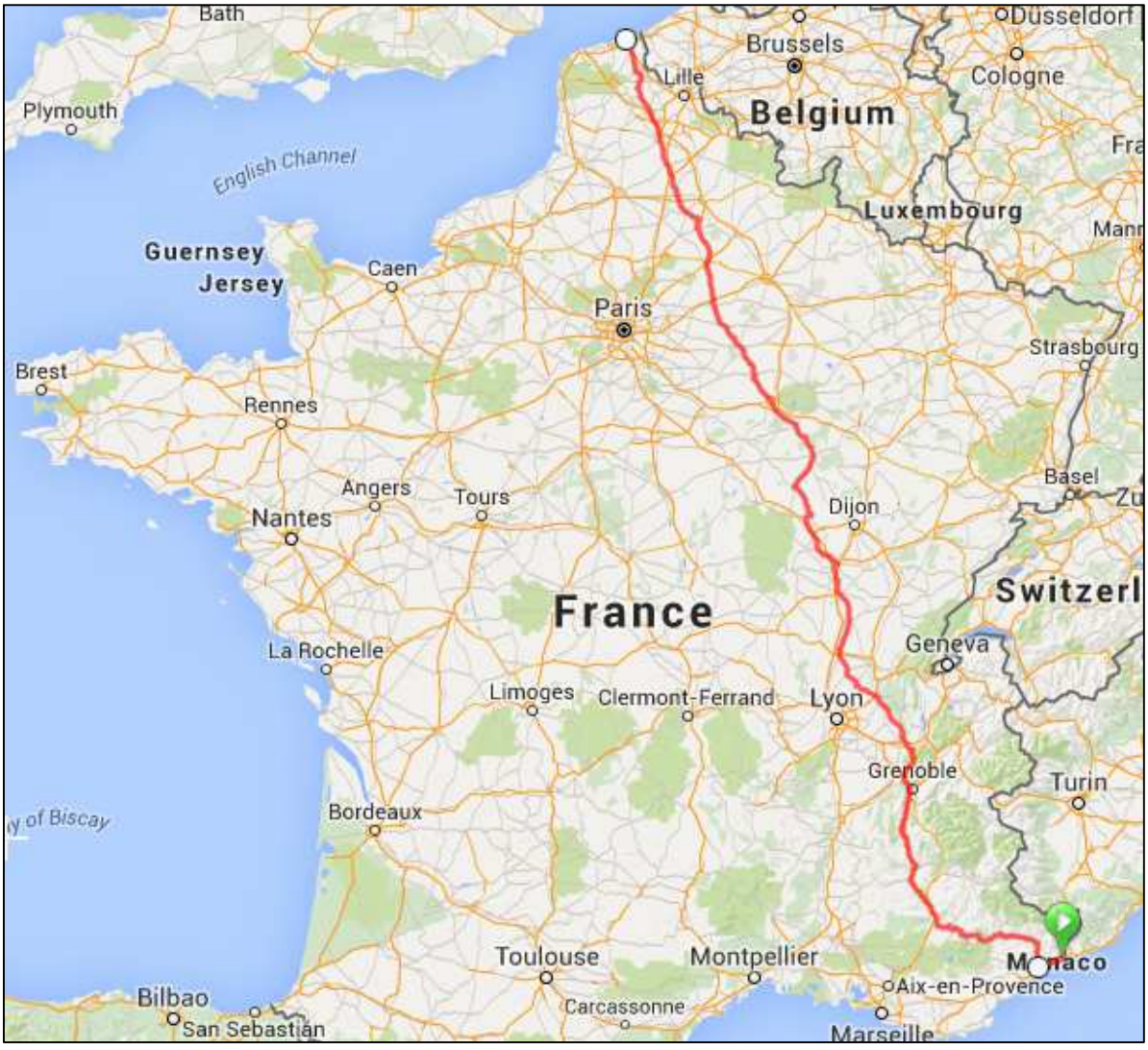
D I A G O N A L E D E F R A N C E

M E N T O N - D U N K E R Q U E

S E P T E M B E R 2 0 1 5



I N T R O D U C T I O N

I first learnt of Les Diagnonales de France, several years ago in a Lonely Planet guide to Cycling in France. I had cycled Lands End to John O Groats in 2005, and the challenge of riding diagonally across France within a time limit appealed to me. In summer 2014 I began planning a route, informed by the Diagonales De France website, and I also focused my cycle riding towards the goal of completing a Diagonale.

It was around this time that I learnt of a fellow Briton who had already completed 4 of the Diagonale de France rides, so I decided to try and make contact with him. His name was Jim Churton, and we developed a friendship which saw Jim helping me with fully understanding what I was planning to undertake, advice on how to plan my route and many other points of interest.

R O U T E P L A N N I N G

By October of 2014 I had a route planned that I was quite happy with. Jim had not helped me with my choice of route, but had offered to take a look at my route once I had completed it. Upon seeing my route Jim offered a suggestion for me to pass through Malijjai near Sisteron – in order to take advantage of quieter roads for a handful of Kilometres. I used a mapping website called 'RideWithGPS' to plan the route, this was very useful as it is clear to see the profile and the distance of your planned route – something which is essential when putting together your route sheet for your Diagonale application. If you are planning to use a GPS unit during the Diagonale attempt, then .gpx files of your route can be downloaded from the website. I planned the route as a whole to begin with from beginning to end, simply marking my nominated control towns as I went through.

At this time I had cause to visit Grenoble for my work, and I thought that it would be a good idea to meet with Jean-Phillippe BATTU – a decorated Diagonaliste and the curator of 'Les Diagonales De France' website. I met up with Jean-Phillipe for an evening, during which we discussed cycling, Diagonale routes and various points of advice for attempting a Diagonale.

Jean-Phillipe advised that along the way I make use of hotels which will allow you to enter with a credit card (in-case of un-manned arrival during out of normal operating hours), and that contrary to my understanding from the website – you can have as many control towns as you want to, they just can't be more than 120Km apart. My previous understanding was that control towns had to be 120Km apart – which was proving difficult in terms of route planning suitable control towns.

With this new knowledge, and a slight change to my route out of Grenoble upon the advice of Jean-Phillipe I went back to my route sheet and edited it to reflect the changes and to subtly edit the route through the control towns to pass by the suitable hotels I had elected to stay at.

With a 1200Km route on the mapping website, it was proving to be cumbersome for my home computer, so I decided to split the entire route up into 11 stages, book ended by my start and finish locations, and staged between control towns along the route.

This had the following benefits;

- The stages were easier to handle on my home computer,
- I could export all of the stages to my GPS unit – and when I had completed a stage I could delete it from my GPS unit, which would provide more memory space for the GPS unit.
- There was less risk of something going wrong with the saving of a very big ride file, as with the staged approach I would be saving a series of 11 rides of approximately 110Km length.
- If there was a problem with saving the ride or one of the saved files then it would be limited to just that ride and not the whole ride.
- The mental highlight of deleting a stage, and the feeling of making progress is pleasing on a long ride.

The mapping website route data was used to fully populate my route sheet. I decided to edit the version that I downloaded from Les Diagonales de France website. I added formatting and calculations to help be able to better estimate passage timings based on a predicted average speed / distance, and stops. I altered the predicted average speed to allow for ascending climbs, descending climbs and relatively flat riding – although I was conservative with the predicted descending speeds, to allow for cautious descending overnight and through potentially bad weather, and also to build some time margin into my plan.

Figure 1 – Route Sheet Example

Jour	Localité	Vkm/h	part.	cumul	controle dist	temps mins	temps Hrs	Heures de passage arrivée	arrêts	Heures de passage départ	Cumul Day hrs	Cumul Time Hrs	Cumul Time Mins	N° des routes
1	**Menton**		0	0	-					15/09/2015 17:00				D607
1	La Turbie	12 km/h	12.9	12.9	12.9	64.50	01:04:28	15/09/2015 18:04	00:10	15/09/2015 18:14	01:14	1.2	74.51	D2564
1	Promenade des Anglais	16 km/h	16.5	29.4	-	61.88	01:01:50	15/09/2015 19:16	00:00	15/09/2015 19:16	02:16	2.3	136.38	M6098
1	Saint Martin du Var	12 km/h	25.2	54.6	-	126.00	02:05:55	15/09/2015 21:22	00:00	15/09/2015 21:22	04:22	4.4	262.38	M6202
1	Puget Theniers (Controle 1)	12 km/h	39.4	94	94	197.00	03:16:52	16/09/2015 00:39	00:45	16/09/2015 01:24	08:24	8.4	504.41	D6202

As well as using the mapping website with the intent of riding with a GPS unit for navigation and data recording, I decided to make physical map sheets as well. If I had physical map sheets with me, I would not be stranded with no clue as to my direction in case of a GPS unit failure or mishap.

Figure 2 – Physical Mapping



This idea was suggested to me by Jean-Phillipe Battu. On previous attempts of his, Jean-Phillipe had taken a small concertina / fold out map with him. I liked this suggestion and made some route sheets up.

I took a standard road atlas of 1:200,000 scale, photocopied the relevant pages and drew a red pen line along the route that I had put together on the mapping website. I then cut the map into rectangles that would fit within A6 laminating pouches, and laminated each sheet.

Figure 3 – Route Sheets Mounted in Cockpit



The end result was a somewhat waterproof collection of palm sized route sheets which provided me with a physical map that I could look at whilst riding.

During my attempt, I spent a lot of time looking at these route sheets. They were a great tool to be able to set yourself mini targets – next junctions, next towns etc.

Figure 4 – Used Route Sheets



An example of my route sheets after my digonale attempt.

T R A I N I N G

Cycling has been a regular part of my life for many years, commuting to work, touring, and riding with friends and family. On my return from a family holiday in the Jura in the summer of 2014, I began training specifically for my diagonale attempt.

Training advice from my friend Jim Churton;
240Km/week from January to the middle of March.
320Km/week from the middle of March until 2 weeks before the attempt.

When Jim suggested that these weekly distances were what was required of a candidate to position himself successfully for his attempt, I thought that it would be difficult for me to realise the weekly distances – what with work, travel commitments and family demands on my time. So, I took the approach of just riding my bike as much as I could, and building cycling into as many parts of my life as practical.

I increased the frequency of my cycle commute to work from 2 days/week to 3 days/week and later 4 days/week (a round trip totalling 50Km). My work commutes were an excellent method of building on my base fitness and were a practical way of integrating more cycling into my week.

My work commutes continued through the UK winter of 2014/2015, which was very cold and icy. When I considered outside conditions too risky to ride in, I would turn to my turbo trainer as an alternative.

As well as my work commutes, I would ride as often as I could at the weekends, often riding distances anywhere between 40K and 200K with friends, or on my own.

Jim had suggested that I ride with him during a 300K Audax UK ride in early April 2015, so I was targeting this ride as a test of my distance capacity. The ride was tough, but I considered it a success, as it was the furthest I had yet cycled in a day.

In July I followed up with another Audax UK ride, this time a 400K ride, which was (and still is) the furthest distance I had cycled in a day. These rides were excellent preparation for my diagonale attempt, and they really deepened my appreciation of what would be physically and mentally required from me during my attempt.

From the 14 months from the end of summer 2014 to my Diagonale attempt in September 2015, I had cycled 9,502Km – training.

A P P L I C A T I O N S U B M I S S I O N

I was ready to submit my application for my Diagonale attempt at the start of the year, but the Diagonales website indicates that you cannot submit your application more than 2 months in advance of your planned departure date. So it was in mid-July, ahead of a September departure date that I sent off my application to the Federal Delegate.

In the envelope;
Covering letter (in French)
2 x Bulletin d'inscription forms
Audax UK Long Distance Cycling Club - membership evidence
Entrance fee (€8)
4 x Route sheets

Figure 5 – Required FFCT Documentation



Around 10 days later I learned that my application had been accepted by the Federal Delegate and I received through the post all the necessary items; carnet, frame plate, post cards and SAR list.

This was very exciting, and turned the theoretical ride into a very real prospect.

I studied the SAR list and highlighted the names and addresses of SARistes whom I may either be contacted by on the ride, or have need to contact in case of an emergency situation during the ride.

I now turned my focus to the logistics of deciding what to take with me, travel methods and securing accommodation.

P A C K I N G

It can be difficult to decide what to take with you on a Diagonale attempt. There was a balance to be made between clothing on the bike and off the bike, tools, spares and ride food.

I have listed out the items I took with me, and reasoned why.

