

The rest of the story (final day at the 'Tour, \$500 taxi ride and getting home)



The SNCF TER train, our normal, infallible means of greatly extending our range in France. Infallible until today that is...

Up through Sunday morning, we'd had exceptional experiences with the local trains in France, using them to take us from wherever we were staying to a place from which we could easily/reasonably ride to see the race. We've done this for years; it's a great way to see a lot of the race, France itself even, without having to pack up and move all the time.

Sunday morning, no problem. Catch the Lyon to Culoz train, stash the bikes in the bike car, arrive in Culoz an hour later and go see the 'Tour!

Sunday evening, we race back from the race, hoping to catch the earliest-possible train to Culoz. That would be the 6:26 train. We made it, despite Kevin getting a flat on the way! Life seemed good. Until, somehow, 6:26 got mixed up with a 6:35 train that Kevin and I both are certain we saw on the digital display was the train going to Culoz. We looked at it several times, to verify which platform it was boarding (Platform A, the nearest). While waiting there was another train, likely about 6:26pm, that arrived and left at a far platform.

Normally, we check with a conductor to make sure this is the train to "x." Or the train will have something on the outside, saying it's going to "x." This particular train didn't have functioning messaging boards (the ones that tell you where the train is going, and what the intermediate stops are). We just got on it, not even considering it might not be the train to Lyon.

First indication all is not right with the world comes when some elderly woman is sitting across the bike section, tons of bags taking up all the available spots where bikes are normally hung. Another biker, a local, had more than a few words with her in French, but she wasn't budging. Well, whatever, only an hour ride holding our bikes, standing up.

The train goes through a tunnel. A longer tunnel than I remember. Then another tunnel. I only recall one tunnel on the way in. Maybe the train's taking a different route back. I start having some doubts and begin working my phone, trying to connect to the 'net so I can check the train schedules. Uh-uh. Not enough signal here. Hmm. First train station, different name than I recall. After leaving, I finally get a connection. For just a bit. Not enough to find out where the train we're on is going and, like I mentioned, the messaging board isn't working.

A stop or two later and I've figured out this train is not heading to Lyon; it's going the opposite direction, to Geneva (Google Maps made that pretty clear). I finally tell Kevin we've got to get off the train and figure out what to do, after first figuring out that it doesn't look like there are any trains going in the opposite direction that are going to get us back to Lyon.

It's a suburb of Geneva. Here's the weird thing. The official train schedule doesn't even show this as a through train. It's supposed to stop in Bellegarde and then you transfer to another train to continue to Geneva. This made it very confusing to figure out what was going on. Our stop, in a suburb on the far outskirts of Geneva, didn't show on the schedule. Valleiry.

I've found the actual schedule for the train we ended up on [here](#). It answers at least one question; this train originated in Lyon, so apparently what we were looking at was something telling us where the train was FROM, not where it was GOING.

Valleiry isn't much of a town. The station has no agents left, but a helpful security person let us know about the bus heading back to Culoz, as well as the last train. Obviously, we needed to retrace our tracks (literally). This was going to add time to our journey, which was an issue, since we had to take a train from Lyon the next morning at 5:50am to get home. Turns out it was a whole lot worse than that.

There were no trains or buses that could get us anywhere where we could catch a train back to Lyon that night. We were stuck in Valleiry, on a Sunday evening so no rental car places open, no way to get back. We only had our cycling clothes with us, Kevin didn't have his evening epilepsy meds... and besides, the only way to get home as planned required that we be in Lyon, packed and ready to go, for a 5:50am train to Paris. It was now 8pm. 150 miles from where we needed to be.

This is when you consider the unconsiderable. The costs and inconvenience of not getting back to Lyon, having to make different flight & train arrangements, was huge. And there was a taxi sitting at the station.

How much to Lyon? The guy looks slightly baffled. Says in half-English half-French that it's going to be expensive. I ask if he takes credit cards. He says yes but he doubts mine will work. I ask again how much, he looks it up, it's about 225 kilometers and runs 2 euros/kilometer. 450 Euros. About \$500. I say yes, he runs my credit card ahead of time (to make sure it works), and we're off.

Just over two hours later we're in Lyon, where we needed to be. You hear wild stories about expensive taxi rides, never thinking you'd be in a position to have to be quite so desperate. You usually think someone's just dumb. We had been dumb previously (taking the wrong train); at this point, we're desperate. But we get to the hotel in time to get things packed, grab a Kebob from a place open late near the train station, get about 4 hours sleep and get onto that 5:50am train (which I thought ridiculously-early when I booked it, and I was thinking maybe 6 hours sleep).



Arrival at Paris Airport (CDG) via TGV high-speed train from Lyon. Just 12 hours earlier it was very doubtful we'd be here at this moment.

8am we're off the train at CDG (Paris airport). Security and passport control are lengthy (no surprise, given all that's happened recently), spent less than an hour in the Star Alliance lounge, and board the 11am UA flight 986 back to Chicago and then, several hours later, the flight from Chicago to SFO. A very long (and a bit more stressful than planned) getting-home travel experience.

There was one pleasant surprise on the way though. Likely due to selling too many seats in economy (where we were sitting), the boarding passes given to Kevin and I were for seats 9K & 9J. In small print, it said "Business First". We'd gotten what's called an

op-up (operational upgrade) into a much nicer seat with the possibility of actually getting some sleep on the way home! Kevin took advantage of that, while I tried, but sleeping on planes, for me, just doesn't work out. But I certainly arrived home less-ruffled than I would have otherwise. :-)

I should explain that, utilizing a tour company like [TrekTravel](#), you would have avoided not just the \$500 taxi ride but also the two hours in which your ability to reason and figure things out seems to be held prisoner by forces unknown. Afterward you have something to write and even laugh about, but during those two hours, the carefree just-eat-sleep-and-ride-your-way-through-France [TrekTravel](#) trips sound pretty darned nice.