk a little about hunting. These two guys epitomized the whole good-ol-boy, huntin', drinkin', smokin' and cussin' thing. I don't think they had too much good to say or think about us and the 105 mile people. They didn't “get” us. But, they were nice enough and chatted when we pushed.

**Friend of Guy Burying Dad's Ashes:** definitely the more talkative of the two.

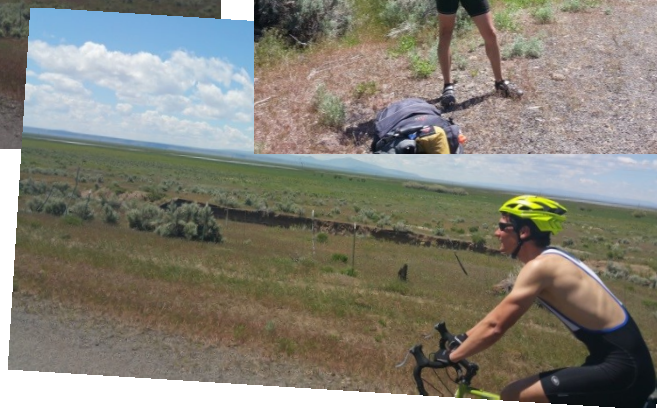


Gary begins the long descent from the summit of BAH 2 into Fields, about 10 miles away.

## *Along the way to Fields Station*



Rod and Pete on the Open Road, Gary in front of beautiful canyon on private land and Pete cruising down the highway.



Super Gary at the summit of BAH 2.



At Fields Station we slept in the new construction area to the left of the white building, and were happy to get it.



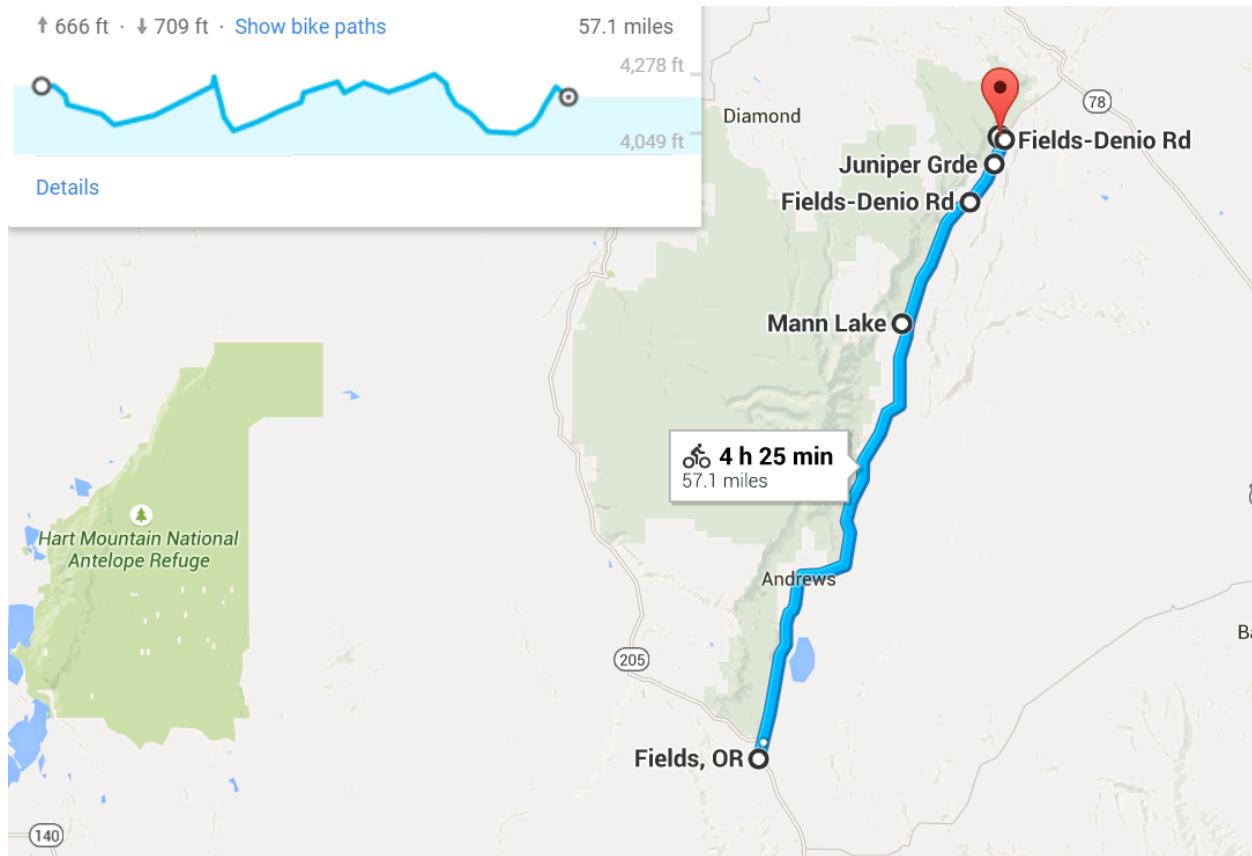
Super Rod at the summit of BAH 2 getting read for the long, sweet ride into the Fields. And below, this is the view looking down as Gary begins his descent into Fields, about seven miles away.



