

Planning helps me feel better aka Oops I did it again

My first trip to France was in 2000, when Trek invited me, along with a number of other dealers, to the Tour de France to watch Lance Armstrong try for his second Tour de France win (later taken away from his, along with his other six, for doping). Flew into Paris, took a train to Avignon, and two days (if I recall correctly) later I rode the "citizens's" race, a copy of one of the Tour de France stages, starting in Carpentras and finishing atop Ventoux. Almost finishing anyway; the weather went south and they stopped us 4 miles from the top. A really tough day on the bike for anyone not prepared for the freezing cold conditions as we climbed. One person actually died from exposure and there were quite a few busses put into service hauling cyclists off the mountain.

Since then I've ridden up Ventoux another two times, both with my son (Kevin), both quite a bit less eventful! Still never made it the last kilometer to the top, due to shutting down the road hours ahead of the race.

And now I want to do it again. Which is kind of nuts; first because why would anyone want to climb that beast in the first place, second because we're pretty short-staffed at the shop, third because my wife's health could be best seen as "fluid" and fourth because I'll be 69. But that last reason is also one of the reasons to do it; how many more big climbs do I have left in me?

But last year I proved that we could do a shortened version (we usually leave on a Thursday and come back a week and a half later, on a Monday... last year we left on Sunday and came back just 8 days later, on Monday) and, even with a very complicated itinerary, pull it off. I would much rather go back to the 12 day gig, but just don't see that as reasonable. But thinking about it, maybe it's possible to leave after the shop closes on Saturday? Adding an extra day compared to last year?

Turns out, it just might be possible! There's a flight out of SFO at 7:25pm. Shop closes at 5pm. Can be at airport by 5:45pm at the latest, which is a bit tight for an international flight with luggage (bikes!) but, since I still have elite status with United and can take advantage of the shorter lines, plus TSA-Pre, this is doable.

2:10pm.

So the plan, worked on late last night-

Saturday- Fly out of SFO at 7:25pm Saturday, straight from the shop. Connect in Frankfurt (short connection, just 1hr 5mins, tighter than I'd wish!) and fly to Lyon. Very familiar with Lyon airport; have flown into it a number of times. Arrive Lyon 5pm Sunday. Take a train directly from the Airport to Avignon, where there's an IBIS hotel two blocks from the station.

Sunday night- Sleep!

Monday- Shakedown cruise on bikes. Monday evening, find that restaurant in Avignon Kevin and I visited years back, with the monstrous-sized "Formidable" Orangina mug. :-)

Tuesday- Take short train from Avignon to Carpentras. From Carpentras, just 36 kilometers to top of Ventoux. See the race, head back down, catch train from Carpentras back to Avignon. Trains leave every hour so no issue with timing. Worst case scenario, ride all the way back to Avignon, making the ride back (which is pretty much entirely downhill or flat) about 64 kilometers. Re-pack bikes.

Wednesday- Take a train that, amazingly, goes direct, no transfers, from Avignon to Bourg St Maurice, where we'll be staying 4 nights. Hotel 1000ft from station. Rebuild bikes. Train leaves 10:39 and arrives 4:28pm, so lots of time upon arrival to check in and rebuild the bikes.

Bourg St Maurice is in the Alps, way out there, and very convenient to the two final, and really difficult to get to, mountain stages. It's pretty much a perfect location for those two stages, and very unexpected that I could find a place to stay that's reasonably priced and close to the station! That was key to making everything work; logistically, it was so important it was the first piece of the puzzle that had to be figured out. When that piece was found, everything else just had to work out, somehow.

Thursday- The big stage up the Col de la Loze, an epic climb we've never done. Thankfully just a 30km or so flat ride from our hotel to the base of the climb. No time pressures whatsoever getting "home" afterward because we don't have to worry about trying to catch a train. But- there are trains running up and down the valley anyway, so we still might have the option of shortening the ride a bit, if needed.

Friday- Another big stage, this one to La Plagne, another climb we have not done. This one's even closer to our hotel. Yay!

Saturday- This is a "free" day for us to ride, possibly doing the Cormet de Roseland from the Bourg St Maurice side, which we've

never done before. After the ride, we pack our bikes (this will have been their last ride this trip), do whatever laundry we need to do and get psyched up for the final stage in Paris.

Sunday- Take the (direct!) 9:10am train, arriving in Paris at 2:10pm. Check into the hotel (probably the one right at the train station), then head out on foot/metro to the location Trek Travel sets up for viewing the final stage. Normally we're ok missing the finale, but this year Trek has a real contender for both the Green jersey (best sprinter) and the final stage itself, a big young guy (age 24, 6'4" tall) named Johnny Milan. Traditionally walk about 5 miles after the race seeing Paris and finding a place to eat.

Monday- Leave for home, probably a 2pm flight, arrive Monday night at about 8pm.

Notice not one mention of a car... no need to rent one this time!

Anyway, that's the plan, it looks extremely workable, with the trains being right where we need them, when we need them. Not a single ride where we'd be in trouble missing any sort of connection. The only crazy thing is the idea of leaving immediately when the shop closes at 5pm on a Saturday, for an international flight that leaves at 7:25pm.