

Sometimes feeling small is the absolute best!



As the blog title says, you can feel very small in the shadow of something so immense. Just one more thing cycling can do for you. Put you in your place, in a very awesome sort of way.

Visiting the Tour de France isn't all about riding the same roads as the race and being in huge crowds all day long. It's also about the things that make France special, like trying to figure out why anyone would build roads in the crazy places they do. Oh yeah, there's the food too, especially if you like the type of meat that hangs on one of those big rotating things and they scrape it off in layers.

Today was our first full day, which meant it was time to hit the ground running, er, riding. Originally the Tour de France wasn't in the plan at all, until I discovered that the stage finish wasn't too far from where our ride would be ending. But mostly, since my friend Larry had never ridden a bike in France, I wanted to introduce him to some of the special back roads with great pavement, little traffic and once in a while, a bit of insanity you'd never see practiced in the US. Since we were staying in Grenoble, what better way to start than the Vercors.

Most haven't heard of the Vercors. The Alps, the Pyrenees, and if they're really educated or a bit snooty, they'll let you know about the Massif Central. But not the Vercors, which is good and bad. It's almost as if it's a semi-unknown semi-autonomous region in France, built within its own miniature-but-powerful mountain range. Perhaps no coincidence that it was also central to the Resistance movement in WWII.

I discovered that amazing piece of road, the Combe Laval/Col de la Machine, 5 or 6 years ago on a trip with Kevin. It was a beast of a climb, but that ridiculous road with the incredible views (shown in the photo at the top) made it worthwhile. But, the climb getting there was really grueling (Col de la Machine) and the payoff, the cliff road above, actually came too early in the ride. So I made some improvements. :-)

Basically we did it in reverse, and it would have been completely awesome if not for the gnarly headwinds we faced once we had descended the mountain and were riding the flat roads into the town of Romans, where today's Tour stage finished. I think I could improve upon it further still (even after dropping the flat section because there's really no need to ride into Romans); the route we traveled up was supposed to have some cliff roads of its own, but a few years ago they abandoned the fun part in favor of a modern, uphill tunnel that's over a mile long. Still, a very pleasant ride heading up to it. You can view our route below, including photos taken along the way if you click on the map.