



BIKEPACKING EVENT IN THE LAND WITHOUT SHADOWS

ADVENTURE MANUAL

GRAVEL BIRDS ULTRACYCLING 2026

APRIL 2026 – VERSION 1.0 ENGLISH



- GRAVEL BIRDS ULTRACYCLING -

'Gravel Birds Ultracycling' is a bikepacking and adventure-cycling challenge in the land without shadows: Alentejo, Portugal.

Gravel Birds XL is the new route and the longest loop of the event with 1.000 kms, adding historical and sociocultural diversity to the experience. **Gravel Birds Classic** is a hilly challenge with 750 kms across the remote inland areas of Baixo Alentejo, including the Guadiana Valley, and the majestic Atlantic coast. **L'Abetarda** explores, along its approximately 350 kms, the inland and central areas of Baixo Alentejo. The departure and finish of all three routes will be in Castro Verde.

WELCOME SOCIAL MEET

Thursday May 07th | Evening

WARM UP SOCIAL RIDE

Friday May 08th | Morning

ACCREDITATION

Friday May 08th | From 14:00

BRIEFING (mandatory)

Friday May 08th | 19:00-20:00

WELCOME DINNER

Friday May 08th | 20:00

START & TIME LIMIT

Saturday May 09th | 08:30

Friday May 15th | 20:30

MANIFESTO

'Gravel Birds Ultracycling' was designed to be much more than just an off-road bikepacking experience. It is a journey through a vast and remote territory, which remains genuine and resistant to the passage of time.

In addition to the set route(s) that guides you on this journey, this 'Manifesto' summarizes our values and the seven principles you must follow. If necessary, we will take decisions that are not foreseen in the 'Manifesto', with the aim of ensuring equality of circumstances, as possible, among the participants.

Gravel Birds is an inclusive event. We are committed with gender equality values. Gravel Birds is for all. Doesn't matter your pace.

#1 | RESPECT NATURE & LEAVE NO TRACE

Leave no trace. The territory of Alentejo is a deeply humanized landscape, but one that has evolved over time in a delicate dynamic balance with nature. Despite the human presence, the cork oak forests, the pastures, the enclosed valleys and the shoreline are ecosystems with an incredible biodiversity, but which depend a lot on us. Observe and absorb the landscape, but never leave litter or cause any disturbance around you.

#2 | RESPECT THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES

We are a community who wants to build a positive legacy. The way you behave will shape how society and institutions will look to ultracycling and long-distance cyclists.

#3 | RESPECT THE TRAFFIC RULES

The event takes place in open roads used by motor vehicles. Strick compliance with traffic regulations is essential.

#4 | RIDE THE ROUTE, RIDE SAFE & ENJOY

The route was designed to tell a story across the landscape and you are the main actor. Trust the script and let yourself go. You can leave the route temporarily (for accommodation, resupplying, tourism, etc.), but then return in the same exact point. The GPS live tracking shows your geographical position on the route and your tracker should always be on.

#5 | NO THIRD-PARTY SUPPORT

This is about your personal experience and challenging your own. It is not allowed help from your family, friends, coaches and teams with food, accommodation or mechanical support. You should only use the commercial services. If you have a mechanical problem you should solve it by your own or using the commercial mechanical services available. The self-supported approach recreates the purity of the bikepacking experience and ensure a level playing field for all participants. Riders in the touring category can help each other. Each pair is viewed as a team.

#6 | NO DRAFTING

You cannot follow other participants, cyclists or vehicles for aerodynamical advantages.