Table 1 – On Bike Clothing

I T E M	US A G E	F R E Q U E N C Y
Helmet & Glasses (dark and light)	Safety, Sun Protection	Everyday
Cycling Cap	Warmth, Sun Protection	Everyday
Short Sleeved Jersey X 2	Necessity	Everyday
Short Sleeved Base Layer	Warmth	2 days out of 4
Rain Jacket	Warmth and protection from rain	Everyday
Fluorescent Gillet	Warmth, and legally required in France at night.	Everyday
Bib Shorts X 2	Necessity	Constantly
Arm Warmers	Warmth	Everyday
Leg Warmers	Warmth	2 days out of 4
Long Fingered Gloves	Warmth	2 days out of 4
Short Fingered Gloves	Protection for hands against handlebar pressure	Everyday
Socks X 3	Necessity	Everyday
Snood	Warmth	2 days out of 4, when the sun was down and during rain
Cycling Shoes	Necessity	Everyday

I agonized over taking my overshoes with me, in-case of prolonged rain. I decided not to take them on the basis that within 2 hours of raining my feet would be wet, even with the overshoes. This proved to be a mistake, as what I had not allowed for was the warmth that an overshoe offers, even when your feet are wet. My toes have been lacking in feeling since the ride.

Table 2 – Off Bike Clothing

I T E M	US A G E	F R E Q U E N C Y
T-Shirt	Travel and off bike clothing	Everyday
Lightweight Tracksuit Trousers	Travel and off bike clothing	Everyday
Underwear X 1	Travel and off bike clothing	Everyday
Flip Flop shoes	Travel and off bike clothing	Everyday
Rain Jacket (as on bike)	Travel and off bike clothing	Everyday

Table 3 – Items in my Saddlebag

I T E M	US A G E	F R E Q U E N C Y
Inner tubes X 3	Puncture repair	Never
Small Hand Pump (80Psi Max)	Tyre Inflation	Once – at Nice airport when building up my bike
Disposable rubber gloves	Messy repair jobs	Never
Small First Aid Kit	Emergency medical work	Never
Emergency Foil Blanket	Emergency situation.	Never
Small Cable lock	Bike security	Never
Portable Accessory Charger	Charging USB Rear light, Phone, GPS unit and portable battery pack.	Every Day
Fluorescent snappy bracelets	Riding visibility	Never
SudoCreme	Embrocation	Twice per day
Spare GPS Unit (with maps and routes)	In case of GPS unit failure	Never
Wash bag and Tool Cannister		

Table 4 – Tool Cannister

I T E M	US A G E	F R E Q U E N C Y
Stick on repair patches X 1 pck	Puncture repair	Never
Emergency Tyre Boot X 1 pck	Severe tyre cut	Never
Full size allen Keys (including 3 way allen key)	Bicycle Assembly and repair	Once – at Nice airport when building up my bike
8mm Spanner	Bicycle Assembly and repair	Never
Spoke Key	Emergency repair	Never
Multi Tool with chain link remover	Emergency repair	Never
Tie wraps	Bicycle Assembly and repair	Frequently
Wire cutters	Bicycle Assembly and repair	Frequently
Pedal Spanner	Bicycle Assembly and repair	Once – at Nice airport when building up my bike
Small squares of fleece	Packing tools out	All the time

Table 5 – Washbag Contents

I T E M	US A G E	F R E Q U E N C Y
Toothbrush	Cleaning teeth	Everyday
Small tube of toothpaste	Cleaning teeth	Everyday
Small bottle of showergel	Washing	Everyday
Alcohol gel	Washing hands during riding	Infrequently
Muscle rub gel	Easing leg muscle pain	Every night
Skin cream	Skin complaints	Never
Wipes	Wiping hands/body	Once
IbuProfen Tablets	Easing pain	Everyday
Paracetamol Tablets	Easing pain	Everyday
Caffeine Tablets	Alertness	Once
Razor	Shaving	2 Days out of 4

T R A V E L & A C C O M M O D A T I O N / L O G I S T I C S

Attempting a Diagonale requires consideration of travel options to your departure town and back from your arrival town. There are many options, one of which is to take the train from the UK to the south of France.

I considered the trains as my first option as I was initially not keen on boxing my bike up to put on the luggage hold of a plane, however when I studied the train route required, the elapsed time was in excess of 30 hours of travel including many line changes and an overnight train – and was more expensive than flying to France.

Studied train route;
Home → Peterborough → London → Paris Gare du Nord → Paris Austerlitz → Nice Riquier → Menton.

I did not want to arrive in Menton feeling any more fatigued than I had to, so I decided against trains as my method of travel and looked to travel by airplane instead. I booked a flight for me and my bicycle from London Luton Airport to Nice Airport, leaving at 7am and arriving in Nice at around 10am the day before my planned diagonale start day. Enough time for me to build up my bicycle and deal with any potential issues with the bike incurred during the flight, and also enough time to rest and relax. I had arranged hotel accommodation in Menton for the night before my attempt.

I had arranged accommodation in my 3rd control town of Grenoble initially with Jean-Phillipe Battu, however upon e-mailing Jean-Phillipe I later found that he was unavailable at this time, so I arranged alternative accommodation in the centre of Grenoble, with one of my work colleagues.

I arranged accommodation in my 6th control town of Beaune in a Kyriad hotel, and for my final overnight in my 9th control town of Soissons in a Campanile hotel. For my arrival in Dunkerque I had arranged for a good friend of mine to meet me, with his car outside the Police Nationale after completion of my attempt. From there we would travel to De Panne in Flanders and stay in the Hotel Cajou, before returning to the UK the day after completing my attempt.

The week before my attempt, I packed down my bike and found a suitable cardboard box to put it in for the flight. I found a box at my local bikeshop, it was big enough for my bike and came with many pieces of plastic tube protection, which I used to wrap around the frame for protection.

I packed my bike with the seatpost and saddle off, pedals off, handlebars removed (but brake and gear cables still attached), the rear derailleur removed (but chain still attached), front rack removed, front wheel removed and the rear wheel still in place. I packed everything up with cardboard and packing wrap to minimize potential for damage, then I dropped in my cycling shoes, 1 pannier and my saddle bag. I made sure I tagged my bike inside the box with my name, address and destination before I made the outside of the box secure. I took with me on the flight, my other pannier with my cycling helmet attached.

I had rented a car to get myself from my home to London Luton Airport and transferring from the rental car station to the airport terminal on a busy bus service, with my bike box was a bit of a squash. Once off the bus transfer, it was an easy check in and straight on to the airplane. I had been feeling anxious about starting my attempt for the previous month and I was pleased to finally have everything packed and to be on the flight to France.

A R R I V I N G I N F R A N C E

I spent a quiet flight thinking about what challenges, difficulties and experiences lay ahead of me on the roads of France, it was totally consuming. Once I had landed I had a focus – to build my bike up. My bike was the first piece of luggage out on the carousel from the flight, so I dragged it to a quiet corner of the arrivals terminal, got some water and a coffee, and took my time building up my bike carefully.

After an hour and a half or so, I had my bike together and it was clear that the rear wheel had become buckled. In itself not a problem that would stop my attempt, but certainly something that needed righting soon. I used the airport wifi to locate a bike shop near Menton and found one in Roquebrune-Cap-Martin. I would visit there once I got to Menton.

Riding out of the airport was a great feeling – I was the only cyclist doing so. It was warm, the sea looked great and it was really nice to see the palm trees and personalities lining the Promenade des Anglais on my way to Nice Ville train station.

I arrived in Nice Ville train station and the station was packed with people. I queued for a ticket and whilst waiting got speaking to an American guy who was interested in my attempt. Time soon passed and I was on the train bound for Ventimiglia stopping at Menton. I was surprised how long it actually took to get to Menton from Nice, my expectation was that it wasn't very far Nice, but time told a different story. Whilst on the train me, and my bike were positioned in a more open part of the train, next to 2 young guys who had dogs that were keen on barking at and biting each other - the young guys did not seem to care at all.

Arriving in Menton, I got my bearings out of the train station and headed straight to 'VIP Bikes and Coffee' bike shop in Roquebrune-Cap-Martin. I explained to the guy in the shop my predicament with my rear wheel and within 5 minutes he had made the wheel perfectly true. Whilst my wheel was being trued, I took the opportunity to put 100psi of air pressure in each tyre. Gratefully, I left the shop and went to locate the hotel I had booked in Menton.

The Hotel de Belgique was close to the train station and the reception did not open till 5pm, so I enjoyed a sit down on the tables and chairs outside reception in the late afternoon sun before reception opened up. When open I went to check in and the patron claimed to be fully booked and not to have a room booking for me. I protested and showed her my e-mail correspondence with the hotel confirming my reservation for that night. This did not appear to be proof enough for her, so she telephoned her husband to see if he knew anything about the booking. From the conversation between them I gathered that he did indeed recall the e-mail correspondence with me, but had not actually booked me into the hotel. Upon realizing that I would not be staying in

this hotel for the evening due to it being fully booked, I directed the patron to call an alternative hotel on my behalf. Some huffing and puffing and a few calls later and I she had secured me a room in the nearby Hotel Claridge. No sign of an apology or any admission of error from the patron. I was not very impressed with this level of service, sol left and headed straight for the Hotel Claridge just a few doors down the road.

I checked into the Hotel Claridge with no issue, the patron was expecting me. He was friendly enough and was happy for me to take my bike up to my room on the first floor. The hotel was not as nice or as clean as the Hotel de Belgique, but I was only there for one night and I could have the room until 2pm the next day – ideal. I took a shower, got changed then headed out to wander around Menton.

I located the Police Nationale as my first location, this was where my attempt would start from then the following day and it was only a short walk from the hotel. I then went on to find somewhere to eat. I opted for a beach front restaurant to enjoy the sunset in the cloudy sky.

After walking off my Pizza around Menton I went back to the hotel, watched a little bit of TV then got an early night. I was tired and slept easily.

D E P A R T U R E D A Y

After a pretty good night sleep I lay in bed resting until around 08.30. I then got up and headed out to find breakfast, this was only a short walk down onto the corner of Rue Partouneaux and Ave Boyer where I had a coffee, croissants and some pastries. I also bought a ham sandwich for ride food later on in the day.

To kill time, take my mind off of the ride and to ease my nerves I simply walked around Menton some more. I located a postbox (for my carte postale) watched some heavy machinery in action in the marina, people watched along the Rue de la Republique, bought the obligatory ecusson and then found somewhere for a decent lunch. Lunch was; tomato and mozzarella salad, spaghetti bolognaise, ice cream and coffee. After lunch I went back to the hotel to shower and get checked out of my room, buying a couple of banana’s on the way.

I was checked out of my room at 2pm and I then had 3 hours to spend before I could take my departure from the Police Nationale. I asked the patron if I could spend time in the lobby, and he directed me to a lounge where I could stay indefinitely. I was pleased with this, I laid out my bags and packed and re-packed the bags, using the hotel wifi as I went, just to distract myself from the growing nervousness I was feeling. More than anything I just wanted to start riding, I had been targeting this time for so long through my build up and training. My immediate anxieties were around navigating main roads out of Nice and crossing the Alps under darkness, but I knew that as soon as I started riding I would be able to stop thinking about these areas and just focus on riding and controlling my pace and effort. I left the hotel at 16.45 and went to wait outside the Police Nationale.

S T A G E 1 – M E N T O N → P U G E T T H E N I E R S

Just before 17.00 I entered the Police Nationale. They knew exactly what I was doing as soon as I presented my carnet to them for stamping. My carnet was stamped at 17.00 exactly, and then I mounted my bike and I was off. Doing it, finally.

It was not long before I stopped to post my carte postale, required to indicate to the federal delegate that I had taken the start of the ride. Leaving Menton, I joined a very busy road which took me up towards the climb of La Turbie. Once the roads for the bas corniche and the moyenne corniche split, and I was on the moyenne corniche traffic got quieter, this gave me time to enjoy the views of Monaco and to just settle into my effort and calm down a bit.

Once the climb to La Turbie was finished it was a fast descent down the col d'eze into Nice. Nice was easy to navigate through and it was pleasing to be on the promenade des anglais again. Crossing the city to leave on the main road to the north along the River Var was busy and peppered with traffic lights and segmented by dual carriageway and overpasses.

