

France

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[Date: 5-aug-2007](#)

[Stage: Preparations](#)

[Country: France](#)

Before we left on our 12.000km in 2006 we had no idea if we would be able to cycle day after day for weeks in a row. As we did not wanted to fail, we did many kilometers before(5.500km). We know now that that is largely enough, actually the kilometers do not count that much, it's the hours you sit on your bike and the fact that you have to get used to that day after day. So that is what we are doing right now. We are almost every day cycling in the area here (South of France) and with the hot weather we have since June, it very much helps to get used to the warm days ahead in Africa.



But this time we also will cycle a large bit in Europe and we know that September can be wet and sometimes relatively cold. So perhaps we should train in the UK as they have a lot of rain there.

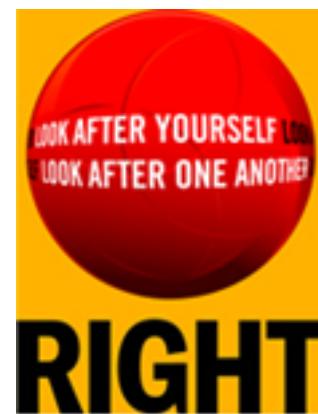
During our rides the last couple of months we almost every day are encountering special people. Early July when we were going to Caussols, we were overtaken by an Englishman, Phil Deeker who gave himself a very special 50th birthday present! He was on his 6th day of a month long trip through France to do 300 cols! An amazing effort and at least twice as hard as what we are going to do! His blog is on www.magclearsmines.org and for those that like cycling, it's worth reading it.

Equipment

We decide to find a less heavy bike for this trip. Last year we had a handmade bike from steel, as we wanted comfort and robustness. We got that, but also a weight of 17 to 18 kilos and especially on a uphill, that was a challenge. So we bought two bikes (12 kg each) from Specialized this time, a Crosstrail Competition. This time a mountain bike is not needed, as we will be mainly cycling on pavement this time and not off roads like last year. We changed the handlebars to be able to change the position of our hands and body if we feel doing so. We had to buy them in Germany, as here in France we were not able to find them. Because of the shape of the handlebar, Jenny calls her bike the Black Butterfly. During the first day after she decided on that name a butterfly that was mainly black sat on the handlebar for some seconds. So her bike is baptized now!

Sponsorship

Like last year, when with the help of many of you, we were able to find support



for 17 children in Africa, we are asking to sponsor us. We are looking for those that would like to either support us per cycled kilometer, or with a sum of money per completed stage, or with a lump sum. The money raised is going to be split 50/50 between 2 organizations, SOS Children's Villages³ and Right to Play⁴. This first organization is helping children that no longer have a family by creating a family-type environment in a village for them and the second organization uses specially-designed sport and play programmers to improve health, build life skills, and foster peace for children and communities affected by war, poverty, disease. We hope that like last time that you will be able to sponsor us. Our goal is to find a sponsor for all the 69 stages of the tour¹. Under [Sponsor us](#), you'll find details as how you could go about helping us.

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Date: 19-aug-2007
Stage: Preparations
Country: France

Thank you all for the nice emails we received, encouraging us in preparation for our Paris-Dakar by Bike adventure. Like last time, the messages we get are very much appreciated, so keep sending them.

Preparation

Like we said last time, almost every day on the road we encounter something worth



Jenny at the end of the

mentioning. At least we feel it's worth mentioning, because it has to do with meeting people, our favorite hobby! Not too long ago we passed two cyclists on their heavily loaded racing bikes. Now that's already worth mentioning, we seldom pass cyclists, especially on racing bike, we are too slow for that! We found out that they were from Budapest and just arrived by plane from there taking a 3 weeks trip through the mountains here. Now we understood why we passed them, they were still trying to get in shape and with the luggage they were trying to bring up the mountain, that was not an easy job during the first day.