#7 | USE YOUR OWN ENERGY

E-bikes and illegal doping aren't allowed

Deepening the Manifesto

- The routes cross environmentally sensitive areas, which is why 'Respect nature and leave no trace' is intentionally the very first point of the MANIFESTO.
- The name of the event – Gravel Birds Ultracycling – is meant to emphasize the environmental dimension as a core aspect of our mission. We limit the number of entries precisely to ensure a balanced relationship between the number of participants and the territory.
- We will not tolerate any behavior that undermines this fundamental principle or threatens the legacy the event seeks to uphold.
- To prevent accidental littering, we strongly recommend a bikepacking setup that includes an easily accessible compartment specifically for waste disposal.
- The event takes place on open roads used by motor vehicles. Therefore, strict compliance with traffic regulations is essential, especially the prohibition of running red lights – including speed-regulating traffic lights.
- It is important that friends and family tracking a participant's progress are also familiar with the tracker system and the Follow My Challenge (FMC) online platform (information about trackers and tracking system on FMC is website).
- Trackers may occasionally experience signal loss, especially in more remote sections of the routes, especially in Vale do Guadiana and Serra do Caldeirão (the eastern and southern parts of the routes).
- The self-supported includes the following situations:
 - Throughout the entire route and participation, riders - including in touring category - may not receive any form of external and non-commercial assistance (from friends, family, coaches, or sports teams), including with food, mechanical support, transport of gear or luggage, and accommodation.
 - Regarding accommodation, participants may not sleep in any type of private (non-commercial) accommodation: own, family and friends.
 - Support among participants is allowed for all riders in the L'Abetarda route and in the touring category. Gravel Birds Classic and XL routes: in pair category a teammate can support the other.
 - Obviously, the self-supported approach does not apply in situations where the participant's physical integrity or safety is at risk.
- Drafting is only allowed between teammates (pair category). In the touring category participants are allowed to ride side by side and in small groups (without drafting).

SAFETY

PERSONAL INSURANCE

Respecting the Portuguese law for amateur events, the organization assures personal insurance for accidents (expenses for treatment, disability and death) between May 09th and May 15th. We strongly recommend all riders to also have their own personal insurance covering civil liability and repatriation in case of severe physical injuries or death (foreign riders). We want to make clear that - from the organization perspective - 'Gravel Birds Ultracycling' is not a race or competition. It's simultaneously a personal challenge and a collective cycling adventure. An opportunity to face your own physical and emotional limits while other adventurers are doing the same. Individually, in community. We won't provide any kind of cash or prizes and we will collect and publish riders' results and times only for information and recreation purposes.

MANDATORY ITEMS

- Helmet;
- Front and rear lights;
- Backup lights;
- Reflective vest and;
- Emergency insulated blanket.

ACCREDITATION/BRIEFING (MANDATORY)

We won't allow the participation of any rider without mandatory items (mentioned above). In the briefing session, we will check together the manifesto and share last hour information.

SCENARIOS

IF YOU HAVE A MEDICAL EMERGENCY

Call always first the medical emergency: 112 phone number. Then, if possible, inform the Event Director via phone call or message.

IF YOU HAVE A MECANICAL PROBLEM

Try to solve it by yourself. If you can't fix the problem, go to a bike shop (or similar commercial services) by your own or using public transportation (taxi, bus, train). Then return to the exactly same point where you left the route. We remember that in self-supported ultracycling your mechanical knowledge and skills are as important as cycling performance.

IF YOU FACE A SITUATION THAT DOESN'T ALLOW ME TO FOLLOW THE ROUTE

The route was recognized several times, but it is impossible to control and predict what happens in hundreds of off-road kilometers. If you face a closed road/trail or land owners that don't allow you to follow the route, contact the Event Director. If the detour means just a few hundred meters of adjustment, find - by your own - the shorter way to back to the original route.

IF YOU DECIDE TO ABANDON

First, don't take important decisions during bad moments. A long journey has highs and lows. If you're certain about your decision, inform the Event Director and return to Castro Verde (or to one of the Check Points) by your own and return the GPS tracker to our staff.

LOGISTICS

TRAVEL TO CASTRO VERDE

The closest airports are in Lisbon and Faro. From both cities you can travel by train to Funcheira - the nearest train station to Castro Verde (30 km away). You should travel in an 'IC Service' train which allows you the transportation of your bicycle without disassemble it. The number of bicycles allowed per train and carriage is very limited, so it is advisable to buy the tickets in advance online (www.cp.pt). Do not forget to add the bicycle transportation option on the ticket purchase form.

CAMPING IN CASTRO VERDE

Thankfully to our partnership with the Municipality of Castro Verde, participants will have free access to the Castro Verde Campsite for camping/tent use and showers/bathrooms. The offer is valid for participant plus one companion (between 7th and 16th of May). Just need to register your name at the entrance.

