

Geology

A combination of volcanic action, block faulting, and glacier carving formed the Grande Ronde Valley and the surrounding mountains. The result of all of that earth moving is a diverse landscape—from arid rangeland to lush forests, tumbling rivers to fertile farmlands—framed with distant granite peaks.

Millions of years ago, large blocks of rock gradually folded and slid into the earth, leaving ragged cliffs of Columbia River Basalt standing above the valley. Now covered with colorful lichen, the cliffs guard the many creeks and rivers that tumble from mountain top to valley floor. Glacial rock, ground into loess and carried to the valley floor by wind and water, makes up much of the rich soil that is farmed in the Grande Ronde Valley.



Distance

80 miles

Time to Allow

4-5 hours

Best Time to Travel

Spring through fall are best, but the road is enjoyable all year round.

Road Conditions

Roads are paved and well maintained, with some graveled sections. Extreme weather in the winter may close some sections, so check with the Visitor Center or visit tripcheck.com before setting out for a winter drive.



207 Depot St., La Grande OR
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Online visitor guide - VisitLaGrande.com
Union County trails & recreation - LaGrandeNaturally.com
Visitor & community info - UnionCountyChamber.org

The Grande Tour



Oregon Scenic Tour Route

The Route

“Grande” is the French word for “big” and the Grande Tour delivers. Along the route you’ll encounter big mountains, wide open spaces, farmlands rich with high crops, and rugged ranges that stretch for miles. This loop makes a lazy figure-eight around the Grande Ronde Valley and is well worth the 80 mile drive. The longest stretch between services is about 50 miles, so start with plenty of fuel and water. Plan your trip for a lunch break in La Grande, Union, or Cove, or pack a picnic to enjoy one of the lovely parks or scenic stops along the way.

The entire route is appropriate for passenger and recreational vehicles. The Grande Tour route is popular with bicyclists, although there are no bike lanes along the route and many miles have narrow shoulders. Regardless of mode, use caution, pull over often to snap some photographs, and enjoy your drive!



Heritage & Culture

Used by Native Americans as summer pasture for horses and for gathering winter stores of berries and camas root, the Grande Ronde Valley was first seen by people of European descent when the Wilson Price Hunt Expedition passed through in the winter of 1811-12. Beginning in 1843, emigrants passed this way during the great migration on the Oregon Trail.

Agriculture is a major component of the economic structure in Union County. A wide variety of grain, seed, and oil crops are grown in the rich soils, including wheat, oats, barley, grass seed, canola, alfalfa, seed potatoes, cherries, peppermint, legumes, and sugar beets, along with beef cattle, sheep, hogs, and horses, among others. Farmland is nourished by the Grande Ronde River and its tributaries, and deep irrigation wells.

Like agriculture, forestry has long played an important role in the Union County economy.

The Grande Tour passes through mixed conifer forests and Hall Ranch, a stand of timber owned by the Oregon State University Agriculture Experiment Station. The route travels through a portion of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest and past several trailheads that access Oregon’s largest wilderness area, the beautiful Eagle Cap Wilderness.



Driving Guide & Points of Interest

La Grande to Union

At the intersection of Fourth St. and Adams Ave. in downtown La Grande, drive south on Fourth St. to C Ave. Turn east (left) onto C Ave. Drive 0.2 mile to Birnie Park.

1. **Birnie Park** is in the oldest neighborhood in La Grande, marking a camping place for wagons traveling the Oregon Trail. Ceramic pillars commemorate the pioneers who stopped here before setting out on most difficult part of the 2,000-mile journey to the Willamette Valley.

C Ave. becomes Gekeler Lane. Continue for about 1 mile to S 20th St.; veer to the southeast (left) onto Foothill Rd. Travel south for approximately 7 miles. Foothill Road, where some of the earliest Grande Ronde Valley settlers established farms in the early 1860s.

2. Approximately 4 miles from the Foothill Rd./S 20th St. intersection, find a wildlife viewing sign. The viewing area provides an opportunity to watch wildlife and birds, and enjoy scenic vistas of the **Ladd Marsh Wildlife Area**, Grande Ronde Valley, and the distant peaks of the Elkhorn Range.

Cross Interstate 84 using the freeway overpass. Turn south (right) onto Pierce Rd. then east (left) onto Hot Lake Ln., a well-maintained gravel road suitable for motorhomes, passenger vehicles, motorcycles at slower speeds, and bicycles for the stalwart.

3. At Foothill Rd./Pierce Rd., a left turn will provide access to a one-mile walking trail of Ladd Marsh. ODFW parking permit required.