Hello or Not Hello, that is the question!
We always say Hello to cyclist and pedestrians we meet on the road. We noticed an interesting behavior from those we say Hello to. About 50% do not respond at all. They look at us, and then just continue their trip. Although we do not have any proof, it's almost predictable who will not respond, they ride their bike with a face as if they have left the house having a big fight with their wife (yes, 95% is male, we seldom see a female cyclist). Is cycling fun or not?

Traffic in the South of France
It seems that France has the reputation of being careless with cyclists. We always get that question "Is it not dangerous on the road as cyclist in France?" Yes, you have to be careful and yes there are accidents with cyclists as anywhere in the world. But we first of all do not go to very congested areas, like at this moment the roads alongside the beaches.

We stay about 1 meter from the side of the road, just in case, but on a

tunnel!



Days we cycled



downhill, going at 50 to 60 km/h we take a little but more space and Kees' new gadget (see under 'Equipment') helps to monitor the road behind him. Jenny also has a orange sign on the left of her bike, which should help to keep distance between the cars and the bicycles.

Occasionally we have a macho, he passes when there is not enough space for it or passes just before a curve not able to see what is coming our way (that's probably more a lunatic and not a macho!), but in general cars and trucks wait till they have enough sight to be able to pass you without a problem.

Equipment

Kees like gadgets! Let's describe two that are of great use as a cyclist according to him. The first is a helmet mirror, an wonderful invention that you see often in the UK and also in the USA, but that you do not find in France.

His second gadget is not new, his Polar cycling watch gave him already all the details he wanted during the Cairo - Cape town trip (speed, distance, heartbeat, height, etc. Yes the time too!), but then he was not able to put the data on his PC. Now he does load them everyday on his PC and will then be able to see how the trip went. It's gets almost too professional!

Sponsorship

Thank you Priscilla & Lucien, Shakir, Jean-Louis, Wim & Yvonne, Marijke, Annelyn & Jos, Marina & Marjolyn, Liesbeth & Puck, Jerry, Paul & Sophie, Jan & Trudy, Kristine, Wivina & Etienne, Gerard, Hanne & Tom, Bert and Betty & Henk for you willingness to sponsor our effort. We hope that many of you will follow!

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Date: 26-aug-2007

Stage: Preparations

Country: France

Preparation

It was a special week for us, after weeks of cycling together we were separated for 5 days. I needed to go for business to Offenbach (near Frankfurt) and Jenny stayed at home, our preparation was split. I rented a bicycle in a German cycling shop and drove along the river Main to towns like Mühlheim, Steinheim and Seligenstadt. The last town is a really nice German town with attracts a lot of tourist. Cycling alongside the Main is a delight, there are cycling paths not used by any cars, sometimes a jogger or in-line skater, but mostly only used by fellow cyclists. Back home I was glad that I was back on my bicycle, the saddle on the rental bike was not really one I would be able to do Paris-Dakar on without any problems....



Seligenstadt



Kees at the river Main

Jenny was also cycling alone and has noticed again that other, male cyclist take a special interest in her not having her buddy cycling on her side. One day she was not happy, during the ascent from Gourdon to Caussols, a male cyclist, without saying anything stayed behind her for a couple of kilometers. *“I could feel his breathing in my neck!”* she said. We are glad that nothing happened and that we can cycle together again.



Jenny close to home on the road to Gourdon

Getting to Paris

We will leave home Friday the 7th of September. On Saturday the 8th the riders will meet with the organization to get instructions for the trip. How to get to Paris from our house? Flying would be cumbersome with the bikes, train could be an option, but driving up there by car would be the easiest in terms of transporting the bicycles. Our sport doctor Jean-Louis (the one that 4 years ago discovered what was wrong with Jenny's foot and is a genius in his field!) wanted to sponsor us for the previous trip from Cairo to Capetown, but due to several unforeseen circumstances, this did not take place. He seemed to feel guilty and when he became aware of our next adventure, he immediately proposed to bring the adventures to Paris with his minibus and also provide us with medication that we might need during the trip. So, Monsieur et Madame are going to get to Paris with a private chauffeur!