Our home away from home in Fields. We've had worse.



## Wednesday, 5/27: Fields past Mann Lake, past Juniper Lake (dry), Fifteen Cent Lake (almost dry) to Ten Cent Lake (looks dry, but wait...)



*Oops! Perhaps we should have stopped for the night at Mann Lake, but we wanted to go further than 40ish miles, so we pushed on, thinking that Juniper Lake, Fifteen Cent Lake or Ten Cent Lake would have water. Wrong! The terrain is not as hilly as it looks on the terrain view on the map. I never registered anything particularly difficult to climb and if I don't register it, then it likely isn't very hilly.*

This morning upon waking, I noticed absolutely no pain in my back and hip. I don't know what happened, but the pain that had plagued me over the last couple of days and nights was 100% gone – and stayed gone for the entire rest of the trip and even now, five weeks later. I suspect the medicinal value of those burgers and shakes and the luxury accommodations. What else could it have been?

We were looking forward to a store-bought cup of coffee and perhaps even a breakfast at 8:00 when the café opened. At about 7:30 I was walking to the porta-potty when a small explosion behind the café erupted. Everything electric stopped. Uh-oh, blown generator. That would definitely put a crimp in our coffee and breakfast plans and, as it turned out, the water pump ran on electricity, so we wouldn't be able to fill up our bottles. This was trouble. But about an hour later the generator had been fixed (seems a starling decided to commit suicide by running into the generator wires) and we got our food, but unfortunately, we were served by Field Station Unhappy Cook.

**Fields Station Unhappy Cook:** Honestly, not a very nice lady. Bitched at us to hurry and get our order for breakfast in – we had had our menus all of ten seconds – and then bitched at *105 Mile people* because they had

to wait forever to get their food and asked if they could forego breakfast. She was the only real mean-like person we met the entire trip. She was not a happy camper. Maybe she was just having a bad day, or maybe that was her pet starling that committed suicide.

**Fields Station Unhappy Cook's Husband:** I think he was the husband. Nice guy, actually. Maybe the first cook's husband. Didn't have much to say.

**Little Blonde-haired Kid with Glasses:** This little guy showed up the morning we were getting ready to leave and sorta latched on to Pete, who was waiting for Gary and me to do our last bit of packing. He asked Pete a million questions and Pete advised him on women. Blonde-haired Kid is about six, if that. Blonde hair, glasses. I would think this little guy would be very lonely if Little Girl with Crush on Pete is always working inside. I don't think there is anyone else to play with. He did have a cell phone that didn't work. He took Pete's number down and Gary's. Not mine. I must have been too mean looking.

**Old Men in House:** Two old men stopped as they walked by to the café. They stayed in the big house on the other side of our little half-built structure we spent the night in. They didn't have much to say but asked about where we were going and how far. They were amazed that we would ride 60 miles in one day. In fact, most folks were amazed when they heard our mileage. But we never did ride 105 miles in a day.

**Bored Man and Woman at Café Bar:** We didn't talk to these folks. I just noticed how terribly bored they seemed, never chatting or hardly looking up at all, as they patiently sat at the end of the café bar waiting for Unhappy Cook to bring them their breakfast. I think we finished our food before they got served. Never a word to anyone else or each other. Sorta sad, really.

Today's ride was nice, except for trying to find a place with water to camp. For much of the ride, the Alvord Desert was to our right (east) and Steens Mountain range was to the right (west).



Steens Mountains to the left and Alvord Desert to the right.

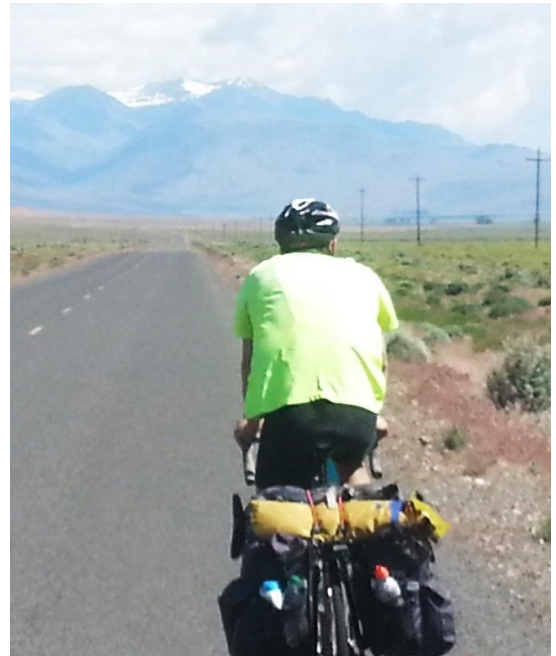
**Cowboy in a Truck:** Wednesday, after leaving Fields, was a few-and-far-between-people-wise day. The only folks we saw were those in cars and trucks. The only person we talked to was a friendly-enough cowboy driving a truck towing a cattle trailer. The trailer had one lone bull in it, I think destined to become someone's beef supply. Cowboy in a Truck stopped at an intersection where we were eating lunch, rolled down his window and asked us if we had come from the north. No, we were coming from the south, I answered. That was it; almost



awkward. He smiled thoughtfully, rolled up his window and waved goodbye. The bull peered out a trailer slat at us as they drove away. I guess we were one of the last sights he (the bull) ever saw.