UNNECESSARY BELONGINGS

It will be possible to store - at the Castro Verde Campsite - a bag or a cycling bag/box with unnecessary belongings for your journey. We will receive it during the accreditation (before the briefing session). If you are staying overnight at the Campsite, we are available to receive your belongings at 8AM. We won't take items of value (e.g. car/house keys, computers, cell phones, cash, etc.). We won't be responsible for the loss of valuable items.

RECOMMENDATION

ACCOMMODATION ALONG THE ROUTE

We don't recommend prior reservation of accommodation located along the route. Unpredictability is ultracycling middle name. Prior reservation of accommodation is linked to the major cause of drops out during the event. There are several villages with old public wash houses ('lavadouros') that, with the help of a bivouac bag and tiredness, it brings the experience closer to a nice hotel room.

WEATHER AND TEMPERATURES

Be prepared for cool nights that can easily reach 5°C. The probability of heavy rain is relatively low, but you should be prepared for all scenarios. The probability of high temperatures is high, eventually reaching 40°C.

WATER FOUNTAINS

We don't recommend you to drink water from fountains, namely with the info: 'Not Controlled Water' ('Água Não Controlada'). You will pass by several villages with 'cafés' and bathrooms. We recommend you to carry large bottles and a 'camelbak'. It's generally safe to drink tap water, but it's always a good idea to double-check by asking locals.

TYRES AND BIKE

Above 40 mm will be our recommendation, but it also depends of the profile/preferences of each rider. The route was designed especially for gravel bikes, but MTB are also welcomed.

COMMUNICATION

CONTACTS

BETWEEN RIDERS

The WhatsApp Community/'GB'26 Riders Group' is already available. The link to access the community/group is available on the media page of the Gravel Birds website. You may click in the available link to join the WhatsApp channels. Don't wait for the organization to add you. The group is exclusively for the riders and moderation is ensured by the participants, also following a self-supported approach. Please, remember that written communication can sometimes lead to misunderstandings. Organization are keeping an eye on the group to be aware of which are the hot topics.

FROM ORGANIZATION TO RIDERS

Organization will simultaneously use two communications channels with participants before and during the event: (1) the email via gravelbirds@ultracycling.cc and (2) the announcements/comunicados group of the Gravel Birds 2026 WhatsApp Community. This means that even if you aren't in the WhatsApp Community, you will receive all official information. Organization is the only reliable source for sharing official information.

FROM RIDERS TO ORGANIZATION

Before the event, use exclusively our official email: gravelbirds@ultracycling.cc. During the event use exclusively the phone contact of the Event Director - which will be shared in the briefing session. Please, don't use Instagram messages to communicate with us.

KEY BIKE SHOPS

- [OFICINA 35](#)
+351 21 138 2735
Bike shop in Lisbon specialized in bikepacking and long-distance cycling, our local partners and friends, available to store bike bags and boxes of Gravel Birds' riders.
- [BIKE ZONE CASTRO VERDE](#)
+351 962 647 710
Bike shop in Castro Verde that will be on standby to help riders with last-minute bike problems before the departure day.
- [N2 BIKE](#)
+351 969 994 066
Bike shop in Castro Verde that will be on standby to help riders with last-minute bike problems before the departure day.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- GENERAL EMERGENCY
112
Ambulance and Fire Services, available 24 hours/7 days a week.
- GNR (NATIONAL REPUBLICAN GUARD)
+351 213 217 00
Security and correspondent to the Police in the territory of the route.
- SNS 24
+351 808 24 24 24
Medical advice and health triage line.

THE ROUTE(S)

The routes of Gravel Birds Ultracycling cross some of the most remote, isolated, and challenging territories in Portugal and Southwestern Europe. Gravel Birds is not a gravel race or an ultramarathon, including L'Abetarda route. The routes are designed for a true bikepacking and adventure cycling experience. Gravel Birds is much more than a long-distance ride – it is an environmental and sociocultural journey, deeply connected with the landscapes, traditions, and people of Alentejo.