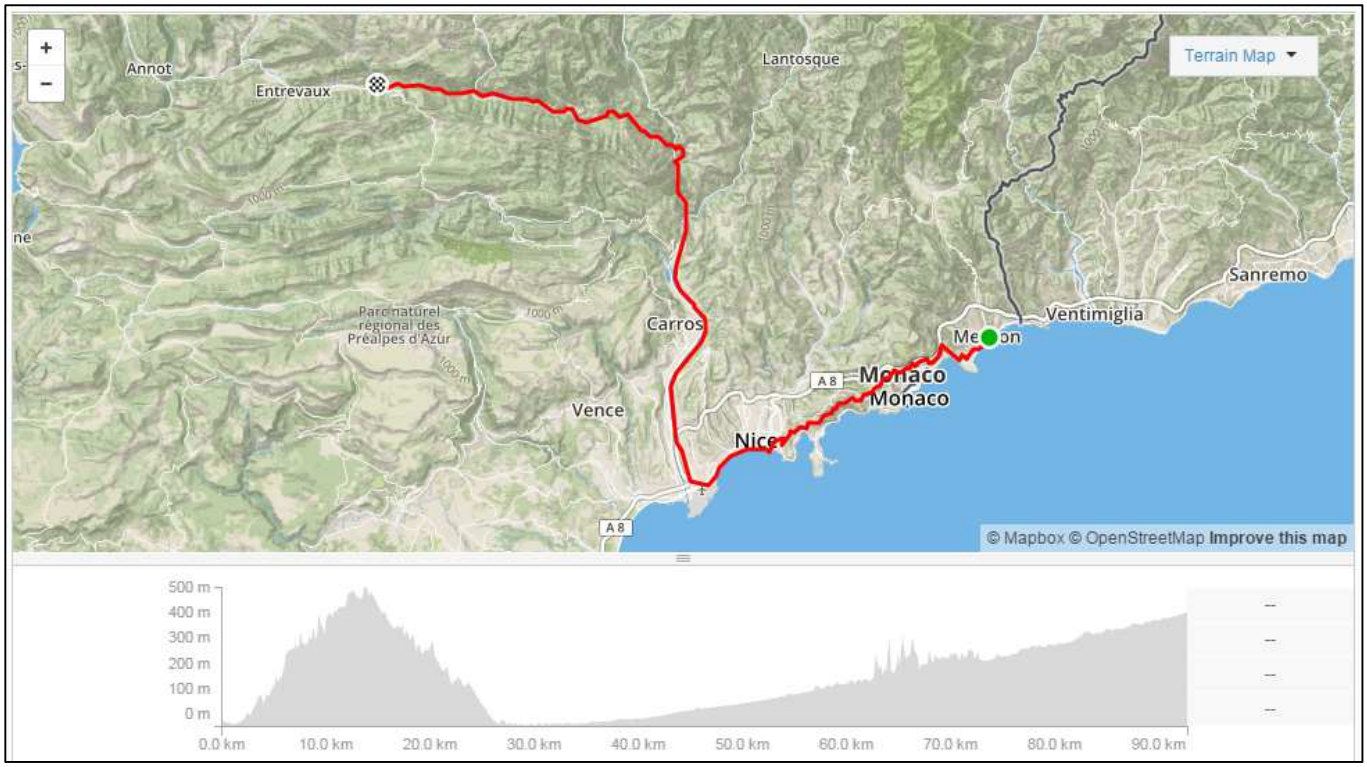
Full darkness came at 20.30, not long after which the roads started to feel very empty. There really was not much traffic at all. A mechanical incident with my left hand side front rack arm saw me have to stop to fix the rack – which appeared to have suffered from a loosened bolt which had allowed the rack arm spacer to be jettisoned. Fortunately, I still had the rack arm fixture, which I could then space out with the knuckle of a couple of tie wraps. This happened just as I was riding out of the north side of Plan Du Var. I did not panic, and I used my headtorch to give me a good look at the problem. I had time in hand, so was not concerned about falling behind plan, and within 10 minutes or so it was fixed and I was riding again.

Shortly after this mechanical incident a guy in a van stopped ahead of me on the road. Seemingly concerned for my circumstance on the bike, on the empty road in the dark he offered to give me a lift to a place of my choosing. I thanked him and showed him my M-D frameplate, to which he roared with acknowledgment and duly said 'bon courage'.

Tunnels and bridges around Pont de la Mescla were very dark indeed, it was difficult to tell when and where a tunnel was – quite disorientating.

The road up to Puget Theniers fell emptier and emptier although the gradient remained steadily uphill and when I reached Puget Theniers, there was only one bar which appeared to be open. The bar was actually closed, but the patron and his late customers were kind and interested in my arrival. I explained my ride to them and the patron gave me my first controle stamp and also gave me 2 espressos for free - in lieu of any food being served. I received another round of 'bon courage' from the guys in the bar before I took my seat outside and began eating the ham sandwich I had bought earlier in the day in Menton.

Figure 6 –Stage 1



S T A G E 2 – P U G E T T H E N I E R S → S I S T E R O N

There was a stillness as I left Puget Theniers, as well as the weather, I felt calm - I was ahead of schedule, feeling good physically and I had made my mark on the map by passing through my first control town.

The road continued on the same gradient out of Puget Theniers as it did on the way up to it, although it wasn't long before I was ascending the col de toutes aures. This was difficult in the total darkness, I could not guage how long the climb was or when the road may kick up or down, it felt as if one of my senses had been dulled, however it was a strangely pleasant experience.

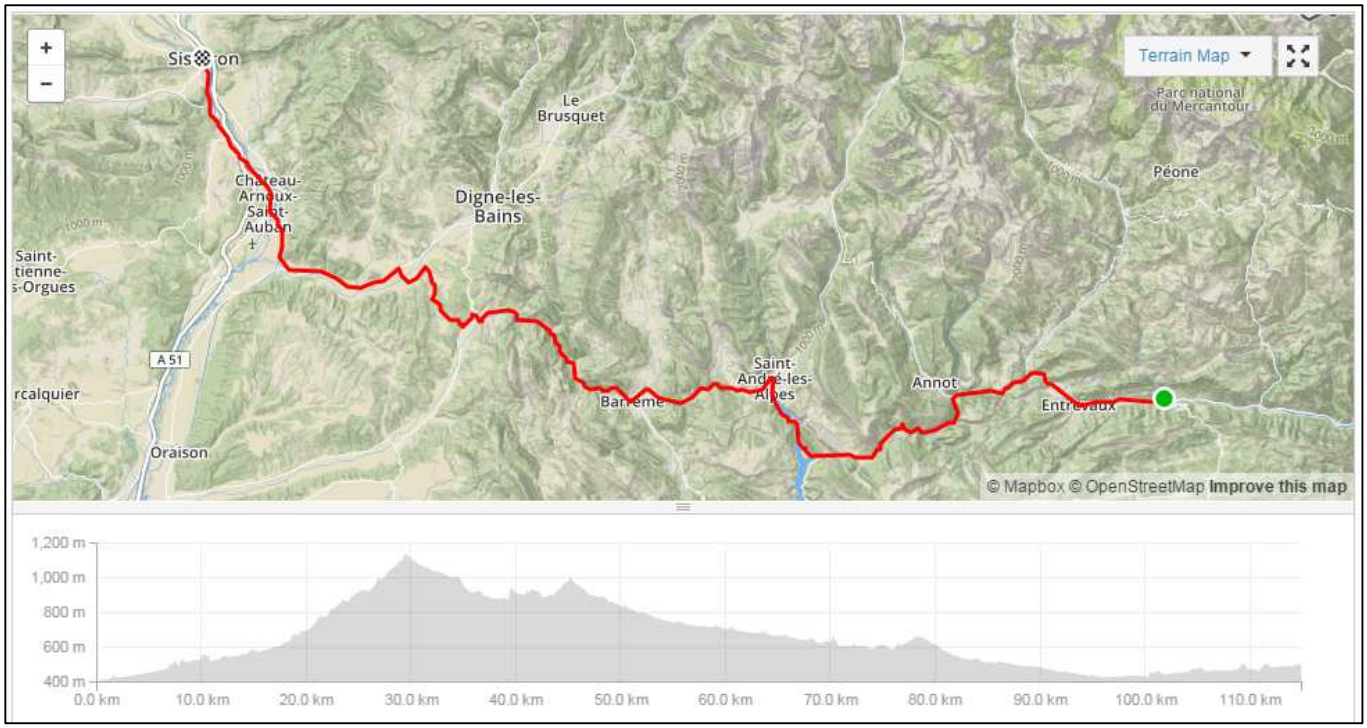
As the road ramped up I began to feel as though I needed more food, despite the ham sandwich eaten at the last control. I had plenty of food with me so I grazed on snack bars, malt loaf and a couple of energy gels. Satisfied, I continued on the road listening for wildlife and trying to imagine the landscape around me by day. The col de robines was next and the continuous climbing was beginning to fatigue my legs. For company during the dark, I had; 2 deer, 3 foxes, 3 cats and 1 boar. I saw fewer than 10 cars in 6 hours and by the time I got to Malijai and the N85 it was a relief to hear some early morning traffic.

I was looking forward to getting to Sisteron, I was again in need of food and had eaten enough snack bars. I now needed something that would satisfy my stomach and give me the carbohydrates I was in need of. Rolling into Sisteron at 5.30am provided very little opportunity for food. I stopped in a closed garage and filled my bidon's with water from an outside tap, then continued into the town centre. On the outskirts of town was a Marie Blachere Boulangerie, it was not a shop but a bake house, I stopped here and spoke with a worker, I asked him for a flute and although his expression seemed reluctant, he was kind and he reached for a freshly baked flute and handed it to me. He did not want any money.

Elated at this food gain and the workers generosity, I made my way into town and sat myself down at the outside table of a closed bar – next to a gentleman who could not sleep. I took out the squeezy jam I had packed for exactly this kind of scenario, and started to gorge myself on the entire flute layered up with jam. Whilst eating, I was aware that the café opposite was preparing to open, the guy I sat next to said that it would be open from 6am before simply getting up and leaving. Whilst eating the flute light rain began to fall, and a gentle breeze started to rise.

The café opened at 6am exactly – marked by the toll of the church bells. The door opened and 2 regulars went straight in, greeted with kisses on both cheeks. I followed and asked for my carnet to be stamped and a coffee. I received the stamp and enjoyed the coffee, before heading north out of Sisteron to begin the last leg of Day 1 – onwards to Grenoble.

Figure 7 –Stage 2



S T A G E 3 –S I S T E R O N → G R E N O B L E

The road continued uphill out of Sisteron, and although I had eaten a whole flute I still had a desire for more food – something that wasn't bread, pastry or a cycling snack. I really needed fruit. Riding in light rain through villages advertising 'pick your own' fruit, I was growing more and more desperate to taste fruit. It was still early in the morning so only boulangeries and cafés were open. Every supermarket I saw showed no signs of life at all.

I was still doing well against my plan so I decided to stop in Laragne Monteglin, only 20Km past Sisteron, to see if I could find fruit. I asked in the boulangerie if there was a shop that was open that sold fruit, I was told that there would be in a short while, so I took the opportunity to eat anyway at the boulangerie. I had a can of Coke and a croque monsieur, this helped fuel me but didn't help my yearning for fruit. I cycled up to the area where the girl in the boulangerie told me the fruit shop was. It was there, but was not open – and wouldn't be for another hour. Disappointed, I cycled away from Laragne Monteglin onwards towards Serres.

I seemed to be on a plateau which gradually made its way uphill, it was quiet for a main road, with not a great deal around to make it memorable – aside from the odd pizza truck in a lay-by, closed of course.

Finally in Serres I was able to locate a small supermarket that was open. I bought apples, bananas, sweets and a litre of pear nectar. In front of me at the checkout were 2 people, one guy in front had an issue with his receipt, it looked like he was trying to get some money back from something – this all took an age, then the woman in front of me had a large amount of shopping to process, which also took an age. When I finally paid for my items, I sat in the entrance to the store and drank every drop of the pear nectar. It was wonderful and instantly made me feel better. The apples and banana's I bought weighed me down quite a lot, but I would rather be with them than without them.

On the road between Serres and Aspres-Sur-Buech I spotted a small van in a lay-by and a man entered the side of the road and took a photograph of me. I suspected that the man was a Sariste. I stopped in the lay-by and said hello to Robert ISOARD and Martine LAPOINT. They were Saristes and had been sent my route sheet by the federal delegate. They had driven from Gap to see me, this was such a lift to see these guys and discuss my journey so far. They suggested we meet again in a café in Aspres-Sur-Buech, so I continued on with my bike and they drove off to find a café.

In the café I had a grand café and a couple of croissants, courtesy of Robert. We had a very nice discussion about cycling, diagonales and previous holidays that I had taken in France. I knew the area they were from quite well from previous visits I had made. Enthused by their encouragement I continued on to tackle the cold de la croix haute.

The road upto the beginning of the col was a main valley type road, which was demanding. It was good to finally take the start of the croix haute though, I wanted to get it behind me. The climb was tough and the wind was starting to really pick up, fortunately it was on my back. Despite being at an altitude of 1179Mm the col de la croix haute was a difficult climb – mostly due to the cumulative

fatigue I was feeling. The decent was lovely – to freewheel downhill is always a fantastic feeling after the effort of climbing. The views were panoramic seemed to me to have a strange familiarity. I had been to Grenoble and the Vercors a number of times, and I recognized the colours and shapes of the mountains around me – however they were not the mountains I had previously seen around Grenoble – I had much further to go until I was to see them.

