



The Owyhee River

Trip Guide



Oregon River Experiences

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The Owyhee River rises high in the desert mountains of northern Nevada and southern Idaho, then flows 400 miles to its confluence with the Snake River on the Oregon-Idaho border. We boat the most pristine section of the lower Owyhee, a National Wild and Scenic River, as it flows through the remote high desert of southeastern Oregon.

The Owyhee River country is a little-visited land of exceptional beauty. Multicolored rock pillars, secret alcoves, petroglyphs, natural hot springs, and thrilling rapids await your discovery. Here you'll feast your eyes on unique scenery that's a match for the more widely known grandeur of river canyons in the Southwest.

The Owyhee's rapids are mostly class III in difficulty: exciting and challenging, but not too threatening for our guests who choose to try their hand at inflatable kayaks or our row-yourself rafts. (Rapids are rated I through VI. Class I indicates the smallest possible rapid, while class VI indicates steep, turbulent, highly dangerous rapids and waterfalls.)

Owyhee country is authentic wilderness. Boatable only in the Spring, when upstream snowmelt fills the canyon with the sound of rushing water, the Owyhee is the most remote, secluded, pristine river we run. With only one town along its 400 mile length (Rome, Oregon, population less than 100), and few other signs of civilization, the Owyhee may in fact be the most isolated, pristine river in the contiguous U.S.. This is a very special place: rare and wild, isolated and pure.

Natural History

Our Owyhee trip takes us through a wonderland of multicolored canyons, valleys, and badlands. As we travel downstream the river cuts through successive layers of rock, beginning with the youngest. The effect is a trip backwards in time, to the tune of 100,000 years per river mile.

Like many desert regions, the Owyhee country may seem empty of life at first -- but this is a rich and varied ecosystem. Pronghorn antelope, bighorn sheep, coyotes and wild burros inhabit the rimrock (although they are seen infrequently). Golden eagles and over one hundred other species of birds soar above: the Owyhee is located along the Pacific Flyway, which makes this a bird watcher's paradise. And when conditions are right, the spring wildflower bloom is spectacular.

Human History

Evidence of human occupation of the Owyhee region dates back nearly 12,000 years. When Europeans first came to the Owyhee they found the Northern Paiutes living a nomadic life here. Food was scarce for the Paiute, and they often travelled great distances in search of what little the desert offered. Early settlers came here to mine silver and graze livestock. Today, these are still the primary economic activities.

Weather

The weather in the Owyhee River canyon is quite variable -- more variable than on any other river we run. Little rain falls, and warm days are likely. But cool or cold days are a possibility, too.

	April	May	June
Average daytime high temperature	63	73	82
Average nighttime low temperature	30	38	46
Average monthly rainfall	0.75"	1.00"	1.00"

For More Information

For more information about the Owyhee contact our office to request our natural and human history pamphlet. A map, Owyhee National Wild River Boating Guide (published by the BLM) is available from the rangers prior to your trip, or contact the BLM at 100 Oregon Street, Vale, OR 97918, 541-473-3144.

Trip Itinerary

First day

We meet at 7:30 AM Mountain Time (6:30 AM Pacific Time) at the Basque Station Motel in Jordan Valley, Oregon. (Please have your breakfast before our meeting time and arrive in your river clothes.) Our Lead Guide will meet you in the Motel parking lot. Look for a vehicle sporting the O.R.E. logo. After a brief orientation you will pack your things into our river bags and park your vehicles next to the motel. We will then go by van to the launch site at Rome.

Once we arrive at our launch site you'll meet the rest of our guide crew, and they'll conduct a short safety and orientation briefing, which will include instruction on paddle and rowing techniques as needed. We're normally on our way downstream by mid-morning.

Days on the river

Each day begin with freshly brewed coffee by 7 AM, and breakfast by 8 AM. After breakfast we'll pack our bags, load the boats and begin our journey downstream.

We're on the river an average of four to five hours per day. Along the way we stop for a riverside picnic lunch. We may also stop to swim, to explore historic sites, to scout rapids, or to hike up scenic side canyons. We usually arrive in camp by mid to late afternoon, and while the guides prepare hors d'oeuvres and dinner you'll have time to hike, swim, fish, read, or nap.

