



John Day River 4-Day Rafting Trip (Service Creek or Twickenham to Clarno – 37 to 45 Miles) Trip Planner

Thank you for choosing Ouzel Outfitters. This trip planner contains detailed information designed to prepare you for your trip. To finish your reservation we'll need to collect certain details about each person in your group. You may provide this information by phone or online. Use the link provided in your [confirmation email](#) to establish your trip account and fill out the [Guest Registration Form](#). If you already have an account, click [HERE](#) to access your information.

Meeting Location & Time

When: 9:00 a.m. (Pacific Time)

Where: All trips meet at the Service Creek Boat Ramp. Most trips launch at Service Creek, but if water levels are low we will launch at Twickenham, a short drive from Service Creek. If this is the case, we will give specific instructions to each and every party. In both instances, your vehicle will be shuttled from our launch location to our take-out at Clarno during the trip (included in your trip fare). PLEASE DO NOT BE LATE. Service at the Service Creek restaurant is slow and is the most common reason for guests being late. **Late Arrivals:** If you need additional directions or will be late to the meeting location, please let us know. Orientation and packing takes about an hour. If we have not heard from you the trip will depart when ready.

Ouzel: 541-385-5947, Service Creek Store: 541-468-3331

Find Service Creek Boat Ramp on [Google Maps](#)

Approximate Driving Times to Service Creek Boat Ramp

The Dalles — 2 hrs, 20 min

Ontario — 4 hrs

Boise — 5 hrs

Madras — 1 hr, 45 min

Bend — 2 hrs, 15 min

Portland — 3 hrs, 45 min

Transportation Information

Airport Information

If flying, the closest airport is Redmond, OR. Rental cars available at the airport.

Fuel & Other Services

Keep in mind that services in this area's tiny rural towns often close early so plan accordingly. [Mitchell](#) – Fuel and small store. [Spray](#) – Fuel and small store. [Fossil](#) – Fuel and small store. [Service Creek](#) – Bed and Breakfast, restaurant, tiny store (no fuel). [Clarno](#) – No services. Make sure to fill up as close to Service Creek as possible.

[Please refer to our Travel Info Page.](#)

Shuttles & Vehicle Security

During the trip your vehicle will be picked up from Service Creek or Twickenham and shuttled to Clarno. We use a local shuttle company that has provided dependable and professional service for us and many other outfitters and recreational rafters for many years. We have never had a problem with theft or damage to any vehicle but there is always a first time and we cannot guarantee the safety of your vehicles and valuables during the trip. We recommend leaving valuable items such as jewelry and laptop computers at home and packing wallets, keys and other valuables in your overnight dry bag. Please bring an extra set of keys.

Local Accommodations

- Service Creek:** [Service Creek Stage Stop B&B](#): 541-468-3331. Store, restaurant
Fossil: [Wilson Ranches Retreat B&B](#): 9000 Acre working dude ranch. 866-763-2227.
Madras: [Inn At Cross Keys Station](#): 877-475-5800.
Prineville: [Best Western Prineville Inn](#): 541-447-8080
Redmond: [Best Western Rama Inn](#): 541-548-8080 or 800-780-7234
Bend: [Shilo Inn Suites Hotel](#): 800-222-2244
Condon: [Hotel Condon](#): Historic boutique hotel, nice dining. 541-384-4624

Trip Itinerary

Orientation & Morning Itinerary: Our day begins at 9:00 am at the Service Creek Boat Ramp. You should have eaten breakfast before this time. Once everyone is assembled, your trip leader will give each guest an overnight dry bag and provide instructions on how to pack your belongings and seal your dry bag. The dry bag provides 3.8 cu. ft. of storage. When closed the bag is 16 inches in diameter and 33 inches tall. Your sleeping bag will already be packed in the dry bag.

Packing your Dry Bag. Most guests find it useful to separate clothes and belongings into smaller bags for easier packing and better organization. Small duffels, laundry bags and even pillowcases work well. Large duffel bags are often difficult to work into and out of your dry bag. Pack toiletries and liquid items in a Ziploc or waterproof container in case they leak inside your bag. Once your trip leader has reviewed how and what to pack you will have a limited amount of time to pack your dry bag and make last minute purchases. Your overnight dry bag will not be accessible during the day, but additional dry bags and waterproof boxes will be available on the rafts for things such as sunscreen, cameras and extra clothing that you'll want accessible during the day. Your trip leader will help you decide what to keep out. If you have special photography equipment or unusual items please call our office for packing suggestions. Many guests find that owning their own personal dry bag for day use is very handy.