Above: As you get closer to the Alvord Desert (background, right) you are made to feel *welcome*.



Right: The ride *started* on pavement anyway.

Below: Steens from the road running between Steens and the Alvord Desert.







But the smooth ride had to end sometime, I guess. But the gravel road lead an amazing place. Here is my first view of...

### ***The Alvord Desert***



We figured we should take a picture of the Alvord with the prettiest person in the group. Gary, of course, would take the picture. I stepped up to have my picture taken with the Alvord in the background, but – can you believe it? – I was overruled. Sometimes, boys can be so hurtful :-P.







Conciliation prize pictures

We made our way past the Alvord Desert and started looking for a place to stay. We passed the wonderfully-full-of-water Mann Lake, thinking it was too short a ride for the day (40 miles) and, looking at the map, we figured either Fifteen Cent Lake or Ten Cent Lake would have water – sure looked like it. Also, there was Juniper Lake that looked all watery (on the map, that is), although it was on private land. Still, we could fill our water bottles there, right? Well, turns out that Juniper Lake was dry and we couldn't have stayed there anyway – too fenced in and inaccessible. Fifteen Cent Lake was dry except for a little puddle right in the middle. That's okay, it's mapped as a dry lake anyway, we can move on to Ten Cent Lake; it is the one that should be nice and wet, right? WRONG! It had less water than Fifteen Cent Lake. Uh-oh. (There was an upside to all of this though: near Juniper Lake the gravel road gave way to smooth, paved road. *That* was a refreshing change. My butt appreciated it.)

We straddled our bikes looking down at Ten Cent Lake, debating if we should go back to the little mud hole at Fifteen Cent Lake. But, being the wise old outdoorsman that I am, I noticed all the pretty yellow flowers growing in the lake bed. That told me that there had to be water. "Stay here, I'll ride down for a closer look," I told the boys – I felt sorry for the little guys and didn't want them to get too tired if they had to ride back up that hill. They waited.

At the wire gate that opened to Ten Cent Lake, I straddled my bike, searching for signs of water – nothing, not one shiny spot in the whole lake bed. But then – what's that I hear? – frogs, bullfrogs! I cupped my ears and, sure enough, I heard bullfrogs *hurr-rumphing* away out there somewhere. That could only mean one thing (well, two if you are an old bullfrog gigger like me: food, but I will stick with the one other thing for now): water! Bullfrogs are not going to hang out where it is dry. There had to be running water out there somewhere. I cupped my ears and, what's that? Yep, running water. It sounded like it was coming from that canyon a half mile on the other side of the lake. I waved the boys down. They waved me up. I insistently waved them down. they waved me up. I yelled, "Water!" They consulted for a few seconds and one of them, Gary, soon rode down the hill.

"There's water out there somewhere. Hear the frogs?" I told Gary when he reached me.

Gary, never having hunted the wily bullfrog, ignored me – yes, I failed in his upbringing. "We should go back to Fifteen Cent Lake; we know there's water back there."

"Cup your ears, can you hear the water running out there?" I said.

Gary cupped his ears – Do I look that silly when I cup my ears? "Yeah, I can hear it. Is it wind or water?"

"Water. It's running out of that canyon. All we have to do is ride out there on that road – the one running through the middle of the lake – and we can get to it. Piece of cake," I authoritatively declared.

We waved Pete to come on down the hill. He hesitated but, being outnumbered now, rode – rather grudgingly, it seemed – down the hill. Once he arrived, we debated a bit more but the boys finally deferred to my superior intellect and outdoor skills. It was only a matter of time, right?

We pedaled across the dry lake bottom, being careful to stay on the already rutted road, through a bunch of yellow flowers, across a rutted sand and gravel bar where I fell over like that little old man that used to ride his tricycle and fall over sideways on the Smothers Brothers Show, and we came to, yep, a running stream. But this was not the stream we could hear; that one was still up towards the canyon, about *another* half mile away. This one was but a trickle.

We rode on to the other side of the lake where the road sort of fizzled out. After some searching, I found another road – packed indentation in the landscape that had a couple of parallel lines running pretty much side-by-side – that ran horizontal with the lake and ridgeline. "Stay here," I ordered. "I will ride out and see if this road leads to the canyon or not." The boys didn't seem to be in a hurry to argue, so I headed out alone. After about 10 minutes of riding over rocks, logs, ditches and sun-cracked packed dirt, I reached the end of the line. Nothing: no water, road or anything except for several antelope standing in the lake bed, peering at me, likely wondering what the heck this yahoo was doing out here. Pretty cool, but not what I was looking for. I returned to the boys, who were lounging at the side of the path.

