

## En-route to France and the plan... well, sometimes you gotta tear it up and replace it

What is it about getting to France the past two years? Last year it was United's meltdown in Newark that produced a 4 hour delay, causing us to miss any possible connection to getting to Lourdes the morning we arrived. With every single train from the Paris region heading south (and wanted to go South, because that's where the Pyrenees are!) for days, we had to fly from Paris to Frankfurt to Toulouse, so we could take a train "sideways" (not so many traveling east to west) to get to our destination. But upon arrival in Toulouse, Lufthansa had lost track of one of our four pieces of luggage, which put us in a bit of a bind, apparel-wise.

We thought we'd worked around that and, while we missed a full day of riding, felt good the next day to be out there, stopping in towns that had bike shops to get a pair of shorts and lights (yes, our lights were in the missing suitcase too). A bit of an expedition, and added to the fun.

Of course, it was just a few days later I was carrying the pizza, in the rain, on a hill, slid out and broke two ribs. On the good side, Kevin got to do a stage entirely on his own for the first time, and had a lot of fun.

So we're done with things gone wrong, right?

Yeah, right. I'd been checking the on-time departure performance of United 194, and it didn't seem to have an issue getting to Munich in time to make the connection to the plane flying to Lyon. Well this morning it wasn't paying attention to history. We sat at the gate for nearly an hour, cabin door closed, baggage compartment open, while they tried to reconcile a baggage discrepancy. Trouble is, we have, er, had, only a 50 minute connection time in Munich.

So, despite admonitions from my wife that I was supposed to get some sleep on this flight (I rarely sleep at all on planes), I was instead spending hours researching options, trying to convince United to reroute us to a different destination so we could get to Grenoble at a reasonable hour instead of midnight. Obviously you can't call on a plane, so it was done through United's "chat" function, which was constantly losing its connection due to poor in-flight internet. The first person I spoke with really wasn't helpful at all, claiming there was absolutely nothing she could do to change the final destination for a segment flown by another airline (Lufthansa). I finally gave up trying to plead my case, and went back to looking at how I could make things work going through Lyon.

And they really didn't work going through Lyon. The only halfway reasonable option was to fly a connection through Frankfurt. Frankfurt. That place that lost our luggage last year, en-route to Toulouse. Sorry, I'm not flying through Frankfurt, and really don't even want to add another airport connection just out of simple fatigue. This is going to be an insanely-long travel day, and it needs to be simplified where possible.

So I call back again, point out the reasoning why UA 194 finally got into the air so late (United made it look like it left the gate on time, which technically it did, but implied that it was an outrageously-long taxi to the runway that created the issue, not a baggage problem). And this new person was wonderful. She understood, she appreciated that I was able to present her with options, and she got us booked onto the flight I wanted (to Marseille).

Now, the only significant challenge will be that we have to collect our luggage in Marseille, and re-check it. Not quite sure why it is that they can code it while I'm in the air to have it taken off the plane and returned to the terminal, but not code it so it can continue on a different flight than original. One thing's for sure... I'm glad I bought 4 apple Air Tags that I can use to track them!

At the moment, we're just over 3 hours from landing in Munich. I've not slept at all, but managed to get plane tickets changed and train tickets purchased. Kevin's zoned out, but to be honest, he hasn't slept as well this flight as he normally does. He's picked up on some of the "excitement" of having everything become unraveled, and then put back together again. Hopefully he's going to be rested enough to make sure I don't completely lose track of things for the remainder of the trip. I need to stay out of Zombie mode!!!

More updates in a while. It could be over a day, as there is so much that has to get done before Tuesday's tour intercept. It's basically Monday morning already, for us.

Next steps-

Land in Munich, find a transfer dest and find out how we collect our luggage and re-check it.

Fly to Marseille (about an hour and 20 minutes, not too long), arrive 1pm, hope our baggage arrives promptly, find the shuttle for the train station and get on the 2:04pm train to Valence.

At Valence, we switch to the final train to Grenoble.

Arrive Grenoble 5:55pm, 10 minute walk to the apartment, find food (hungry right now!), build the bike Fridays, and try to sleep.

Tuesday morning get up early enough to pick up rental car at 8am, find food, load bikes and drive about an hour to Albertville, where we do our first tour intercept, about a 50 mile ride total, maybe 6000ft of climbing.

Crossing my fingers it comes off. I knew that getting in the Tuesday ride was somewhat ambitious before things went screwy; it's possible we might end up skipping that stage. Film at 11.