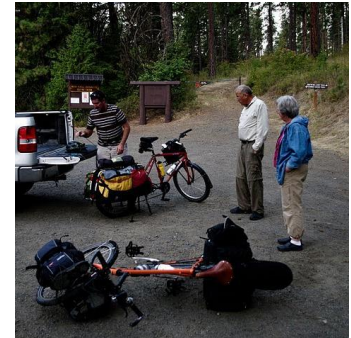


The Grand Rail Trail of North Idaho aka Bitterroot 300k

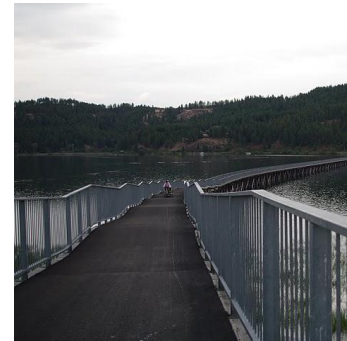
I rode the Route of the Hiawatha in June of 2009 and really like the area and the ride. Looking at maps I decided that the 170 mile loop of all rail trails would be a blast to ride. There was a lot of information about the Trail of CdA, Route of the Hiawatha and the Old Milwaukee Road available to start planning from. I conned my twin brother Tucker into going, so we set the date for sometime in 2010. Here are my recollections from our trip in September of 2010.

Clancy Anderson



Heyburn to Harrison

We arrived at Heyburn State Park about 6pm and had enough time to make it **10 miles** up to Harrison. We were pretty excited, so the pace was fast and furious. Crossing over the Chacolette Bridge was symbolic on the trip to come. It is a combination of trestle and bridge that spans over 3000ft. The ride along Coeur d' Alene(CdA) Lake was gorgeous at sundown except for the swarms of bugs that we swallowed.



We arrived in Harrison and rode up the steep hill one block to eat at The Landing. We met a fellow who was also riding the Trail of the CdA (paved rail trail) that was from Vancouver, Canada. It was great talking to him and sharing knowledge back and forth about biking and the area. He planned to ride up to Wallace the next day though we never saw him again. After dinner and a beer, we headed down to the city run RV park and pitched the tent right next to the lake. Sleep came fast though I woke up hearing rain drops in the middle of the night. In the morning we started breaking camp and cooking on Tucker's new JetBoil stove. Water for the coffee got hot enough right as the stove decided to quit working. Our premade bagels with cheese and pre-cooked bacon were eaten cold. We both thought Harrison was a cool little town to check out maybe on another trip.



Harrison to Wallace

We started up the Trail of CdA about 8am. The first few miles were along the lake then the trail turns east and clings to the CdA River. We saw a lot of wetlands, pastures and lakes on both sides. This area of the trail is known as the Chain Lakes. All the literature and signs make sure you stay on the trail, mostly to respect private property, but also because some of the dirt may be contaminated from the mining activity that happened long ago in the Silver Valley. The ride was beautiful and fairly flat which made for a quick pace. We stopped at one of the many waysides along the trail for a mid-morning snack. All the waysides have some benches, picnic tables and pit toilets. Further up the trail there was a wayside for the Cataldo Mission, so I decided a detour was in order.



In Cataldo, we turned onto a local road for the 3.5 mile detour. The road wraps around a marshy area then back under I-90 into the Cataldo State Park. The visitors center does not charge for bikers and the staff was very helpful. We made our way up to the Mission building, which is the oldest building in Idaho. The inside has been perfectly preserved with some great informational displays and chants of the Jesuits are playing in the background. The building is timber framed with massive hand hewn columns of White Pine, some are 36"x36". Tucker took many pictures in hopes of creating a panorama or 3D model of the inside. Outside there is another old building that housed the Jesuit priest and brothers. We had seen enough and decided to head back down the road. The total detour from the trail is 7 miles, but in the future this may be cut to 2 miles for bikers.



Back on the trail we are out of the Chain Lakes area, but still riding next to the river. We see a few bikers that probably started in Enaville. The Enaville Resort -Snake Pit looks cool as we pass and something to see another time. A few miles past the resort we stop for lunch at the Pinehurst wayside. Lunch was PB & J on tortillas, so chosen as no refrigeration was needed. At Smeltermville, we stopped at Walmart to check the stove. We were able to light it and get some



heat, so we did not venture in to see the Walmart offerings. The trail has now officially entered the Silver Valley. We stopped at Excelsior Cycles in Kellogg because Tucker was looking for some new handlebars. The mechanic was very helpful in replacing the flat bars with something more upright. The owner gave us some insight about the trail ahead including the route details on the other side of the Hiawatha Trail. Onward we passed through Osborn finally making it to Wallace.



The trail follows underneath I-90 and we see the RV park-"Down by the River" where tonight we call home. We payed extra for showers in the quirky building that houses the office. We made camp then walked 2



blocks into town. First order of business was to find a laundromat to clean our biking shorts. While waiting we hopped across the street to some hotel bar for a red beer. We plugged the dryers with quarters then headed up to find dinner at the historic and highly recommended 1313 Club. Along the way we passed the "Center of the Universe". The mayor of Wallace declared this as jest to an EPA official who declared "If it cannot be dis-proven then it must be true". The Center of the Universe was a plaque in the middle of a major intersection. Onto the 1313 Club for a couple of delicious beers brewed next door at Wallace Brewing Co. The Vindicator IPA was the best and highly potent. Before ordering dinner, Tucker ran down to get the precious laundry. Dinner was excellent and filling after a long day on bikes. We biked **58 miles** that day and almost twice as many as either of us had done before.