"Well, the creek that's running out of the canyon isn't running down that way," I announced. "Must be running the other way." We packed up and took the road back the other way, paralleling the ridgeline, but not moving towards the canyon where we could hear the water enticingly pouring. It called to us. This time, when we reached the end of the road, just a few yards away, Gary put down his bike and took off on a run to find where in the world that stupid stream was. He ran a couple hundred yards to the top of a small knoll, looked around. Nothing.

"Crap! That water has to be somewhere; I can hear it," I complained. "Let's go back this way a bit and then walk cross-country to the canyon mouth. We *have* to run into it then." After a bout of whining and pouting around, I led the boys towards the canyon. And after about a quarter-mile trek directly towards the mouth of the canyon, bingo! We ran into the running stream. It was a bit less scenic than we expected though. It had been dredged so that the water detoured to Fifteen Cent Lake. That could answer why there appeared to be a little more water in



Fifteen Cent Lake than Ten Cent Lake. The BLM was busy doing something. We didn't care and were just happy to find fresh water. At least we assumed it was fresh, although it was very silty and had to be filtered.

We found an excellent campsite closer to the stream than we probably should have been, but beggars can't be choosers. And sleeping with the sound of a running stream right by your head is pretty darned nice. We ate our evening gruel, pumped water, took a few pictures and then spread out our air mattresses and sleeping bags to sleep under the stars. Twilight overtook the daylight and night then wrapped its arms around us. Stars twinkled into being in the darkening sky. Gary and I watched the stars and talked a good, long time about past backpacking trips, reminiscing about all the good times. And we certainly have had them. With our voices softly droning, the sound of water a constant serenade and the cool evening breeze wiping away the last remnants of desert heat, Pete fell asleep; Gary and I soon followed.



Above: Not a bad place for lunch even if the earth is cracked.

Right: We took this picture of the heart shaped clouds from our campsite at Ten Cent Lake.

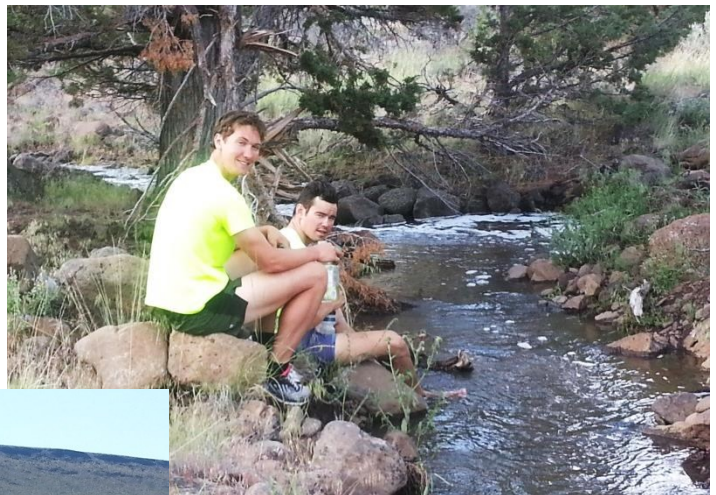






Above: Rod and Gary crossing the first small stream at Ten Cent Lake.

Right: At camp Pete and Gary pump water out of the silty creek.