Last day

Over the course of five days we journey 55 miles on the river. We run the last five to ten river miles on our last morning, then after lunch we float ten miles across Lake Owyhee to our takeout at Leslie Gulch, or take out above the reservoir at the historic Birch Creek Ranch. Our choice of take-out point is determined by water, weather and road conditions. (For the reservoir we tie the boats together, attach an outboard motor to our gear boat, then relax and enjoy the passing scenery.)

We arrive at Birch Creek Ranch at about 3 PM, or at Leslie Gulch at about 4:30 PM. Once we've unpacked our gear and de-rigged the boats, we'll board a van for the ride back to Jordan Valley. We arrive back in town about 5:30 PM (via Birch Creek) or about 7:30 PM (via Leslie Gulch).

Trip highlights

Our first day on the river begins with calm water and mild rapids, which are ideal for a warm up, especially for those behind the oars or paddling an inflatable kayak. After five miles in the open countryside we enter the first of a series of scenic gorges. Highlights of our first day on the water include Upset rapid and Bullseye rapid. The following morning we'll stop at Weeping Wall Springs, a lovely desert oasis, to refill our water jugs with refreshing spring water. We'll run Artillery rapid, stop at a hot springs, and camp at or near Chalk Basin.

Chalk Basin is a strikingly beautiful fairyland of colorful, eroded rock pinnacles and canyons. On our second afternoon or third morning we'll hike to the top of a dome overlooking the river (weather permitting), for a breathtaking panoramic view of this pristine wilderness.

The scenery just keeps getting better as we head downstream. Over the next two days we'll float through gorgeous Green Dragon Canyon where 1,000 foot walls dwarf our boats. And we'll encounter our most challenging rapids: Whistling Bird, Squeeze, and Montgomery. We'll take a soak in the river's best hot springs. And we'll stop to view petroglyphs in a lovely, wide-open valley by the name of "Hole in the Ground".

Our last day on the water features more beautiful and varied scenery. The last day's whitewater is mild, and this is a good time for those who have yet to experience rowing or paddling to give it a try.

Boat Options

Guided oar raft



Our 14 to 18 foot-long guided oar rafts are the most stable of river boats. They're ideal for young children and anyone who wants to hang on while the guide rows the rapids. And they're a great boat to choose if relaxation and enjoying the scenery are your primary interests. (1 to 5 guests plus guide per oar raft; your guide does all the rowing.)



Row-your-own cataraft



"Row-your-own" catarafts are small and lively. They're the boat to choose if you're looking for excitement, freedom and a sense of accomplishment combined with a high degree of comfort. (1 to 3 guests per cataraft. O.R.E. guides provide instruction and supervision but are not present in the boat with you.)



We outfit you and a boat partner with one of our custom designed craft, rigged with frame and oars. We provide coaching and encouragement, and while your guides lead the way you float "follow the leader" style down the river. You trade off rowing with your boat partner and have ample time to relax, take pictures, or take in the passing scenery. Oregon River Experiences pioneered row-your-own river vacations. This is the ultimate "hands-on" rafting adventure.

Prior rafting experience is highly recommended for those considering this boat option. We also recommend either prior rowing experience or a moderately high level of physical fitness. However you do not need to be a daredevil or an athlete to pilot your own cataraft under our supervision.

Paddle raft



Paddle rafts are fast and exciting. Each paddle crew consists of 4 to 7 guests plus a guide. Each crew member gets a canoe type paddle and works as a team under the direction of the guide. For those who want to combine excitement with group involvement, a paddle raft is the boat of choice.



Inflatable kayak



Inflatable kayaks are small, highly maneuverable one-person craft that are sporty yet also surprisingly stable. We bring along 2 to 4 inflatable kayaks to be shared by the group.



A few important details about boat options

- ✓ Paddle rafts are available only when a minimum of six adults want to paddle.
- ✓ Inflatable kayaks are available on a shared basis, and may be reserved for exclusive use by special arrangement only.
- ✓ You are welcome to switch between boat types, but because of the need for training and practice prior to substantial rapids, restrictions will apply.
- ✓ Paddle raft, inflatable kayak and cataraft availability is subject to water level limitations.

