

Jailed on the Tourmalet

Two months later and I'm finally going through the photos I took from the 2010 Tour de France. This was the scene with 9k to go on the Tourmalet, the last climb in the 'Tour, Andy Schleck's last chance to try and beat Alberto Contador. A **big** day! And an epic day for us as well, having gone to bed the night before with a raging thunderstorm rattling the windows, and having ridden that morning 25 miles in weather that varied from drizzle to downpour.

Normally, if you plan your ride so you'll get to your spot three hours before the race comes through, you're fine. This day wasn't normal. At two different towns along the way, we were told bikes couldn't get through. Stay here or go back. And this was with at least four hours to go! Thankfully, I had my Garmin Edge 705 with the Euro mapping chip, so I was able to find my way around the outskirts of each town and back onto the main road, ahead of the Gendarmes that were blocking the way. At one point we had a huge number of other cyclists following us; I felt like the pied piper.



The Gendarme from Hell

But then we came across the Gendarme from Hell. We're riding along, then see some spectator waving at us and yelling something in Italian that we couldn't understand, so we get off the bikes, thinking it's the regular ritual, ride your bike when you're out of sight, then walk each time you see a Gendarme. No, the guy waving at us was trying to tell us to go back before it was too late! The idiot Gendarme wouldn't let people get past, nor would he let people go back down the hill. Once you were in his territory, if you were on a bike, you were in jail.

The second photo shows the dead-end side road the Gendarme forced us to leave our bikes on. We weren't allowed to be anywhere near them, because he feared (correctly) that we'd get on them and fly up the hill as soon as he turned away. So instead of getting close to the finish, or at least up past the corner, where things open up to a dramatic view, we were stuck in this no-man's-land. Even after the race went past we weren't allowed down the hill for another half hour, and with



The "Bicycle Jail" on the Tourmalet hundreds of cyclists backed up behind this guy, I'd just about had enough and decided to get something going, something to rattle this guy. He doesn't understand English, he doesn't want to explain in French, so what do do? Grrrrr. No, I mean Grrrrr. That's what I did. I growled. And got other people to growl as well. One big mob of cyclists, many growling, had to be unsettling to the guy. But nowhere near as unsettling as the afternoon had been for us, his prisoners.