after several months of hot, dusty travel. Valleys were important emigrant stops on the Historic Trail, as well as mileages between stops and keeping your fuel tank as full as possible. Today, farmers use conservation farming tactics, such as crop rotation, and fencing waterways to mitigate the cost. Draining the wetlands to make way for crops was a common practice. Canals were dug, rivers re-channeled, and native grassland turned under a plow, forming some of the richest farmlands in Oregon. In the process, the swamps and wetlands were nearly obliterated, resulting in fewer migratory birds and game animals, and a lessening of the land’s ability to retain moisture through the wetlands. 

Recreation
Recreational opportunities along the Hells Canyon Scenic Byway are seemingly endless and range from tranquil to thrilling. Four distinct seasons alter the scenery and determine the activities.

The Journey
The scenic Byway is approximately 250 miles long, with stretches of more than eighty miles without gas and with no places to refuel. It’s the time for cattle drives, harvest and the byway. To learn more, carry a copy of Oregon’s Roadside Geology with you while you travel.

Hells Canyon Dam, Oxbow, OR 97840
541-785-3395
Hells Canyon Dam Interpretive Exhibit at the Union County Museum in Union.

Cultural Institute of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla at Wildhorse Resort & Casino near Pendleton.

Ranching and Cowboy History:
Eastern Oregon Museum in Haines.

First aid kit, drinking water, blanket and jackets.

• Before starting out, take notice of the travel times and allow for healthy regrowth in the spring.

Heritage
The Forces of Nature

Gold was discovered in eastern Oregon by 1860. Miners flocked to the southern side of the Wallowa range, (now the Halfway/Oxbow area) and in the Elkhorn Ridge of the Blue Mountains. The valleys were later settled by farmers, ranchers and merchants who provided food to the burgeoning mining communities. Agriculture and forestry are still important industries throughout eastern Oregon. Much of the beautiful scenery is related to expansive farms and ranches that retain the wide open spaces, lush vegetation and prevalent wildlife. Settlement was not without environmental cost. Draining the wetlands to make way for crops was a common practice. Canals were dug, rivers re-channeled, and native grassland turned under a plow, forming some of the richest farmlands in Oregon. In the process, the swamps and wetlands were nearly obliterated, resulting in fewer migratory birds and game animals, and a lessening of the land’s ability to retain moisture through the wetlands.

In autumn, cooler temperatures and shorter days turn tamarack (western larch) needles to gold and leaves to jewel tones of yellow, orange and red. Canada geese are on the move, filling the air with melancholy calls. Hunt for deer, elk, bear, bighorn sheep or photo opportunities. It’s the time for cattle drives, harvest and blue sky days crisp with the smell of winter. Catch the small town spirit by watching a high school football game in splendid, scenic surroundings. Visitors are welcome.

Winter’s dry, powdery snow opens the ski resorts and turns back-country side trips and hiking trails into a giant playground for adventurers on skis, snowmobiles, and snowshoes. Enjoy winter raptor viewing in Minam and the playground for adventurers on skis, snowmobiles, and snowshoes. Enjoy winter raptor viewing in Minam and the Wallowas, and surround yourself with spectacular scenery topped with fresh white snow. At night, relax before a crackling fire in cozy lodgings.

The Road
The scenic Byway is approximately 250 miles long, with stretches of more than eighty miles without gas and with no places to refuel. It’s the time for cattle drives, harvest and the byway. To learn more, carry a copy of Oregon’s Roadside Geology with you while you travel.

For a Closer Look
Learn more about northeastern Oregon’s history by visiting these nearby attractions. (Miles from the Byway)

Native American Culture and History: Tamatskiit Cultural Interpretive Exhibit at the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla at Wildhorse Resort & Casino near Pendleton. (45)

Ranching and Cowboy History: Cowboys Then & Now Exhibit at the Union County Museum in Union. (15)

Settlement & Early Twentieth Century History: Eastern Oregon Museum in Haines. (9)

Mining: The Sunshine Dredge State Historic Monument and Sumpter Valley Railroad (20)

Adventures. Cycle the back roads or mountain trails for the amazing views. Ride a tramway to the peaks above Wallowa Lake for views into the surrounding wilderness. Watch Dragon Boats race on Wallowa Lake.

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The Events
Cultural events and attractions honor the history and heritage of the area’s residents and can be enjoyed in towns all along the Byway. POWWOW: music festivals, craft shows, plays, concerts and a wide variety of cultural events and activities. Community celebrations can be found throughout the year. Farmer’s markets and farm stands offer fresh produce seasonally. County Fairs and rodeos highlight the region’s farm and ranch lifestyle that is still common in the wide open spaces on both sides of the Snake River. Contact the county organizations listed on the back panel for event details.

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Grande Ronde Valley to Wallowa Valley
Eighty-four miles via OR Highway 82 and county road 350. Allow 2-3 hours for travel and another one to two hours for stops. Road may be snowy and icy in winter.

Beginning in the patchwork farm lands of the broad Grande Ronde Valley, the first leg of the Byway follows numerous miles of level to mild terrain toward the large, open, rolling pasture lands of the Wallowa Mountains. Each small town along the way offers a different character and combination of services.