Getting Ready to Launch. Once your bag is packed it will be loaded on to our equipment raft. Items you want accessible during the day can be packed into the smaller bags and boxes available on each raft. The orientation continues as we discuss safety, the environment and what to expect on the trip. We try to be on the river by 10:00 am.

Once on the River. We will float for 45 miles from Service Creek or 37 miles from Twickenham to Clarno over the next four days. During each day we'll float the river, enjoying the scenery, running a few small rapids, and make short stops for hikes and lunch. Our equipment raft will go ahead of the group each day to select a good camp and get things set up before our guests arrive. There will be time each afternoon for hiking, fishing, games or just relaxing in camp. Early in the trip we'll encounter the John Day and Clarno geological formations where searching dry stream beds is often rewarded with fossil finds. Later on we'll see relatively young columnar basalts that characterize most of the geology of north-central Oregon. Old homesteads and Indian pictographs remind us of pioneer and Native American history and hiking at Rattlesnake Canyon or Big Bend lets us explore the geology and desert flora of the area. There are few rapids on the river, so the trip is focused more on the scenery, camping, hiking and natural history of the area.

Fishing

Introduced to the river in recent times, small-mouth bass have thrived in the John Day River. Many say that the next record small-mouth will come from the John Day. Without a dam to control flows, the best time to fish the John Day from a boat is hard to determine from year to year. Clear warm water produces far more fish than cold, sediment filled water. Heavy snow melt in spring and early summer makes the river cool and cloudy, but as the weather begins to improve and the snow melt lessens, the river becomes warmer and clearer – and the bass begin to bite. It is not uncommon for groups to catch over 100 fish a day if the conditions are right. With few rapids there is plenty of time to drift and fish. For families, the John Day can offer easy and fun fishing. No dangerous wading, expensive equipment or technical knowhow is required. If the conditions are right, bass will bite on almost anything. A combination of plugs, spinners and live bait, using small and simple spinning reels or closed-faced, push-button reels for kids works fine. If possible, please pack rods in unbreakable cases. You must have the proper fishing license if you intend to fish. Licenses are not available at Service Creek so get it before you come. Information on fishing licenses and regulations can be found at the [Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife](#).

Weather Conditions

This free-flowing desert river provides a narrow seasonal window for rafting the canyon. During this time weather conditions can vary from a sunny 95 degrees to a cold and windy 40 degrees. While most trips have good weather overall, it is imperative that you be prepared for any conditions. Please pay close attention to the special information about preparing for cold days, especially if your trip is happening in the spring. While we provide tarps, personal camping gear and additional rafting wear to make you comfortable on and off the river, being adequately equipped with the appropriate clothing is essential for your overall enjoyment. [Check John Day River Weather.](#)

Special Notes about Clothing for the John Day

It is not uncommon to experience wet & dry conditions and wide temperature fluctuations within a given day on the John Day River. Being prepared on the John Day means being able to adapt to rapidly changing conditions. Common outdoor wisdom tells us that layering is the key. You should have several layers of NON-COTTON tops and bottoms made from synthetic materials such as polypropylene or fleece which maintain warmth even when wet. Clothing should vary in thickness from lightweight to mid-weight and we recommend having at least two layers.

We always have a supply of splash pants and tops, but these garments are not the best for very cold days. We recommend that you have a windproof/waterproof jacket and pants to complete the layering. Protecting your head and feet are extremely important and often overlooked. You should have an insulated and water-shedding hat for wearing on the river. The options for protecting your feet include neoprene booties, neoprene socks or layering with synthetic socks as described above. Neoprene booties have soles and do not require shoes or sandals, while neoprene socks require footwear (either sandals or shoes). Finally, keep in mind that any of the items you choose to wear on the river (with the exception of your waterproof/windproof shell) may be wet when you reach camp (not from rapids, but from rain). A complete change of clothes should be waiting in your large dry bag (including hats, gloves, socks and shoes).