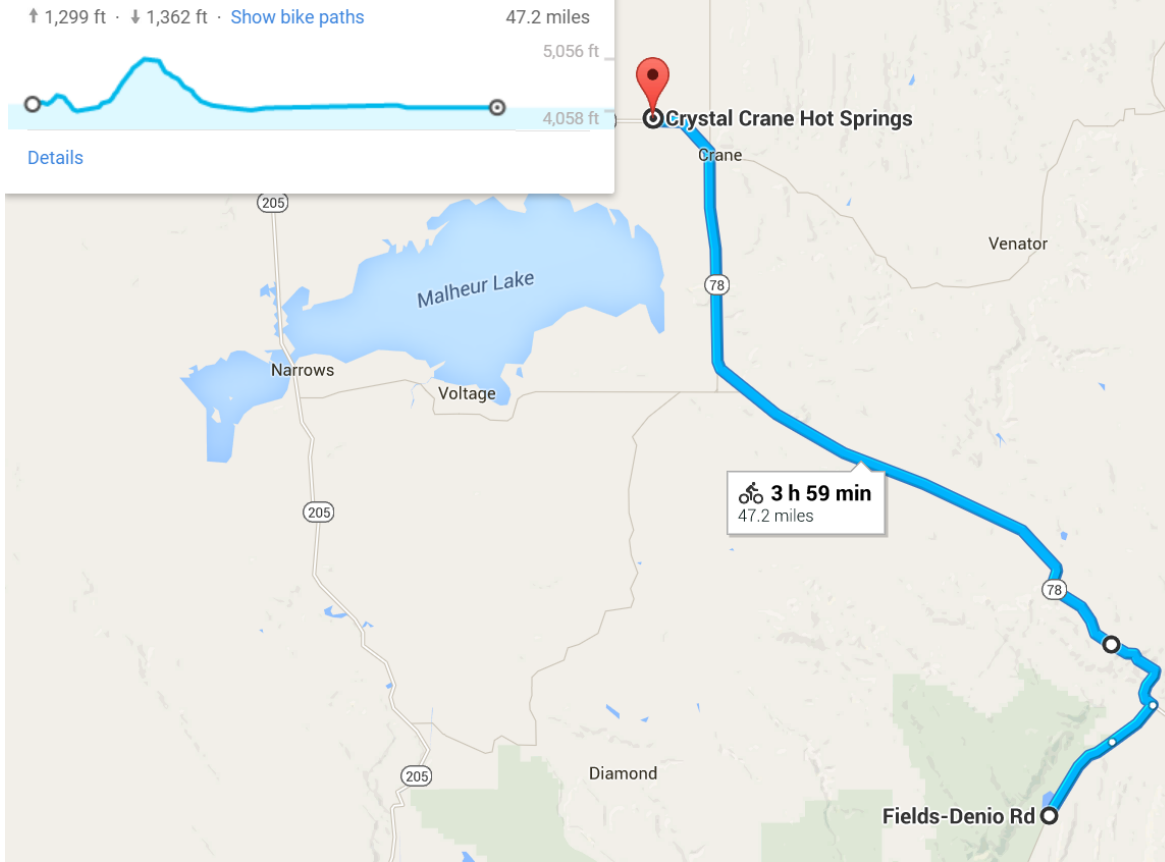


Below: Gary and Pete Navigate through the yellow flowers, being careful to stay on the "road."





## Thursday, 5/28: Ten Cent Lake to Crystal Crane (very) Hot Springs



*In the terrain view you see a hill that climbs about 1,000 feet and then a long flat stretch. Give me hills ANYTIME over that particular stretch. While this was a great six days in the saddle, that flat stretch is one of the most boring, hottest and endless stretches I have ever ridden. The road stretches into mirages for miles and miles and miles (over 30 of them, in fact). I concentrated on my sore butt and aching knee a lot. The miles were not kind over that gawd-awful stretch.*

Our trek out of camp this morning was far easier than our previous evening's search for a place to stay. It took us less than 20 minutes to walk and ride to the rode across the lake bed; yesterday took a good hour. It is nice to know where you are going, isn't it?

Yesterday, near the end of the day the main road turned from gravel back to pavement. The pavement lasted the rest of the trip. We were fine with that; we had had enough macho gravel riding for one trip. There was a 1,000 foot climb as soon as we turned onto highway 78 – put'er in granny gear. The boys waited at the top of the hill. But then we hit that 30+ mile stretch of hot, dry, sage-brush and sand mind-numbing boredom. That was the only real bad stretch of the whole ride in that there just wasn't much to look at. Pete may have been the prettiest – something I'm still willing to debate – but, believe me, even he doesn't cut it for 30 miles.

So, this was the boring day. We finally reached the hot springs. Wow! Those were indeed HOT. It was not at all comfortable. We could have got a private tub where the temperature is adjustable, but we didn't need a hot spring swim that much. The drinking water at the hot springs has that nasty sulfur/fart smell to it and, yes, it

tastes like what you might think a sulfury fart would taste like – nasty. Still, it was potable and it was our only option.

But other than the very hot springs and the nasty water, this is a very nice place to stay. The \$25 for a tent site gets you the hot springs, a shower, toilet, cooking house, lounge area with a big screen TV and a place to kick back, read and fall asleep, which I did. Gary said I was snoring – liar. There is no beer but pop and other drinks and a few edibles, nothing fancy. It was enough. We picked the furthest tent site way back in the corner and had a good evening and slept like babies under the stars. Dianne said it was neat to see us sleeping under the stars, that people don't do that anymore. I agreed.

We met several people at the hot springs:

**Staff Woman:** This lady, who was going to her 22<sup>nd</sup> high school reunion in Florida soon, was the first person we met at the Hot springs. She wore a red "Staff" T-shirt. After paying our \$25 she showed us around. She was (as was 99% of the people we met on our trip) very nice. She gave us site #10 at first. When we got there, I was a bit underwhelmed by the fact that it was small and had just been watered. I was lamenting this fact when Staff Woman came out and told us that she didn't know that the site had just been sprinkled and we could have any site we wanted, just pick. We picked #18 (I think) way back in the corner away from everyone – closer to the cows and further away from people.

**Dianne:** Dianne (one of the few names I eventually got) is, I think, either the owner or a camp host. I know Vick is the camp host but not quite sure what Dianne's relationship is to him. She seemed more the boss than Staff Woman. My first encounter with Dianne was after she had taken a shower. I said hello as we walked back from the shower rooms. Later, while I was walking over to go to the bathroom, she pulled up in a golf cart that the staff drove around. She told me to hop in and would give me a ride. I had 25 yards to go to the bathroom so just told her I was going there and didn't need a ride. She seemed disappointed. I thought she was hitting on me :-P. Later, when I was talking with Vick, she came out and all of us chatted. After our chats and name introductions, I came to realize that she was just being very friendly and wanted to give us tired bikers (especially the *old* tired biker) a well-deserved ride in the cart. She was nice and chatty and not trying to pick me up at all – my feelings were hurt...not really; I have a girlfriend.