Leaving the house and dog

The sad thing of traveling is that you need to get out of your house, and we both like our house very much. We like our dog Floortje (or Flo as the pronunciation is too difficult for non Dutch speakers) even more and I already have nightmares of leaving her behind for almost 12 weeks. There are good Dutch friends who will take care of both the dog and the house. Last time the house took care of itself and there were no more dogs around, both Max and Floppie died before the Tour d'Afrique started. It's very nice that this time the house does not have to be burglar locked. Floortje will even for 6 out of the 12 weeks have another dog to play with, so perhaps she wants us to get on a long trip on our bikes more often!

New Tent

Those of you that have followed our last

adventure perhaps remember that in Malawi our hiking tent broke down and that fortunately we found a new, more spacious one in the capital Lilongwe. Both tents we left behind in Africa, even the small hiking tent was of use to the people there and we gave the Lilongwe tent away in Cape town. So we needed something new and decided to buy 3 Seconds Light that sleeps 3. One of our experience last year was that a small hiking tent is not sufficient spacious if you are camping for weeks in a row. Setting us this tent takes 3 seconds, nice after a long trip on the bike. Folding it away took a bit longer the first time, but we will get used to that. After the trip we let you know how we liked our tent this time.

Sponsoring

Wie maakt ons los!? In Holland on the market there is a Dutch expression “Wie maakt me los?” which is used when close to the end of the foodmarket the salesmen want to sell their goods as not to return home with them.

The €2500 mark has been passed! Over 30 people have agreed to sponsor us as of today. So we are almost half way to get the 59 sponsors that we set as our goal. Are you going to be one of the 29 we are still missing? We hope so.

In addition to those we mentioned before, we like to thank Cor & Noor; Roel, Marilou & Vicky; Géke & Ronald; Hans & Misj; Tony & Trijntje; Marjo; Nelly & Emile; Jerry; Jeljer en Elly for their willingness to sponsor the effort.

If you like to help getting closer to our goal, click on ['Sponsor us'](#)

Websites

There is also information about the 2007 trip on www.bike-dreams.com. For the

statisticians under us: There are 29 participants at the moment, 21 will do the whole trip, the rest do parts of it. It seems to be a rather Dutch tour, 16 out of the 29 are from Holland. 11 women will get on their bike, 18 men are going to follow them!

That's it for now. Next week we are going to cover the questions people are asking us and then the adventure will begin on Sunday the 9th of September. If you happen to be in Paris that day, come and send us off!

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Date: 2-sept-2007

Stage: Preparations

Country: France

Thanks to everybody that has send us a message to encourage us. As always a bit of stress starts to develop one week before, "Do we have everything needed?" Fortunately, we have the experience of last years tour, but some things are different. For instance the weather, this time we start in a country where we could have wet and relatively cold weather in September (Still no rain here however, the area is in great need for water, some towns have restricted use of water and to prevent fires, forest roads are closed for traffic). So consequently we need to be prepared for that with our clothes.

Preparation

Again some days of not cycling together. Jenny has been 3.5 days in Denmark,



Christopher kissing the phone



Marathon Racer

visiting our daughter, son-in-law and of course our grandson Christopher! As the weather there was quite wet, she did some spinning in the sport school of Pauletta. She got compliments from the owner of the school that she is in perfect condition. Perhaps a surprise for him, not for us. Having done about 3000km in preparation should show somehow, isn't it?

I could not go to Denmark this time and stayed home with our dog. Did however communicate with my grandson by video and phone, here a photo Jenny took of him while I was on the phone with him and he wanted to give me a kiss. He simulated it by kissing the phone. We will miss him! I also did some more km's here, but also went into checking the last things, like changing the tires for new ones. With the very good experience we had with Schwalbe Marathon tires last time (On the 12.000km last year, Jenny had no flats and I only 3. Psst, don't say that too loud, brings bad luck!), we put them on our new bikes as well. This time with less profile (so no nobbies, as the mountain bikers calls them) but tires for the road. As you might remember, this trip will be almost all on paved roads.

