

First TdF intercept!



Leaders coming over the top of the summit.



The water bottle is in play!

After modifying the original itinerary due to the threat of heavy rain (which never happened; at most just a few drops here and there), we had a relatively-easy 44 mile ride with about 4500ft of climbing, a far cry from the planned 74 mile/8500ft semi-epic version. But after yesterday's tougher-than-expected outing, getting up at 6am to catch a very early train wasn't too appealing. Plus the train coming back would have arrived close to 10pm, instead of 7:45 for the one we're on right now.



Guy preparing to "basket catch" the bottle.

As is nearly always the case, our ride intercepts require a fairly decent distance up a valley from the closest train station. Today it was St Gaudens: tomorrow probably Lannemezan. It's really not all that interesting until you get into the mountains! It's also the case that it doesn't feel at all like you're getting near the Tour de France until you get to the mountains. No big groups of cyclists on the roads, no painted names on the roadways, it could be any time of the spring/summer/fall. Not that there's anything wrong with riding in France before or after the 'Tour. Just give me mountains to climb.

Today we had just one mountain, the Col d'Mente. A rather pleasant climb if not for a few sections where the gendarmes demanded we walk our bikes. In fact, about halfway up, one insisted that we simply could go no further, period. It was pretty easy to circumvent his perimeter though.

We did make it all the way to the top and found a pretty good viewing spot just the Summit. I expect to find, as usual, that Kevin will have taken the best shots. Added bonus was a nice restaurant at the top selling 4 euro baguettes and cold cokes (at a somewhat inflated price of 3.25 euro, but it's a coke, it's pleasantly cold, and you're on a mountain top. It's worth it.

Also worth it was the wild trip down the other side. This would be a really fun descent if you knew it well. We made it back to the station in plenty of time to catch the earlier train back home. Home? This place is so familiar to me that it feels like my home away from home.