



The Grande Ronde River

5 day trips



Oregon River Experiences

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The Grande Ronde River begins life high in the Wallowa Mountains in the Northeast corner of Oregon. The river remains in Oregon for most of its 185 mile journey, but crosses into Washington State shortly before it joins the Snake River, where the Snake forms the border between Idaho and Washington.

Our trip begins amidst beautiful mountain forests then drops deep into the isolated canyon of the Grande Ronde. Along the way we pass through some of the most beautiful mountain scenery in Oregon. Bald eagles, black bear, and Rocky Mountain elk make their home here, and glacier lilies color the hillsides.

The Grande Ronde is an unheralded gem of a river. This is one of America's most beautiful yet least known river journeys.



Natural History

The Grande Ronde River canyon is composed of basalt (5 to 15 million year old lava formations) interspersed with layers of sandstone and clay. These alternating layers of rock create the canyon's lovely terraced appearance. Within the canyon are found an abundance of plant life and a wide variety of animal life, particularly bird life. It is not unusual for the careful observer to spot over 50 species of birds in a few days, and well over 100 species of plants, including many wildflowers. Because of the river's location and elevation, the Grande Ronde's scenery and its plant and animal life are more reminiscent of Idaho rivers to the east than Oregon rivers to the west.

Human History

The Lower Salmon is rich in history. The earliest inhabitants of the region were here 10,000 years ago, although permanent villages didn't begin to appear along the river some 5,000 years later. In modern times, the earliest contacts between the Nez Perce Indians and European explorers date from the early 1800's. The discovery of gold in 1860 brought a flood of miners to the Salmon canyon, and precipitated several confrontations, which erupted into the Nez Perce War.

Weather

The weather in the Grande Ronde River canyon is usually very pleasant. Warm days are likely, especially late in June. However, due to the river's relatively high elevation, cool weather is always a possibility. The river water itself is quite cool.

Here's some climate data for the nearby town of La Grande. Temperatures in the upper river canyon are usually fairly similar, but the climate warms considerably as we journey downstream.

	<i>July</i>	<i>Aug.</i>	<i>Sept.</i>
Average daytime high temp.	89	88	77
Average nighttime low temp.	59	59	51
Average monthly rainfall	0.70"	0.80"	0.80"

For More Information

For more information about the Grande Ronde River contact our office to request our natural and human history pamphlet. For a map and other river information contact the U.S. Forest Service at 1415 West Rose St., Walla Walla, WA 99362, (509) 522-6290.

Trip Itinerary

First day

We meet at 7:30 AM at the Red Lion Hotel in Lewiston, Idaho. (Please have your breakfast before our meeting time, and arrive in your river clothes.) Our Lead Guide will meet you in the motel lobby. If in doubt about where to find us, ask at the desk, and they will direct you. After a brief orientation you will pack your things into our river bags, and park your vehicles at the motel. We will then go by bus to our launch site at Minam (approximately a 3 hour ride). We'll rig the boats, have lunch, then after a safety orientation is completed we'll be on our way down river.

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 make our way downstream.

We're on the river an average of three to five hours per day. Along the way we stop for a riverside picnic lunch. We may also stop to scout rapids, or to take a short hike up scenic side streams. 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, fish, read, or nap.

Last day

On our last day we run the river's biggest rapids (The Narrows) and arrive at Heller Bar, our take-out point, between 2:30 and 4:00 PM. Once we've unpacked, you'll board a van for the ride back to Lewiston, an hour's drive. You'll arrive back at the Red Lion between 4:00 and 6:00 PM.

Trip highlights

For the first ten miles of our journey we'll be floating the Wallowa River, the Grande Ronde's biggest tributary. (The Wallowa is actually the larger of the two rivers in terms of flow, but the Grande Ronde, being the longer river, gets to keep its name past the confluence.)

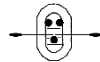
The Wallowa is clear, swift and steep. Most of the rapids we encounter are class II, with several class II+ to III rapids: Minam Roller, Redrock, and Vincent Falls. (Rapids are rated I through VI. Class I indicates the smallest rapids, while VI indicates steep, turbulent, dangerous rapids and waterfalls.)

Below the confluence the pace slows, but several long class II+ rapids remain, including Sheep Creek and Martin's Misery. The Narrows, the Grande Ronde's largest rapid, will be encountered the final day of our trip.