After the descent, another climb up the col du fau took some more energy from me. Finishing the climb in Monestier-de-Clermont saw an increasingly strong wind come round square onto my back. The remaining Km's to Grenoble were all downhill or flat, and with a strong wind with me, I was riding at speeds of over 45Km/h without having to pedal, this was a fantastic way to finish my first day. As soon as I got into Pont de Claix I knew the roads, I continued onto my workplace in Grenoble, where I saw 2 of my work colleagues. They were very encouraging and had arranged to see me at my overnight accommodation in Grenoble, which was my friend's apartment. In between work and the apartment I got my control book stamped, but had to try 3 different shops before I found one which had a stamp. Arriving at the apartment I saw my friends again, it was wonderful to have day 1 completed. I was exhausted, but had achieved a great deal in the last 24 hours and was 2.5hrs ahead of my plan. I also had the section of the ride that I was most anxious about behind me. I had a shower and dinner, then chatted with my friends for a short while before getting into bed for a good night's sleep.

Figure 8 –Stage 3

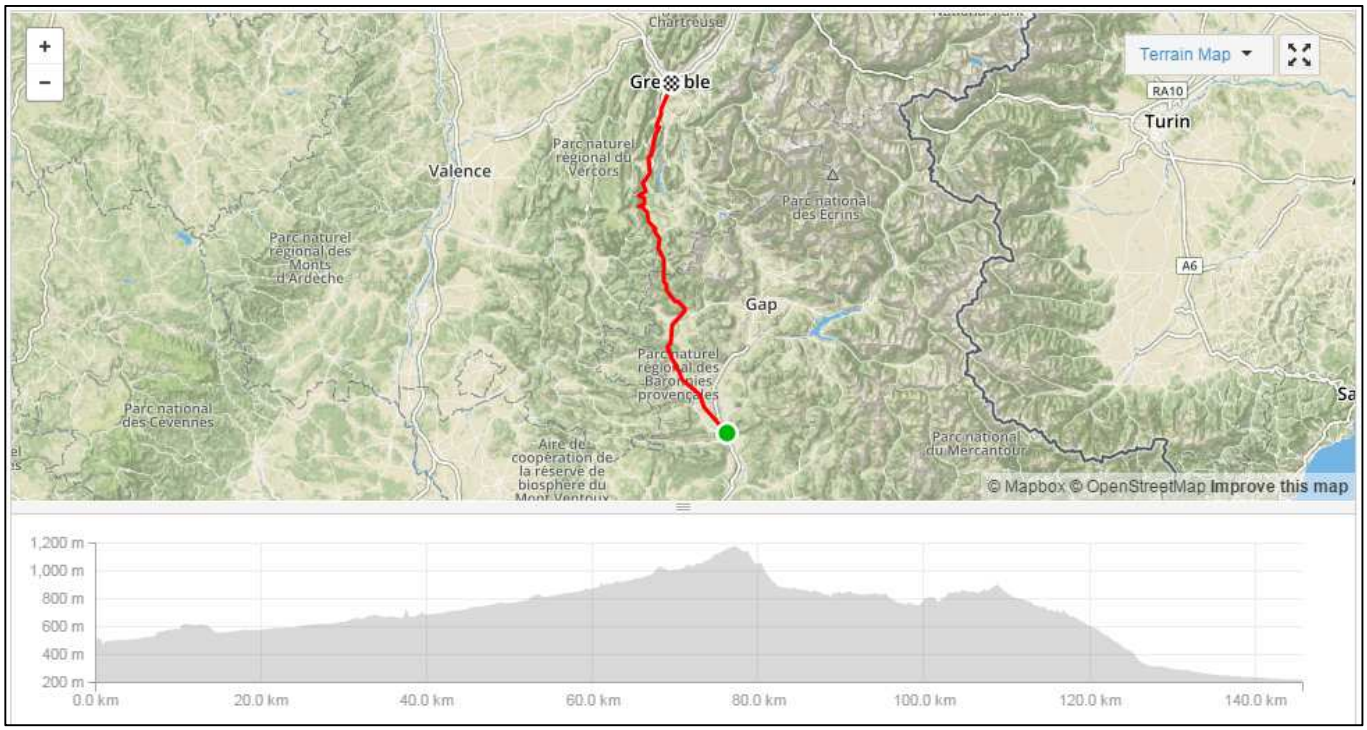
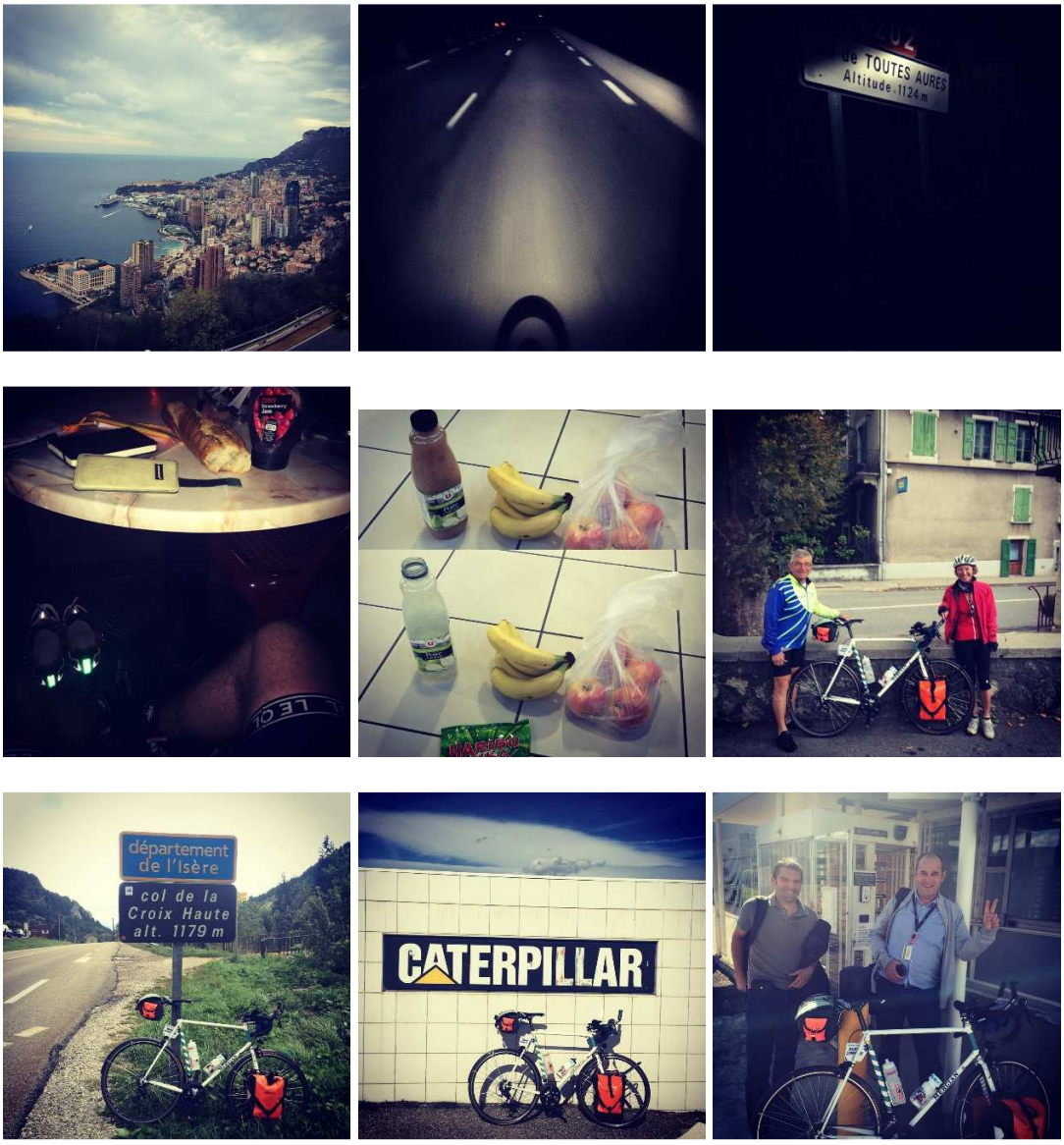


Figure 9 – Day 1 Photos



S T A G E 4 – G R E N O B L E → L A G N I E U

My alarm woke me early, around 3am. I had enjoyed a good night's sleep and I had used my time advantage yesterday to rest for longer, in the hope of recovering as much as possible. I had a good breakfast of muesli and fruit, then packed my bike up ready to leave on plan at 4am.

Riding through central Grenoble at 4am it was surprisingly mild, Grenoble is always a little warmer than its surroundings due to is basin like setting, however the wind was still strong from yesterday. I picked up my route quickly and upon the advice given on the diagonales de France website by Jean-Phillipe, I chose to ride out of Grenoble along the cycle paths that run next to the l'Isere river, these were deserted and had been absolutely battered by the winds. Lining the route of the cycle paths were very tall poplar trees, most of which had dropped big heavy branches onto the path due to the force of the recent winds. I found myself dodging the bigger branches and just riding over the smaller ones.

Once off the cycle paths and onto the main road heading up to Voreppe I could really take advantage of the wind again. The fatigue from the previous day was still with me when I pushed my legs, but this worsened when the road cranked up for the first and last proper climb of the day the col de la placette. This was a very tough way to get into the Chartreuse, my legs felt empty and the rest of my body was also reminding me of the pains collected from the previous days riding, so I had to ride at a slower than anticipated pace.

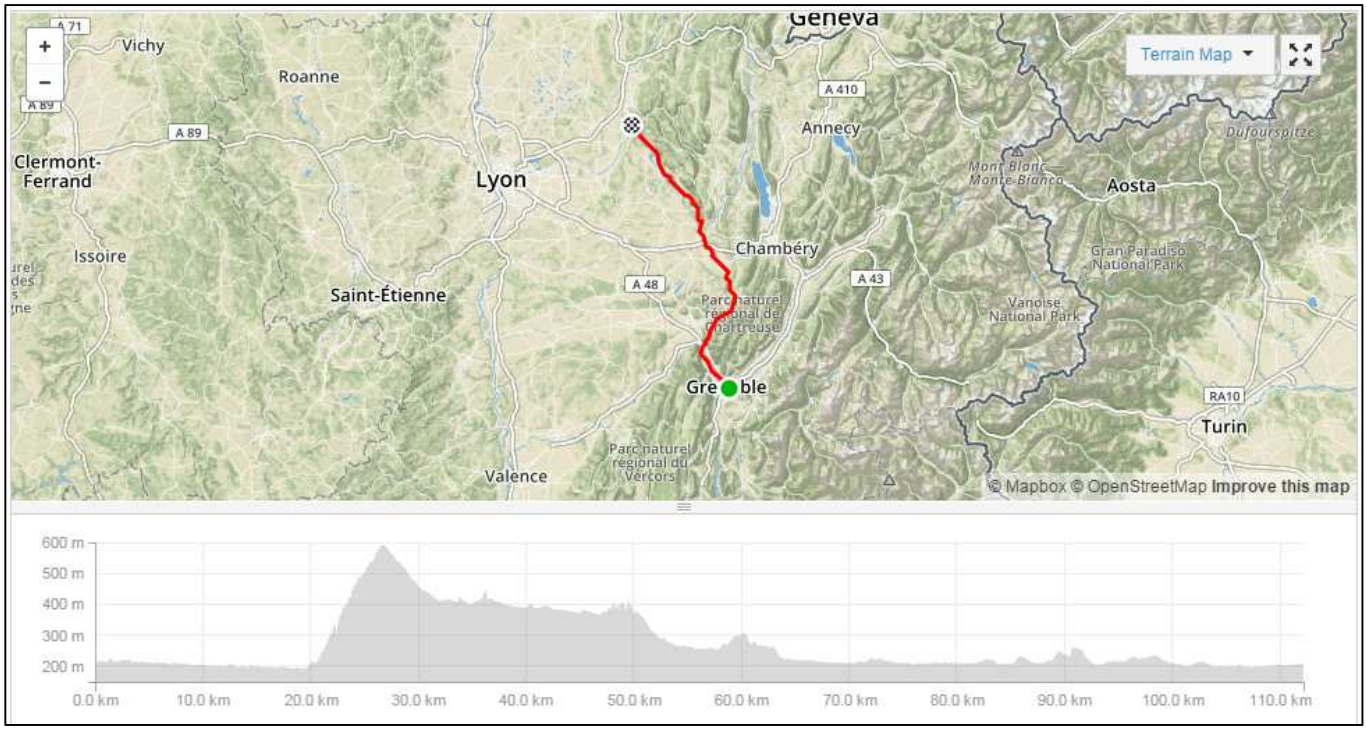
I had lost the advantage of the wind upon starting the climb up the col de la placette, and the wind had turned into a ferocious gusting danger. Cross winds were so strong that they had me riding at an angle just to allow me to continue riding straight. I arrived at the top of the col and could not believe the strength of the wind, there was even a road traffic warning sign telling drivers to adapt their speed because of the violence of the wind.