The Press

A couple of weeks ago, a journalist of Nice Matin interviewed us and photo's were taken. This week Thursday a page large article appeared in all their issues that day. So we are "world famous" in Bar-sur-Loup. It might be just a coincidence, but that day and the day after many more cyclists said good-bye to me when encountering them on the road. It must have been me! A scan of the article is [here](#) (or you can click on the article on the right.)

The day after the article we receive a message from the French television



Jenny on the road?

station FR3 in Nice. If they could do an item on us. [Click here](#) to see the result.

History (Source: "Uit Grootmoeders Tijd" Thanks Pieta!)

One of the readers of this Newsletter did send us an interesting summary of an article describing the history of the bicycle. It seems that in the year 1760 the bicycle was invented. The bicycle had a wooden structure and there was no steering. The men went on the bicycle in the same outfit as they used during horse riding, but had a cap instead of an helmet. Interesting that we are back to the helmet nowadays. Men above 40 years of age were advised not to ride a bicycle. Priest found that cycling for ladies was indecent and the general practitioners advised ladies that it was detrimental for their health.

In 1817, the bicycle steering became possible, but still no pedals. The first bicycle club in Holland was formed in Deventer. In 1879, a race was organized in United Kingdom and was won by a Dutchman. A.E. Derkinderen. He won the 80.5 km in 4 hours and 55 minutes. So a little bit over 16km/h, compare that to todays average in the Tour de France of over 40 km/h. Finally in the magazine "Nature" from 1883, they wondered if the bicycle had a future? History has decided differently.

WRAPPER

We live in France as you know and we try to keep our host country clean when we cycle through France to Andorra. That's why we have proposed to the organization "Paris-Dakar by Bike" to collect all wrappers of the Maxim energy bars which are provided daily by Bike-Dreams. The empty wrappers are collected after each stage and we will donate 50 eurocent for every wrapper. We believe that this



initiative cuts both ways; one the hand we keep the route of "Paris-Dakar" clean, and on the other hand the organizations of SOS Children Villages and Right To Play are supported. In our journals that we write during the trip, we will let you know how many wrappers were collected.

With the help of our creative genius Lucien (webmaster and son-in-law) WRAPPER stands for: **We Reduce All Possible Pollution Each Race**

Sponsorship

The €3000 mark has passed! Over 40 people has agreed to sponsor us as of today. So we are getting there to get 59 sponsors that we set as our goal. Are you going to be one of the 19 we are still missing? We hope so.

If you like to help getting closer to our goal, click on ['Sponsor us'](#)

In addition to those we mentioned in our last Newsletters, we like to thank Henrik & Paulette, Gaëlle, Frank, Jeroen & Marina, Donald & Geja, Anton & Renée, Maryli, Garage Gordolon, Didier, Kenneth and Gerrit & Hermien for their willingness to sponsor the effort.

And Finally....

Another reader (Thanks Alfonds!) proposed us to use this vehicle as to have more fun during our trip. Jenny is against it, she doesn't even consider a tandem! But one day with 5 other riders we might do a test drive. Volunteers? That's it for the this edition of our Newsletter. Not sure when exactly you will receive number 5, it depends where we can find a Internet café to send our report.

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Date: 08-sept-2007

Stage: Paris, the day before the start

Country: France

Like with all bicycle races, a prologue is needed to get into the spirit of the “race”. Race between inverted comma’s, because we do not only want to see the tarmac in front of our bicycle, but also and maybe foremost, our wish to see the countries we plan to travel through and above all to meet the people there.



Our prologue has been a very special one, first of all the day before the start, where we meet many “old” friends, those that already had done tours with each other in the past, a real pleasure to see each other again after many moon months.

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Date: 09-sept-2007

Stage: Paris to St Hilaire les Andrieses

Distance: 145 km (From campsite to campsite)

Ascent: 555

Temp (L/M/H): 15/20/26

KCal: 2129

Time: ±8 h 0 m (not exact due to start Eifel Tower)

Country: France

The second part of the prologue started with getting out of bed while it was still dark, which brought again back sweet memories from earlier tours. Standing around the “breakfast” table,

feeling still a bit sleepy and cold close to the river Seine, it all helps to get into the right mood to get on our bikes and GO!