Pre-Trip Details

Where and When to Meet

We will meet at 7:30 AM Mountain Time (6:30 AM Pacific Time) at the Basque Station Motel in Jordan Valley, Oregon. The Basque, currently the only Motel in town, is on the main road and easy to find. Jordan Valley is 43 miles east of Burns Junction, approximately 425 miles southeast of Portland, Oregon, and 85 miles southwest of Boise, Idaho.

Getting To and From the River

- ✓ If you Drive

From Portland follow I-84 to the Oregon-Idaho border. Just past the border turn south onto US-95 and follow it to Jordan Valley. Or drive to Bend, take US-20 to Burns, OR-78 to Burns Junction, and US-95 to Jordan Valley. From California take US-97 or US-395 to US-20, US-20 east to Burns, OR-78 to Burns Junction, and US-95 to Jordan Valley.

✓ If you Fly

The closest commercial airport is Boise, Idaho. It is serviced by Alaska, United, Delta, and Southwest Airlines. Plan your flight to arrive the day before your river trip begins. There is no public transportation available from Boise to Jordan Valley, but car rentals are available at Boise's airport.

Trip Shuttles

Your trip fare includes transportation from Jordan Valley to our put-in at Rome, and from our take-out at Leslie Gulch or Birch Creek Ranch back to Jordan Valley at trip's end. If you'd rather have your car waiting for you at take-out please give us a call and we will assist you in arranging for shuttle service. Conducted by local drivers, the price of this service is approximately \$150 vehicle .

Accommodations (before and after your trip)

There is currently only one motel in Jordan Valley: The Basque Station Hotel (and Texaco Station), which is where we meet. They can be reached at (541) 586-9244. There are two trailer parks in Jordan Valley, which provide showers, a laundry, and hookups for RVs. Also there is a small BLM campground next to the river in Rome.

A Note About River Levels

The Owyhee is a natural, free-flowing desert river. As such its water level is subject to sudden fluctuations. We will contact you if it appears that the river will be either too high or too low for safe and enjoyable boating. (Overly high flows are rare; overly low flows somewhat less so.) Please call us if you plan to be away from home during the week prior to your trip so that we may discuss the river's current flow with you, and to discuss how we may reach you at the last-minute if there are water level concerns.

What to Bring

The weather in the Owyhee River canyon is often warm and wonder-fully pleasant. But the weather here is also quite variable: we may experience both warm sun and a cold storm in the space of several hours. Cool or even cold weather as well as wet weather can occur on any trip. So please pay close attention to the proper selection of clothes and gear for your river vacation. Hopefully you'll never need most of the cool-weather gear that we strongly recommend you bring. But it is vital that you do bring these items just in case!

What to wear

On cool or rainy days: Appropriate clothing for these conditions is clothing that dries quickly, and keeps you warm even when the garment is wet. Modern high-tech synthetic fabrics such as polypropylene and polyester fleece do both. (Wool provides warmth when wet, but does not dry quickly and is less comfortable. Wool is often less expensive, however, especially when purchased from Thrift or Military Surplus stores, and wool/synthetic blends can be a good choice.)

Think in terms of layers of clothing for changeable and cool weather. As conditions change you can add or subtract layers as needed. The first layer in cool weather should be long underwear made of

synthetic materials such as polypropylene, which provide warmth and wick moisture away from your skin. The middle layer(s) should consist of polyester fleece (or wool), and will provide further warmth. The outer layer consists of a rain jacket and rain pants. Rain gear made of modern waterproof, breathable fabrics such as Gore-tex are best. But for a less expensive option coated nylon will work, too.

If you have enough of the other sorts of clothing we recommend then a wetsuit is generally not needed. However, wetsuits *do* make inflatable kayaking more comfortable in cool weather, and for this reason O.R.E. provides wetsuits on a shared basis for kayakers. If you'd like to bring your own suit, look for an 1/8" thick "farmer john" style (which can be worn in conjunction with a sweater and raincoat). Thicker, full-body scuba style suits are warm, but they're less comfortable and their bulk makes rowing and paddling more difficult.