Even when it's raining, our camps are comfortable with large tarp shelters and campfires to keep you warm and dry. As such, comfortable cotton and wool garments are perfectly acceptable in camp. It is our hope that most of your cold weather gear will remain packed in the bottom of your dry bag for the entire trip. Our goal is for you to enjoy the scenery, the hikes, the river and the campsites without being distracted by the weather. Don't hesitate to call us if you have any questions about weather or clothing. And don't forget the sunscreen! There is a very useful tutorial on how to layer and dress for a river trip at [Cascade Outfitters River Traveler website.](#)

What to Pack for Wearing on the River

Typical Warm Summer Days

- Hat (for sun protection)
- Sunglasses (w/strap)
- Water Bottle (**Important!**) See below for how to purchase an Ouzel water bottle.
- T-Shirt & shorts (or swimsuit/board shorts)
- Rafting Shoes: Sandals w/heel strap or sneakers (no flip flops)
- Lip Balm (with SPF) & Sunscreen (spray sunscreen runs out quickly)
- If you are sensitive to the sun, you might consider wearing pants and a long-sleeve shirt made from a lightweight, quick-drying material.
- Hydro Silk, Under Armour and other manufacturers make clothing designed for water sports. These stretchy fabrics are designed to keep you warm when wet, cool on hot days and help avoid chafing from life jackets. A small investment here can add substantially to your overall comfort over the course of a trip. Check any major or local sporting goods or outdoor apparel.

Cold Weather Clothing Suggestions

- [Check the weather before your trip!](#)
- Footwear. On colder trips we recommend having neoprene socks or booties. Booties have a built-in sole. Neoprene socks are designed to be worn with a sandal or sneaker.
- Neoprene gloves (optional)
- Warm/water-shedding hat
- Good quality rain top and pants. Fabrics that are waterproof and breathable work best.
- Extra polypropylene or fleece tops and bottoms (non-cotton). Wear these in layers under your rain gear or the splash gear we provide. Have a second set for camp.
- Avoid Cotton!**

Having the above items available each day allows you to layer your clothing, making it easy to adjust to changing conditions. Your guide will help you decide what to keep out each day. We'll have plenty of extra dry bags to handle extra fleece and rain gear that needs to be accessible during the day. Many customers prefer owning their own dry bag for day use. If conditions warrant, wetsuits will be made available for inflatable kayakers.

AVOID COTTON on the river!!!!

Ouzel will provide splash jackets & pants for use on cooler days, but this does not replace the need for good quality, non-cotton layers underneath. Dressing in layers allows for easy adjustment to changing conditions.

What to Pack for Camp

- Long and short sleeve shirts and shorts/pants for camp (think comfort - cotton is okay)
- Sweater, fleece pullover or light jacket (for chilly evenings and mornings in camp)
- Socks and underwear
- Warm hat (optional but nice for chilly mornings)
- Sneakers or light hikers (sneakers pack well and are more than adequate for hiking)
- Light rain jacket (just in case)
- Small Towel & Toiletries (no need for a large bath towel)
- Insect Repellent
- Flashlight or headlamp

You should plan to have a completely separate (and dry) change of clothes and footwear for camp.

Optional Items to Pack for your Trip

- Cameras can be packed in our communal (or your personal) day-use bag. We recommend having a padded case and (because bags can leak) a ziplock or other moisture barrier.
- Your favorite beverage—we'll keep your drinks on ice if needed. Please avoid glass.
- Travel-sized pillow. If you pack efficiently a regular size pillow might fit in your dry bag. A pillow case stuffed with extra clothes also works.
- Personal amenities such as a journal, book, deck of cards, Frisbee, etc. Think about easily-packed games or activities you or your family enjoy.
- Small personal dry bag for day use. (9.5" X 18" is a good size for two people)
- Kayaking gloves. If you plan to spend a lot of time kayaking, past guests have recommended gloves to keep hands from blistering. Cycling gloves work great.
- Small first aid kit with Band-Aids, ibuprofen, etc... All trips have major and minor first aid kits readily available, but it can be handy to have your own "ouch pouch".

Recommendations for Kids

Exposure to varying temperatures and weather extremes during the course of a river trip can affect kids (and certain older or sensitive adults) more severely than others. Dehydration, hypothermia and general discomfort is far more likely in our very youngest and oldest guests. We recommend paying special attention to footwear, base-layer clothing and additional sun/rain protection.

