

Friday's ride was pretty AMAZING



This climb is so fun they warn you when you're 5km away

Heading up the Col d'Iseran, a beautiful climb but where are all the people?[/caption]Got some catching up to do; this is actually Monday July 29th, sitting in a lounge in Toronto on our way home. But need to cover a pretty nice ride, Friday's trip up the Col d'Iseran.

Weather has been a continuing issue so we drove to about 25 miles from the summit, bypassing some of the long, gradual grades leading up to Besson. No problem finding a place to park the car, but a bit nervous about food. You just don't know how many villages there will be, and how many will have shops selling sandwiches. On the lower flanks, it wasn't a problem, but once we got to the hill, there was some concern that we'd be on fumes. More on that later.

The mountain is relentless. It just keeps going, and going, and going. Unfortunately, it was broken up nastily by long stretches where the gendarmes required us to walk our bikes. Did not realize how much walking we'd be doing, and how our legs would feel.

One very surprising thing was how few spectators there were. This was the first time we'd been on a major climb where there were no issues finding good spots to take photos. Some of this may be due to the remoteness; accessing the Iseran base is about a two hour drive from Grenoble. Still, not THAT much further from the Galibier. Go figure.



Our survival depended on getting to the top for more food & drink!

We were a bit concerned about the weather, after the prior day's fun descending from the Col du Lauteret. I know from experience that weather above 8000ft can get dicey very quickly, and the top of the Iseran is at about 9000ft. We were initially thinking about not even getting towards the top (due to the amount of walking involved, courtesy of the Gendarmes) but we were running out of both food and drink. Not a good thing. Getting up closer to the top was almost a matter of survival. So we set out to climb the final 2k, almost entirely on foot (yuck!) and found a place selling cokes and sausage sandwiches (the best!). Stocked up and headed back down to a really cool place right around 8000ft. Great photos, and got a feel for what was happening in the race as things had split up before getting to us.



Kevin squeezed against the wall

Kevin was squeezed tightly against the inside wall, and had some very tense moments when it appears cyclists were going to run right over him. I was going for longer shots.

After the last rider came through, we quickly packed up and descended the hill, encountering just light sprinkles on the way down. Meantime, just a very few miles away, the road had been devastated by a localized heavy downpour that created a mudslide across the road in one place, and so much hail in another that it couldn't be cleared off in time before the race got there. They ended up cancelling the race after it went over the top of the mountain. We had no idea just how bad things were, so close by.



Peter Sagan leading the sprinters to the top, well after the leaders

The descent... it was one of those super-long descents where it seemed like it was longer, more descending, than the climb up it was. It didn't seem like THAT bad a climb, and yet the descent just went on... and on... and on. There were two spots where you had to do some climbing on the way back, but they actually came as a welcome relief, a chance to stretch the legs a bit.

And then, finally, we were back at the car. This is a climb I'd love to do on my carbon-fiber Trek Emonda, and without the Gendarmes.