

If you don't take a few "wrong" turns now and then, you're missing out



Kevin and our bikes at the top of the Col du Soulor

The plan was to head up the Tourmalet and finish the job we started a few years ago, when an over-zealous Gendarme decreed that "none shall pass" about three miles from the top of the mountain. Today we would avenge that. Or so we thought. Turns out that the annual citizens race, where 12,000 people get to ride a stage from the Tour de France a few days ahead of the actual race, was today. I had thought it was going to be tomorrow. So we get to the base and it's clear, we need to do something else.

So I looked at Google Maps on my iPhone and saw this cute little road D13 quite near to us, which headed up into the mountains to a place named Lac Estaing. What I didn't realize is that we need to make a left onto D103... so instead we looped around (in a stunningly-beautiful area I'd not ridden previously) until we eventually came upon... D918. That sounded familiar. We headed in the direction that I thought we should head in, and the surrounding started looking familiar. And soon enough, we saw signs indicating this was the road to the Aubisque/Col du Soulor. Kevin noted that it was only 2:30pm so, why not? Why not indeed. So our supposed-to-be-easy ride was now heading up into the clouds, both literally and figuratively, which then began to rain, and get really cold, and after a while what kept us going was knowing that we had warmer clothing with us that we could put on at the top, and the cafe.

Thank goodness the cafe was open, and even more thankful they had coffee! This was not a coke-at-the-top day. Inside were quite a few other cyclists, all of them ordering the same thing (coffee), all of them getting warmer (gradually) and most likely wondering how long the purchase of a single cup of coffee would allow them to stay. Met some really nice people up there, including Alan, from England, who knew all about Chain Reaction. I was sure he must have meant the mail order firm in Ireland, but no, he meant us! He's read our site for some time. And of course I didn't have the presence of mind to do a video of him recommending us, and not the "other guys." Dang!

The descent, when we finally got to it, was cold & wet & not-very-fast. It didn't really warm up until we were all the way at the bottom, at which point I was quite thankful for my Edge 1000 which could easily be asked for a route back and it magically displays, and actually readable on the much-improved screen! Gotta love that thing. But this ride wouldn't have been nearly as adventurous, or fun, if we hadn't taken that wrong turn early on.

Lots of photos & notes in the photo galley below. And, of course, details from Strava. --Mike--



Our favorite food truck, near the base of the Tourmalet



While we're eating lunch in the pouring rain, this woman is looking worried, from the comfort of her car, about her husband getting wet while ordering their lunch.



This photo included just because I like the town's name



Things are beginning to look familiar after taking the wrong turn;



Nearing the top of the Col du Soulor you're sharing the road with cows, sheep, cars, rain, wind, cold;



Proof that small wheels can do big things



These guys rode up (and presumably down) without leg warmers or jackets or long-fingered gloves???



Kevin taking as long as possible to drink his coffee while watching the Tour coverage in a well-heated cafe



Watching riders come up the Col du Soulor from inside the cafe at the top



Why I love the Garmin Edge 1000. You can actually see what's on the screen!



We had miles and miles of road just to ourselves



It's my ride, so there's a question about which direction? Always choose 'up'.



Post-ride observation of the heavy rain that hit, again, just after we got back.



Kevin figures out why ice cubes are so few in French drinks. He'll tell you if you ask.