**Woman and Two Men Chatting:** After I went to the bathroom there was a rough looking woman and two men talking outside one of the private hot tub rooms. When I passed them the woman looked up, gave me the once over and said, "nice" or something like that. I got the impression she thought the "nice" thing was me. Sheesh! I wanted to get back with Gary and Pete so they would protect me from these women. Maybe I should start wearing a T-shirt that says, "Back off girls; I'm taken."

**Sad Guy from Bend:** A guy camping by himself. Maybe 40. Has a wife and kids in Bend. Has several jobs from carpet cleaning to coffee shop. Heavy set. Nice enough but...*sad*, I think is the best term. I talked to him at length about biking. He had actually done Cycle Oregon but hadn't been on a bike for over ten years. He lamented the downfall of Bend because of all the rich, spoiled "college" people coming in. He even said something snide when describing them like, "Oh, we have a college degree so we know what is right for Bend. We have money..." He apparently was not happy with college people. He told me he had just taken a day off and drove from Bend to Crystal Crane to be alone. He told us about all the good beer places in Bend, but was even sad (or negative) about that, saying there were too many and they were becoming common place and "big



beer.” He just didn’t have too many good things to say but, somehow, he stayed nice enough. I guess I would call him “defeated.” Wow! Nobody should be defeated at 40ish.

**Kid from Kentucky:** I was walking by the office when Staff Woman came out with a young man. She followed him out and said something like, “it’s a little rustic.” He responded by saying, “I’m from Kentucky; I can handle rustic just fine.” Of course, hearing that, I had to interrupt them and ask where in Kentucky he was from. It was a small town in western Kentucky. I told him I was from Ashland. He said he was moving out to Oregon (Portland specifically) because he had to get away from Kentucky and he loved the west. I chuckled and told him that that was pretty much my story as well. He was travelling with his girlfriend and a couple of buddies from Kentucky. Nice kid, maybe 24ish. I got his name but it was a little different. I think it was Devin, Blevin or something like that. Welcome to Oregon Devin.

**Biker Guy:** Later in the afternoon a guy showed up on a beautiful red-orange Harley Davidson motorcycle. It was a big bike and looked like it was made for touring. He was alone. As I often do with biker guys, I left him alone. He had the hair, shades, biker garb (vest with writing), etc. that made him look like a tough biker. He was a little grizzled and thin, just like an older biker might look. He looked the part, but didn’t look mean, actually, just *biker-ish*. Later, when we were cooking our food in the communal cooking shed, he came in with a big bag of ice and asked us if there were any cups. I handed him one of the communal cups. He asked if we wanted any of the ice, that he had had to buy the whole bag and all he wanted was just to make a “couple of cocktails.” We didn’t need any ice, but told him he could probably put it in the freezer here when done. He seemed almost nervous around us. Of course, being me, I didn’t want anyone to be nervous around me. “That sure is a beautiful bike you have out there,” I said to, uh, break the ice – ha ha. And that opened the door to conversation. He really liked his bike and told us that “it cleans up real pretty.” He had taken a few days and had ridden down from Washougal, Washington, heading south to wherever he gets to. After we had eaten, I was walking by his cabin. He was sitting at a picnic table by himself, looking out over the hot springs pool. He seemed very lonely. If he would have looked over I would have walked over and talked with him. I bet he would have liked that. He was probably 50ish. I bet I would have gotten a free drink out of the deal as well. I should have stopped by and said hello. I should have got his name.

**Vick:** Vick was the camp host. Trim, healthy looking. 72 years old and doesn’t look a day over 65 (like me), if that. He retired a couple years ago from his second career as a counselor for troubled kids. He biked, backpacked, hiked and did healthy stuff all his life. We talked about bikes, bike trips, hikes, great rides around Bend, etc. He told us about riding a Rim Trail around Grand Canyon and how he had made three days of the five day ride. It was hard. I think, in a way, he is, at 72, about where I want to be when I am 72: still on the trail. Vick was walking his little dog when we left the following morning. I made an idiot move and crashed my bike in the driveway when leaving the hot springs on Friday morning. I didn’t look back to see if anyone else had seen my embarrassment, but I know Vick did since he was ahead of us and watching as we left. He was kind when I rode past him after picking myself up and he simply said, “It happens.” Thanks Vick; that made me feel a little bit less stupid. It does happen, even to the best of us and it makes the story a bit more enjoyable...a few days later anyway.



