

France, Travel Day, Day 1, Day 2



There's no good reason I should be showing this photo here. It's just a guy from the Tour de France Caravan, someone who throws little packaged sausages into the crowd, turning grown-ups into carless children as they risk life & limb for something of little value. I blame it on the camera. For some reason, it chose to focus more-sharply on this guy than any other picture I took. There must be a reason.

Travel Day-

Nothing not expected; a very, very long day that starts 36 hours before it ends. Basically you're creating a day that's 36 hours long instead of 34. No real issues; United got us here close to on-time, however, what should have been an extremely-conservative 4 hours to get from CDG to the Montparnasse train station in Paris? Not sure if it was road work or what, but it took the "direct" bus about two hours to make what should have been a one hour trip. Very, very thankful I didn't try to cut it closer; I'd normally think two hours would be OK for that transfer. The long (5 hour) train trip to Lourdes was uneventful, especially for Kevin, who managed to sleep on the plane and on the train. He should hire himself out as a professional sleeper!

No problem getting checked into our usual Lourdes hotel, right next door to the train station. Dinner? At the always-reliable and very close Pizza place just down the street. Entertainment provided by the huge (in France) soccer match between France and Allemagne (which they won, creating as much or more noise as would have been the case in the SF Bay Area had the Warriors won).

Day 1- Seeing the TdF stage on the Col d'Aspin

The original plan had been to take the 6:26am train for Lourdes to Lannemazan, riding from there up the valley and then up the Col d'Aspin. Getting in so late though, and having to spend quite a bit of time getting the bikes set up, I ditched the 5:45am alarm in favor of a much more reasonable 8am with plans to take the 10:26 train instead. This would be slightly risky, in terms of getting up the mountain in time before they shut down the roads. In the end it turned out to be a day-saving choice though, as, while adjusting his seat height waiting for the train, his seatpost clamp (the one holding the seatpost tight to the frame) broke!!! The bolt snapped in two, meaning he wouldn't have a seat to sit on. This happened at 10:02am. Fortunately I had one of my clear mental moments and did some quick calculations to determine that I could ride to the bike shop a mile away and hopefully get the part needed and return in time for the train.

Fortunately, the shop did have the part, they weren't mobbed either, so I managed to get back with about 6 minutes to spare. Inspired riding on my part, getting there and back as quickly as possible.

There was one other mishap; one of the rack fittings on my own Bike Friday had become stripped, so I had to load everything up into a backpack instead. On 90+ degree days, I prefer having it on a rack, not my back. You do what you gotta do.



Kevin is a man of many hats.

There turned out to be no issue at all with getting to the top of the mountain in time; I'd allowed for 3+ hours but in reality it took just 2 hours, 6 minutes... including a short period of time in which Kevin had to walk up the hill due to his back hurting.

We'll get race photos up one of these days. I had to do a bit of improvising for the camera, since, for reasons unknown, my camera decided it didn't want to talk to my main lens (70-200 F4 Canon L-Series, very nice lens that's known for reliability). Error message said the contacts probably needed cleaning, which I did, but no change.

The ride back from the Col d' Aspin was pretty fast; mostly downhill with a fair amount of tail wind. All but the section from the very bottom across to Lourdes, which is lumpy and cross-wind prone. I'm still looking for a way to get around that one section of road, a section required for hitting up any of the mountains to the east of us. Dinner? Yikes, that took a while. To find, and to get through the meal. 10:30pm by the time we were finished, which was NOT in the plan. I had lots of work I needed to get done, and starting out that late, with an early-morning ride the next day?

Day 1- Evening Internet disaster

This trip is not an opportunity to get away from work; Trek decided to have their big sale precisely the same days I'm gone, so there's a fair amount of stuff I need to get done to let customers know we're having a sale going on. Shouldn't have been a big deal, if dinner hadn't run so late, and if I'd not had issues connecting to the Internet. Knowing that hotel internet can be sketchy, I had a backup plan of using my phone's high-speed internet as a wi-fi hotspot (tethering, it's called) to my laptop. Well the hotel internet is just barely working, if that, and I discovered that tethering isn't an allowed use of the phone's French simcard. What should have taken just two hours ended up taking over 4; it was past 2am here in France when I finally got an email out to customers telling them about our sale, and I found myself so wound up about the issues I was having that sleep just wasn't coming to me. Kevin, of course, was sleeping like a log.

Day 2- I moved the alarm from 7am to 7:30 and, when it went off, explained to Kevin my ordeals and had him get the bikes and drink mix for the bottles going while I slept for just a little bit longer. We got out on the road a bit later than planned, but thankfully, not so late that we had closed-road issues like we have in the past on the Tourmalet. It was not an easy ride for me (an understatement); the last 16 kilometers of that nasty climb were getting to me, but I kept on going. Kevin was doing much better today than yesterday, and was getting a bit annoyed about having to wait up for me a few times. But I did make it, all the way to the insanely-crowded top section, where Kevin bought food and drinks, which, after forcing myself to eat, made me feel a whole lot better.

We descended about a kilometer from the top, to one of the better spots I think we've had for photos. Hopefully we'll have some good ones to show (at least a few of the racer who was doing wheelies through the corner we picked!). Nice ride back down the hill except for a flat front tire on Kevin's bike (didn't take too long to fix) and of course the crazy traffic. Picked up lunch at the bottom, prior to the long run into a headwind on the bike path that runs to Lourdes.

Now it's time to wake up Kevin and go find dinner again. At least no early wake up tomorrow; the Tour de France stage is extremely

remote so we have no way to get out to see it; we'll be doing something local.



Pinot leading up the Tourmalet, looking like his old self again, 3 minutes ahead of the main contenders. This didn't last; he faded and ended up off the back.



Best sunglasses seen on the Col d'Aspin belonged to one of the Caravan people.