- Good footwear means shoes that have a sturdy sole, protect the toes, are firmly attached with straps that can be tightened and do not hinder swimming.
- Head, hands and feet. On cold days, keeping hands, feet and the head warm goes a long way toward increasing comfort. Consider neoprene socks and gloves and an insulated hat.
- Hydration. The number one source of discomfort during a typically sunny day on the river is dehydration. Kids must be encouraged to drink plenty of water (not sodas or sweet juices) – this is also the case for older adults. Bring plenty of sunscreen and apply often. Prepare to cover up if you're sensitive to the sun and don't underestimate the effects of glare and reflection of sunlight on the water.
- Personalized snacks. Planning the itinerary for a given day on the river is an inexact science. Many factors can slow us down, lengthening the time between meals. Snacks are important to keep guests (especially kids) fueled and happy. The snacks we carry are limited in variety, so for "picky eaters" we recommend bringing snacks that will be welcomed.

What Ouzel Outfitters will Provide

- Tent (Sleeps two) *Family-sized tents are available on request and sleep four or more.*
- Sleeping Bag & Pad
- Beverages include: Water, Lemonade, Iced Tea, Coffee, Hot Chocolate, Tea and an assortment of wines served with dinner (we plan for 2 glasses of wine per adult per evening). Consumption of alcohol is not allowed while on the river.
- Splash Jackets & Pants (for cooler days on the river)
- Small library with books and information about the area
- All meals from lunch the first day to lunch on the last. Healthy snacks are always available.
- All group camp gear including area tarps (for rain), campfires (when allowed), tables & chairs, toilets, hand-washing stations, etc.

Where to Purchase Items on the Packing List

Items listed in the packing list such as fleece and polypropylene tops and bottoms can be purchased at most local sporting goods stores. Neoprene socks and gloves are also available at sporting goods stores and dive shops. Don't hesitate to call us if you have questions. You can also find a useful tutorial on layering for a river trip as well as order clothes and equipment at [Cascade Outfitters](#). **Or call Cascade Outfitters at 800-223-7238 for a free catalog.**

Order T-Shirts & Water Bottles!

Take home the perfect souvenir from your rafting experience with Ouzel. Call to order t-shirts or water bottles at least 24 hours prior to your trip and we'll deliver them to you at the river. T-shirts are \$15 and water bottles are \$10 if ordered in advance. [Click here to see our t-shirts and water bottles.](#) Call 541-385-5947 or email us your order at info@oregonrafting.com.

Camping Equipment

Tents: Our tents are Alps brand outfitter model tents designed for durability. They are spacious for two (7ft x 8ft on average) and can accommodate more in a pinch. Special family-sized tents that accommodate up to four are available upon request. Please indicate your request for a family-sized tent on the Guest Registration Form.

Sleeping Bags: Our sleeping bags are 3 or 4 pound square bags with a flannel or polypro lining. Sleeping bags are professionally cleaned by commercial launderers after each and every trip. You will find your sleeping bag packed inside your large overnight dry bag when this is issued during orientation. Letting you pack and unpack your sleeping bag each day insures that you won't get anyone else's during the trip. Our bags are of standard length (75" to 80") and will sleep a 6'0 person comfortably. If you need a larger bag it may be advisable to bring your own. Please call us for options. If bringing your own sleeping bag, please indicate this on the Guest Registration Form.

Pads: The pads we use are called “Paco” pads. These pads are used by river rafters and guides their comfort and durability. They are 1-1/2” poly foam in a heavy duty PVC shell. They are waterproof, do not roll up and are carried flat on our equipment rafts. If you feel you need additional padding you are welcome to bring an additional pad. Please bring only a closed-cell foam “backpacker” pad or compact Thermarest. If the pad you bring cannot get wet, it will need to be packed into your large dry bag along with your sleeping bag and personal items. If you bring a small air mattress make sure you have a pump and patch kit.

Setting up Tents: The riverside campsites we select most often have a variety of options for tent sites. We find that most guests enjoy selecting their own personal site and setting up our easy-to-set-up tents on their own. Our guides will be happy to teach you how to set up your tent at the first campsite and are always available for “troubleshooting” during the trip. If you find that setting up your tent is difficult and don’t mind the guides selecting your site, feel free to let your trip leader know that you would like your tent set up for you each night. We will be happy to accommodate your request.