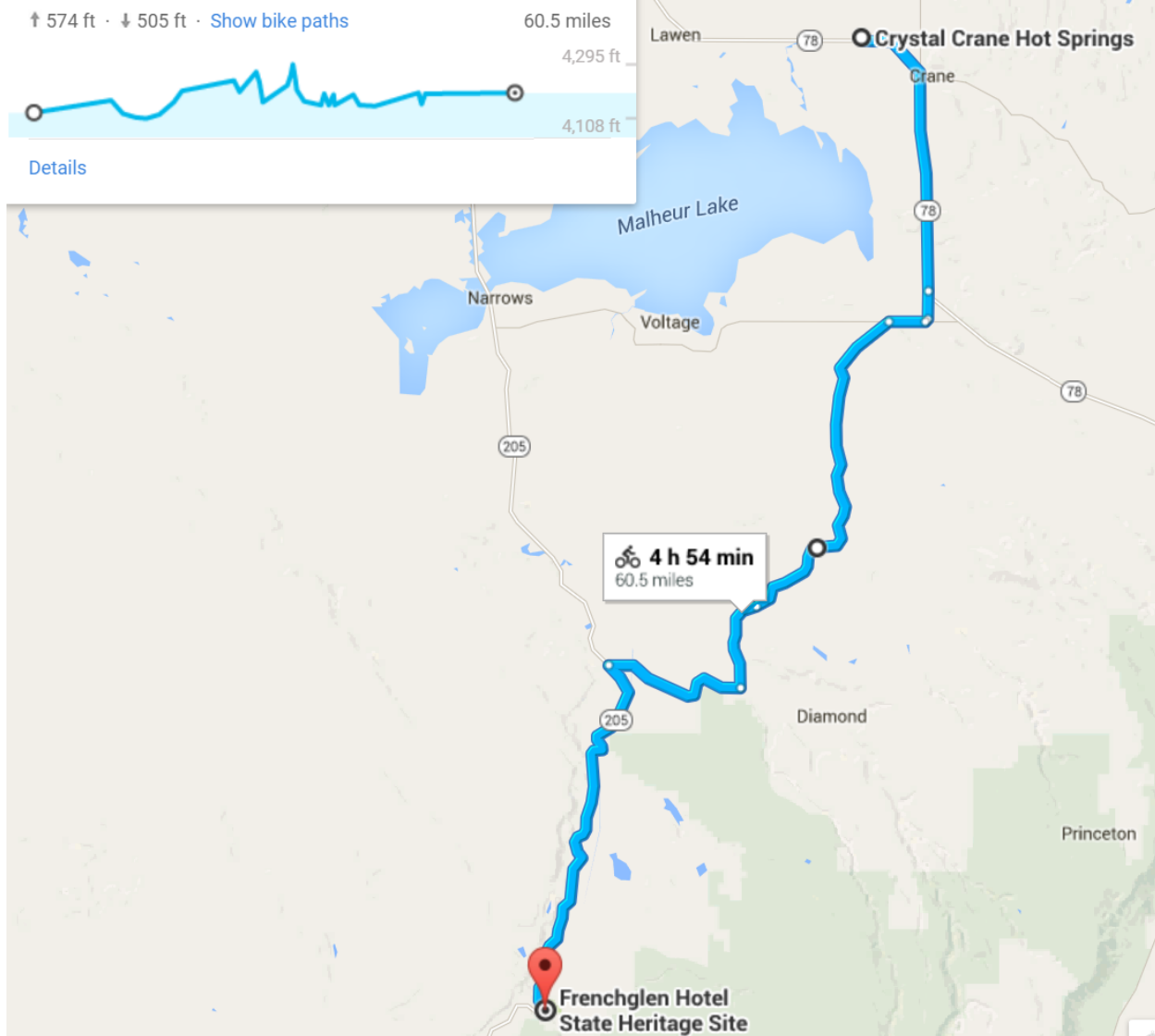
Pete and I were in the lead, talking and enjoying the ride. Gary yelled from behind for us to look up. Standing on the hillside less than 50 yards away three wild horses were watching as we passed by. It made us wonder how many other horses we had passed. These three were the first wild horses I have ever seen.

But not to be deterred for long, we took off for the hot springs. Pete led the way down a hill onto the very long stretch of road to Crystal Crane (very) Hot Sprints.





## Friday, 5/29: Crystal Crane (very) Hot Springs to Frenchglen and then Home

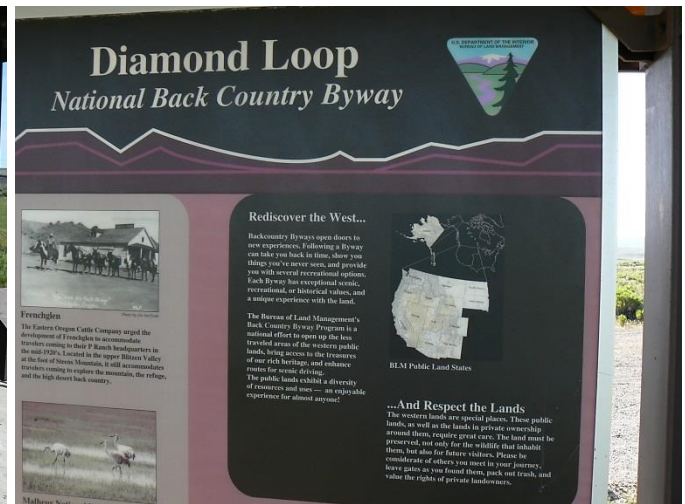


The ride back into Frenchglen was very nice. When we turned off 78 onto the north end of Diamond Loop, the easy, flat ride was sweet. It was something of an uneventful ride, actually, except when we turned onto 205 heading south, where we turned into a headwind that lasted all the way to Frenchglen. I prefer hills to headwinds anytime.