Finally we got the first KM's through the sleeping streets of Paris via the Arc de Triomphe to the Eiffel Tower where the real start was going to take place.

Surprises were waiting for us there, family and friends that were standing at the start (in our case unexpectedly with our daughter Priscilla and our friend Hans), and also a photographer of the Dutch Newspaper De Telegraaf; we almost felt like celebrities given the number of camera's that were pointed at us.

With the bang of an exploding tube, we started our 7200km trip to Dakar. First in convoy, chatting, stopping for traffic lights, enjoying the River Seine with all the beautiful buildings alongside; and then further on to the first lunch stop. Actually I should write Lunch stop, as the lunch was excellent, a good start indeed and good for the moral of the riders.

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Date: 10-sept-2007

Stage: St Hilaire les Andrieses to Vézelay

Distance: 116 km

Ascent: 830m

Temp (L/M/H): 9/18/29

KCal: 2213

Time: 6 h 51 m

Country: France

We need to get used to these cold starts! But how, if you are lying in your warm sleeping bag, when the thermometer is somewhere in the range of 5? degrees Celsius and everything is wet of morning damp? Mariska is helping us to get over that hurdle, with her jokes and laughs we get quickly into the right mood and of course not to forget Michèle, Marianne (did the organisation select them on the M?) and our South-African cook Rudy.

But OK, we got on our bikes for the 2nd stage and had to use our tube repair skills already, Jan got two flats within 5 km! A last uphill brought us to the nice town of Vézelay, with the beautiful Basilique Ste-Madeleine and nice terraces where we try to wind down from the ride of the day.



We are not sure if this statue is in honour of one of the two owners of Bike-Dreams, probably not!

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Date: 11-sept-2007

Stage: Vézelay to Boudon-Lancy

Distance: 130 km

Ascent: 1495m

Temp (L/M/H): 9/15/27

KCal: 2500

Time: 7 h 45 m

Country: France

Day 3, weather-wise was as the day before, but a lot sunnier in the afternoon. Mist in the morning with rolling hills, so some of us put on their red lights to make sure the cars and trucks did see us in time to avoid any mishaps. In Boudon our cook Rudy was not a happy man, as there were many wasps around his kitchen, but with the help of a wasp catcher (an empty water bottle, remodelled to make sure the wasps can not get back out. 21 wasps were not able to make live miserable for Rudy any longer.

Another significant number are the 40 wrappers that were collected today, so that will help Right to Play and SOS Kinderdorpen again with another €20,-

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[Date: 12-sept-2007](#)

[Stage: Boudon-Lancy to Olliergues](#)

[Distance: 146 km](#)

[Ascent: 1740m](#)

[Temp \(L/M/H\): 7/16/25](#)

[KCal: 3139](#)

[Time: 9 h 40 m](#)

[Country: France](#)

Two more significant numbers on day 4 were the 146 km we cycled and the 1740m of climbing over 3 cols.

Many of us were happy to have arrived in the camp. We could use some of that stimulating stuff that we have heard about...

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[Date: 13-sept-2007](#)

[Stage: Olliergues to le Puy-en-Velay](#)

[Distance: 125 km](#)

[Ascent: 1430m](#)

[Temp \(L/M/H\): 8/21/35](#)

[KCal: 2521](#)

[Time: 9 h 00 m](#)

[Country: France](#)

A very nice surprise for some of us was that the organisation was able to have

the truck driving on Sunday, so we do not have to keep pedalling till Sunday and can already take a rest day in Le Puy-en-Velay, but only after some 125km and 1430m of climbing and again with a rather cold start in the morning, which can give nice pictures.

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Date: 15-sept-2007

Stage: Le Puy en Velay to Villefort

Distance: 105 km

Ascent: 1505m

Temp (L/M/H): 11/21/31

KCal: ±2000

Time: 6 h 47 m

Country: France

Again a day with a start in the mist, so we could use our red backlight again. Never thought before leaving our house that we would use it that much!). The first couple of kilometers we did in convoy, always a nice start of the stage, chatting with everybody together.