Meals & Dietary Restrictions

Our menus are designed to be flexible in order to accommodate vegetarians and other dietary restrictions. Since our meals are largely made from scratch, it is usually possible for us to prepare portions on the side. When appropriate or necessary, dishes and utensils are not used to prepare or serve more than one dish. While we will know your dietary restrictions in advance, it is ESSENTIAL that you remind the guides of your needs PRIOR to meal preparation. Here is a breakdown of what we are able to provide:

Vegetarians/Vegans – Plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables (including avocado, bell peppers, etc.) will be supplemented with Hummus, Tofu, Boca Burgers, Eggplant, Portabella mushrooms and other protein sources. Meals that have ingredients containing animal products and/or dairy products will have portions that can be prepared on the side.

Nut Allergies – It is crucial for you to let us know the severity of your nut allergy. If necessary we will make every effort to eliminate or reduce products with nut oils or extracts, but it is vitally important to check with the guides prior to meals so that we can take appropriate precautions during preparation.

Wheat/Gluten Allergies – While we cannot guarantee your favorite brand we will endeavor to have plenty of gluten free options. This includes breads, tortillas, pastas, snacks and other items.

Non-Dairy – While we cannot guarantee your favorite brand, we can provide soymilk or other non-dairy options and/or prepare dairy-free portions where possible.

Guest Registration Form - Please record any dietary allergies or restrictions on the Guest Registration Form. We purchase food for our trips the day before departure and do not have the ability to significantly adjust menus or add alternate dishes once food has been purchased. Please keep in mind that “preferences” are different than “restrictions”. We can’t possibly tailor the menu for each and every guest according to preferences, but we will make every effort to accommodate food allergies and medically-related restrictions. Don’t hesitate to call or email if you have questions or concerns about the menu for your trip. Download a [Sample Menu](#) here.

Bathing

While swimming regularly will reduce the need to bathe, we understand that there is nothing like a refreshing wash and shampoo at the end of an active day. The most current “leave no trace” ethics encourages us to discard suds and wastewater into the river as opposed to on shore so bathing takes place near the river’s edge. Please bring a biodegradable soap and use it sparingly. For showers we carry solar showers – a special bag with a small showerhead that heats water during the day. It works pretty well even on cloudy days. The bag is suspended on a tripod. Privacy is often difficult so bathing in your swimsuit is common practice. Please let the guides know in the morning if you are interested in a shower that evening. Total hot water capacity is limited, but our guides will make every effort to make you comfortable.

Hygiene Information

Safety on a river trip doesn’t just mean wearing your life jacket and never diving into the river, it also includes washing your hands! We are very careful when it comes to contaminants on a trip. Our food coolers are “triaged” and drained daily and ice is carefully managed. Our dish washing and kitchen cleaning systems include a sanitizing bleach solution and hand washing stations are always set up near the kitchen and toilet. Please help us keep everyone healthy by washing your hands prior to each meal and after using the toilet.

For Women: Most of our river trips have female guides on them so it is easy to ask questions. Our male guides are also fully aware of issues specific to women, so if you are comfortable speaking with them, they are comfortable addressing your concerns. Sometimes, however, they need to be reminded that you may need more “stops” than they might have anticipated.

A helpful hint from past guests—having a comfy, casual skirt or wrap-around sarong handy makes urinating in the wet sand much more comfortable. You can wear it over your swimsuit during the day and/or wrap it around you in the evening. Frequent stops for urination are common and locations are selected to maximize privacy. Don't hesitate to ask your guide for a “potty stop”.

If you are expecting your period during the trip, we suggest that you pack a small amount of toilet tissue, a few Ziploc bags (small and large sizes), a few small paper bags, a small bottle of hand sanitizer and your napkins/tampons into one large Ziploc bag. Each day, pack a day's supply of tissue, pads/tampons, small Ziplocs and a paper bag in a large zip lock and put this in your day-bag or in one of the watertight boxes that is available during the trip. During the day when you change a napkin/tampon, place the used one in a small Ziploc bag and put that in the paper bag with everything going back into the large zip lock. You can dispose of used products in the garbage set up by the toilet each afternoon. Do NOT put used products in the toilets. Feel free to ask any of your guides for assistance. We carry extra feminine supplies on each trip as well as zip locks and plenty of toilet paper to help restock your kit.

