

PYRENEAN PERSEVERANCE

A tale of perseverance and endeavour, July 2022

John Griffiths has ridden several tours with us over the years and this year returned to ride the Pyrenees Loop. He kindly shared this blog which he wrote for his cycling club. Cheers John!

Punchy Pyrenees

I returned from a pre-tour cycling trip to the Alps just in time to clean my bike and then drop it off at On Your Bike at London Bridge for it to be picked up by the Le Loop team and taken to the Pyrenees, where I would be riding Stages 16, 17 & 18 of the 2022 Tour de France, one week ahead of the pros. I love riding with this group, not just because the organisation is first class (www.rideleloop.com), but because the money raised for the William Wates Memorial Trust does a great job of providing opportunities to disadvantaged young people and helping them avoid a life of crime. Some of these young people come out on Tour too, and really helps to emphasise what Le Loop is all about. It's not just the riding, though that of course is a key element. My fundraising page is still open if anyone would like to contribute - [WWMT - John Griffiths](#).



Pastoral Pyrenees

I knew it was going to be hot when arriving in Carcassonne on the Monday afternoon – we had all seen the forecasts and knew what was coming our way at home too. The decision was taken to start riding Stage 16 at 7am the next day, rather than 8pm, to try and stay cooler for longer, but the temperature climbed quickly to 41C again, just as it had been in the Alps (if my device is to be believed) where it stayed all day. The first climb (Port de Lers) saw me stopping at times to soak my cap in cold water - it then acted as an air conditioning unit and stopped my brains from boiling. The second climb of the day (Mur de Pégère) is a steep little so-and-so that I've climbed twice before - but in today's heat I took nearly twice as long as previously. How on earth was I going to cope over the next two days? This Stage was billed as a little warm-up act for the two mountain top finishes to come! As well as the heat sapping my energy, I was also constantly conscious of the need to hydrate, which meant finding water at the roadside as well as at our feedstops, plentiful though those were.



Roadside Relief

Day 2 in the Pyrenees wasn't any cooler - I think my device goes straight to recording 41C and then doesn't go any higher so that it doesn't scare me! I took a lite option today by missing out the first two climbs (Aspin and Hourquette d'Ancizan). It was a shame, though I have climbed those mountains before, but I didn't think I could take another day like yesterday just yet. After climbing the Col de Val Louron-Azet it was a long descent to Loudenvielle where the climb to the final mountain (Peyragudes) started - or not, in my case. That's because our final feed stop (and ultimately our evening meal too) was located there, so I opted to end my ride at 3pm, have a massage and then spend two hours in the spa! My whole focus was on being able to ride the whole stage tomorrow so I wanted to be in the best shape possible, given that I came into this somewhat undertrained despite my recent Alpine adventure. The spa itself was like a mini world tour with its Incan, Mayan and Roman Baths sections and also the Japanese "zen" section where, if you slipped your ears below the water, you could hear relaxing music being played! Credit to those who completed the whole Stage. Had I been riding the whole Tour again like I did in 2017 and 2019 then I would no doubt have pushed myself to complete it too. But I was only there for three stages and wanted to enjoy myself – or as another rider put it “what’s wrong with you this year then”!



One mountain is high enough



Spa time

Day three was quite the challenge! Great climb up the Aubisque to the highest point of these few days (1,709 metres). At our feed stop there, Neddy was trying to sign in and snaffle a few more cheese and pickle sandwiches by the look of it! The next climb was the Col de Spandelles – new to the Tour and it was unrelenting, tough and hot. The descent was tricky too – it's where Vingegaard and Pogacar were duking it out, taking it in turns to slip and slide on the bends until a truce was called before competition resumed on the Hautacam which was to follow. Although the day had started cooler, my device registered 43C at one point (so no 41C cut-off then!) as there was next to no shade, so the heat was really bouncing off the road. I rode the top part of the Spandelles more or less one-legged as my hip flexor was giving me trouble. But I was able to stretch that out at the top and I was then good for the final ascent up the Hautacam. I was determined to complete this ride, if only to justify taking the easy option (plus two hours in the spa) yesterday! The Hautacam is a ride to nowhere, so once mission was accomplished, it was a descent and then a short ride back to the hotel in Lourdes after more than 10 hours in the saddle. Vingegaard completed that Stage in 4 hours. My 2 to 1 ratio is crumbling. I'm going to have to stop all this mountain nonsense at some point, but not yet!



Sanitise, sign in, then help yourself



The Splendour of Spandelles



On a high at Hautacam