Travel along Hot Lake Ln. for 2.7 miles to Hwy 203. Turn southeast (right) and follow the highway to the town of Union.

4. **Hot Lake Springs**, a huge brick building that is a fraction of a once sprawling complex called "Mayo Clinic of the West." Now owned by internationally renowned bronze sculptor David Manuel and his family, Hot Lake Springs boasts a history center, artists' marketplace, mineral springs, dining, hotel, and casting tours.

Historic Union Loop

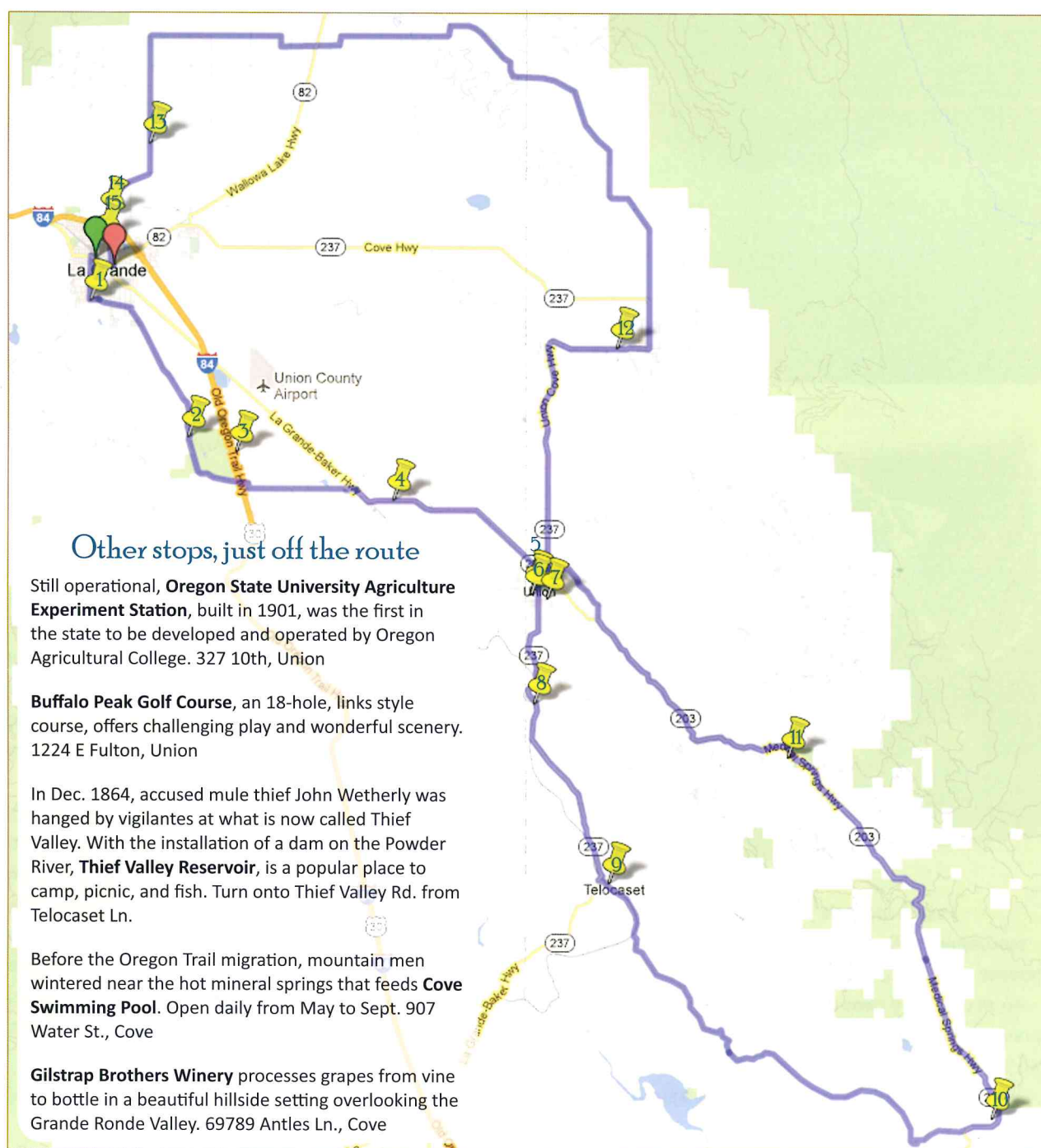
5. **Union** is noted for its Victorian homes and charming brick storefronts. Many of the early settlers around Union were freighters, carrying merchandise from The Dalles or Umatilla to the mines around Auburn in Baker County.

