

A LIGHT TUNNEL IN THE DARK

#nightride

BY CAROL GODWIN, CYCLEMANIA

It's a cool summer evening with small lightning flashes on the far horizon and a soft breeze blowing. You are cycling through the dusk with your headlight creating a tunnel of light in the otherwise dark expanse. Periodically, you hear footfalls and small crunching sounds to your left and right but, in general, it's just you, the bike and the soft sounds of tires passing over the surface moving through this tunnel of light. Night riding makes an old trail new again and heightens your senses. The headlight(s) make everything stand out in stark 3-D with sharp shadows behind every rock, branch and leaf. Unless you are gravel or road biking, night riding slows you down just a bit, giving your brain time to process what you are seeing and feeling and giving you a chance to let yourself focus on what you are currently doing, while allowing you to relax and forget the rigors of the day.

One particularly good night ride route is to ride the Land of Pioneers Trail and visit the abandoned LOP cabins, circa 1890. It doesn't matter if you believe in ghosts or not, these cabins take on an entirely different vibe at night and add a bit of a spooky thrill to the ride! I wouldn't suggest riding brand new trails at night-- make sure you have at least some day-ride experience on the trail so that you know what you are getting into. If you are taking dogs along, be especially aware of their location by using lighted collars or bells. It's easy to forget that dogs don't have headlights and although they have good night vision, on a particularly dark night, they will have trouble seeing the trail and are more prone to getting lost or distracted by night-time sounds.

If you plan on night riding while mountain biking, you will want to go out prepared -- nobody wants to end up hiking out of a trail in the dark! You will want at least two lights -- and preferably a spare. You will want a helmet-mounted light to see where you are going to be and to see what it is that's making those mystery noises in the bushes. The Bontrager Blaze helmet comes with a great magnetic light mount or you can use strap-on helmet mounts. You will want a bar-mounted light to see where you currently are, preferably at least 1000 lumens.

Bontrager Ion lights are our favorite and are USB rechargeable. It goes without saying -- but I'll say it anyway -- you need to make sure all your lights are fully charged before you get started.

It's preferable that you travel in groups and keep talking or making noise at night but, if you are alone, be sure you attach a bear bell or some other noise-making device to your bars. Nobody wants to sneak up on and startle a large nocturnal predator but, just in case, carrying a canister of bear spray as a defense is a great idea. If you are traveling in a group, be sure to respect your

companions and be aware of where your helmet light beam is facing. When you stop to chat, dim or lower the beam so you don't temporarily blind others and/or reduce their night vision capability once back on the trail.

If you plan on night riding while road or gravel bike riding, you will really only need to have a handlebar-mounted headlight and a taillight since you will be traveling in relatively straight paths. Use a taillight with a random pattern strobe flash for best visibility towards drivers. Follow the rules of the road and dim your light or lower the beam when approaching an oncoming vehicle. It might seem unnecessary but a 1000+ lumen light can blind an oncoming driver and endanger both of you.

Night riding is awesome and gives you a new perspective on your trail, your riding capabilities and your connection with your natural surroundings. Try night riding on dark moonless nights for the full light-tunnel experience and try a moonlit night ride to get a feel of how it must have felt to be living before the time of electricity. Make sure you let a loved one know where you are headed and be smart, be prepared and be ready to become addicted to getting out at night.