Many kilometers of climbing was announced, but the gradients were not too heavy, so we kept on chatting until the group dispersed, due to the different level of power to go to the top.

The organizers do a great job in finding the scenery and quiet roads, and they promised us that the next two days would even be more scenery and spectacular.

After our lunch stop we stopped at a small snack to drink a Coke or take a



tea. The owner of the stop did us a favor; he offered us a glass of Genepi, a home brewed 55degrees liquor with herbs. We only took a small sip of it, as alcohol and cycling do not really go together.

Shortly after we thought that the alcohol did do us a trick as we did not believe what we saw, Lama's on the side of the road! But here is the proof that they were really Lama's.

We arrived at a wonderful spot at an artificial lake at the Camping Le Lac, on top of that we experienced the highest temperature so far, a +30 degrees Celsius, and so many of us took a dive into the water of the lake. Have a beer afterwards on the terrace of the local restaurant made it really feel like we are on holiday!

May be less for our truck driver Ron, he needed to get under the truck to do some modification on the electricity. Our old mattresses were of good use to him lying on his back for an hour or so.

The cooks made a wonderful meal and the cake was so much appreciated by Kevin, that he loaded his plate completely with it.

A campfire at the end of the day completed a very successful stage of Paris-Dakar.

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[Date: 16-sept-2007](#)

[Stage: Villefort to Le Rozier](#)

[Distance: 131 km](#)

[Ascent: 1210m](#)

[Temp \(L/M/H\): 10/25/43](#)

[KCal: 2095](#)

[Time: 8 h 47 m](#)

[Country: France](#)

The next morning, some of us took the footpath along the lake to get to the dam, which gave a nice few on the spot where we have had a wonderful camp.

It was also one of the first mornings we had no mist to start with, the ascent was kind of easy and from there on we went

almost all down through nice villages
trough the Gorge du Tarn.

It became really hot, especially on the little square were we had our lunch. I left my bike in the sun, so that's why the temperature went up to 43 degrees. Jenny and Rob discussed if they would go into the fountain or not.

Edwin managed to get his first puncture, due to a piece of green glass from the empty beer bottles that are thrown out of cars. A strange habit we see quite often here in France.

The road winded down through the Gorge, giving spectacular views of the rocks, so of them hanging over our heads.

Jenny and I decided that one day we will go to the Chateau de la Caze and spend a couple of days walking or cycling around.

Today was my turn to wash the dishes, together with Kevin and fortunately many other volunteers, because washing +25 plates, cups, pots and pans, could be a major effort to finish the day.

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Travel journal & preparations

Published: Wednesday, 08 May 2019 09:28
Written by Kees Vonk



[Date: 17-sept-2007](#)

[Stage: Le Rozier to Le Salvetat sur Agout](#)

[Distance: 119 km](#)

[Ascent: 1890m](#)

[Temp \(L/M/H\): 14/22/32](#)

[KCal: 2557](#)

[Time: 8 h 47 m](#)

[Country: France](#)

As a group we covered the distance between our camp and the Bridge of Millau, the magnificent bridge, covering almost 2,5 kilometers, and a height of 343 meters. The visitors center was still closed, so we continued and I broke my speed record on the new bike, going at 72,6 km/h, perhaps a record to be broking in the Atlas or the Pyrenees. But I promise that I never will drive faster than my angels can fly!

Let me introduce two cyclists that have been with Jenny and me for many days in a row now. Edwin and Jan. The 4 of us have been given the nickname the Three Musketeers and the Noble Woman (Jonkvrouw Jenny).

Today the lunch stop was far away, mainly due to the wind that started to blow heavily and the fact that the last stretch to get there was a bit boring. The second surprise was when reaching the first col, we thought we were there, put on our jacks and then found our that we still needed to go higher!

The third surprise that day we experienced at the campsite, it started to rain for the first time during our trip. The crew had put up a kind of tent between the truck and the van, but the wind and the rain were too strong for the construction and in the middle of our meal the tent collapsed, leaving everybody in the rain and rushing to get



into the truck. Have you ever seen +25 people with plates and cups in their hands to get through the one door the truck has? It must have been quite amusing for those that could watch this without getting wet (where there any?).