L'ABETARDA

L'Abetarda is the smaller and more accessible version, forming a central loop in Baixo Alentejo and sharing much of its course with the larger routes. L'Abetarda avoids the harshness of the Guadiana Valley, but challenges riders in the rugged terrain of the Serra do Caldeirão. L'Abetarda has approximately 350 kilometers, an elevation gain of 5,000 meters and is 65% off-road. Designed as an introduction to bikepacking and a more relaxed adventure. Touring is the only category available – meaning all riders can help each other and ride together (side by side, not drafting).

L'Abetarda	distance (km)	
	from departure	to the end
CP4 Santa Clara a Nova	185	151
Almodôvar	201	135
Ourique	233	103
Aljustrel	274	562
(arrival) Castro Verde	336	0



GRAVEL BIRDS CLASSIC

Gravel Birds Classic is our traditional route, and the longest loop between 2022 and 2025 editions. The Classic 750 has played a pioneering role in the development of the bikepacking and gravel scene in Portugal: it was both the first established off-road bikepacking route and the backbone of the first off-road ultracycling event in the country. Gravel Birds Classic has around 750 kilometers and is 75% off-road. Route planning apps indicate an elevation gain of 8,000 meters of climbing, but according to the GPS riders' devices you can expect, at least, 11,000 meters of climbing. The Classic remains a landmark ride, combining endless gravel roads with cultural and natural diversity.

Gravel Birds Classic	distance (km)	
	from departure	to the end
Beja	93	663
Serpa	125	631
CP2 Pomarão	195	561
Mértola	214	542
Odemira	389	367
CP3 Zambujeira do Mar	423	333
CP4 Santa Clara a Nova	605	151
Almodôvar	621	135
Ourique	653	103
Aljustrel	694	62
(arrival) Castro Verde	756	0



GRAVEL BIRDS XL

Gravel Birds XL is the new route and the longest loop of the event. It was designed to deliver a more diverse journey and a higher level of challenge. It follows the Classic route until Beja, then heads north to reach Évora, while also exploring the landscapes around Alqueva, the largest artificial lake in Western Europe. Gravel Birds XL has around 1,000 kilometers and is 70% off-road.

Route planning apps register 11,500 meters of climbing, but we believe that GPS riders' devices will reach 15,000 meters of elevation gain. The XL promises an epic bikepacking odyssey, blending endless gravel, historical towns, and wild nature in a route made for those who want to push their limits.

Gravel Birds XL	distance (km)	
	from departure	to the end
Beja	93	906
Cuba	114	885
Viana do Alentejo	149	850
Reguengos de Monsaraz	192	807
CP1 Monsaraz	235	764
Moura	257	678
Serpa	368	631
CP2 Pomarão	438	561
Mértola	457	542
Odemira	632	367
CP3 Zambujeira do Mar	666	333
CP4 Santa Clara a Nova	848	151
Almodôvar	864	135
Ourique	896	103
Aljustrel	937	62
(arrival) Castro Verde	999	0

ROUTE(S) INFORMATION

SURFACE TYPE

The vast majority of the routes runs along unpaved rural roads. Its surface is mostly hard packed dirt and smooth gravel (Grade 2 and 3) allowing a fast pace. However, there are also some large sections with a more irregular surface (Grade 4 and 5), being recommended to use more versatile tires (above 40 mm will be our recommendation). Asphalt sections are mainly on secondary roads and with reduced traffic, with only one or two crossings on roads with significant car traffic. At one point or another, you will need to hike-a-bike. Along the coastline, between Malhão beach and Pessegueiro island, the path is on loose sand and for sure you'll need to push your bike.

VILLAGES AND LOCAL SERVICES

The routes cross many villages/small towns, but many of them have so few people that there aren't any commercial services for supplies. In larger towns you can find all your basic needs, so it's really important that each person does its own planning, as there are some remote areas without any support. There are only a few specialized bike shops along the way, so be prepared to solve most situations on your own.

REMOTE AREAS AND RESUPPLYING

The routes do not cross deserts or inhospitable mountains, but on several occasions, you will wonder if you are still riding in Portugal, especially on Gravel Birds Classic and Gravel Birds XL where you will have long hours riding far from civilization. At several points along the route, but in these more remote areas in particular, the mobile communications network is scarce or non-existent. You should previously study the route. The KMZ and GPX files of the route, as well as the 'Ride With GPS' maps, provide you important information about the location of the main resupply spots along the routes. Do your own research as well.

