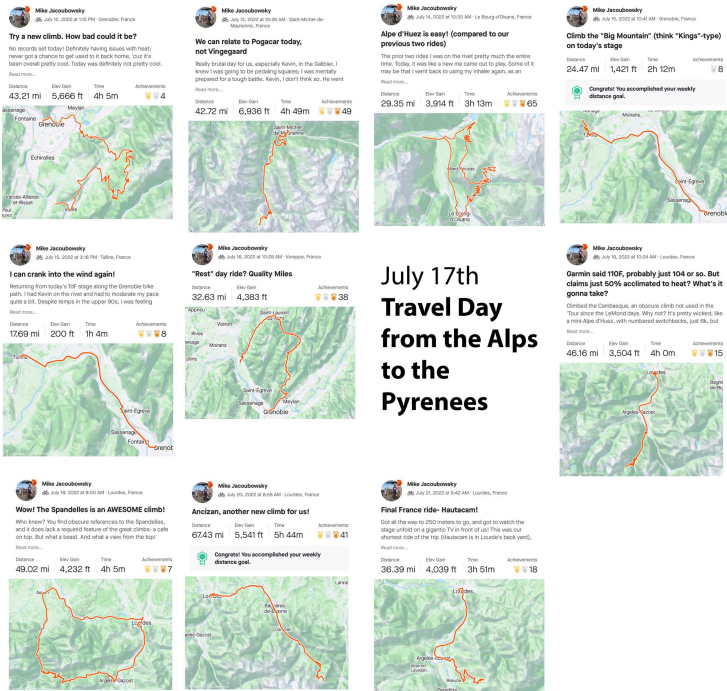


Why was this one of our best-ever trips to France?



9 days of riding, one travel day between the Alps & Pyrenees. Not sure why this trip went so well, despite some real difficulties getting to France (spent all day in the Munich airport thanks to a delayed United flight), and a longer-than-should-have-been travel day between the Alps & Pyrenees causing us to be stuck in Toulouse for hours. Also missed two stages of the 'Tour, the first due to our extremely-late arrival in Grenoble Monday night (close to midnight instead of 2pm) and later on, when France cancelled rail service to Foix due to heat.

So a fair number of changes and hassles, plus the long transfer between the Alps & Pyrenees (we normally stay in just one place, but this year's Tour de France route was really light on mountains in the Pyrenees, so the idea of basing ourselves in just one place, and then moving on to Paris, didn't make sense.

Paris. We missed out on the final time trial and the finale in Paris. Logistically, even if we'd only done the Pyrenees, it still would have been impossible to get to the time trial and then Paris afterward. The time trial was in the middle of nowhere; it would have added another day of travel to get there, and afterward, it would have been tough to get to Paris the next day. But Paris is pretty tiring; it becomes a very very long day & evening, followed by a very early flight out the next morning.

If we weren't traveling, we were riding. Every day, without exception. By the end we were absolutely stronger than the beginning! Nothing really long, but we did get in some pretty stiff climbs. The weather was probably the hottest ever, but the humidity was pretty low. The toughest was the very first day's ride, a new climb for us, the Chamrousse. 104 degrees on the lower flanks of the mountain! But every day after seemed to get just a little bit easier.

The least-challenging ride was from Grenoble out to the Cat 2 climb out past Tulins, a town just 17 miles from Grenoble yet feeling like an entirely different country. While Grenoble is modern and people dress up and nobody's overweight and English is common, Tulins is the opposite. The crowds lining the hillsides were 100% local too, with no sign of anyone who follows the 'Tour from place to place. Kind of refreshing to see. Just surprising that you could be so close to Grenoble yet feel like you were in a different country.

I'm going to work on this some more, breaking the trip down day-by-day and try to figure out exactly what made it feel like such a success, despite the best efforts of airlines and trains to try and mess things up for us.