The 4th surprise was the wine and cheese we were offered in the truck and after that quickly in the tent as tomorrow could be a cold and wet day the weatherman said.



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Date: 18-sept-2007

Stage: Le Salvetat sur Agout to Carcassonne

Distance: 99 km

Ascent: 1145m

Temp (L/M/H): 12/15/27

KCal: 1534

Time: 7 h 54 m

Country: France

The prediction came through; we had rain at the start, so getting all our stuff into the Truck, so we started a bit late. The first col was kind of easy, the second also, but due to the wind and rain, a bit difficult. The descent was even colder, but with a nice lunch prepared by Rudy and Marianne, they got us hot drink like hot chocolate and cookies. Although they are not cyclists themselves, they know what we need with this type of weather!



Unfortunately Jenny and I collided in the descent, due to the fact that I stopped for a dog that wanted to chase our bikes.

The damage was not too bad, but we got a shock and if spoiled the last part of the trip to Carcassonne, but the town and the camping compensated for it.

Fortunately we have a rest day tomorrow, so that any injuries can be treated and some rest can be taken, as well as typing this report in the Truck.

Participants

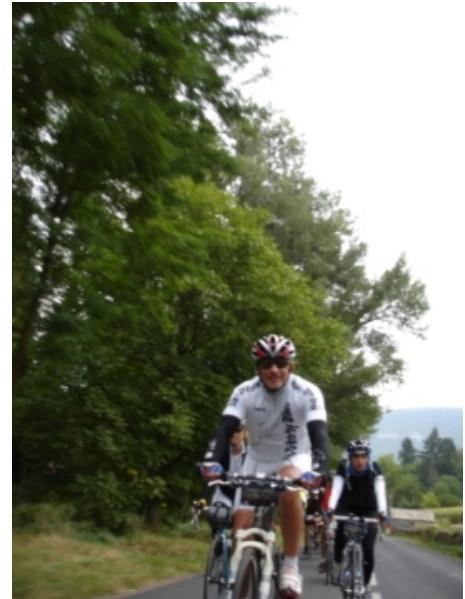
Every now and then, we will also talk about some of the cyclists. Let's start with the fast boy, Bob. Only 18 years and so fast that we decided that he should have a bag of sand behind his bike to slow him down a bit.

Another fast guy, but a "bit" older is Jef, as you can see on this picture, he is really fast, not only with his bike, but also when standing in the queue of the food.

One more fast guy, the Frenchman that did the Tour d' Afrique with us, Christian. His wife Madeleine is following him in the truck and pampering him with the logistics like putting us his tent, etc. That's real love!

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Date: 19-sept-2007
Stage: Carcassonne (restday)
Country: France

We experienced a real rest day in Carcassonne, the washing was done the day before, so we could fully concentrate on resting (we needed that as we are going

to make a lot of altitude meters the days to come), writing the reports for www-14xp9.hosts.cx, visiting the Cité (old fortified town of Carcassonne), cleaning the bikes and stocking up on calories, with pancakes in the morning, prepared by our tour leaders Rob and Wilbert; pizza in the afternoon and tapas in the evening.

In between we looked at the old town, took a lot of pictures and did everything by walking around. Jenny, due to her crash the day before, could not walk so fast, we hope that she can cycle tomorrow, but she definitely has planned to get on the bike tomorrow. In the afternoon we meet a couple of local retirees, who apparently are not planning to cycle to Dakar as we do, chatting and sitting in the shade of the trees.

Our truck driver Ron left us, he has been replaced by a couple, Adam and Anne, both live in Denmark, so we can try to learn a couple of words of Danish on the trip to Dakar. When he explained the new drivers all the in and outs of the truck, he demoed how you can leave the cabin to get to the engine. We hope Adam and Anne do not need to use that...