La Grande & Island City
Est. 1865; pop. 12,420 & 920; elev. 2,788’
La Grande was established at an important rest stop along the Oregon Trail. A wide variety of travel services and proximity to varied terrain make La Grande a popular base for all types of outdoor recreation. Watch biker bands play on the nearby Lard Marsh, explore the trails of the Mount Emily Recreation Area and enjoy concerts and cultural events at Eastern Oregon University. Walking tours highlight the community’s historic homes and downtown Historic District. Crops thrive in the valley’s deep, rich soil and relatively mild climate. Watch for orchards and fields of mint, alfalfa, wheat, barley, sugar beets, potatoes and turf grass seed.

Imbler
Est. 1922; pop. 305; elev. 2,732’
Deli, grocer & gas
Pastoral Imbler’s farming heritage is deeply rooted. Known as the “Grass Seed Capital of the World,” numerous commercial farms in the area have been operated by the same families for more than 100 years. The community and Mt. Harris, to the east, were named for early settlers.

Elgin
Est. 1891; pop. 1,660; elev. 2,670’
Lodging, RV park, restaurants, shopping, grocers & gas
The former location of Fort Baker and a trading area since the 1860s, Elgin has become a gateway to outstanding outdoor recreation in the Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests. Home to cattle, grain and hay producers as well as mill and timber workers, this little community hosts the roaring Elgin Stampede PBRCA Rodeo each July. The beautifully restored Oregon Avenue presents live musical theatre. The Grande Ronde River flows through town, providing ample opportunity to raft, fish and enjoy the scenery. The Eagle Cap Excursion Train operates out of the Elgin Depot on a section of the historic “Joseph Branch” railroad, giving passengers scenic views unseen from the highway. The railroad connects Joseph with the main line in La Grande.

Minam
Lodging, store, boat launch & state park
The Minam and Wallowa Rivers meet here and flow into the Grande Ronde River a few miles down stream. Segments of all three rivers have been designated “Wild & Scenic.” The rivers offer excellent steelhead fishing, rafting and year-round wildlife viewing. In winter, watch for bald eagles and other raptors. Pedal a Railrider beside the river from Minam to Wallowa on the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center.

Lostine
Est. 1903; pop. 230; elev. 3,200’
Restaurant, drive-through express, & mercantile
At this tiny turn-of-the-century town, visit second hand stores, dine on local fare at the Lostine Tavern, rest a while on a wooden bench in front of the combination sporting goods, grocery and dry goods store. Lostine comes alive during the town’s big 4th of July Flats Market. Numerous nearby Forest Service roads provide access to year round recreation in the Eagle Cap Wilderness. A side trip up the crystal clear Lostine River leads to rustic campgrounds, trailheads, and breathtaking scenery.

Enterprise
Est. 1889; pop. 1,940; elev. 3,757’
Lodging, restaurants, shopping, grocers & gas
The largest of the Wallowa Valley communities, Enterprise offers an array of shops, accommodations and back country and river outfitters. Hells Canyon Mule Days and the Bowlby Bash are among the town’s popular events. Plays and concerts take place at the restored theatre and on the lawn of the historic courthouse. The Wallowa Mountains tower above rolling ranch lands. A self-guided barn tour highlights ranching heritage.

Joseph
Est. 1887; pop. 1,130; elev. 4,191’
Lodging, restaurants, shopping, grocers & gas
Named for young Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce Tribe, this town is now a flourishing art community with a national reputation for its top quality bronze foundries and galleries. The summer is full of events, from art and music festivals to the Chef Joseph Days Rodeo. Most galleries and shops are open year round, as are museums with Indian artifacts and early ranching and logging history collections. Use facilities at Joseph or Wallowa Lake as a base for extended Hells Canyon or Eagle Cap Wilderness exploration. Call ahead to arrange a four-deck tour and reservations. Continue on OR Highway 82 to Wallowa Lake or proceed on the Byway route; at the north end of Joseph, turn east (between the gas station and grocery store) onto Highway 350.

Wallowa Lake
Lodging, RV park, restaurants, groceries, boat launch, state park & campground. No gas.
Many services are open seasonally.

Salt Creek Summit Recreation Park
Near mile post 25. Restrooms, no drinking water
In summer this is a hiking trailhead area; in winter, it’s the end of the paved road and the entrance to a snowy playground. Ahead are Uirk Creek Campground and Guard Station, listed on the National Historic Register, and Ollokit Campground, a site historically used by the Nez Perce Tribe and named after Young Chief Joseph’s brother. Side trips off this segment include (3) Hell’s Canyon Overlooks, at mile post 29 for expansive views of canyon country and interpretive signs.

National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center
Near Baker City, 5 miles east of I-84 on Highway 66. History is alive in a 23,000 square foot Oregon Trail Interpretive Center. Marvel at the courage and hardships of pioneers on their 2,000 mile trek to Oregon. The BLM-managed center offers extensive interactive exhibits and dioramas, living history presentations, live theater performances, demonstrations, educational programs, interpretive trails and the Oregon Trail Shop. Interpretive themes include exploration, mining and settlement, natural history and Native Americans. Open daily.

Baker City
Est. 1874; pop. 9,450; elev. 3,499
Lodging, RV parks, restaurants, shopping, grocers & gas
Known early on as the “Queen City of the Mines,” Baker City sits along the Powder River between the dramatic Elkhorn Ridge of the Blue Mountains and the Wallowa Mountains. Turn-of-the-century Victorian architecture dominates the commercial and residential district. Cross the street downtown, earning it distinction as a National Historic District. Many buildings have been carefully restored, including the famous Geiser Grand Hotel. The Baker Heritage Museum highlights the area’s history and houses a fantastic rocks and minerals collection. The Adler House Museum preserves the home of an early local businessman and philanthropist.