

# Seattle to Portland (STP) 2007 trip report, part 3 of 4: Toledo to St. Helens

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July 26, 2007



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Note: You probably want to start with [Part 1](#). **Sidebar:** There are a lot of groups that wore matching jerseys to build team spirit. Here are a few riders that caught my eye that I haven't already mentioned:

- The *Something Something Team in Training* with bright green jerseys and shark fins on top of their helmets. ([John Westerfield explains the value of those strange helmet decorations.](#))
- The *In Memory of BJ* team. These folks were notable not just because of their matching jerseys but also because they seemed to stop by the road frequently to take group pictures. I never did learn who BJ was during the ride. [Possibly this handsome fellow.](#) [Here's a comment from a member of the BJ group](#), appended to a photo-blog completely dedicated to the 2007 STP. (Notice the specially-designed [camera phone holder contraption.](#))
- The pair of tandems in [purple and fluorescent orange](#), matching even down to their shoes.
- [Team Parkinson's](#), who [raised money](#) for the [NW Parkinson's Foundation](#).
- The woman with the huge head of long, curly black hair, whom I remember passing several times. You couldn't miss her.

Our detour to Toledo bypassed the towns of Napavine and Winlock, which meant that we missed out [Napavine night life](#), the [banana bread lady](#), and The World's Largest Egg. I found a funny picture of another rider [trying to eat the world's largest egg](#), and check out that bizarro bicycle towing contraption they cobbled together later in the ride! **Sunday (Day Two) 6am:** I did not have a very good night's sleep. My throat was still horribly sore, but I dared not cough for fear of waking up everybody else. Nobody figured out how to turn off the lights in the library, so the light streamed into our classroom all night. I feel bad for the people who are sleeping in the library! We got up and had breakfast, brush our teeth, change into our clothes for the day, pack up, all that stuff. Breakfast consists of pancakes, scrambled eggs, ham, and milk. They run out of cups, though. **A** and I are ready a bit earlier, so we go on a self-guided tour of Toledo High School. Okay, first thing is that these rural high schools are

small. Graduating class of 66 students. When we start our wanderings, I wonder where all the other classrooms are, and then I realize: *There are no other classrooms.* Other observations:

- Lots of motivational posters. We didn't have those when I went to high school.
- This is an iMac shop. No PCs anywhere. But they're not exclusively Apple; they have an HP laser printer.
- This school offers Japanese as a foreign language.
- Our classroom is a math classroom, and from the ceiling hangs a giant slide rule. **J** quips, "They probably use it in industrial history class." **A** studies it with some amusement, and I'm surprised that he never learned how to use one. **A** is conversely surprised that I do know. I explain, "I asked my dad, 'Hey, what's this thing?' and he said, 'It's a slide rule' and gave me one of his older slide rules and taught me how to use it." **A** replies, "Ah, my experience was very similar yet different in a significant way: I asked my dad, 'Hey, what's this thing?' and he said, 'It's a slide rule.'"
- They have chalkboards! Out here in the city, everybody switched over to whiteboards years ago. Somehow, whiteboards don't feel right. Teaching is done with chalk.