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Date: 20-sept-2007

Stage: Carcassonne to Ax-les-Thermes

Distance: 101 km

Ascent: 1775m

Temp (L/M/H): 9/21/34

KCal: 2663

Time: 7 h 58 m

Country: France/Andorra

A bit of climbing today, almost 1800 meters; and a start as a group again. The weather was kind of cold, but soon the sun was able to warm us up. The small roads to Ax-les-Thermes are surrounded by vineyards, and the harvest of the grapes is in full swing. Close to the “cooperation” we had a good grip with our tires on the road as it was very sticky of all the grape juice that leaked during the transport.



The climb was not too heavy, Jenny suffered a little bit from her injury, but when an old man in a small town on the road started to clap his hands and was said “Bravo, Bravo!” all pain was forgotten (for a little while at least).

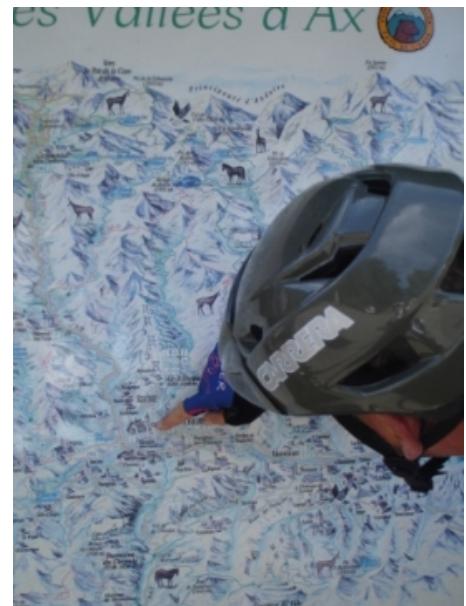
During the climb we saw a map of the area with the road on it that we need to take tomorrow. It's going to be a hard day tomorrow!

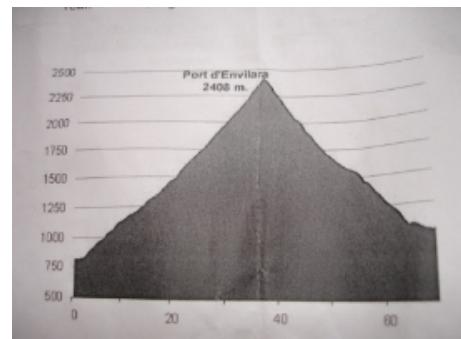
On the col we were welcomed by those that reached the top before and Jenny was asked to do a couple extra meters as Rob wanted to get her on his photo camera with the Right to Play shirt she was wearing today. Perhaps you can find that photo soon on the website of Bike-Dreams www.bike-dreams.com but her is already one of the pictures.

During an excellent dinner, spaghetti with meatballs, prepared by Rudy and Marianne, we got our directions for tomorrow, 1700 meters of climbing, from Ax on almost 800 meter to the Col d' Envalira on 2408 meter.

Needless to say that many of us decided to get to bed early, and also our mechanic Rik was solicited by many cyclists, which wanted to have a last checkup on their bikes to be able to get to the col as quickly as possible. We are counting on 4 hours, let's see what tomorrow will bring us.

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Date: 21-sept-2007

Stage: Ax-les-Thermes to Andorra La Vella

Distance: 64 km

Ascent: 1675m

Temp (L/M/H): 12/22/27

KCal: 1949

Time: 6 h 47 m (4h09m to get to top)

Country: France

A cold night was predicted, but it was not too bad actually, so we got out of bed as early as we thought possible and were on the road before 8; 37 kilometers of climbing lay ahead of us. This time we road with Edwin, as Jan wanted to ride to the top at his own speed, he left later and passed us after 2 hours.

The N20 to Andorra is rather busy with cars (mainly tourists), plenty of camping cars and some trucks. The road however is reasonable wide, so driving at the far right side does not give us too many uncomfortable situations. The noise and the pollution however is not so nice, especially not if you are climbing, go slow an average of less than 10km/h) and breathing more heavily than usual.

Just before noon we reached the top, where our lunch van waited us with warm drinks, food and our warm clothes that we really needed for the descent into Andorra La Vella.

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