6. **Union Library**, built in 1912 with a \$5,000 matching fund from the Carnegie Foundation, still serves as a library for the residents of Union.

7. **Union County Museum** is noted for its exhibits showing the area's rich natural and cultural history. Open Mother's Day to mid-October.

In Union, Hwy 203 becomes Main St. Continue south along Hwy 203, which becomes Hwy 237. Travel approximately 9 miles through Pyles Canyon to Telocaset Lane, turn east (left).

8. **Pyles Canyon** was an alternate route around the Ladd Canyon mountain pass for pioneers on the Oregon Trail. This important route was a toll road constructed in 1864 by J. M. Pyle, an early member of the state legislature and the first senator from Union County. After his death, the Pyle estate agreed to sell the toll road to the county.



Other stops, just off the route

Still operational, **Oregon State University Agriculture Experiment Station**, built in 1901, was the first in the state to be developed and operated by Oregon Agricultural College. 327 10th, Union

Buffalo Peak Golf Course, an 18-hole, links style course, offers challenging play and wonderful scenery. 1224 E Fulton, Union

In Dec. 1864, accused mule thief John Wetherly was hanged by vigilantes at what is now called Thief Valley. With the installation of a dam on the Powder River, **Thief Valley Reservoir**, is a popular place to camp, picnic, and fish. Turn onto Thief Valley Rd. from Telocaset Ln.

Before the Oregon Trail migration, mountain men wintered near the hot mineral springs that feeds **Cove Swimming Pool**. Open daily from May to Sept. 907 Water St., Cove

Gilstrap Brothers Winery processes grapes from vine to bottle in a beautiful hillside setting overlooking the Grande Ronde Valley. 69789 Antles Ln., Cove

Travel 14 miles on Telocaset Ln.; veer northeast (left) onto Hwy 203 (Medical Springs Hwy).

9. Telocaset Ln., a gravel road, goes through the tiny hamlet of **Telocaset** (pronounced by the Nez Perce Indians as "Taulekarsset," meaning "on the top"). The community marks the crest on the railroad grade between the Grande Ronde and Powder River valleys.

10. **Medical Springs** was established around 1868 by Dunham Wright, a cousin to Abraham Lincoln and an early state politician. Medical Springs was a popular hotel and hot springs resort in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

11. **Catherine Creek State Park** provides picnicking, hiking, fishing, and overnight camping facilities. Tranquil, crystal-clear waters and towering ponderosa pines frame the landscape, providing visitors a cool, quiet and peaceful setting. Access to Eagle Cap Wilderness trailheads are nearby.

Travel 19 miles along Hwy 203 Kofford Rd. Turn north (right); travel 0.4 mile then turn west (left) onto High Valley Road. Travel 1.7 miles, then turn north (right) onto Hwy 237 (Union Cove Hwy); travel about 8 miles to Cove.

Foothills and the Grande Ronde

12. The **Henderschott Home** is a stunning example of neogothic architecture, built in 1877 by Hon. James Henderschott, who served in the Oregon house and senate, playing a role in Oregon's statehood.

Continue through Cove on Hwy 237 for 1.5 miles, then merge onto Market Ln., traveling along the Mt. Fanny foothills. Market Ln. becomes Lower Cove Rd. as it winds along the Grande Ronde River.

Merge northwest (right) onto Gray's Corner Road; travel 2.4 miles. Merge south (left) onto Alicel Lane for 4.8 miles to Hwy 82. Cross Hwy 82 and continue west on Standley Ln.

Travel 4.4 miles west on Standley to Mt. Glen Rd., merge south (left) onto Mt. Glen Rd.

13. **Ackles Cemetery**, established in 1866, is the final resting place of some of the area's earliest settlers.

Travel 5 miles to Riverside Park at the intersection of Mt. Glen Road and Fruitdale Ln. Mt. Glen Road becomes Spruce St. Continue on Spruce St. for 1.2 miles to Monroe Ave.

14. **Riverside Park** is adjacent to the Grande Ronde River, inviting swimming at the park's edge. Lined with Heritage Trees, this 12.4-acre park offers a cool summer respite and breathtaking fall foliage.

15. As you drive down Spruce St., you'll pass under a great canopy of Norway maple **Heritage Trees** between X and V avenues. The original 1923 planting of 250 trees commemorated the end of World War I and welcomed returning soldiers.

Turn east (left) onto Monroe Ave.; travel 500 ft. to Hwy 82 (Island Ave.). Turn left to access I-84 onramps. Turn right to access Hwy 30 (Adams Ave.) and historic downtown La Grande.