Descending off the col and the strength of the wind reduced as the light began to come through the darkness. Riding was comfortable now and I was feeling reasonable as the road wound its way through a gorge and down to Le Pont de Beauvoisin, from which the rain began to fall. Within 5 minutes of passing through Le Pont de Beauvoisin I was as wet as I would be by the end of the day. The amount of rain fall in such a short space of time was deeply penetrating, and after the initial downpour the rain settled into a more even fall which you could tell was here to stay. I continued on the road and was interested to see the landscape change from mountains and gorges to rolling fields of dead sunflowers and corn crops. I saw many signs which had Bugey in the title, and I remembered fondly the colourful, sweet and fizzy wedding drink of my friends, the Bugey Cerdon, made in this area between Lyon and Geneva.

Riding next to the river Rhone, I was impressed with its size and speed. I was feeling cold by this point as the rain had made me wet, although my rain jacket kept me very well protected from the rain, my legs and core had begun to feel cold, I was very keen to get to my next control town of Lagnieu and I had to push harder on the bike to try and raise my heartrate to generate the heat in my body to help keep me warm.

Arriving in Lagnieu, I stopped in a boulangerie again to get my carnet stamped and some pastries and croissants, along with another ham sandwich for later in the day. I then saw a bar/café and headed inside to warm up. The patron inside was welcoming and did not mind me being inside the bar with all of my wet clothing on. She bought me 2 grand cafes and allowed me to eat the pastries I had bought in the boulangerie. After I had eaten and drank I took myself to the outside toilet, and put on a base layer, arm warmers, leg warmers, my shorts, my rain jacket, my gillet and my long fingered gloves. I felt so much warmer now and had stopped shivering. I paid for my coffees and thanked the patron, then returned to my bike and to the rain.

Figure 10 –Stage 4



S T A G E 5 – L A G N I E U → P O N T D E V A U X

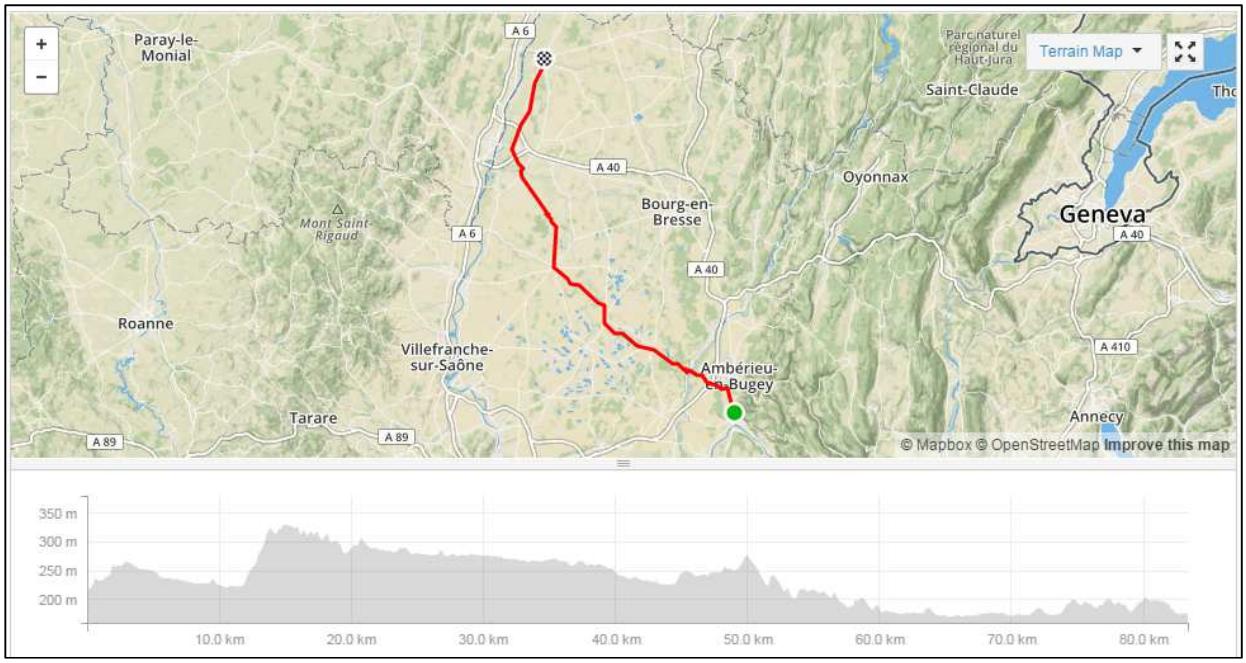
I was feeling much warmer now that I had had a little time out of the rain, had put more clothing on and had taken on more food. The roads were quiet for the most part and I was making good progress through the rain. I stopped at Chalamont just to fill up my bidons with more water. I had, for the last few stops been forgetting to switch my lights off and ask for my bidons to be filled up at my control stops – an indication of how tiredness can have an effect on your mental capacity to remember important things. I joked with the patron of a bar in Chalamont, about the contents of my bidons, he asked me what I had in them and I replied that I had lots of drugs in them. It is always nice to engage with people on the ride, everyone I had spoken with thus far was very encouraging about my ride, and also very helpful.

Leaving Chalamont, I found myself riding through an almost wetland type landscape. There were many many small lakes and flooded fields, accompanied by an awful lot of herons, a bird which can be difficult to see in the UK. I passed through several villages, which after a while I was finding it difficult to differentiate between villages, there was not a great deal to distinguish them from eachother, I do remember Manziat, as the Boulngerie/Patisserie had a wooden door handle which was shaped like a croissant.

A short distance later and I was in the next controle town of Pont de Vaux. I could sense that on the way to Pont de Vaux I was going to be too late for a good lunch. As I suspected all bars and cafes had stopped serving food, I was perhaps 40 minutes too late. I found a bar that stamped my carnet and sold me a coffee and a can of coke, then I took the sandwich I had bought earlier in Lagnieu, out of my pannier, sat down and ate.

Arriving in Pont de Vaux marked the end of the rain for the day and the sun started to shine. This was a very welcome change in conditions, I was still cold from the continuous rain. I got chatting to a tri-athlete in the bar who was interested in my bike, we discussed my route out of Pont de Vaux for a short while before I continued on the road again.

Figure 11 –Stage 5



S T A G E 6 – P O N T D E V A U X → B E A U N E

Aside from drying weather and favorable wind conditions it is difficult to remember much about this stage. Straight roads with gentle up and down undulations featuring very sleepy and tired villages were the landscape of the afternoon. I did stop and chat to some English riders who were heading South in the opposite direction to me. They were on a relay ride down to L'Alpe d'Huez. One of the riders I was talking to was nervous about ascending the famous climb. Having climbed it twice before myself, I reassured him that it is a good climb, momentous with lots of cycling celebrity attached to it. Shortly after this I stopped in a quiet place for a toilet stop and unfortunately upon dsmounting my bike I hit my right knee on the tip of my saddle, causing an instant bruise. I feared that this may come back to hurt me later in the ride.

Reaching the outskirts of Beaune was lovely, I was very tired indeed and was again in need of food. I reached the hotel, one which I knew as I had stayed there with my family a few years ago whilst travelling down to the Alps. I arrived at the hotel and checked in. They had me booked into the hotel, which considering what happened in Menton, was positive. When I told the patron that I would be taking my bike into my room, she became adamant that this was not acceptable and told me that I could not do that. She said that instead, I could put my bike in a room which could be locked in the lobby. I declined her offer and told her that I had got permission that I could take my bike into my room – which is why I had booked the hotel room on the ground floor. She did not believe me, so I retrieved the e-mail I had printed off from my booking conversation which showed her the permission to take my bike into my room. Reluctantly, she agreed.

I got showered, and laid out my wet cycling clothes to try and dry off a bit. I went into te hotel restaurant and ate beef bourgignon, taglietelle and chips, with a llrge coca cola. It was just what I needed. I headed back to my room to get some sleep, but annoyingly my telephone charging lead was not working and I was unsure if my alarm would actually wake me in the morning. I was nervous for this as I had to be awake at 2am to leave just before 3am. Adding to this the people in the room next door to me were very loud, and I struggled to get to sleep that night.

Figure 12 –Stage 6

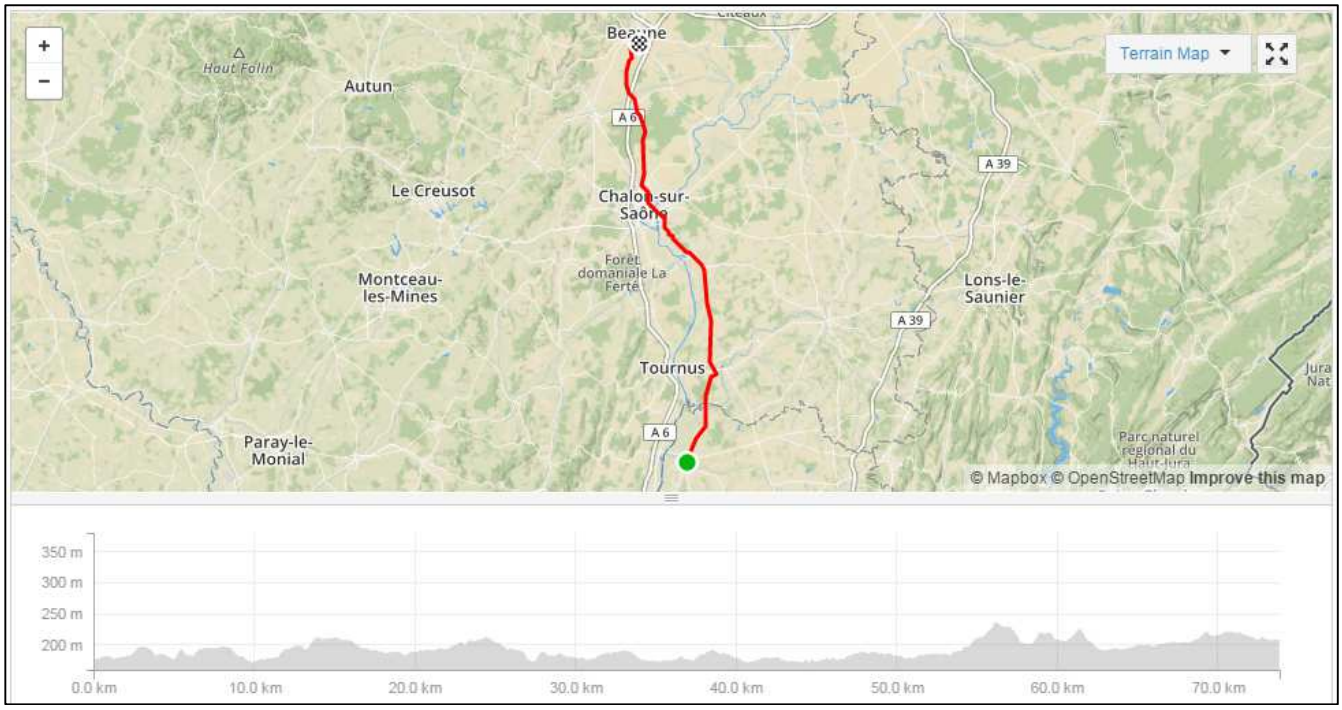
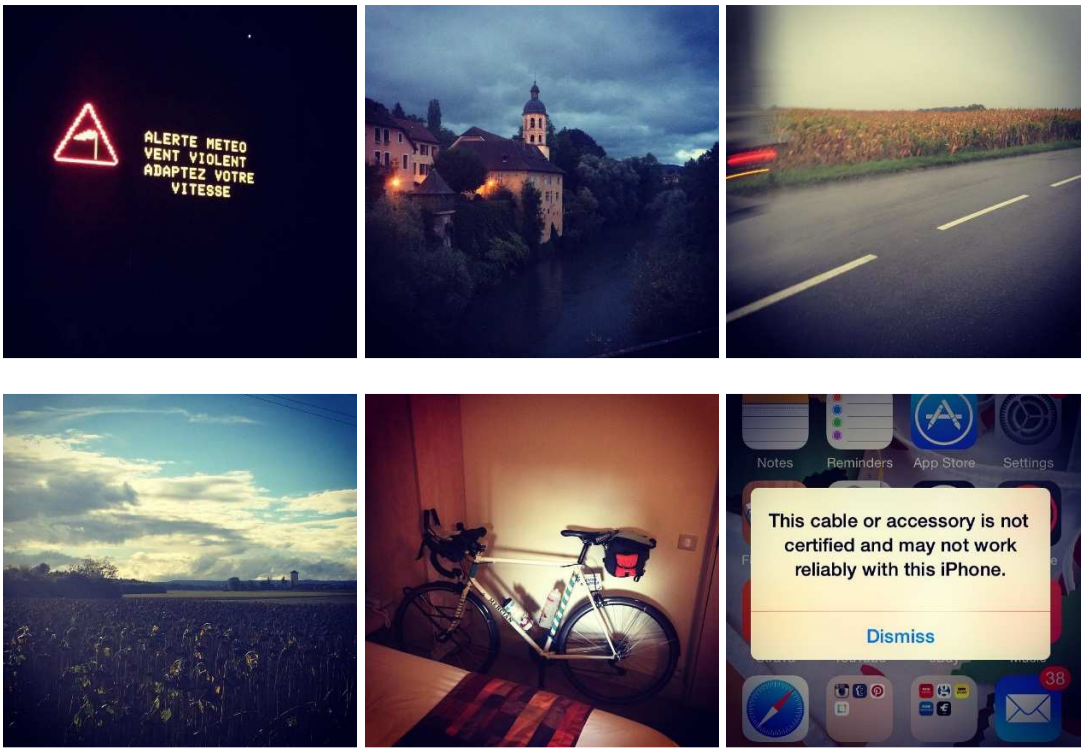


Figure 13 – Day 2 Photos



S T A G E 7 – B E A U N E → C H A T I L L O N – S U R – S E I N E

Despite my worries about getting to sleep and waking up very early I managed to wake up naturally without the need for my alarm. The people in the hotel room next door had been noisy and I had had to insert some toilet paper into my ears to block out their noise. Upon checking my telephone it was apparent that it had very little charge in it and that I would soon be without the use of a phone, camera, and alarm clock. This potentially caused me a problem for the following reasons; now I would not be able to contact people should I need to, or vice versa, I would not be able to photograph my bike under the entrance signs to control towns and I would not be able to set my alarm to wake me for early starts. My charging lead refused to work in Beaune, so I had to begin thinking about how to get another lead to be able to charge my telephone with.