Toilet Facilities

For many, the most feared and apprehensive aspect of a river trip is the “toilet situation”. When we arrive at a campsite on a wilderness river, we don't expect to find the traces of previous visitors. Despite the fact that we arrive with tons of equipment and up to 16 people, we intend to depart leaving only marks in the sand. “Leave No Trace” means we take everything with us, from food scraps from the cutting board to garbage left by others. Like everything else, human waste must be transported out of the river canyon. We use the state-of-the-art “River Bank” toilet system on all of our trips. The River Bank system offers a large, double-hulled container with a molded seat that is slightly smaller than a normal household toilet. The toilet is set up away from camp in a private area. An “occupied indicator” insures privacy. One of the most difficult aspects of the portable toilet is the fact that capacity restrictions do not always allow urination in the chamber – the toilet is for defecation only. If this is the case on your trip, users must urinate in the river or the separately provided “urinal” chamber nearby. Don't forget to use the hand-washing system after every use. In some respects, this is the price we pay for seeing and experiencing the beautiful and dramatic settings our wilderness river canyons have to offer. Don't despair! Our guides will take you through the procedures with sensitivity and humor. Be sure to ask them why we call it the “groover”.

Environmental Concerns

While on the John Day you may be exposed to a wide variation of temperatures and weather conditions. Sun exposure is always a concern but cold days are just as common. Pay special attention to the clothing suggestions in your trip planner and [CHECK THE WEATHER](#) before your trip. The John Day River is home to a few pesky plants and insects. Poison oak is present, so keep on the lookout. Our guides will help you identify it if you're not sure what to look for. While most guests never encounter them, scorpions, black widow spiders and rattle snakes are present in the John Day River Canyon. It is important while hiking and in camp to watch where you put your hands and feet. Don't leave items lying around on the ground that critters will want to crawl under. Ticks are present during the rafting season and it is important to check yourself after hiking through grass or brush. Mosquitoes, when present, are not abundant.

Assumption of Risk & Guest Responsibility

Whitewater rafting is an outdoor activity that requires moderate physical exertion and exposure to the elements. There are risks associated with whitewater rafting and trip-related activities that are impossible to eliminate. While we take all reasonable steps to minimize the risks associated with the activity, it is vitally important for our guests to understand what is required of them and to appreciate and assume the risks of participation. Guests are expected to be prepared for their trip, to follow all instructions provided by Ouzel guides and staff and to act responsibly. Each participant is required to sign an [Assumption of Risk Form](#) prior to departure. **Only parents or legal guardians can sign for minor children.** Please let us know ahead of time if there will be minors on your trip who will **NOT** be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian. Feel free to review our [full participation requirements](#) and please don't hesitate to call or [email](#) if you have any questions.

How Strenuous is the Trip

Our John Day trips include [oar-assisted paddle rafts and inflatable kayaks](#). Oar rafts are only available on a limited number of trips. In an oar-assisted paddle raft, all participants are expected to assist with paddling. Paddling is required only occasionally and only moderately strenuous as there are very few rapids. Optional inflatable kayaks require a little more upper body strength and endurance (mostly to counter the wind). Camping involves sleeping on the ground (we provide pads) and negotiating rocky or uneven ground on hikes and around camp. The only lifting required is what you have packed in your bag. Days on the river can be long, and so preparing for extended exposure to the elements is vitally important.

Raft Types

Oar Rafts, Inflatable Kayaks, Oar-Assisted Paddle Rafts.

Given the relaxed nature of our John Day trips, the long stretches of flat water and the general interests of our guests, paddle rafts are replaced by Oar-Assisted Paddle Rafts on all John Day River trips. Oar rafts may not be present on some trips. Get a description of our [Types of Rafts](#).

Gratuities for Guides

If you have enjoyed your trip and feel that your guides have done an outstanding job, it is customary to thank them with a gratuity. A gratuity of between 15% and 20% of your trip fare is common from our guests. The amount is up to you but anything will be greatly appreciated by your guides. The guide staff typically shares gratuities. [Meet our Guides](#).

Area Attractions

[John Day Fossil Beds National Monument](#): Composed of three separate units, the John Day Fossil Beds exposes brilliantly colored volcanic deposits ranging from 30 to 40 million years old and contains one of the world's greatest collections of early mammal specimens. Interpretive hikes will reveal plant and animal fossils from tropical rainforests to savanna life forms.

