



Mount Hood disappearing in the rearview mirror

We left the trucker's junction at Biggs, Oregon, after a good night's sleep, crossing the Columbia River into Washington and connecting to Route 14, the Lewis and Clark Highway. Adventure Cycling Association's maps, in fact, referred to the first half of our entire planned route as the Lewis and Clark Trail. Their maps follow roughly the same journey, from St. Louis to Astoria, of the famous explorers of the nineteenth century. We would follow this route into Montana, and then join the so-called Northern Tier route.

Ten miles into our ride, our first encounter with dogs was about to happen. I really don't like hearing a dog bark when I'm bicycling. And I like it even less when I can see them running at me. When I hear their excited barks and ominous growls, adrenaline begins to kick in. When I see their curled lips, sharp teeth, and the cold look in their eyes, chills travel the full length of my spine.

There they were: three big ones. I could see them from afar as they began barking and sprinting down their owner's driveway, launched like a triad of missiles at the prospect of fresh meat. The driveway was about the size of a football field, so I had some time to gather my thoughts. They seemed on pace to intercept me when I arrived at the end of what had become their racetrack. And Debbie was several feet behind me. Surely, no one on this isolated stretch of road would be investing in invisible fence technology, but I could hold out hope. Since Debbie had our only can of pepper spray, it would do me little good. And another troubling thought occurred to me: *If I get through this pack in one piece, what about Debbie? She's lagging behind and sure to encounter these snarling canines.* Nevertheless, I wasn't inclined to stop and serve up lunch on a silver platter to these mutts.

When the three dogs reached the end of the long driveway and swarmed Tim's bike, I had a front row seat to the

horror show. I reached for the can of pepper spray as the first and most aggressive dog lunged at Tim, circled his bike, and clenched his teeth onto something on the right side of Tim's bike. Tim just kept on riding, dragging the dog for several feet until it let go. At first, I couldn't tell whether the muscle dog had sunk his teeth into Tim's leg. But it was his pannier instead. I couldn't believe how calm Tim was. Thankfully, a passing vehicle with heavenly timing herded the troublemaking hounds and sent them on their way home. We escaped unscathed despite our heightened pulses.

Many dogs have chased me over my years of bicycling, but never multiple dogs at the same time. After our frightful encounter early in the day, I thought about how defenseless we were on these bicycles. Pepper spray is a logical defense, but it needs to be readily available. Even if I'd had the spray in my bag, opening it while riding would have been tricky. After all, I was using both hands to balance the bicycle. And even if I'd had it in my hand, I would have needed a good aim to make a difference. Another school of thought is to spray water in the dog's face. However, even if I could have squirted it effectively with one hand, water was becoming a valuable commodity on this very hot day. I also wondered what might have happened if these dogs had gotten in front of me while I was traveling at high speed. Crashing could have been the worst result. As in life, unforeseen pitfalls lurk. But you can't let that stop you from running the race.

Even without the dog attack, Route 14 proved to be an intimidating stretch of road. What initially seemed like pleasurable warmth on a wide-open, well-paved, and well-shouldered road became a most discouraging and seemingly endless journey to nowhere in oppressive heat. To make matters worse, a persistent headwind whistled into our helmets. Without the anticipated prevailing westerly wind, it felt as though we were biking uphill. The more energy we expended, the stronger the wind, or so it seemed. Before we knew it, we were in a desert, and we were parched.

The surroundings were plain—and redundant. There were no services for miles—only brown rolling hills covered with windmills