I left the hotel at 02:50am, and upon leaving asked the night receptionist if he had a suitable charging lead – no he didn't. I rode past closed supermarkets in the industrial estates of Beaune before starting to climb out of Beaune on the steeper than I had anticipated road up to Bouze les Beaune. During the climb I heard people laughing and partying and then I passed a farm outbuilding where maybe 10 or 12 people were still drinking and dancing around a large open fire, this was nice to see, and I wondered what they would make of me gatecrashing their party?

It was cold and very dark still and I could feel that I was riding through a heavily forested and occasionally misty area, which wasn't too far away from main trunk roads, I could hear and sometimes glimpse the larger roads. There were many wind turbines up on this plateau interspersed with woodlands and the noise of the turning turbines was a gentle whooshing sound. Looking up at the red lights of these turbines against the dark sky was nice and although dark, the sky was clear and there were many stars showing off in the very early morning sky.

I arrived in Vitteaux just about opening time for the first café/bar - just after 6am. I had a large coffee and waited for the boulangerie to open. I passed the time chatting to the patron, who also did not have a suitable charging lead I could borrow for my telephone. We discussed my ride and where I would be going to for the day, then I asked him about supermarkets along my route – in search of a charging lead. My telephone was now without any charge and the battery was flat. I had 3 options up to, and including my next control town – a Super U in Veneray les Vaunes, an Intermarche in Montbard, and a large Intermarche in Chatillon-Sur-Seine. I used the toilet, thanked the patron, and went to the boulangerie down the road. I ate 2 croissants outside and kept a pain au rasin in my pannier. I started to shake with cold, I needed to get riding again to get my heartrate up and generate some internal heat.

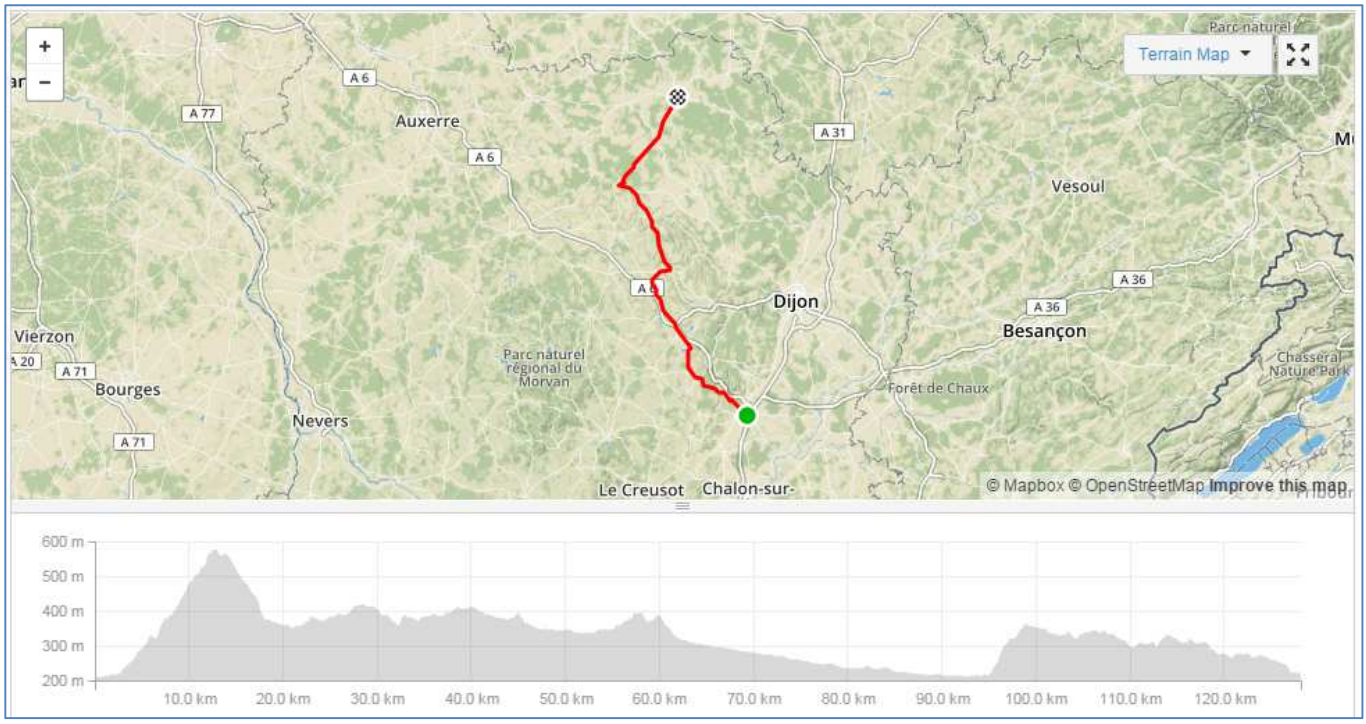
The road brightened with the rising sun. It was really a lovely sunrise, which of course I could not capture because I now had no camera! The roads were quiet, punctuated by the odd logging truck thundering past me. Arriving in the first supermarket possibility of Vernay Les Vaunes, I was 45 minutes too early. The supermarket was shut and did not open until 08:30am. Arriving in the second supermarket possibility of Montbard, I was 30 minutes too early. The supermarkert was shut and did not open until 08:45am. The inconsistency of opening times was beginning to annoy me. I could not afford to hang around until opening time, just to see if the shop might have a suitable charging lead, so I continued on the road to my first control town.

I arrived in Chatillon Sur Seine, tired and hungry, today I had been struck by the vastness of France, it really is a big country, which in many ways had felt deserted to me during this day. First priority for me was to get my control book stamped. I got this in the first pharmacy In saw, then I headed through town to find the large Intermarche.

There indeed was a phone shop in the Intermarche, and I joined the queue to get served. I waited for 15 minutes and I was desperate just to buy the lead I needed (I could see it behind the counter) and then get on and buy some food. I spoke to the lady in front of me in the queue and explained that I was riding against the clock, asking her if she minded if I went in-front of her. She explained that she too had been waiting a long time, but then she agreed to let me go in front of her when I explained that I had a very quick transaction to make. Whilst I was waiting in the queue, I tried to plug in my portable battery pack into my telephone, and unbelievably my phone began to charge. I do not know why it now worked, but I remained in the queue to buy another lead, just in-case the same problem happened later in the ride.

Once I had bought the lead I went round the shop buying fruit, pear nectar, sweets and biscuits. I was told by one of the supermarket staff that I was not allowed my bike in the shop. I ignored her and continued to wheel my bike around the shop. Once I had bought my items, I went and sat down in the café/bar in the lobby, ate a Quiche Lorraine and a can of coke. Re-fuelled, I went to pack my bike, my GPS unit required charging, so as normal I plugged in my portable battery pack, unfortunately it would not charge the GPS unit unless the charging lead was biased to the right hand side, if I released pressure from the lead, then it would not charge. I had to tie wrap the lead up so that it was always biasing the lead to the right hand side, so I could charge the GPS unit whilst I was riding. I then after a longer than planned stop, continued on the road again.

Figure 14 –Stage 7



S T A G E 8 – C H A T I L L O N – S U R – S E I N E → S E Z Z A N N E

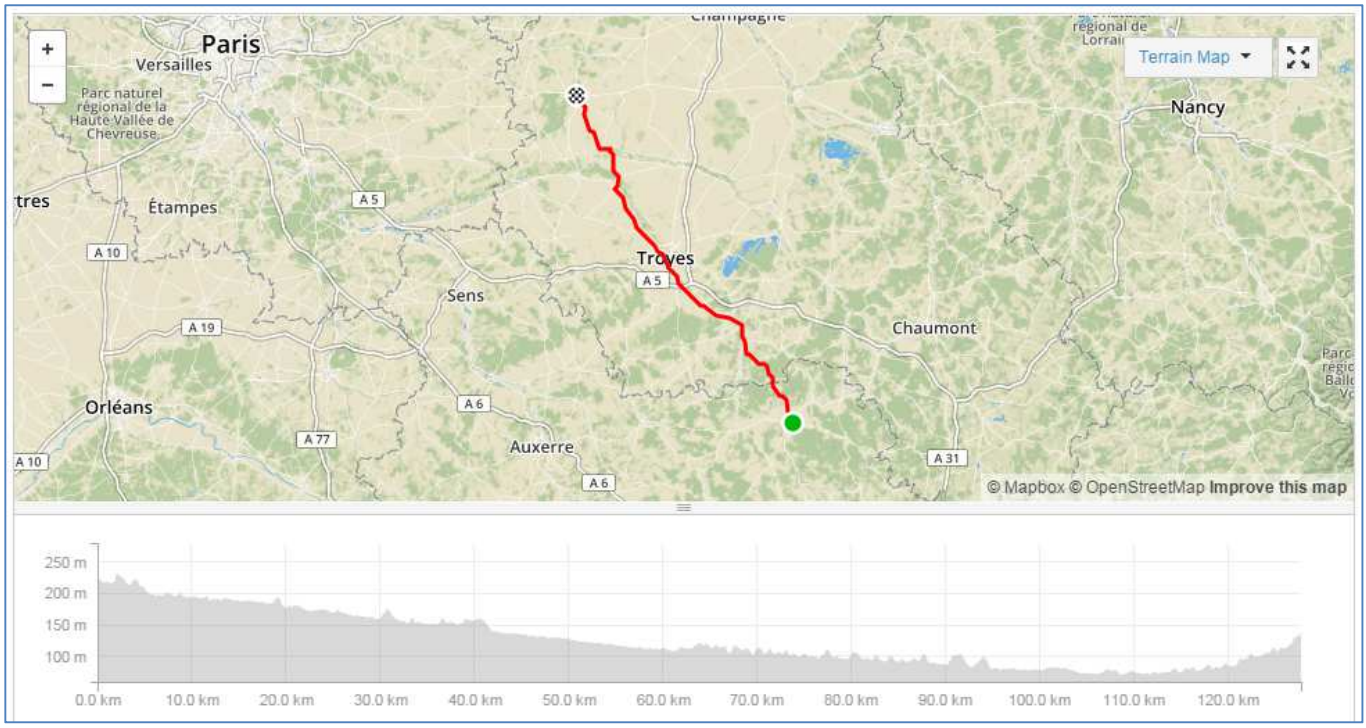
I could feel and see the landscape changing, it felt great to be criss crossing the river Seine, and feeling as if I was nearing Paris. There were many Champagne houses around, and I thought of the wonderful drink many times. I was feeling very tired during this afternoon, my legs, knees and backside were really hurting. Riding through Bar Sur Seine was a low point, I felt as if I had been riding for so long, but yet I had so far still to go until I reached my overnight destination of Soissons, I really had to focus hard and maintain my goals short to make them achievable.

Cross winds had been growing throughout the day, and leaving Bar-Sur-Seine I became more aware of the strength of the crosswinds. The D671 was a very tough road in terms of cross winds, I saw 2 trees which had been blown over from the roots, wind turbines to my left placed in enormous fields, with blown over trees on my right. This did not make riding any easier.

Arriving in Troyes was a relief, the cross winds abated as I got into the city, I passed though and found a place to eat towards the north side of the city – taking on a quick pizza and buying another ham sandwich for later in the ride. Leaving Troyes I passed the Michelin tyre factory on dual carriageways, and then settled back into the relentless cross winds. The weather was cloudy, but had not rained until I get to around Anglure. The sky was very threatening and eventually opened up. I was soaked within a few minutes, and by the time I reached my second control town of Sezzanne the rain had become intermittent.

