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How to Plan for a Bike Tour

Take Small Bikes at First

By Chain Gang Expert Cyclist [Ethan Gelber](#)

Industry magazines and fanatics will tell you that road bikers are once again sloshing on the sunblock after years of living in the long shadow of would-be singletrackers, rock-hoppers, and BMXers. It would appear that the asphalt whine of thin tires is finally finding a new audience. Maybe we are experiencing a delayed awareness of Greg Lemond and now Lance Armstrong as champions in the sport of two-wheeled road racing. Maybe it's because the high-tech appeal of knobby-tired and bouncy Y-frame cycles (and the paths for which they are designed) is too high tech for some. Maybe it's because finding and maintaining speed over very long stretches of open country is only possible on covered roads. Maybe it's because human-powered long-distance travel is sometimes best accomplished on byways along which human settlements and support networks have been built. Maybe it's all of the above. Whatever the case may be, road cycling and touring are coming back into their own.



[Ethan Gelber](#)

However, along with the newly licking flames burst from the bellowed embers of this fine sport and leisure pursuit come the standard dangers of uninformed enthusiasm. While that which is in vogue attracts attention — the flash of the product (cool bikes, shapely thighs, and the much-sought-after biker's butt) and the bubble of the boast ("I just biked in from Greenwich . . .") — there is also a lot wrapped up in the preparation and production of the end result. Unfortunately, there is not always enough attention paid to these means.

How About the Who and Why?

Now that you know the how, why should you do it?

[Check out the who and the why!](#)

Here, then, to ease our conscience and help prepare

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you for some of the challenges ahead, is a short list of practical things to contemplate seriously BEFORE you begin a road biking trip of any length. Just as you wouldn't (or shouldn't) launch into an involved camping expedition without studying the terrain and weighing both your bags and the options, think ahead before you assume that there are just the right kinds of ideal biking roads and resources in between you and your distant destination.

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How to Plan for a Bike Tour Practicalities

By Chain Gang Expert Cyclist [Ethan Gelber](#)

Don't bike off more than you can shoe.

This goes without saying, but needs to be said before you go. In this age of glamorous "extreme" sports, there's no reason to think that the degree of challenge and number of scrapes make for better vacation splendor than a simple, gentle, three-day long-weekend spin through somewhere different from what your normal routine throws at you. If you haven't dusted off your fenders since the training wheels were removed, don't plan on an across-the-Rockies assault. If you have never done it, 30 miles may not sound far . . . until you are halfway through a desolate stretch of nowhere and realize that the your legs have mutinied. Basically, if you are a novice at cycle touring, it is probably best for you to choose an itinerary that is short on distance and long on good support, with towns every few miles, lots of campgrounds or hotels along the way, and ample opportunity for renourishing and/or rehydrating.



(c)BikeAbout

Being prepared for all kinds of weather is very, very important.

Brush up on what you need to know.

Just because you are on a bike doesn't mean that your backcountry or wilderness skills should be any less finely tuned (especially if you are heading out into anything more than a day from help). You should also have a good grasp of first aid as it applies to both you and your bicycle.

Study the terrain/climate and pack accordingly.

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Research where you are going before you get there and be prepared. If you are planning on hitting the far-flung corners of the most isolated areas, bring what you will need, even if it is a short trip. For example, in the mountains, bring colder weather gear and perhaps the makings for a simple shelter; in the desert or a bayou bring extra water and food. Also, as a safety precaution (especially if you are traveling with children), try to find the contact information of the nearest emergency support (police, ranger, hospital, etc.).

Bring the right tools.

This doesn't only apply to bike tools, which are, of course, vital to your on-the-road success. Also make sure that you have all that you will need for regular comfort, i.e., the right kind of bike (!), the right clothes (according to the terrain and climate), the right cooking and camping equipment (if you are out for an extended ride), and good maps and guidebooks etc. Use a checklist and check it twice!

How About the Who and Why?

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Do some preliminary itinerary preparation.

Make sure that the resources you don't want to carry or that you will need along the way will in fact be available to you. This includes legal camping areas, towns with bike shops, groceries, restaurants, and hotels (with vacancy). There are few things worse than having to bike a bunch of miles late in the day when you are tired and hungry just because the place you planned to pause in was little more than a one-street town with a bric-a-brac shop.

Try it to make sure you will actually like it.

Jumping in feet first is exciting. It can also be more trouble than it is worth. Before doing anything you consider ambitious, try a simple shorter version of the same. In other words, before packing your car with the essentials, driving 100 miles and then embarking on a three-day tour, try a 24-hour experiment with one overnight. One early afternoon, start at your front door. Pack the bike with everything you plan to bring on the longer trip. Bike 20-30 miles to a campground or motel you have selected and that resembles the kind of accommodation you will be using later. Spend the night and then bike home the next day. Sure there will still be surprises on the full-length version, but you will get a good feel for what to expect by going short and simple in a familiar environment first.

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