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**Editorial Sketchbook**

## Back on bicycles, we're discovering a new next door

**A**s if in a trance, and induced by high gas prices, thousands of Portlanders have hopped back on their bikes this summer, testing whether they still command the pedal powers of their youth. I'm guessing many are discovering they still do.

Biking may have developed a Tour de Lance mystique during the past few decades, but it's still a lovely, lazy way to lay claim to the universe, sitting down.

Here's where our "compact urban form" comes in so handy, too. From Portland to Lake Oswego is only 8 miles, Beaverton 9, Gresham 14, Forest Grove 23. It's longer by bike in every case, and yet it all begins to sound like a snap.

Thus, recently, feeling strangely cocky, if also a bit abashed, like a lemming on two wheels, I, too, fell under the spell of the spokes.

The fourth annual "Ride to Tomorrow," sponsored by Cycle Oregon and the Urban Greenspaces Institute, just seemed too good a chance to pass up. The trip promised a flat-as-my-home-state-of-Kansas terrain linking bike trails in, of all places, Washington County.

True, it's been 23 years since I last did a 30-plus-mile bike ride. But with lunch at Tualatin Commons, frequent rest breaks and help for anyone who got a flat tire, how bad could it be?

The idea behind the trip is to take policymakers, park wonks, assorted pencil-pushers and pedal wannabes — 105 in all — down bikeways they've never seen before, such as the glorious Fanno Creek Trail.

The Red Electric Trail, linking Fanno to the Willamette Greenway, could be the place where they drive the "golden spike," the planners say, connecting cyclists east and west. But the annual trek also illuminated miserable gaps in the Washington County system, such as Hall Boulevard.

That's where the police escort came in handy, and I was painfully aware we had one: at the end of the trip, I was the one they were baby-sitting. It wasn't a race, I kept reminding myself — but if it had been, I would have lost.

Still, arriving home, I felt like a conquistador, on top of the bike — and the world.

—*Mary Pitman Kirch*