I arrived in Sezzanne and again looked for a pharmacy to stamp my carnet. I got the stamp quickly, then rode up to the square outside the big church where I found a bar and had a coffee and some of the food I had bought in Chatillon-sur-Seine. Whilst I was in the bar I watched a father and his young daughter, they were together in the bar and clearly knew the patron. The father was basically ignoring his daughter and using his phone, then the little girl's mother arrived, which ignited a fierce argument between the parents. This was very ugly to watch, as I looked on at the little girl – clearly saddened at the situation. My bike outside the bar drew the attention of 2 smokers, who noticed that I had come from Menton. They were interested in my ride and I chatted with them for a few minutes before setting off again. The weather had worsened and there was heavy rain falling again.

Figure 15 –Stage 8



S T A G E 9 – S E Z Z A N N E → S O I S S O N S

The rain ebbed and flowed between heavy and light rain fall, then there was a break for a while. The light was fading now and I had to make a phone call to the hotel I had booked in Soissons, to advise them that I would be arriving after 11pm. I was not feeling good, my legs had very little strength in them and it was a case of having to dig deep to keep going. I could now feel pain in my right knee, I assumed from the hit on the saddle from the previous day.

Joining the D1 after Montmirail, the long straight road undulated up and down through open field land, and through wooded areas before descending sharply into Chateau Thierry, where again the rain poured heavily down. Passing though Chateau Thierry I could hear an acapella vocal group singing in the Chateau. Climbing out steeply from Chateauu Thierry I could hear the group's voices echoing up out of the city giving the night an eerie feel.

I needed to break the monotony of the D1 and it's undulations so, whilst riding I spoke to my best friend and my wife. It was lovely to speak to them and their words encouraged me onwards. I could not believe how slowly the Kilometres seemed to be counting down and the last 17Km to Soissons were incredibly tough. I was so tired, that I missed the entrance sign to Soissons. I had to turn back around and ride maybe another 700 metres, retracing my route to find the town entrance sign. I found it and got a picture of my bike underneath the sign.

Locating my hotel was not so easy, I followed the route I had planned but was met with a gate across the road that I could not pass. I could see the entrance to the hotel and had to circle around the gate on the industrial estate roads to get to the entrance of the hotel. When I arrived, the hotel was locked up and there was no sign of anyone on reception. I was so tired, that I simply banged on the door, and eventually the night receptionist came to the door, I gave him my name and he checked that I was booked in. He gave me a key to my room and showed me to it, through the car park of the hotel. I wheeled my bike into my room, took off my wet clothes, and got into the shower. I fell into bed and was asleep within a few minutes of lying down, drawing a close to the longest day I have spent on a bike.

Figure 16 –Stage 9

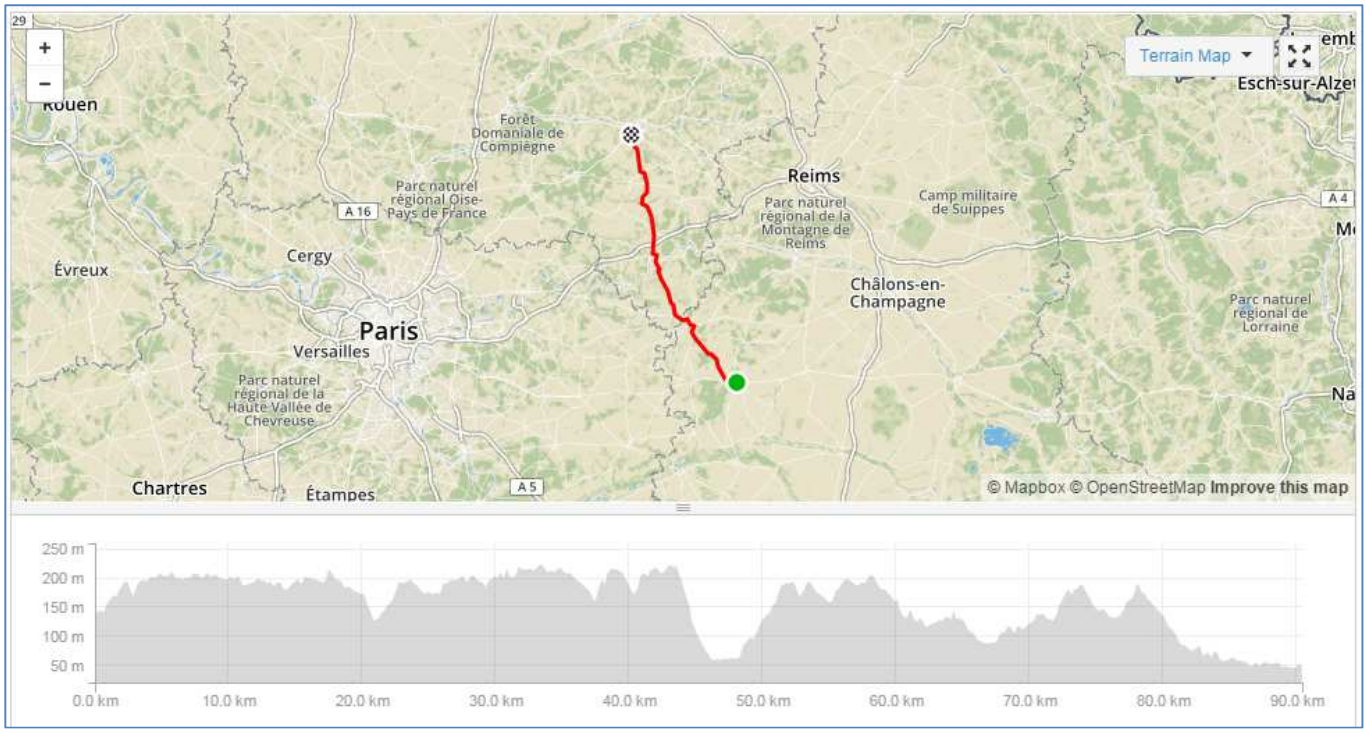
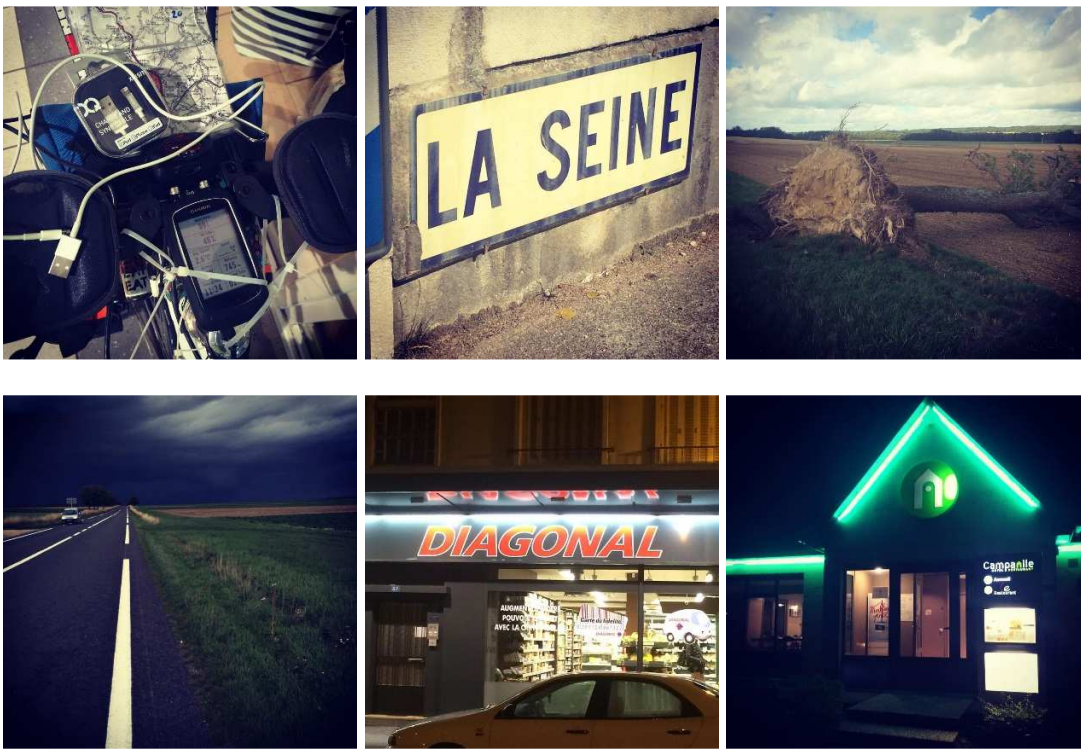


Figure 17 – Day 3 Photos



S T A G E 1 0 – S O I S S O N S → A R R A S

I had a good night sleep, if only for a handful of hours and I woke easily at my alarm sounding. All of the troubles from the previous day regarding charging leads was gone – my original charging lead was now functioning fine as it did in the shop in Chatillon-Sur-Seine, I have no clue as to what the problem was with the lead in Beaune. I left the hotel too early for breakfast at 06:35, so I ate breakfast in my room, some porridge oat sachets came in handy, along with some fruit. I rode into the centre of Soissons to find a shop that would stamp my carnet. I found one quickly and asked the patron to stamp my carnet, even though I had arrived in Soissons the night before.

I got riding again and found myself continuing on the D1 climbing quite steeply out of Soissons, once atop, the road straightened and began to undulate up and down. My body was complaining, particularly my legs, neck, shoulders, hands and backside, every undulation in the road required an awful lot of effort to get over. It was very misty and this gave an ethereal feel to the Somme region, I found myself trying to imagine what war times must have been like, and I came to the conclusion that the landscape was most likely still the same now as it was back then for the most part – and war times must have been hell. This area, at this time felt utterly deserted.

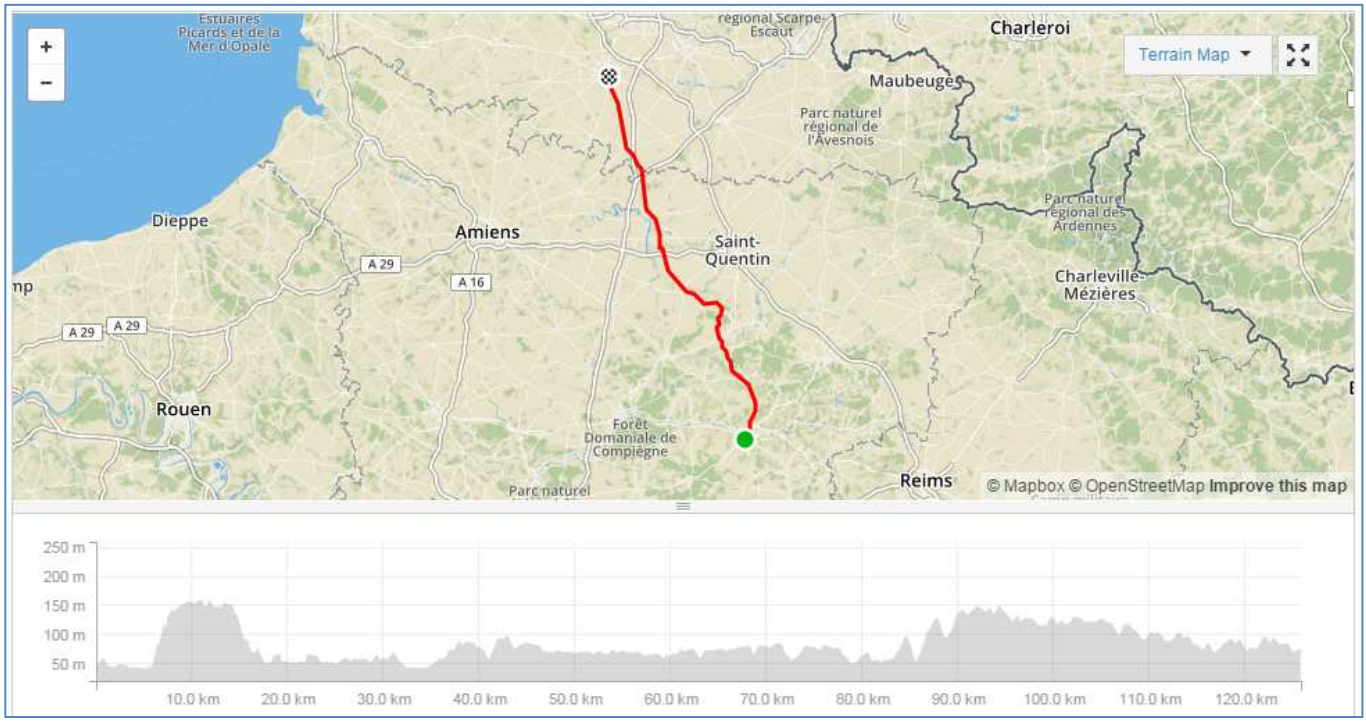
I arrived in Chauny, hungry and in need of some pastries. I stopped at a boulangerie and got my usual 2 croissants and a pain au raisin, I ate the croissants outside the shop and felt re-fuelled. Chauny had a nice feel to it, it seemed to have some kind of large school or college at its heart, which gave it a bit of liveliness. The D1 finished just south of Pierremande, and it felt great to be off that road – certainly a tough road to deal with mentally for me, however this led me onto the D937, which of course was much the same as the D1.

