

They closed the Lacets de Montvernier to the public. So how did we get these pictures?



Interesting almost-straight-down shot of the Lacets de Montvernier, taken by Kevin. Almost a helicopter shot. How did he do it?

This was definitely not a day that went as planned. All through the run-up to the Tour de France there was talk of the "Lacets de Montvernier" - first time ever used in the Tour de France, a real attention-getting piece of roadwork with 18 switchbacks squeezed into just 3.7 kilometers (not much over two miles). Lots of pretty pictures of this road. We figured yeah, have to be there!

But last night we learned that they were going to close the road completely to all but official vehicles. A part of the Tour de France off-limits to anyone but those watching on TV. Seriously? How rude! To be fair, the road is quite narrow so there really isn't much room for anyone but the riders. Yeah, well, whatever. We decided we'd drive to La Chambre at the foot of the Col du Gandon (a beast of a mountain which they'd be doing just prior to the Lacets), ride the 4 miles from there to the Lacets to see if it really was closed, and go with a Plan B if that was the case. Plan B was to do the Col du Gandon.

Well yes, the Lacets de Montvernier was closed. Too bad; it looked pretty amazing from below. So Kevin and I head back to the Col du Gandon. We get about 100 meters up and a Gendarme is telling everyone the road is closed. OK, so they've closed the road in town, that happens sometimes. I look at Google Maps and determine there's an alternate road that connects about a mile or two up. That ought to do the trick! Nope. Gendarme at that location won't let us pass either. Says the whole road is closed TO CYCLISTS. That doesn't sit well with me. It's OK for someone to walk (but not with a bike), it's ok for those who pay a zillion dollars to become an "invited guest" and fly through in cars (which is one of the reasons they want us cyclists off the road, I think?), but it's not OK for the hundreds, thousands even, of cyclists... nearly all of whom traveled significant distances and are spending a lot of money in France.

We don't give up easily. We looked for ways to get around the Gendarme, first by hiking across a field and through someone's back yard (fortunately they were friendly)... where we came across another Gendarme. Next we tried hiking down to the river to see if there would be a trail we could follow for a while before coming back to the road. Nope. You'd have to make your own with a machete. We even tried a route that had us hopping over electric fences. We were not to be denied!

Well this time we were denied. Kevin was annoyed, very annoyed, thinking my plan was bad, we got there too late etc. Maybe. No way would I have thought they'd have closed the road THAT early though! So I persuade him to ride back the way we came and see if perhaps we can approach the Lacets de Montvernier from another direction... the top... and see how far we can get.

Well it turns out that the Gendarmes on that part of the course were, for the most part, "tranquilo." We were told the roads would be open until 2pm, less than 3 hours before the race came through. Like old times! There'd still be no way to actually get out and see the race go up the Lacets, right? That, it turns out, is a matter of interpretation and perhaps common sense. After climbing up through the village of Montvernier where the friendly locals were having a big TdF party (which means pretty good food cheap), we rode to, well, the end of the road. As close as you could get to the Lacets, but you still couldn't see a thing. No matter, that's the way it goes, we'll still get to watch them emerge on top. That's when I overheard a conversation that, if you cross that field over there and turn

right where you see the gray car, there's a cliff you can view the climb from.



This has to be the craziest place I've ever taken pictures from. Or even been to! Even though our position was completely safe, it still seemed quite scary and some of the others up there were simply nuts.

Kevin wanted no part of it; he was tired and a bit cranky about not getting to ride the Glandon, so I scouted it out alone at first. What I saw was amazing. If you're willing to stand near the end of the earth, if you're willing to peer over a rock and look straight down 1200ft, there is this most-amazing place to watch the race go up the Lacets de Montvernier. Kevin came down with me and yes, this was an experience to be remembered for a very long time. No more than perhaps 20 people got to actually watch the race, in person, play out on that stretch of road... and we were one of those 20. Unlike some of the professional photographers (of which there were maybe 10, about half the population of "the rock"), Kevin and I had a safe place to take photos. Not comfortable, as we were perched on an uneven rock, but what worked in our favor is that the rock was oriented so we had to peer over it (so if we lost our footing, we can down on the "safe" side).

In the end, it was a pretty decent consolation for not being able to ride up the Glandon.



Overview of the climb



Bardet approaching the top.



Seemed like they were almost directly underneath us