



# **The Grande Ronde River**

*5 day trips*



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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 Hells Canyon Grand 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 Hells Canyon Grand Hotel 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

## Essential Eligibility Criteria for River Trips:

The following are the physical and mental eligibility criteria for all participants on any OutRecX LLC, (Oregon River Experiences) river trip.

1. Ability to remain seated and balanced while in a whitewater craft.
2. Wear a Type V Coast Guard-approved personal floatation device (maximum chest size of 56 inches). Wearing leg straps may be required to ensure proper fit. Where required, properly wear a helmet, required when using inflatable kayaks.
3. Ability to independently board and disembark a boat four to ten times each day. This may require stepping into the boat, and then maneuvering your body over and across tubes and fixed objects into a seated position.
4. Ability to independently navigate shoreline terrain, including safely maneuvering around and across boulders, rocks, and slippery and uneven surfaces, under low branches, and around vegetation. This includes the ability to maintain your balance near precipitous ledges or cliffs.
5. Ability to independently swim in whitewater or swift currents while wearing a personal floatation device. This includes being an active participant in your own rescue, including having the ability to (a) keep your airway passages sealed while underwater, and regain control of your breathing when being submitted to repeated submersion under waves or currents; (b) orient yourself to new "in-river" surroundings; (c) reposition yourself in the water to different swimming positions; (d) swim aggressively to a boat or to shore in whitewater; (e) receive a rescue rope, paddle, or human assistance, and possibly let go of the same; (f) get out from under an overturned boat.
6. Ability to follow both verbal and non-verbal instructions given by guides in all situations, including during stressful or dangerous situations, and to effectively communicate with guides and other guests.
7. Ability to manage all personal care independently, or with the assistance of a friend or family member. Including carrying personal drybags and gear to your campsite each day (only for multiday trips)
8. If taking prescription medications, have the ability to maintain proper dosage by medicating independently, or with the assistance of a friend or family member.
9. Ability to remain adequately fed, hydrated, and properly dressed so as to avoid environmental injuries such as hypothermia, heat related illness, and sunburn.

The above criteria, if not met, will disqualify a person from participating in a river trip with OutRecX LLC, (Oregon River Experiences). The criteria exist for your own safety and that of all



trip participants. None of the criteria are meant to discriminate on the basis of any physical or mental disability, and are applied uniformly to all potential trip participants, irrespective of the presence or absence of any disability. OutRecX LLC, (Oregon River Experiences) is committed to making reasonable modifications to any trip for any persons with a disability, so long as they do not fundamentally alter the nature of the trip. OutRecX LLC Guides have absolute discretion in determining guests' fitness for a particular trip.

### **MULTIDAY TRIPS ONLY:**

### **FURTHER INFO ABOUT EXPECTATIONS FOR TRIP PARTICIPANTS**

The following paragraphs are meant to further inform all potential participants of the expectations for all participants in order to promote a safe, enjoyable experience for everyone on a trip. There may be requirements, whether physical or mental, that are not specifically applied "essential eligibility criteria", but that help our guests understand the reality of being on a wilderness river trip.

Our primary goal is to minimize the risks associated with adventure trips in a wilderness environment. The trip involves physical exertion and exposure to the elements, including cold water and the potential for heat, sun, wind, rain and snow. We have experience accommodating people with a wide range of physical disabilities and/or health conditions. However, individuals who are overweight, lack conditioning, or have other physical limitations or ailments that interfere with the realistic encounters on a wilderness river can endanger themselves, other guests, and the guides. Please consult your doctor if you have medical or health conditions that could impact your ability to participate in this outdoor adventure.

It is very important that each trip participant take an active role in their own safety. You will likely encounter wilderness conditions that you are unfamiliar with, and those conditions may change rapidly. It is critical to pay attention at all times, to be aware of your surroundings, and to avoid taking unnecessary risks. Even a non-life threatening injury in a wilderness setting can become a major emergency for you, and can endanger the entire group. Swimming alone or hiking alone is discouraged. Excessive alcohol consumption or illicit drug use is not tolerated. Using common sense, and following both the explicit instruction and the lead of your guides can go a long way towards keeping yourself and the group safe. Some obvious things to avoid in camp and on shore (by way of example) are: walking around without shoes in camp, approaching wild animals, not paying attention to what is above or around your tent site that could harm you, not paying attention to hazards such as poison ivy and rattlesnakes, and walking near precipitous ledges.

River trips, particularly those involving whitewater, are inherently risky. While the risk of a trip is part of what makes it an exciting adventure, you must be entirely respectful of the risk that such a trip poses. It is important that you are confident in your swimming ability, and your ability to stay calm in the event you become a non-voluntary swimmer. Your odds of becoming a non-voluntary swimmer change with the classification of a rapid, boat selection and

environmental factors. A swim in whitewater is much more difficult and physically draining than swimming in flat water. Swimming in cold water can cause a gasping effect on your respiratory system. This can be overcome by focusing on your breathing and calming yourself down. Swimming in cold water will also much more quickly sap your energy and decrease muscle function than swimming in warmer water. While our guides are highly trained and will do their absolute best to rescue you, a successful rescue is greatly hampered by a swimmer who is unprepared for a swim in whitewater, who fails to actively participate in their own rescue, and who is not able to follow directions while under stress. You will receive a detailed orientation talk at the start of your river trip.

Due to the physical nature of this trip, we highly recommend that you engage in regular exercise for at least three months prior to departure to ensure preparedness. No gym membership required! Simple exercises like push-ups, sit-ups and squats go a long way to improving core fitness. Start with these exercises and do three sets of ten repetitions each, three to four times per week. Aerobic training is also easy to accomplish without expensive equipment. Take 30 – 40 minutes two to three times a week and go for a brisk walk, easy jog or bike ride around town. If you have access to a pool, lake or the ocean, swimming is obviously an ideal choice for aerobic exercise. It provides a full-body workout and is training that is useful in the event of an involuntary swim in a whitewater rapid. It is important to push yourself in the months leading up to your trip by increasing your strength training repetitions and the pace of your aerobic training. Check with your doctor prior to beginning any exercise program to be sure you are medically safe to participate. Starting an exercise program that is more strenuous than you are ready for may result in injury or risk exacerbating existing health conditions. Getting in shape will certainly add to your enjoyment of the trip.

## **Where and When to Meet**

We meet at 7:30 AM on the day your trip begins, in the lobby of the Hells Canyon Grand 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 Hells Canyon Grand Hotel 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 Hells Canyon Grand Hotel 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 Hells Canyon Grand 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 Hells Canyon Grand Hotel). 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!

All of your personal camping gear is provided for your trip. Our standard trip fare includes use of 3-person tent (for 2 people), sleeping bag, sleeping bag liner and "paco" river style sleeping pad. (Deluxe kits available, includes cot & bigger tent).

### **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: The preferred footwear of clients and O.R.E. guides is from **Astral Shoes**, due to high quality grip, durability and they look good off the river as well.

For footwear while on the river we recommend nylon, canvas running or tennis shoes, hard soled wetsuit boots, or sports sandals such as Texas.

For extra comfort you may want to wear nylon, polypropylene socks or neoprene wetsuit socks. They work well as a first layer when it is cooler.

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](http://www.rei.com)) or L.L. Bean (800-341-4341, or [www.llbean.com](http://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

Deluxe sleep kits (includes cot) & deluxe tents (larger tent holds 2 cots) available.

## 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

- \_\_\_\_\_ 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).

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.
- 3-person tent (for 2 people), sleeping bag, sleeping bag liner and "paco" river style sleeping pad. (Deluxe kits available, includes cot & bigger tent).
- 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.

