



**HEADING
SOUTHWEST**

ADVENTURE MANUAL

HEADING SOUTHWEST 2026

MAY 2026 . VERSION ONE - ENGLISH



- HEADING SOUTHWEST 2026 -

'Heading SouthWest' is an on-road ultracycling and bikepacking event across Portugal in one-stage. The seek for the essence of cycling.

In 2026, the bikepackers will face the harshness but beautiful landscapes of the inland regions of central and northern of Portugal. The HSW'1000 route has approximately 1.000 kilometers and 19.000 meters of climbing. The HSW'500 route has approximately 500 kilometers and 10.000 meters of climbing.

The basecamp – briefing and departure/finish point – of the fifth edition will be in Guarda, the Portuguese city located at the highest altitude.

ACCREDITATION & BRIEFING*

Saturday June 06th | 18:00-19:00

WALKING DINNER*

Saturday June 06th | 19:00-20:00

GRAND DÉPART

Sunday June 07th | 08:00

FINISH & TIME LIMIT

Friday June 12th | 23:59

***ACCREDITATION/BRIEFING/DINNER**
GIN GIBRE (Bar next to the departure point)
Praça Luís de Camões, Guarda

MANIFESTO

Heading SouthWest is an adventure-cycling and bikepacking experience. The seek for the true essence of cycling. We believe that the self-supported approach fits perfectly with the adventure-cycling spirit. This isn't about how far you can go, but how deep is your experience. Instead of rules, we have a 'Manifesto': an agreement among all riders.

If necessary, the organization will take decisions that are not foreseen in the 'Manifesto', with the aim of ensuring the common good, as well as equality of circumstances among the participants.

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

1 | RESPECT THE LOCAL TRAFFIC RULES, COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT:

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.

2 | RIDE THE ROUTE, RIDE SAFE & ENJOY:

The route was designed to tell a story across the route/landscapes and you are the main actor. Trust the script and let yourself go. You can leave the route temporarily (for water, food, WC, accommodation, 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.

3 | NO THIRD-PARTY SUPPORT:

This is about your personal experience and challenging your own. It isn't 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.

4 | NO DRAFTING:

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

5 | USE YOUR OWN ENERGY:

E-bikes and illegal doping aren't allowed

Self-supported Ultracycling events only work with integrity and a relationship of trust between organization and participants, as well as among all riders.

This "rules" are shared by hundreds of events and races around the world, even without the existence of an international federation. We were inspired by events such as 'The Transcontinental'.

The organization and crew will be under high pressure before and during the event. We will give our best. Good vibes are very welcome.

DEEPENING THE MANIFESTO

- The routes cross environmentally sensitive areas and rural areas, which is why 'Respect the local traffic rules, communities and environment' is intentionally the very first point of the MANIFESTO.
- 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 in remote territories and mountain areas.
- 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. Participants are allowed to sleep in commercial private accommodation (Booking, Airbnb, etc.).
 - Acceptance of spontaneous help from locals is allowed in the provision of water. Isn't allowed any other type of provision/help (including bike parts).
 - Support among participants is allowed if you are: (1) a rider in HSW'500 route, (2) a rider in the touring category, (3) a pair – both riders work as a team and support between each other is allowed.
 - 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 or in small groups.

SAFETY

PERSONAL INSURANCE

Respecting the Portuguese law for amateur events, the organization assures personal insurance for accidents (expenses for treatment, disability and death) between June 07th and June 12th. 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 - 'Heading SouthWest' 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 kilometers. If you face a closed road 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

Inform the Event Director and return to Guarda by your own (or to one of the physical Check Points). You should be logistical prepared for this scenario, including to hike a bike for several kilometers. Don't forget to return the GPS tracker to our staff.

LOGISTICS

TRAVEL TO GUARDA

The two closest airports to Guarda are located in Lisbon and Porto. You should travel in 'IC Service' trains (InterCity Train) which allows you the transportation of your bicycle without dismount it. The number of bicycles allowed per train/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. You can reach Guarda using the national railway network from either Lisbon or Porto. We will also encourage carpooling among participants.

IN GUARDA

The accreditation, briefing session, departure and arrival point will be close to Guarda Cathedral ('Sé da Guarda'), located near the highest point in the city (around 1.030 meters). The lower altitude areas of the city (including the train station) are located at around 800 meters. Avoid booking accommodation in the lower altitude areas of the city.

BAG AND BIKE BOX STORAGE

It will be possible to store your belongings: a bag or/and a cycling bag/box with unnecessary belongings for your journey. We will receive it during the accreditation. We will not take items of value (e.g. car/house keys, computers, cell phones, cash, etc.). We will not be responsible for the loss of valuable items. At the departure we will only accept small bags. We will not accept belongings along the route.

RECOMMENDATION

ACCOMMODATION ALONG THE ROUTE

We don't recommend prior reservation of accommodation located along the route. Unpredictability is ultracycling middle name. There are several villages/towns with local accommodation, hostels, hotels. Route studying is very important in self-supported ultracycling and you should be aware of the accommodation options along the route.

TEMPERATURES AND WATER FOUNTAINS

The probability of high temperatures is significant (around 40°C), but be prepared for cool nights (around 5°C). 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/towns with 'cafés' and bathrooms. We recommend you to carry large bottles and a 'camelbak'. It's generally safe to drink tap water, but you should ask locals for more info.

TYRES AND BIKE

We recommend 28 mm or above, but it also depends of the preferences of each rider (32 mm is a growing option thinking about comfort). Make sure your tires are good. You will ride in just a few days what you eventually ride in a month. The route was designed for road bikes, but gravel bikes are also welcomed.

DECISION TO ABANDON

A long journey has highs and lows. Don't take important decisions during bad moments.

THE ROUTE

In the mid-XX century, the geographer Orlando Ribeiro developed the first in-depth study on territorial conditions and society in mainland Portugal. He identified two opposite realities in terms of geomorphology, climate and social organization. In the North the Oceanic Climate prevails and in the South the Mediterranean/Semi-Desert Climate. These conditions and the different geological elements have shaped - over time - the diversity of cultural heritage that remains today. The Central System Mountain Range and the Tagus river divide the two realities. The name of Orlando Ribeiro's masterpiece is precisely: 'Portugal, the Mediterranean and the Atlantic'.

In 2026, 'Heading SouthWest' route will be focus on the Center and North of Portugal, Orlando Ribeiro's 'Atlantic' side of Portugal. The North is also known by people's strong sense of identity and delicious food. Heading SouthWest 2026 routes are almost 100% on tarmac. However, be prepared for sterrato sectors (one sector with 2 km in total in HSW'500 and three sectors with 5 km in total in HSW'1000) and for several cobblestones sectors. Cobbles are typically present in the villages and central areas of the cities of North of Portugal. You will also cycle on roads with damaged asphalt. 28mm tyres are enough to face these adversities, but 32mm tyres will definitely increase your comfort and confidence.

HSW'1000 - Data (Komoot) by Sectors and Check Points (CP) Cut Off.

SECTIONS	KILOMETERS	D+ METERS	CP CUT OFF DAY	CP CUT OFF TIME
S1 GUARDA – CASTELO RODRIGO	203	3.090	Monday 08	20H00M
S2 CAST. RODRIGO – RIO DE ONOR	247	4.240	Tuesday 09	23H59M
S3 RIO DE ONOR – MEDA	350	7.100	Thursday 11	12H00M
S4 MEDA - GUARDA	195	4.280	Friday 12	23H59M
HEADING SOUTHWEST 1000	995	18.720	Friday 12	23H59M

According to Komoot, the HSW'1000 route has 995 kilometers and almost 19.000 meters of elevation gain and the HSW'500 has 507 kilometers and almost 10.000 meters of climbing. The three/four sections should not be seen as proposals for daily stages. We strongly recommend you to study the route and build your own plan according to your level/capacities. Concerning elevation gain, you should be aware that the measurement provided by GPS Cycling Computers usually overestimates the field terrain reality

comparing with route planning apps. So, according to your perception of elevation gain, you should be aware that the route could be harder than what you could expect.

HSW'500 - Data (Komoot) by Sectors and Check Points (CP) Cut Off.

SECTIONS	KILOMETERS	D+ METERS	CP CUT OFF DAY	CP CUT OFF TIME
S1 GUARDA – CASTELO RODRIGO	203	3.090	Monday 08	20H00M
S2 CASTELO RODRIGO – MEDA	111	2.260	Thursday 11	23H59M
S3 MEDA - GUARDA	195	4.280	Friday 12	23H59M
HEADING SOUTHWEST 500	509	9.630	Friday 12	23H59M

Attached, in the HSW Website Media Page - <https://www.headingsouthwest.cc/media> - you will find the Roadbooks of the sections with key information about the hardest climbs, main towns and villages for resupplying, as well as the most dangerous locations/segments on the route that you should be aware.

CHECK POINTS

Departure Guarda // All Routes // with HSW CREW // Sé da Guarda

CP1 Castelo Rodrigo // All Routes // with HSW CREW

Estacionamento e Parque de Autocaravanas do Castelo

CP2 Rio de Onor // HSW'1000 // with HSW CREW

Day: Café do Parque de Campismo // Night: Ponte Romana

CP3 Meda // All Routes // NO HSW CREW

Day: Café-Restaurante 'Pito na Brasa' // Night: Stamp at the finish point

Finish Guarda // All Routes // with HSW CREW // Sé da Guarda



In case of questions or need of communication, contact us, exclusively:

Before the Departure

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During Participation/Along the Route

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