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**D**o you love mountain biking? Do you enjoy a well-organized race? Do you like to travel? Are you looking for the thrill of riding amazing singletrack for the first time, on the best dirt that's ever touched your wheels, multiple times a day for multiple days in a row? Do you want to finish those days around a campfire with free-flowing beer, delicious food and like-minded people? Do you want to remember those experiences vividly 20 years from now?

"For those who seek experiences, I'd argue that you'll find a better experience in this world on your bike," says Nick Gibson, race director and co-founder of Trans-Cascadia, a Pacific Northwest-based non-profit that puts on a one-of-a-kind mountain bike enduro race every fall. Heading into its third year, the event will continue with its curated format of whisking stoked mountain bikers into the backcountry and showing them a really good time.

"We take you away, we guide you, we feed you, we entertain you," shares Alex Gardner, another co-founder. And by "entertain," the organizers of Trans-Cascadia mean making sure you're having as much fun off the bike as you are while on it. Who doesn't enjoy a good bonfire, hatchet throwing and a full bar serving everything from margaritas to Manhattans?

"Trans-Cascadia is as much about the adventure and camaraderie as the riding," shares Curtis Miller, an East Coast professional who participated in the first two

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years of the event. "Sure, most everyone in the race is there to push the envelope and go as fast as possible, but it's impossible to not get caught up in the feeling of being part of a large, diverse group of people all looking for the same good times."

As the enduro scene continues to be popular, Gibson and Gardner and their third partner in the endeavor, Tommy Magrath, have taken this race format and turned it into something that transcends the typical experience. While Trans-Cascadia is technically a race, it's really a multi-day, blind-format adventure (you won't know the day's courses until the night before) that covers routes deep in the backcountry of the Cascades. Ultimately, it's much more like an "I've died and gone to heaven" type of mountain bike experience. It's four days of riding hard, exploring, communing and indulging.

That indulging part speaks to both the trails and the off-bike activities. Social activities mentioned, let's talk now about the food. With extended race days that include six to eight hours in the saddle, appetites obviously trend toward the insatiable. Fortunately, Trans-Cascadia participants never go hungry because there is a full complement of gourmet meals from sunrise to well past sunset. And just to be clear, "gourmet" isn't just a label slapped on some mediocre food that tastes good when you've been out in the woods all day. Your daily calories are actually created by executive chefs Chris DiMinno and Matt Christianson, who, along with their team, bring your taste buds flavors that are just as rich as the riding experience.





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### Speaking of the riding . . .

As you contemplate the backcountry bar and the throwing of sharp objects for fun, you might be trying to picture just where all this takes place. What are the trails like? The Cascades, after all, cover a lot of territory. The first two years of the event were routed on trails near Oakridge, Oregon, a destination already known for its outstanding mountain biking. The area has a number of experiences from mystical moss-laden forests to the jagged and craggy ridges along the divide of the Cascades. The stages of 2016's Day 2 are good examples of a typical day in the life of Trans-Cascadia. The day started at Timpanogas Lake, circumnavigated Sawtooth Mountain, ferried over to Moon Point for a long and rowdy downhill and ended on the ultra-classic descent of Larison Rock Trail. During six stages, 18 miles and 10,000 feet of descending, riders were treated to everything from spicy descents over scree and slide rock to narrow singletrack and high-angle slopes. In many places, the exposure was both terrifying and thrilling, the stuff that makes most mountain bikers tingle.

### Leaving a legacy

"Tomorrow we have a stage on Eula Ridge, a trail that has never been permitted for a race before," announced Gibson during the racers' meeting on the eve of 2016's third day.

A round of applause was punctuated by a few hoots and hollers. While some might have understood how special that was, many folks probably didn't know how much time and effort goes into making that scenario happen. Getting permits to do something like Trans-Cascadia is a long and sometimes difficult process, requiring much more than filling out a multiple-page document and signing a check.

"There are three layers to Trans-Cascadia," shares Gardner. "When the original idea was created, we wanted to advocate for trails, we wanted to promote those trails through the race and we want[ed] to leave behind a legacy of trails that feed our industry and give us places to ride and keep people riding."

The group takes the advocacy and legacy parts of the vision very seriously. Each year, the Trans-Cascadia team, its sponsors and several groups of volunteers spend a great deal of time working on trails across national forest landscapes. They create multi-day work parties, basically functioning like four mini Trans-Cascadias, to get trails in shape for both the coming year's race as well as future editions. The commitment for this trio is huge considering what is involved in just putting on the race. It certainly speaks to their love for the outdoors and the community that surrounds them.







