

# Mountain Biking the Klickitat Trail

*Handy tips and general information for having a fun ride*

*By Bob Hansen*

There are a variety of ways to bike the Klickitat Trail. From a jaunt through the town of Klickitat, to an extreme 51 mile loop over paved roads and unpaved trail, the possibilities are endless. The Klickitat Trail offers the beginning mountain biker a wonderful opportunity to ride a variety of surfaces, while not being too technical or difficult. The experienced mountain biker will find the Klickitat Trail a hidden Gorge gem just waiting to be explored. You can bike the trail in round-trip sections, or you can organize a car shuttle and accomplish one way rides.



These guys are having WAY too much fun. This biking group from the Portland/Vancouver area enjoys a November day on the trail. Photo: J. Hamilton

As you travel along the trail, you will see silver and black mileage marker signs, remnants of the original railroad. They approximate the down grade distance remaining to the Lyle trailhead, at SR 14. I recommend mountain biking toward Lyle, or downhill.

## General Information to Plan a Successful Trail Ride

There is rock debris scattered frequently along cliff faces. A lot of rock has been moved aside, but it is necessary to be vigilant for large and/or sharp rock debris. Fences have cropped up recently, but they are easy to see in advance. Fences mean you must dismount your bike, open the gate

One popular bike route starts with a car shuttle from the trailhead at Lyle to either the Harms Road or the Centerville Highway trail crossings, then bike the trail back to Lyle.

This ride is approximately 30 miles. A shorter 12 mile ride starts at Harms Road and ends at the parking lot at the Wahkiakus trailhead, where your second vehicle is waiting.

Another excellent route is the Pitt-to-Lyle ride. Leave a car at the Fisher Hill Bridge (8.5 miles) or the Lyle trailhead (10.2 miles), drive to Pitt and then bike back to your car.

and **close** the gate behind you. The trail is in open range country, so you **must** close the gates behind you and be watchful of cattle. There are a few technical washouts and dip-de-dos along the way to provide some fun, but never are there any serious technical obstacles that will prevent you from having a pleasant ride. If you come across a section of the trail that you don't feel comfortable riding, dismount your bike and walk around the obstacle. These technical sections are never very long.

The Klickitat Trail Conservancy (KTC) has port-a-potties at three or four locations, depending on the season. They can be found at the **Lyle** trailhead (intersection of SR 14 and 142), **Pitt** (on the west side, or downstream, of 142), at **Wahkiakus** (southwest of Schilling Road) and at **Harms Road** (this one is removed seasonally when Swale Canyon is closed by Washington State Parks due to wildfire danger).



## Biking Tips for the Klickitat Trail

- Expect to take 3 to 5 hours to bike the entire trail.
- Front **suspension** for your bike is recommended.
- Carry at least 3 liters of **water** on a hot day. You can refill water bottles in the town of Klickitat.
- Slime in your inner tubes will help prevent **flats**. Carry a tire repair kit. The yellow-star thistle burrs, a.k.a. goat's head, are notorious for puncturing tires.
- Bikers need to **exit the trail** at Schilling Road, and re-connect in the town of Klickitat via SR 142. See **Trail Descriptions** for more details.
- Carry extra **food, sun cream** and a **first aid kit**.
- Beware of **ticks, poison oak** and **rattlesnakes**. Lyme Disease is in the area, check for ticks!
- There is currently **no** predictable **cell phone coverage** on the trail, especially in remote Swale Canyon.
- The only way in or out of Swale Canyon is at the trailheads.
- **Stay on the trail**. Private property abuts the trail in most places.
- Swale Canyon is closed seasonally due to **fire danger**, usually mid-June –October 1st. Visit **www.klickitat-trail.org** for up-to-date information.

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## *Trail descriptions and mileage information*

*Trail descriptions, including mile markers and mileage, starting at Uecker Road. The numbers in parentheses reflect the mile points, or distances, from the start of the trail at Uecker Road, moving downgrade toward Lyle. Visit [www.klickitat-trail.org](http://www.klickitat-trail.org) for a map.*

### **Far East End of the Trail 2.2 miles**

#### **Uecker Road (0.0) to Centerville Highway (often referred to as Warwick) (0.6) and Harms Road (2.20)**

Uecker Road is the easterly end of the Klickitat Trail and ties directly into The Dalles Mountain Road to the south. However, most start either at Centerville Highway or Harms Road. This is one of the flattest sections of the trail, a high prairie setting with distant views of surrounding hills. There are no trees, only shrubby vegetation in the riparian corridor that parallels the trail. Currently, there is parking on the south and east side of the trail, where it crosses Centerville Highway. Trail bed is in good condition, with grasses and small vegetation growing on the trail. Close all gates behind you.

### **Swale Canyon 12 miles**

#### **Harms Road (2.20) to Schilling Road (14.17)**

This remote section of trail is generally in good shape, with several interesting trestle bridges. One washed out section requires a brief bike walk, and one debris mound about ¼ mile down trail from the big washout is fun for those hungry for a technical challenge. This section of trail is generally closed from June through September, sometimes later, depending on fire conditions. Check [www.klickitat-trail.org](http://www.klickitat-trail.org), or call Columbia Hills office of Washington State Parks, (509) 767-1159, to determine if Swale Canyon is open during this period.

### **Wahkiacus to Klickitat 2.5 miles**

#### **Schilling Road (14.17) to the town of Klickitat (17.54)**

At Schilling Road, you will find a KTC port-a-potty in the parking area. For biking, you must exit the Klickitat Trail at Schilling road because the trail dead ends downstream. To reunite with the trail, turn right onto Schilling Road (gravel), then left on to Horseshoe Bend Road (paved) and continue across the concrete bridge across the Klickitat River to SR 142. This area is called Wahkiacus. Turn left onto SR142 and bike 3 miles to the town of Klickitat.

### **Klickitat (17.54) to Pitt (20.73) 3.2 miles**

The Klickitat Trail is west of, and adjacent to, the small community park in town center. Once on the trail, head south, crossing SR 142, proceed past small rural homesteads. The trail is a bit rocky and sandy in places, particularly in the section parallel and adjacent to SR 142. It crosses a wetland that many walk their bikes around. There is also a section of the roadbed that has been washed out for about 100 yards. A trail has been bushwhacked at the toe of the road slope, but at this time is generally not rideable. Prior to the bushwhacking, the standard approach was to climb the road embankment with your bike, climb over the guard rail and ride the pavement about 100 yards to the dirt access road used by fishermen. This section of trail is probably the worst for getting flat tires from “goat’s head” and star thistle.

### **Pitt (20.73) to**

#### **Fisher Hill Road (29.23) 8.5 miles**

Pleasant ride through open areas and pine forests. Short dips and rock piles keep you from drifting off into la-la land. Several gates need to be opened and closed near Pitt. Always close gates behind you. Do not leave the trail to visit the Yakama Nation fishing area. This is private tribal land. Exit the trail at the large, concrete Fisher Hill Road Bridge, onto the road (the old railroad bridge is currently unsafe, and is closed to the public). Fisher Hill Road crosses under the rail trestle bridge. Turn right onto SR 142 and return to trail on the right.

### **Fisher Hill Road (29.23) to**

#### **SR 14 (30.98) in Lyle 1.7 miles**

Black rock ballast (2” to 3”) along this section of trail is soft and requires you to keep up your momentum. Eventually the Forest Service will pave this section of the trail to make it ADA accessible for all, including seniors, toddlers, walkers and joggers. There is a port-a-potty tucked in the trees at the parking area adjacent to SR 14 between the Klickitat River and SR 142.

