

Hells Canyon Dam

Gold Wing Road Riders Association

Chapter ID-T, Nampa, Tour Idaho Rides

Geographic Area: Southwestern Idaho and Eastern Oregon

Location: In spectacularly deep and rugged Snake River Canyon, on the border of Idaho and Oregon

Accessibility: From Interstate 84

- Fruitland, Idaho Exit 3, to US 95. US 95 is also accessible from northern Idaho.
- Baker City, Oregon Exit 302, to OR 86

If traveling I-84, either east or west, this side trip should be considered. It does add 130 miles to the interstate distance, of 80 miles, between these two Exits. The additional travel time is 3-4 hours, plus any time to stop and enjoy the scenery.

Our chapter rides out of Nampa, Idaho so the following description begins at Fruitland, I-84 Exit 3.

Route described is approximately 210 miles and time required is over 4 hours.

From I-84 Exit 3, in Idaho, take US 95 north along the Snake River through the towns of Payette and Weiser, and then over Midvale Hill. As you reach the top and begin to descend, about 40 miles from start, there is a nice rest area with a beautiful view of the valley below and the little town of Midvale. From there the road follows the Weiser River into the town of Cambridge.

At the far (north) end of Cambridge turn left (west) onto ID 71 and begin the descent into Hells Canyon. In about 20 miles is Gateway Store and Café, which is a normal lunch stop on our Chapter rides.

From this café, the road you will enjoy sweeping curves which lead to the first view of the Snake River, and the lake behind Brownlee Dam. The highway follows the lake to this dam and provides more curves and vistas of the lake and the canyon. After slowing for some sharper corners you pass the dam and drop in front of it, getting a great view of it and its spillway. The road then crosses the river into Oregon and the highway becomes OR 86.

The road continues to follow the river, which soon becomes another lake, this one behind the Oxbow Dam. It is hard to get much of a view of this dam except from its upper side, unless you make effort, getting off the highway and maybe walking some. The Snake River makes a very sharp S-curve here and the road goes through a cut, missing the side of the 'S' where the dam is built.

Next, there is an intersection with Hells Canyon Road, to the right (north). This road is the public access to yet a third dam, Hells Canyon Dam, 23 miles by road further north. Take this road, that was built by Idaho Power to build and access this dam. It is a well-maintained paved road that crosses back to the Idaho side, and is very enjoyable and even more scenic as it heads further into this 7,000-foot deep rocky gorge. Words fail, as the canyon narrows, and you try to absorb it all.

The road crosses the top of the dam before descending in front it, taking you on down river to the Hells Canyon Creek Visitors Center. There is a nice parking lot here and the visitor center provides a nice view

of the mountains, and the river as it continues north. There is also information about the canyon and the building of the dam. It is truly a gorgeous point and a great trip to get there. Below is a boat ramp, and you may even see a jet boat, as they occasionally come upstream from Lewiston.

After your stay here, the trip continues right back over the last 23 miles you have just enjoyed, so you get to enjoy them all over again. Beginning with a great look at the front of the dam and a sharp uphill right turn as you climb back to the top of the dam.

Back at the junction with OR 86, go straight ahead, toward Baker City, into the little town of Copperfield and then on to Pine Creek as you begin the climb out of the canyon. Along the way, you will pass through the small towns of Halfway and Pine, and then as you get out of the canyon you follow a part of the original Oregon Trail, and may want to stop at the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, about 9 miles out of Baker City.

Have a good trip. Enjoy the road and the scenery

Fuel and distances for planning: Cambridge is about 50 miles from Fruitland, another 40 miles to Copperfield the first time (near the Hells Canyon Road junction), and 46 more to Copperfield the second time, after riding to the dam and back, then 70 miles into Baker City, so plan accordingly.

Food, lodging and camping: Cambridge, Gateway, Copperfield, Baker City, and maybe other, too.