Rock hounding. Countless varieties of gemstones and fossils can be found in the immediate area, including Oregon's state rock, the Thunder Egg. Several private, dig-for-a-fee mines are located near [Fossil, OR](#), such as [Richardson's Rock Ranch](#): call 541-475-2680 for info (no calls after 5 pm).

[Kam Wah Chung & Co. Museum](#) : Owned by 19th century gold miner "Doc" Ing Hay, the museum previously housed a Chinese herbal clinic and opium room. Contains a wide variety of tools, furniture, bootleg whiskey, religious objects, herbs and medicines of the era.

[Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area](#): Scenic vistas, a fantastically designed historic highway, windsurfing, deserts to rainforests, and one of the greatest concentrations of waterfalls on the continent combine to make this river corridor one of the most inspiring and diverse places in the West. [View our River Info Links Page](#) to find lodging, attractions, maps and more!

The John Day River

Born in the Blue Mountains of northeastern Oregon and flowing west then north to the Columbia River, the John Day River is distinguished as one of the longest undammed rivers in the United States. Over millions of years the river has carved a beautiful and twisting canyon through the hard basalts of central Oregon's high desert plateau, revealing geologic wonders and providing a quiet and out-of-the-way setting for those seeking to escape the crazy pace of everyday life. Home to Native Americans for thousands of years and later for pioneers arriving on the Oregon Trail, the John Day offers opportunities for exploring old homesteads and examining mysterious Indian rock art. Excellent bass fishing and ample opportunities for hiking also exist in a landscape that is still sparsely populated. With very few rapids, the John Day is the perfect river for those who believe that whitewater gets in the way of a perfectly good river trip.

History

A wintertime residence for Tenino Indians, the John Day River Valley has produced artifacts from over 150 sites, and pictographs are common. Also resident in the nearby Deschutes River drainage to the West, the Tenino were master salmon fisherman, employing weirs, dams, funnel and hoop traps, baskets, nets hooks, harpoons and even poison. The Tenino were fortunate to live near what is today The Dalles on the Columbia River. The Dalles was at the crossroads of trade in early times and the tribe controlled a fair amount of trade in the form of buffalo robes and horses from the east, elk skins and beads from the south, goatskin, slaves and berries from the northwest and marine products from the west. Native American history lasts well into the 19th century with the marauding activities of the infamous Chief Paulina.

During early immigration a fort was established at The Dalles to protect wagon trains on the Oregon Trail. Lost wagon trains in the eastern Oregon desert were the source of many legends including the Blue Bucket Mine party who reportedly located and marked a promising mine location with a blue bucket. While the Blue Bucket Mine has never been found, miners begin flocking to central and eastern Oregon where gold was eventually discovered on a tributary of the John Day River. With the great influx of whites, The Dalles Military Road along the John Day as well as others was built to facilitate traffic. All of this activity attracted the unwanted attention of the Northern Paiute who began conducting raids to the north of their homelands. Many settlers and miners were killed until Chief Paulina and his band were ambushed at Trout Creek in 1867. Development and activity continued in the area, but dropped off sharply at the turn of the century, leaving the John Day to dispersed ranchers.

Geology

Our float traverses the uplifted and incised Blue Mountain Anticline. Some of the exposed core rocks are more than 250 million years old. Early on, Columbia River lava flows give way to the 30 million year old John Day Formation, famous for its beautifully preserved fossil leaves and mammal bones. An hour of combing small streambeds that drain out of the rocks in certain places is often rewarded with finds of fossilized teeth and bones from past inhabitants. A little further on brings us to the startling reds, tans and even deep green of the Clarno Formation. The Clarno Formation also produces a wide variety of plant and animal fossils.

Suggested Reading List for the John Day River

[John Day River Recreation Guide](#), Bureau of Land Management, Call 541-416-6700 to order.

[Roadside Geology of Oregon](#), David D. Alt & Donald W. Hyndman, Mountain Press Publishing, 1978.

[Sagebrush Country – A Wildflower Sanctuary](#), Ronald J. Taylor, Mountain Press Publishing, 1992.

[In Search of Ancient Oregon: A Geologic and Natural History](#), Ellen Morris Bishop

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