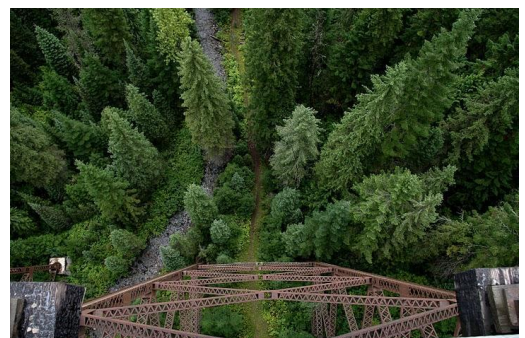
Wallace to Calder



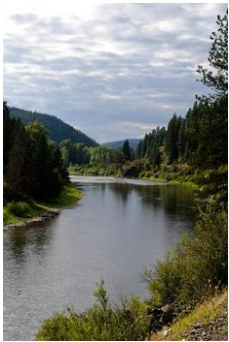
We walked back up to camp and went to sleep as it rained more. Daybreak hit with the skies cloudy but dry. About 6:30am, Tucker struck up a conversation with an older fellow who was staying in an RV. Tucker came back into the tent with a devilish look in his eye. The older guy, Gordon, was heading up to ride the Trail of the Hiawatha. Tucker said he was going to try to get us a ride so we did not have to do the dreaded climb up to 4 of July Pass. Gordon walked past 10 minutes later and Tucker popped the question. Gordon said yes!! He had plenty of room for our bikes though squeezing 4 of us in the cab of the pickup would be tight. We know we cheated on the whole loop ride, but felt justified in not ruining the fun with a gruelling climb. We loaded up the bikes and arrived at Lookout Pass Ski Area by 8:30 am, well ahead of our schedule.



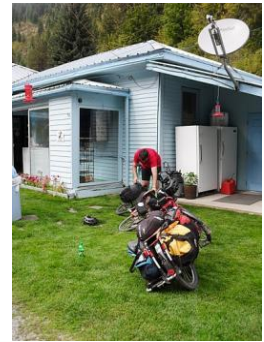
We purchased our Route of the Hiawatha passes at Lookout and were on our way down the old North Pacific trail to Taft. This is a fun downhill ride for 12 miles that passes through one tunnel and under I-90. At the Taft exit, we rode up the dirt road to the East Portal entrance of the Hiawatha. We spoke briefly with the trail marshal and were on our way. The Taft Tunnel is 1.6 miles long and very dark. My light worked well while Tucker's was pretty dim. We stopped midway in the tunnel at the Montana/Idaho State line for a few pictures. Then it was off down the trail for many more pictures. Tucker was pretty enthralled by the trestles and the structures creating them. Overall there are 7 tunnels and 10 trestles on the Hiawatha. The tallest trestle was 230 feet from the valley floor. Our pace was faster than most, but we still enjoyed this section of the ride. We stopped at the Pearson (bottom of Hiawatha) for another PB & J lunch.



We followed the directions from the bike shop owner in Kellogg to the Alternate Milwaukee Road. This is the old road bed while the main road actually uses the old railbed. The Alternate Route was beautiful as it followed the North Fork of the St. Joe very closely at a much lower elevation than the main road. This route was fairly rough especially the lower section past the North Fork



Campground. Mid afternoon we rolled into Avery, ID that is situated at the confluence of the North Fork and Main St Joe Rivers. We stopped at the store for a cold drink and a rest on the nice green lawn. We crossed the Main St. Joe River in town to follow the Alternate Milwaukee Road on a lowly traveled dirt road. The skies finally opened up with rain for 5 miles of this portion, but let up by the time we crossed the main highway by Marble Creek. The route now is back on the railbed that also doubles as a very nice dirt road. The ride along the St Joe river is beautiful as we roll into Calder, ID with another **58 miles** of riding under our butts.



We asked at the Calder Store (bar, restaurant, store), if there was anyplace to pitch a tent. Jeff, the owner, said we could stay in the rear yard, if we didn't mind putting up with his cousins who were also camped out. The cousins looked like ZZ Top because of the long grey beards. We ended up having a few beers and stories with them around the campfire after a delicious burger from Jeff's restaurant. We woke to clear skies in the morning after our first night without rain.

Calder to Heyburn



Back on the old railbed we encountered a small burned out trestle a half mile down from Calder. Crossing it required both of us to help walk each other's bike across. The road for the first few miles was very rough, but beat riding on the highway on the other side of the St. Joe River. We passed lots of private RV parks on this section along with a cool "slanted" trestle whose lines trick the eye. Eventually we roll into St. Maries with the smell of the fresh wood being cut by the mills. We stopped in the town park for yet another PB&J lunch.



We read about the highway between St. Maries and Heyburn State Park as being skinny, hilly and curvy, but very scenic. A perfect combination for being the most non-bike friendly part of our trip. We strapped our bright yellow coats to the rear of our bikes to increase our visibility. The traffic was nerve wracking at times. There were some long uphill followed by exhilarating downhill and many scenic vistas of CdA Lake. We finally turn off and make it back to the visitor's center at Heyburn State Park. **42 miles** to finish off the trip.



Conclusions

Overall I thought our planning was adequate as we gathered and took lots of information with us.

- We had no set schedule, just general ideas of where we might end up for the day. The first night to Harrison and our stay in Calder were impromptu but successful.
- Less food is needed with the amount of towns along the trail. We came home with some dehydrated dinners and energy bars.
- I really like the Wallace to Lookout cheater ride. It allowed for the fun to continue.
- The only route change would be taking the main road from Pearson to Avery. The alternate route is scenic but rough. Plus we missed more tunnels and trestles.