On warm or hot days: Synthetic fabric shorts and bathing suits are worn, as well as a hat to keep the sun out of your eyes. Cotton shirts may be worn to keep cool and to ward off sunburn. But cotton clothing is recommended for hot weather only. Wet cotton will lower your body temperature. This is great for keeping cool during a heat wave, but cotton provides no warmth when wet the fabric gets wet.

On your feet: For footwear while on the river we recommend nylon or canvas tennis or running shoes, hard soled wetsuit boots, or sports sandals such as Tevas. For extra comfort you may want to wear nylon or polypropylene socks as a first layer. Sport sandals are comfortable for rafting, and are preferred by many of our guides. But they're often more expensive to purchase, and do not protect your feet as well as do shoes.

In camp: You may want a change of shoes as well as comfortable clothing for lounging about or hiking. Cotton clothing may be worn on shore in dry weather. But in order to be prepared for rainy weather we recommend that you have camp clothing available made of synthetic or wool fabrics.

Where to find it

Check with local sporting goods stores. If they cater to outdoor sports (hiking, backpacking, etc.) rather than team sports, they should have most of the items you need. Gear is also available through mail order and online, for instance by contacting REI (800-426-4840, or www.rei.com) or L.L. Bean (800-341-4341, or www.llbean.com).

How to pack it

Pack your gear in a manner appropriate for your journey to Jordan Valley. When we meet we will supply you with a watertight river bag into which you will pack your clothing. This bag is roughly 14" in diameter and 24" tall. We'll also provide you with a second, larger river bag (roughly 16" in diameter and 33" tall), which you will share with one other person. Into this second bag will go your tent, sleeping bag, sleeping pad, and other bulky items. These bags will be transported from camp to camp by raft but generally will not be accessible during the day. For items that you want to keep handy during the day bring a small daypack or dry-bag. Items that you want to keep handy during the day but which absolutely must stay dry (camera, binoculars, a book, etc.) go best in a 50 caliber military surplus ammo box. O.R.E. provides these boxes on a shared basis. If you would like your own, they are available at most surplus and some outdoor stores. (Note: boxes cannot be carried in paddle rafts or inflatable kayaks.)

Because of the Owyhee's variable weather we want to be sure you are able to bring everything you need to stay dry and warm. The bags we provide permit you to bring quite a bit of gear (more than you might suspect based on the dimensions stated). But we will have extra bags along for use as needed.

The river bags and boxes we provide are watertight under most conditions, even when submerged. But for extra security we recommend that you wrap your sleeping bag and clothing in heavy-duty plastic garbage bags for extra protection. We also recommend that you pack your camera, binoculars, reading material and similar items in large zip-lock bags.

Rental Equipment

O.R.E. offers camping equipment for rent to those who do not own this gear (or do not wish to transport it from home). High quality, two-person backpacking style tents are available for \$40 per trip. Sleep kits (synthetic-fill sleeping bag, cotton liner, self-inflating sleep pad, and ground cloth) are also available for \$40 per person per trip. Reservations and advance payment are required. To place a reservation for a tent or sleep kit please call our office at 1-800-827-1358.

Equipment Checklist

✓ River Gear

- _____ swimsuit or shorts and T-shirt (avoid cotton shorts)
- _____ tennis shoes, sport sandals, or hard-soled wetsuit boots
- _____ wool or synthetic "ski" hat — for cool/rainy days
- _____ wide-brimmed hat (preferably with chin-strap), or baseball cap — for sunny days
- _____ 2 pair socks (wool or synthetic)
- _____ waterproof rain jacket and rain pants
- _____ Polypropylene (or etc.) long underwear tops & bottoms (heavy-weight suggested)
- _____ 1 warm sweater or jacket, polyester fleece or wool
- _____ water bottle or canteen
- _____ waterproof sunscreen and lip balm
- _____ sunglasses, with strap