We're all ready to go except for **Z**, who is not having a good morning. Eventually, he joins us, only to discover that his rear tire is once again flat. (We slap ourselves on the forehead for not checking that while we were waiting.) Fixing this flat is a team affair. **M** extracts the tube from the tire, I search for the puncture and proceed to patch it. **J** and **A** study the location of the puncture and track it back to a spoke in the wheel that sticks out too far beyond the rim. **Z**'s wheel doesn't have rim tape, so a rogue spoke can puncture the tube. We might have gotten away with it at lower pressure; once again, our quest for higher tire pressure comes back to bite us. **S** produces a dollar bill to use as temporary rim tape. Okay, tube repaired, bicycle back in service, off we go. **7:30am**: As we depart Toledo High School, I take a picture of their athletic field. I don't see it at the time, but in the picture, there is a rainbow. Rainbows are pretty, but on a bike ride, they mean rain. **Z** is not quite at full power yet (after the ride, he explained that his knee was bothering him, though it loosened up later in the day), so I hang back with him while the others proceed at a peppier pace. We cross I-5 on Toledo-Vader Road, giving us a great view of the famous Vader/Ryderwood exit sign. Well, famous to me at least. I've traveled up and down I-5 many times, and somehow that sign sticks in my brain. Other people probably remember that exit as the place that has the giant ice cream cone. Riding along Highway 506 early in the morning is quite peaceful; there's nobody else on the road. That changes once **Z** and I reach Highway 411, because that's where we rejoin the official STP route and see an endless stream of bicyclists pouring down the road. We slip into the crowd, and off we go. I broke my bike mirror this morning, so I can't use my usual trick of riding in front of **Z** and checking in the mirror that I'm not pulling away. Instead, I ride behind **Z** for a while, then pass him and ride in front for a while, checking that I'm not pulling away, and then drop behind him for a while, and so on. This initial leg is a longer one than usual since we had to ride out of Toledo to rejoin the route (7½

miles), and the riders on the official route had just come out of a mini-stop, so we miss out on that, plus this section of the route is rather hilly. Note: Even though we took a detour that added about four miles to our distance, I will continue to use mileage markers as measured along the official route. It's around this point that Morgan Scherer, who is riding not just STP, but STPTS (Seattle to Portland to Seattle), asks another cyclist "Do you feel a headwind?" The other cyclist responds, "I don't feel anything. This is day two!" **9am:** I'm ahead of **Z**, maybe a third of a mile from the Castle Rock mini-stop (mile 138) when my phone rings. I pull over to answer it, and it's **J** checking up on us. I let him know that we'll be there real soon, but in the process of taking out my phone, I accidentally pulled my map out of my back pocket, and it fell on the road, right on the route. I have to play a little game of Frogger to wait for a break in the riders so I can scoot out, pick up the map, and scoot back to the safety of the side of the road. During all this excitement, **Z** passes me, and I am the last one in our group to roll into the Castle Rock mini-stop. The people in the lead group are about to leave when I arrive, and I'm pretty keen on leaving too, but first I have to find **Z**. He's over at the food tables stocking up on goodies. He offers me some candy. I look at him kind of puzzled; it's nine in the morning. Who eats candy at nine in the morning? I fail to notice the Four Corners General Store just a half mile down the road from the high school, but fortunately Matt Picio did: Guns, Ammo, Optics. But that's not the strangest sign combination I've seen in my life. That belongs to Rooney's Liquor Store in Los Banos, California, which has the sign "Video, Groceries, Sporting Goods, Ammo, Snacks." Ya gotta love a liquor store that also sells ammo. During this leg, I decide to change my strategy. Instead of sticking close all the time, I ride for a while, pulling away gradually, and then stop at the side of the road to wait for **Z** to catch up to me. I let him go for a while, and then I hop on and catch up to him, pass him, and then pull over some time later to wait. Repeat. When you use the "hare" strategy, you find yourself passing the same group of people over and over. One such group is Wheels of Change who were riding to raise money for Asha for Education. I happened to stumble across not one ride blog but two and thought it was a charming coincidence that these were the people I saw over and over again. At one point, I think I am ahead of **Z** when I am actually behind him. I pull over and wait several minutes, and **Z** doesn't appear. I ride for a while longer, and then wait some more. Still no sign of **Z**. At this point, I figure I must be behind him, and I ride onward, but at a more determined pace. My cold isn't getting any better. My throat is still sore, though not as bad as yesterday (doesn't hurt to talk), and my nose is now running like a garden hose. **9:51am:** **Z** calls me. He's at the Lexington stop and wants to know whether we should stop or keep going. I'm confused and think that the lunch stop is in Longview, not Lexington, so I tell him to keep going. **9:59am:** I reach the Lexington stop (mile 145) and realize that this is the lunch stop. I call **Z** to tell him to come back, but he says that he'll just pull over and eat the lunch that he brought with him. I try to convince him to come back, but he says he's fine and will just wait for us. The line for lunch is quite long. **S** comes over to keep me company waiting in line, and she grabs a lunch for **Z** when we reach the front. The rest of the group have been at the Lexington stop for quite some time and most of them are ready to head out. We give **Z**'s lunch to **J**, and he, along with **M** and **A**, head out. **S** relaxes while I finish my teriyaki chicken wrap and stuff the other food