FENCES, GATES AND PRIVATE PROPERTY

All paths were previously validated and were considered of free passage, but often these paths run on private property. Along the route there will be gates or fence doors that may be closed. Whenever a door is closed, you must open it, pass through and close it again. These doors are used for cattle management and should always be left as they were.

RISK MANAGEMENT

In the design of the routes, we tried to reduce hazardous situations, but risk is also a part of the adventure. Riders should always evaluate any situation in order to reduce the risk. In Alentejo many small

rivers are often dry for most of the year, but with a highly variable flow during the rainy season. All water line crossings are crossing points used by local populations throughout the year, even when there is some flow, but the safety conditions for the crossing must be evaluated on site by each rider. Guard dogs, which protect livestock and farms, are quite territorial and should not be provoked. If it is not possible to keep the distance to keep on route, it is best to remain calm, not show aggression and go slowly or even dismount from the bicycle. Please be aware of wild boars, especially on downhill slopes and in surfaces more susceptible to higher speed. The Iberian Lynx is not a dangerous/aggressive animal (small cat type).

ACCOMMODATION AND BIVOUAC

Along the routes, accommodation availability will be quite variable. In larger towns (Beja, Évora and Mértola) or along the coastline it is relatively easy to find accommodation, but on the inland Alentejo it may not be easy to find a place. If your option is to bivouac, know that in many small villages you can find old public laundry washrooms (mostly deactivated) that offer perfect conditions to sleep for a few hours: clean floor, a roof and (with luck) a faucet still with running water. In the KML route files and in the 'Ride With GPS' maps you can check the exact location of a few dozen spots of these wonderful "5-star hotel rooms" along the route.



CHECKPOINTS

Rider control along the route is done through the GPS trackers, but additionally there are several Check Points (CP) along the route. To be considered a “finisher”, each participant must arrive at each CP before the respective time barrier and stamp his brevet card. It is possible to rest and sleep, using your own bivouac, in CP2 Pomarão, CP3 Zambujeira do Mar, CP4 Santa Clara a Nova and in Castro Verde (in the campsite and only with your tent or appropriate vehicle).

CHECK POINT	ROUTE(S)	DAY LIMIT	TIME LIMIT
START CASTRO VERDE	L'A350 / GB'750 / GB'XL	MAY 09	SATURDAY 08:30
CP1 MONSARAZ	GB'XL	MAY 10	SUNDAY 20:30
CP2 POMARÃO	GB'750 / GB'XL	MAY 11	MONDAY 20:30
CP3 ZAMBUJEIRA DO MAR	GB'750 / GB'XL	MAY 13	WEDNESDAY 20:30
CP4 SANTA CLARA A NOVA	L'A350 / GB'750 / GB'XL	MAY 14	THURSDAY 20:30
FINISH CASTRO VERDE	L'A350 / GB'750 / GB'XL	MAY 15	FRIDAY 20:30

THE LANDSCAPE AS STORYTELLING AND THE BIRDS OF CASTRO VERDE

The routes in Gravel Birds weren't designed at random: the paths chosen tell a story and many other stories within. And the difficulties along the route are also a part of this narrative, recreating the hardships of the territory itself, just as its people have experienced them since immemorial times. The sequence of landscapes, the difficulties, the hard and the perfect gravel roads, the melancholy and solitude, the towns and cities, the remote and almost deserted villages, the ruins of the past, the pastures, the cork oak forests, the mountains, the beaches and sea cliffs, the touristic and fishing villages: all this tells the story of Alentejo, a territory that is greater than the sum of its parts.

The Castro Verde Biosphere Reserve (UNESCO) holds the most important cereal steppe area of Portugal, which is one of the most representative of the Iberian Peninsula. This ecosystem is one of the most threatened rural landscapes of the Mediterranean region and is recognized internationally for its importance for several bird species, like the Great Bustard, the Lesser Kestrel, the Little Bustard, the Black-bellied Sandgrouse or the Montagu's Harrier. Riding the Gravel Birds routes you will likely see many of these endangered birds, so always keep your distance, enjoy the moment and avoid any disturbance.



powered by **ACAN**

thanks to our partners:

