

Tour de France 2013- Planning for the Alps

This is not going to be an easy year following the Tour de France. In fact, it may be the toughest-yet for me, due to the unexpected near-total cessation of train service in the Alps this year (due to a massive modernization project). The original plan, which has worked out very well for a number of years, was to work out of a single city for as long as possible, getting close to the nearby stages using the train when they weren't close enough to ride to. So with that in mind, I set up reservations in Avignon (to see the Ventoux stage, which simply can't be missed despite being out of the way and accessible only by car) and Grenoble, from which all of the Alps are, theoretically, accessible.

Theoretically. We should have been able to take trains to places reasonably close to each of the stages, but that plan's now shot. Here's what's in store for the Alps-

This is the most-heavily-affected stage. It's a two hour drive, in good traffic, from Grenoble to Chorges, and on the day of the TdF, could be a whole lot longer. In all likelihood it could be a totally-jammed road, with time trials being very popular and there being so few roads in the area.

Time Trial, Wednesday, July 17th. The plan will be to drive from Grenoble to Veynes, about 100k and supposedly 90 minutes over very twisty roads. This is the toughest stage to catch, because there are so few roads into the area and it carries huge interest because it could determine the final winner of the TdF. It's not very long, just 21 miles or so, but all of it up & down.

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The beauty of driving to Veynes instead of Gap is that we'll be taking a route that virtually nobody else is. Traffic congestion should be minimal, and no problem parking at the Veynes train station.

From Veynes, we catch the 11am train to Embrun, arriving right at noon. We then try to intersect the course somewhere on one of the two main climbs, using local roads whose suitability is in question (but that's never stopped us before!). For the return we ride 30 miles back to the Veynes train station to pick up our car, since the last train out of Chorges (at the end of the time trial) leaves at 5:25pm, likely too early by half an hour or so.

Alpe d'Huez, Thursday, July 18th. Traffic isn't an option for this one, it's assured. There's only one route from civilization to the base of Alpe d'Huez, a narrow road that starts in Vizille, about 10 miles out of Grenoble, and climbs relatively-gradually for 20 more miles. It would be nice to ride from Grenoble to Alpe d'Huez, but that would preclude doing anything but going up & back. The route below has us parking about 2 miles short of Bourg d'Oison (the base of the mountain), riding further up the valley and then taking one of the amazing "balcony" roads that intersects the main climb just a bit up from the bottom. Then we ride to the top and descend down the back side, the Col de Serenne, and back to the car where we will be waiting in traffic... forever.

Col du Madeleine, Friday, July 19th. Drive from Grenoble to Chamousset and do the loop shown below-

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