✓ Extra River Clothing, Camp Clothing

- _____ camp shoes (or lightweight hiking boots)
- _____ 1 pair long pants
- _____ 1-2 pair shorts
- _____ 1-2 long-sleeved shirts
- _____ 1-2 short-sleeved shirts
- _____ socks and underwear

✓ Camp Gear

- _____ compact, lightweight tent (freestanding is preferred)
- _____ compact, medium-weight sleeping bag
- _____ compact foam sleeping pad or air mattress
- _____ small tarp (to place beneath your tent, or as a ground-cloth for sleeping under the stars)
- _____ personal toiletries, including small towel, biodegradable soap, dry-skin lotion, prescription medicines
- _____ small flashlight or headlamp, with extra batteries

✓ Optional Items

- _____ a second warm polyester fleece or wool sweater or jacket (highly recommended)
- _____ gloves (especially if you'll be rowing or kayaking)
- _____ binoculars
- _____ camera
- _____ insect repellent
- _____ reading material
- _____ pen and journal or notebook
- _____ compact fishing gear
- _____ spare glasses, sunglasses
- _____ small daypack, ammo box, or small dry bag
- _____ beer or soft drinks (up to 2 six-packs per person), wine or liquor—in unbreakable containers. (We provide coffee, tea, and juice; also wine with some dinners). By the way, consumption of alcohol is prohibited during the day but okay once we arrive in camp.

Please do not bring pets, guns, or valuable jewelry

Additional Information

Your trip fare includes the following

- ✓ The services of our professional river guides.
- ✓ Transportation to the boat launch from Jordan Valley, and from the take out point back to Jordan Valley at the end of the journey.
- ✓ All meals, from lunch on the first day through lunch on the last. Our menu is delicious, varied, and hearty. Meals are freshly prepared by our guides from the highest quality ingredients. Juice and water are available at each meal. Coffee, tea, and cocoa are available at dinner and breakfast, and complementary wine is served with some dinners. Special dietary needs can be accommodated with advance notice.
- ✓ Durable, professional quality rafts and river running equipment, including U.S. Coast Guard Approved lifejackets.

- ✓ Waterproof river bags and boxes for your personal gear.
- ✓ Cups, plates, and eating utensils.
- ✓ Camp chairs.

Fishing

Fishing on the Owyhee (trout and smallmouth bass) is only fair during high water but improves as the water warms and clears. If you would like to fish you'll need an Oregon fishing license, which may be purchased at most Oregon sporting goods stores.

Camping

We select beautiful beaches for our camp sites. Our guides establish a central kitchen and social area, and trip members select spots in the surrounding area to pitch a tent or roll out a sleeping bag. O.R.E. will set up a portable toilet at each camp, which will be located with privacy and convenience in mind. O.R.E. practices minimum impact camping, and the crew will instruct you on the simple steps we follow to protect the river environment.

Gratuities

Our guests sometimes ask whether it is appropriate to tip the guides. Tipping is optional, but if your guides did a great job then feel free to thank them with a gratuity. The amount is up to you, but tips in the range of 8% to 20% of trip cost are typical. Gratuities are customarily presented to the Lead Guide, and will be shared equally among all guides on your trip.

Nearby attractions

If you'd like to do some additional camping, hiking, and exploring while you're in the area, consider visiting Leslie Gulch, Jordan Craters, or Succor Creek State Recreation Area. For more information contact the Bureau of Land Management at 100 Oregon Street, Vale, OR 97918, 541-473-3144, and request a map of the region (\$4.00): the Vale District Recreation Guide.

Cancellations and Travel Insurance

The size of our trips is strictly regulated by law, and your reservation means we cannot sell the spaces to others. So we strictly adhere to the cancellation and refund policies we explain in our reservation materials. For this reason we recommend that you consider the purchase of travel insurance, which will (amongst other benefits) reimburse you if you must cancel your trip due to illness.

Emergencies

It may be difficult for family and friends to reach you while you are on the river. In case of emergency they should contact the local Bureau of Land Management office (Vale, Oregon) at 541-473-6210. They should also call the O.R.E. office at 800-827-1358.

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