The road continued in the by now very familiar up and down undulations along a relatively straight road and by this time the wind had picked up and was now an element that was working against me. I was excited to get to Peronne, as this was one of the countdown towns I had identified as being essentially on the home straight – I was a little optimistic with this thought, there was still an awfully long way to go until I reached Dunkerque. The climb out of Peronne took me by surprise, it was long, straight and un-relenting into the wind. The difficulty was with the effort involved in climbing against the wind, and when I finally reached the top of the climb, I still had to pedal to go downhill the other side. It was very tough riding indeed, and giving myself a time check against my plan in Bapaume showed me that I was an hour behind plan and I still had yet to stop for food in my next control town. There was no option but for me to have to push harder and try to raise my speed.

I arrived in Arras at around 2pm, I had a good chance of finding a café//bar that was open at this time, and quickly found a decent looking place. Although I was behind plan, I was in desperate need of food again, I left my bike outside the bar and walked in, the patron saw me and immediately took my carnet and stamped it. We discussed my rise, and I expressed my situation to him - asking for a quick turn-around for food and a grand café. The patron was fantastic, he sat me at a table in the sun, had a coffee brought out to me within 2 minutes and my food within 10 minutes. I paid when he brought my food out to me, and he did not charge me the full price for the food as he saw I had a 10Eu note in my hand, and he jjust took that. After I had eaten, he filled my bidons for me and wished me ‘bon courage’. I was really enthused by this guy and some of his

customers, who whilst outside taking a cigarette had seen my bike and my frame plate and were also wishing me good luck. Now the ride was really on its last stage, and I could not wait to arrive in Dunkerque.

Figure 18 –Stage 10



S T A G E 1 0 – A R R A S → D U N K E R Q U E

Leaving Arras, I knew I was now around 1.5 hrs behind my plan. This was getting very close to the time limit and I had no option but to ride as fast as I could. I had been contacted by Stephane COLLEWET the previous day, and he had suggested that we meet in Hazebrouck where he and his friend would ride with me into Dunkerque. I was very excited about this, and the thought of riding with other cyclists helped me to push on along the continuing long straight up and down roads – battling the headwind which seemed to be picking up force the closer I got to the coast.

Passing through towns in between Arras and Dunkerque, they all appeared very similar in appearance which made them hard to distinguish. I arrived in Hazebrouck and looked out fro Stephane and Michel in the square. They saw me very quickly from their position and we greeted each other warmly, then all got riding again quickly, the guys knew that I was anxious about completing my attempt within the time limit, so there was no time to waste.

It was an absolute pleasure to be cycling and chatting with Stephane and Michel, I learnt about their riding experiences, and we talked generally about cycling, family, holidays, the weather and the genuine difficulty of trying to complete a diagonale. Chatting with these guys made the time and the distance disappear, before I knew it we were off the main road route that I had planned and were on a nicer route through to Cassel, where we would join up with my planned route again, so nice to have local knowledge helping me at this stage. We passed through Wormhout, where I stopped to post off my arrivé carte postale to the federal delegate.

Michel left us to return to his home shortly before Bergues. I thanked Michel for his company and then continued onto Stephane's home town of Bergues. Stephane was born in Bergues, and of course, knows it very well, so from here I was taken away from my planned route and into Dunkerque on a quieter road which was really very peaceful. By this time, I knew that I would complete my attempt within the time limit and I was beginning to feel jubilant. I knew that I would finish, I knew that when I finished the pain would stop, and I knew that when I finished my best mate would be waiting for me at the Police Nationale.

Stephane and I stopped under the town entrance sign to Dunkerque. We took a photograph and then Stephane asked me if I minded him taking a picture of me next to the statue of Jean Bart in the centre of Dunkerque. I said I did not and Stephane explained that he found it amusing to have a picture of an Englishman next to the statue of Jean Bart. I obliged and then we made our way to the Police Nationale.

When I arrived at the Poloice Nationale I saw my friend. He had been waiting in the car park on the Quai D'Hollandais for a few hours and was elated to see me. As In was to see him. I went into the Police Nationale and got my carnet stamped with the time of 19.30. I had made it in 98.5 hours. I was exhausted, but running on adrenaline and excitement. Stephane met my friend and we went to hhis car, where we all ate some cake before thanking and saying goodbye to Stephane. It was a pleasure to meet him and I was very grateful to spend the final Kilometres on the road with him.

My friend packed my bike into the back of his car before we left Dunkerque to go to our hotel in De Panne in neighbouring Flanders. It was an absolute pleasure to be moving in a car – it seemed totally effortless. We arrived in the hotel and had a fantastic evening discussing the ride, drinking beers and eating great food.

Figure 19 –Stage 11

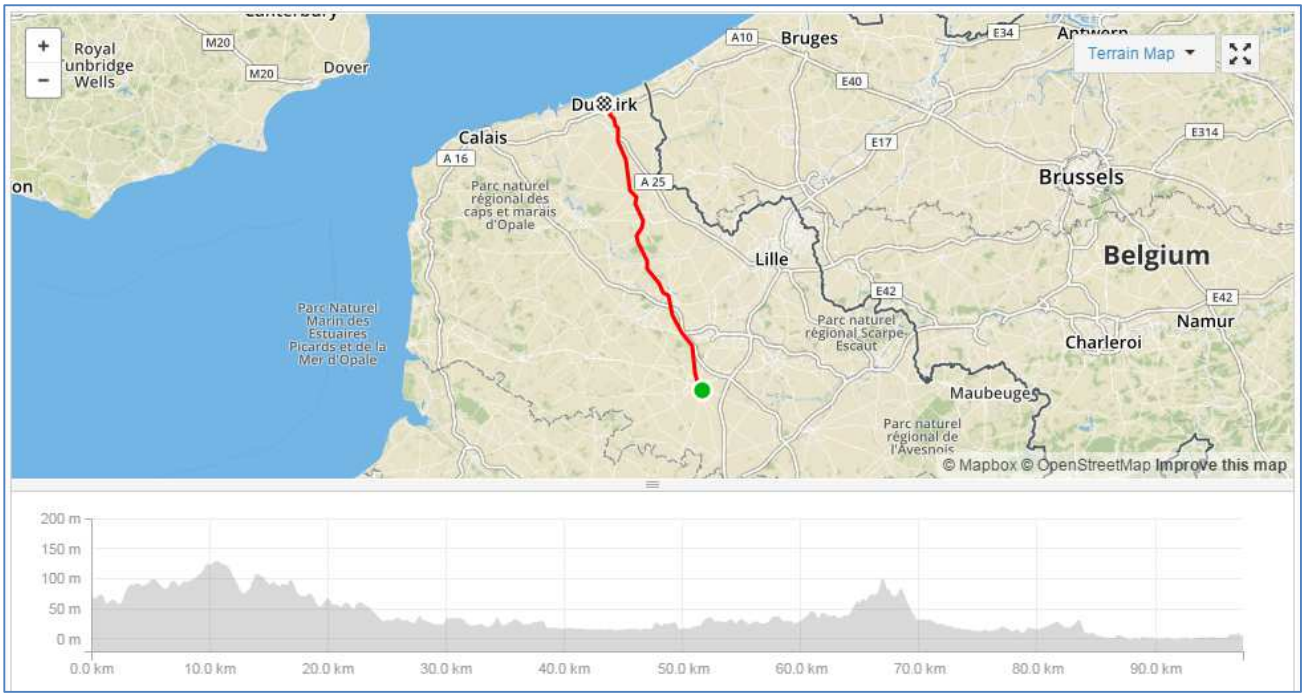
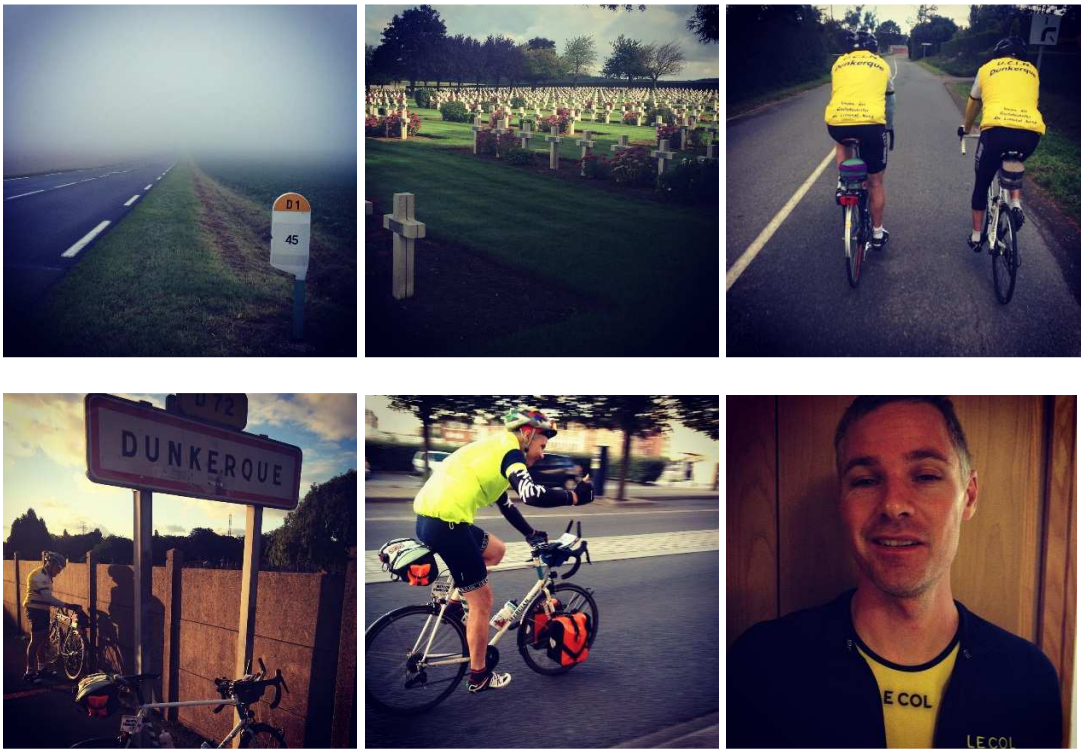


Figure 20 – Day 4 Photos



C O N C L U S I O N

My diagonal attempt was very tough indeed. It took an awful lot from me physically and was a difficult concept to deal with mentally. The planning and logistics phases were more demanding than I had anticipated they would be and I felt a great deal of relief when I had finally finished.

I really enjoyed the ride and I feel very satisfied to be one of the few Englishmen to have attempted and completed a Diagonale de France. I was very lucky along the ride not to suffer any serious injury or serious mechanical failures, and I was also lucky to meet some very kind people, who helped me in situations where I needed it.

The weather was a tough characteristic of the ride, the rain was very heavy for a very long time on day 2 and there were nagging crosswinds and very strong headwinds to deal with on days 3 and 4, which made riding at speed very difficult.

Before riding, I thought the difficulty of the ride lay in the first day or two, but really it was day 3 where things got a bit grippy, doing things differently, perhaps I would have planned for a shorter distance to be covered on day 3.

This has been a big undertaking and a very tough ride indeed, but it has given me a great experience.

Table 6 – Total Timing

STAGE	DEPART	ARRIVE	MOVING TIME (Hrs)	ELAPSED TIME (Hrs)	DIST (KM	ELEV (M)
1. Day 1	17:00	22:10	4h31	5h10	92.8	2,765
2. Day 1	23:10	05:30	5h35	6h14	114.8	1,999
3. Day 1	06:15	15:34	6h24	9h26	145.6	1,778
4. Day 2	04:00	09:55	5h16	5h46	112.1	1,008
5. Day 2	10:45	14:40	3h28	3h52	83.3	427
6. Day 2	15:30	18:50	2h66	3h16	73.8	315
7. Day 3	02:50	09:55	5h53	7h06	128.1	921
8. Day 3	11:35	17:55	5h22	8h01	127.7	276
9. Day 3	18:45	00:00	4h22	4h58	90.4	962
10. Day 4	06:35	13:50	6h26	7h17	125.7	758
11. Day 4	14:40	19:30	4h22	4h44	97.4	391

Table 7 – Totals Numbers

C H A R A C T E R I S T I C	V A L U E
Distance	1,191.7km
Climbing	11,600m
Duration	98 hours 24 minutes
Start Time	15 Sep 2015 17:00:23
Finish Time	19 Sep 2015 19:24:42
Minimum Altitude	-17m
Maximum Altitude	1,191m
Average Speed - Overall	12.1kph
Average Speed - Moving	22.0kph
Time At Rest	44 hours 8 minutes

Figure 21 – Carnet

