

## Touring Orcas and Lopez Islands

Orcas and Lopez islands provide contrast. We gained approximately 1,400 feet while pedaling 22 miles on Orcas Island. We pedaled 37 miles on Lopez Island to achieve 1,300 feet of elevation gain. I note the elevation issue not to deter novice cyclists from riding on Orcas but to give newbies fair warning! Using a road bike with only two chain rings could cause a novice to walk the steeper grades. A touring bike or mountain bike, with lower gearing, would make the trip more doable.

Orcas is shaped like a horseshoe. The ferry docks at the southern town of Orcas. Services are limited to one hotel and a few eateries. You are greeted with the first good climb as you pedal away from the dock. You gain about 300 feet in elevation in less than a mile. You've reach the top when you see a small lane dubbed "Uff Da Hill". We found an excellent dinner spot at West Sound – three miles from Orcas. The Kingfish Inn recommends reservations. The next climb awaits cyclists as they head north from West Sound on Crow Valley Road. As I tell my wife, the benefit of a climb is a nice downhill. For those on "island time", the Orcas Island Pottery offers a nice respite.



Enchanted Forest Road gets the heart pounding but it may not have anything to do with romance! It may have more to do with the 16 percent grade for about a mile. The lush forest is worth the trip. And, again, there is a nice downhill stretch just before entering the biggest town on the island – East Sound. Plan to spend awhile in town, which is about 10 miles from Orcas, depending on your route. There are several blocks of eateries, bed and breakfasts, shops and a bike shop. One can return to Orcas via Orcas Road or if one desires more exercise, the east side of the island awaits via Olga Road. Cyclists can choose to stay along the shoreline to the small towns of Olga and Doe Bay. The other option is to test your conditioning by pedaling from the entrance of Moran State Park to Mount Constitution. You climb 2,000 feet in elevation in five miles but the scenic vistas are worth the effort.

After a day on Orcas, we chose a recovery ride the next day. That meant we chose to ride on Lopez Island. By touring in mid-October, we almost had the island to ourselves. Late on a Sunday afternoon, we rode for the better part of an hour on Fisherman Bay Road without seeing a single motorist. By the time we pedaled to Agate Beach County Park, about 15 miles south from the ferry terminal, only birds and water lapping the beach, interrupted the solitude. When we boarded the ferry bound for San Juan Island, no motorists or pedestrians joined us. I thought of asking the ferry's staff if I could do laps down on the vacant vehicle deck.

We enjoyed stopping in Lopez Village on our way to the southern part of the island and on our return. Sunday was two-for-one at Holly B's Bakery. I stocked up on "carbs". In the evening, we returned to the village and ate at the Dog Lovers Café. A sign on the door

“warned” customers that: “Fall season brings a shortage of staff – an endangered species” and to be patient with the staff. That was easy to do. Our waiter went out of his way to make our dining an enjoyable experience. Even the flowers on the plate were edible.