We changed clothes in Frenchglen and drove to Bend for Pizza. We stopped at Fire Pizza. It was good and the boys enjoyed the scenery.

**Waitresses at Fire:** Nice and friendly. Cute. The boys were impressed.

**Steens Mountain Area Drivers:** Wow! I am positively impressed. Not once – NOT ONCE! – did a driver of a car, truck, 18-wheeler or any other rig honk, yell, or otherwise harangue us. When we were passed, 90% of the drivers got all the way over in the other lane and the ones that didn't make it all the way over still got over at least half a lane. I never felt threatened by bad driving. A big THANK YOU to the Steens Mountain Area Drivers!



I like the picture on the left of Gary's bike, Stephanie, and the "Roads to Adventure" sign. The Diamond Loop is pretty cool. Next time, I will do the entire loop. It would be cool to bike to Diamond.

And, below, we rode by a beautiful lake. Although we were still drinking the nasty sulfur-fart water from Crystal Crane Hot Springs, we didn't walk over and get the cleaner water. I guess we were just getting antsy to get home. Once we are on the final stretch to the car, pizza and beer start sounding pretty good; no time to dawdle.

And the final picture (that I took) of the trip was the French Round Barn. The barn is round and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The late 19th century barn was owned and constructed by cattle rancher Peter French; French trained horses there during the winter.





## The End

(Except for a few extra pictures that didn't make the first cut...)



Clockwise: Rod's sleeping arrangement at Crystal Crane (very) Hot Springs.

Taking a break at (yet another) summit. Is that cheating Pete?

Super biking stud.

10.8 MPH!? That speedometer must be broken.

Desert road.

Snow bunnies.















*All Done<sup>5</sup>*









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<sup>1</sup> Steens Mountain Loop: <http://www.oregonbikepacking.com/portfolio-posts/steens-mountain/>

<sup>2</sup> Miss-T (the bike, not Gary)



<sup>3</sup> Miss-T is a bike that is a female. You might ask, “how can you tell,” Rod. Well, female bikes have three chain rings and male bikes have two chain rings. It is that simple. See the front chain ring on Miss-T? You can see three chain rings. That means she is a female. Men and women can both ride girl bikes or boy bikes. I have two bikes: Bikey (a male) and Miss-T (a female).

<sup>4</sup> Less Traveled Northwest: <http://www.lesstravelednorthwest.com/index.html>

<sup>5</sup> Places of interest:

- 8945 feet on Steens Mountain: <http://maps.google.com/?q=42.69398481,-118.58064563>
- Blitzen River Trail: <http://maps.google.com/?q=42.80110239,-118.86683702>
- Top of hill out of Frenchglen: <http://maps.google.com/?q=42.82951277,-118.93751939>
- Pee Break ☺: <http://maps.google.com/?q=42.70939374,-119.0046981>
- Beautiful Canyon: <http://maps.google.com/?q=42.55658151,-118.94223601>
- Lunch Break: <http://maps.google.com/?q=42.40410961,-118.86729392>
- 5584 feet pass (and a rattlesnake): <http://maps.google.com/?q=42.31796808,-118.75082231>
- Pretty Flowers: <http://maps.google.com/?q=42.37783121,-118.64247635>





- Antelope: <http://maps.google.com/?q=42.38570142,-118.64101449>
- Pavement ends: <http://maps.google.com/?q=42.43521735,-118.62554452>
- First real good view of Alvord Desert: <http://maps.google.com/?q=42.48977972,-118.5375787>



- Alvord Hot Springs: <http://maps.google.com/?q=42.54239104,-118.53489695>
- Beautiful stream out of Steens: <http://maps.google.com/?q=42.6186377,-118.50098422>
- Pretty: <http://maps.google.com/?q=42.62679197,-118.49485384>
- Lunch: <http://maps.google.com/?q=42.67523618,-118.45155973>



- Stonehouse Burn: <http://maps.google.com/?q=42.86426317,-118.38889458>
- Camp spot at Ten Cent Lake: <http://maps.google.com/?q=42.99209726,-118.30156264>
- See wild horses here: <http://maps.google.com/?q=43.01107766,-118.26278292>
- Long-ass climb pass: <http://maps.google.com/?q=43.10030277,-118.23652255>
- Lunch: <http://maps.google.com/?q=43.24690652,-118.52924506>
- Diamond Loop starts here: <http://maps.google.com/?q=43.2796459,-118.58254069>
- Dry Lake Reservoir (pretty): <http://maps.google.com/?q=43.16339461,-118.66103233>
- Break spot at top of hill: <http://maps.google.com/?q=43.078679,-118.74474961>
- Diamond Valley Junction: <http://maps.google.com/?q=43.03040437,-118.74519652>
- Lunch: <http://maps.google.com/?q=43.0372661,-118.77610028>
- Gary finds a rock to throw :-P <http://maps.google.com/?q=43.03724877,-118.77608425>
- Fire Pizza: <http://maps.google.com/?q=44.0570946,-121.3135003>
  - Good service so far. Pretty girls as waiters. Pizza good but not great. If they give option to make sauce spicier could be great. Recommended. We would return.

