

Your First Gravel Ride

Roads are optional — here is how to ride them anyway

Gravel cycling is road cycling on unpaved surfaces — dirt roads, fire roads, double-track. The bike is the same, the mindset shifts. This guide covers setup, pacing, and not getting stranded 40 miles from your car.

Tire and bike setup

- Minimum tire width for gravel: 35c. Most riders use 40-50c for mixed surfaces.
- Tubeless setup is worth the hassle — sealant stops most small punctures automatically.
- Lower tire pressure on dirt: 28-35 PSI for most rider weights (vs 80-100 PSI on road).
- A flare on the handlebars (the Shimano GRX style) gives control on loose surfaces.

Pacing and nutrition

- Gravel is slower than road — add 20-30% more time for the same distance.
- Eat 200-250 calories per hour after the first hour. Gravel rides go long.
- Carry more water than you think. Water sources on gravel are unreliable.
- A 4-hour gravel ride equals a 3-hour road ride in effort — plan accordingly.

Navigation and safety

- Download your route to a GPS device before you leave — cell service disappears on gravel.
- Always tell someone your route and expected return time.
- Carry: CO2 or pump, 2 tubes, tire plug kit, multitool, emergency food, first aid basics.

Insider glossary

Double-track — Two dirt tire tracks with grass in the middle — classic gravel terrain.

Hike-a-bike — When the trail is too steep or technical to ride — you walk the bike.

Tubeless — A tire setup that runs without an inner tube, using sealant to stop small punctures.

Flare — The outward sweep of gravel handlebars that improves control on technical terrain.

Starter checklist

- Gravel-specific tires (35c+)
- Tubeless setup or spare tubes

- GPS device with route loaded
- 35mm saddlebag with tools
- 2+ water bottles or a hydration pack
- Emergency snacks for unexpected miles

Roads Are Optional — gravel cycling tee at l5d0.com/shop/gravel-cycling/