in my pockets. I'm fine with eating en route, and seeing as I'm the trailing end of our group, it would behoove me not to waste time. **11:17am:** It's not long before **S** and I reach the Lewis and Clark Bridge (mile 153), getting there just before the assembled group of riders [source blog] is escorted over the bridge. Studying photo timestamps, I calculate that the lead group picks up **Z** and reaches the bridge at 10:47am just as the previous group of riders is being escorted over. They have to wait until 11:01am before they get their chance to go over the bridge. **S** and I luck out; we happen to arrive just before another group is to be taken over the bridge. We got the best-case scenario; the lead group got the worst-case. Without even trying, we made up nearly fifteen minutes on them! (Chana Joffe-Walt calls the mass of riders a "bobbing monster of helmets". That's why she's a writer and I'm a computer programmer.) As **S** and I descend into Oregon, we see **Z** waiting for us at the bottom of the bridge. We stop and chat, and I take pictures of riders descending the exit and merging onto Route 30. I don't realize it at the time, but my picture captures a group of riders I won't even learn about until later in the ride. **11:28am:** **Z**, **S** and I saddle up for the final 50 miles. Once we cross over into Oregon, I start sneezing. This is not because of my cold; I'm just allergic to Oregon. I'm used to it. Once we leave the town of Rainier, we find ourselves on a long, imperceptible climb. **Z** zips ahead, while I stick with **S**, who appears to be losing energy and is struggling to keep going. On the left, **S** spots an "observatory"; it's actually the reactor core from the former Trojan Nuclear Power Plant. The sight was more impressive before they imploded the huge cooling towers. A fire engine goes past us in the opposite direction with its sirens on. We do not stop at the Goble mini-stop (mile 163) on the principle that we should just keep moving. That same fire truck goes past us in the same direction we're going, with its sirens off. We figured it was a false alarm. Stopped by the side of the road is a family of five on two bicycles. The father and son are on a tandem, and the mother and two daughters are on a triple. The men have matching outfits, as do the women. These are the ones I happened to take a picture of purely by chance back at the bridge. We'll see still more of them later. The people who live in the towns on the Oregon side are not big fans of STP, as far as I can tell. Some businesses do well, like convenience stores and anything else that sells ready-to-eat food. Though I read that one business that suffers terribly is the cigarette store, because most of its customers come from Washington to take advantage of the significantly lower tobacco tax rate in Oregon. Travelling over the bridge is an ordeal on STP day because of all the bicyclists, so people just don't bother. At one point, I find myself riding by myself in a gap between two larger groups. There is a semi-trailer up ahead trying to pull out of a lot, so I slow up and let the gap expand, allowing the semi-trailer to get out. I figured the poor guy would otherwise be waiting there for a long time; heck, he may have been waiting for a long time already. I don't normally get a chance to create a gap like this; when you're riding as part of a large group, you aren't really in a position to say, "Okay, everybody stop so this car can get out." I resolve on future large organized rides to do more to be considerate of cars trying to cross the line of bicycles. Although we don't know it at the time, it is around this location earlier in the day that a drunk driver ran into a STP cyclist, seriously injuring him. (That article also has an interview with the skateboarder.)

**1:33pm:** We reach the final food stop, St. Helens High School (mile 175), just 30 miles from the finish line. Tune in next time for the exciting conclusion!

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