"[The U.S. Forest Service] are understaffed and lack the resources. The staff that is there, like the recreation planners, are busting their tails just to keep the trails open," shares Gardner.

The backlog on trail maintenance is a very real thing for the Forest Service, which currently maintains only about one quarter of the 158,000 miles of national forest system trails. These routes host recreation experiences not just for mountain bikers, but for hikers and other outdoor enthusiasts as well.

"We've been able to add about 1,000 hours in each year of the event in collective labor, which is a huge resource to the community," continues Gardner. During the process, they've become seasoned trail builders, experienced sawyers and are super efficient on the trails. "We're like special forces on the trails in the network. We come in with a small group, but we get a ton of work done."

Together with the Forest Service, they have rehabilitated and refurbished existing routes as well as re-opened a few trails that were all but forgotten. In the 2016 edition of the race, Eula Ridge Trail, with its long, rowdy and exciting downhill, was not only a first-time ride for many racers, but a first-time route in a mountain bike race.



"Being able to host Trans-Cascadia has helped us build and support the mountain bike culture in Oakridge, which in turn brings new energy and more capacity to the community. It's a big contribution to the economic vitality [in] the area," says Kevin Rowell, trails and off-highway vehicle program lead for the Middle Fork Ranger District of Willamette National Forest. Rowell and his counterpart in the McKenzie River Ranger District have been working for years to expand the offerings for mountain bikers in this region of the Willamette. While progress was definitely being made, the Trans-Cascadia team has upped the ante, helping them to go bigger and harder than ever before.

"Oakridge has always had a robust trail-work game and culture of stewardship. Having the people involved with Trans-Cascadia has been a natural extension of what's already existed; they've come in and strengthened it. They have embraced the ethic and adopted it as their own," adds Rowell.

In 2017, Trans-Cascadia will again offer its highly curated experience with an entirely new collection of courses (100 percent new to you) over its four-day blind format. When you consider the ground that was covered during the 2015 and 2016 editions of the race, you've got to be both amazed and stoked.

"[Trans-Cascadia is] unique because the amount of inventory [trails] you need to put on a race like this is hard to get. There's only a couple of places you can pull it off. It's really Colorado or here in Oregon and Washington, in the Cascades," says Gibson.

The race is limited to 100 riders and is expected to sell out well ahead of the September 27 start date. ▶

## THE TRANS-CASCADIA FAQ

**WHO** is the race for? Anyone who loves mountain biking all day and communing all night with good food, drink and 99 other like-minded people.

**WHAT** am I getting myself into?

You will be participating in a four-day blind-format mountain bike enduro race in the backcountry of the Cascades. You will pedal and be shuttled, fed and watered, guided and pampered. All you have to do is register at [trans-cascadia.com](http://trans-cascadia.com) and then show up in Portland, Oregon, with your gear, your bike and a Go Hard attitude.

**WHEN** should I block off my calendar?

Plan to arrive in Portland by 9 a.m. on Sept. 27, 2017. For now, the specific meeting location is a secret (it's a blind format, after all) and will be shared a few weeks before the event. Racing starts on Thursday, Sept. 28, continuing for four days and ending on Sunday, Oct. 1. Racers are free to leave after 7 p.m. the night of Oct. 1 or after breakfast the next morning.

**WHERE** on Earth will I be riding?

Shhhh ... it's a secret. You'll be riding somewhere in the Cascades on trails with drippy green mossy trees and grippy, loamtastic soils. The 2017 stages will feature 100 percent new course routes.

**WHY** should I do this race?

See WHO and WHERE above. Also, you will be helping Trans-Cascadia's larger mission as a nonprofit to promote and build sustainable trails in the Pacific Northwest. Every year, the crew organizes four multi-day build parties to support trails in the national forest. Consider joining one of the 2017 work weekends: April 21-24, May 19-22, July 21-23 or Aug. 25-27.

**HOW** fit do I need to be to participate in this race?

Expect to spend about six to eight hours on your bike each day, with an average of 4,000 feet of vertical ascent. Each day is designed to have the most amount of descending fun, and not every stage is shuttle-able. The most important thing: Bring your passion for long singletrack descents and no qualms about pedaling to get to them.