We camp in beautiful meadows dotted with ponderosa pines and fragrant mock orange. Our camps are good places to fish, birdwatch, or hunt for wildflowers -- all rewarding pastimes on the Grande Ronde. Take a walk, and you may see columbine, sego lily, lupine, shooting stars, or monkeyflower growing along the river, and golden eagles, pileated wood-peckers, western meadowlarks, and evening grosbeaks in the sky above.

Boat Options

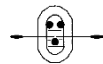
Guided oar raft



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, 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 meet at 7:30 AM on the day your trip begins, in the lobby of the Red Lion Hotel, 621 21st St., Lewiston, Idaho. Lewiston is roughly 325 miles east of Portland, Oregon, and about 95 miles south of Spokane, Washington.

Getting To and From the River

- ✓ If you Drive

Lewiston is at the crossroads of highways 12, 95, and 195, in western Idaho, not far from the corner where Washington, Oregon, and Idaho meet. From Portland take I-84 past Boardman to US-730. Take US-730 into Washington, and turn right onto US-12. Follow US-12 through Walla Walla to Lewiston. Once in Lewiston, US-12 becomes Main Street. Continue east then turn right on 21st Street. The Red Lion is 1/10th of a mile further along on your left.

- ✓ If you Fly

There's a regional airport in Lewiston. Service is provided by Alaska, Horizon, and Delta Airlines. Plan your flight to arrive the day before your river trip begins.

The Red Lion provides free airport shuttle service to guests staying at the hotel. Their shuttle bus meets all flights. Car rentals are also available in Lewiston.

Trip Shuttles

Your trip fees include transportation to and from the river. A chartered bus will transport us from Lewiston to our put-in at Minam, a 3 hour trip. At trip's end we will be transported from our takeout at Heller Bar back to Lewiston, a one hour ride.

Accommodations (before and after your trip)

We recommend the Red Lion Hotel in Lewiston, which is our meeting place for the trip. For reservations phone 800-232-6730. They offer a discount to our customers, so be sure to tell them you're taking a river trip with Oregon River Experiences. For a lower price (but fewer amenities) we recommend Inn America (across the street from the Red Lion). Again, in order to receive the best rate tell them you are taking a river trip with O.R.E..

What to Bring

Most of the time the weather in the Grande Ronde River canyon is warm and pleasant. But cool, wet weather can occur on any trip, particularly early in the spring. It can be quite chilly when it's overcast, breezy or rainy, especially when you're in a raft. Please pay close attention to selecting your clothes and gear for your river adventure. Hopefully, you'll never need most of the cool-weather gear we recommend that you bring. But it is vital that you do bring it, 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 water-proof, breathable fabrics such as Goretex are best. But for a less expensive option coated nylon will work, too.

Wetsuits are generally not needed. However, they do make inflatable kayaking more comfortable, given the river's cool water. 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 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 shoes, hard soled wetsuit boots, or sports sandals such as Tevas or Alps. For extra comfort you may want to wear nylon or polypropylene socks as a first layer. Wetsuit boots do a good job keeping your feet warm in the Grande Ronde's cool water. Sport sandals and shoes also work well, when combined with a pair of thick wool socks or neoprene wetsuit socks. Sport sandals are comfortable for rafting, and are preferred by many of our guides. But they're generally more expensive, 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 Lewiston. 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.)

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 or 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
- _____ 1 pair socks (wool or synthetic)
- _____ waterproof rain jacket and rain pants
- _____ Polypropylene or similar long underwear tops and bottoms
- _____ 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

- _____ gloves (especially if you’ll be rowing)
- _____ binoculars
- _____ camera
- _____ 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 from Lewiston, Idaho to our put-in at Minam, Oregon and from Heller Bar back to Lewiston.
- ✓ 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 Grande Ronde is often good for steelhead in the spring, and trout in the summer. If you would like to fish you'll need an Oregon fishing license, which may be purchased at Oregon sporting goods stores.

Camping

We select beautiful meadows and forest glens 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

While in the area consider a drive up Highway 12 along the Lochsa River. Along the Lochsa you'll find many lovely trails, good camping, and a number of excellent natural hot springs. Or pay a visit to nearby Hells Canyon National Recreation Area, the deepest canyon in North America. For more information on Hells Canyon contact the HCNRA at P.O. Box 699, Clarkston, WA 99403, (509) 758-1957. Also consider a visit to the Nez Perce National Historic Park just east of Lewiston.

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 Forest Service office (Walla Walla, Washington) at 509-522-6277. They should also call the O.R.E. office at 800-827-1358.

