

CLASSIC CLIMBS: PROVENCE-ALPS

tentative itinerary subject to change

Pre-Trip Arrival

Arrangements for the night(s) prior will vary according to individual plans, based around a mid-morning ride depart on Sunday, June 20 from Malaucene. Guests attending the Ventoux-Provence program the week prior check out Sunday morning and leave the hotel by bike.

Note: The ride ratings are a rough gauge given the combination of distance and climbing. The scale is 1-to-10, with 10 being the hardest ride in this particular program and 1 a non-included, 50k flat route. Your actual suffering level may vary. Climb percentages as noted are averages.

Sunday, June 20

Our journey begins from the charming village of Malaucene, nestled at the base of the Mont Ventoux. Those who are so inclined can start the climbing immediately with the Ventoux itself; cyclists preferring a more civilized start will take in the more gradual climb and spectacular views of the Gorge de la Nesque. Our path continues east, passing over the wonderfully isolated Montagne de Lure, where Contador soloed to victory during the 2009 Paris-Nice.

Ride Distance: 140 k/87m.

Difficulty Rating: 9, La Montagne de Lure (25k/15m, 7%).

Monday, June 21

We are truly into the Alps today, passing over three major climbs and east almost to the Italian border. The best known of the passes is certainly the Col d'Allos, which the Tour peloton has crossed some 33 times since 1911. Allos is our last climb of the day and from the summit we'll have an entertaining descent down into Barcelonnette, where we'll spend two nights.

Ride Distance: 140k/87m.

Difficulty Rating: 10, Col de Corobin, Col du Defend, Col d'Allos (12k/7.5m, 6.6%).

Tuesday, June 22

Since we're staying a second night, today's ride is a loop and one of the classic routes of the southern Alps. It starts with the northern side of Allos this time, followed by the splendidly isolated Col des Champs. Our last climb is the Col de la Cayolle, with a narrow, winding descent back into Barcelonnette. And there's always the option to add on the Col de la Bonette, whose Cime addition may be the highest paved through road in Europe at 2802 meters.

Ride Distance: 100k/63m

Difficulty Rating: 9, Col d'Allos (21k/13m, 5.5%), Col des Champs (12k/7m, 7%), Col de la Cayolle (20k/13m, 6%). Optional Col de la Bonette (25k/15.5m, 6.5%).

Wednesday, June 23

Today's route to Briancon includes two well-known Tour climbs, both used for the first time back in 1922 and crossed more than 30 times since then. It will be hard to find a good rhythm on the Col de Vars, with a flat kilometer seven kilometers from the summit, followed immediately by the steepest parts of the climb. Then it's into the Queyras regional park and onto the mythical Col de l'Izoard, with its stony, stultifying *Casse Déserte* surrounding the summit.

Ride Distance: 110k/68m

Difficulty Rating: 8, Col de Vars (14k/9m, 5.5%), Col de l'Izoard (16k/10m, 7%)

Thursday, June 24

The Col du Lauterets is a bit wide open and trafficky, so it's one place we recommend a quick transfer in the morning. Our "official" ride start is right near the Lauterets col sign where you get off the main road. Then we head onto the Col du Galibier, which at 2642m is clearly today's main obstacle. The 12% final kilometer should slow us down enough to get a picture of the memorial to Tour founder Henri Desgrange just before the top. Then it's a good idea to stretch, as it's a long 30+ kilometer descent, passing by the Col du Telegraph on our spinning drop into the Maurienne valley. Finally, it's rolling to flat (!) on the smaller country roads leading us into Albertville.

Ride Distance: 120k/74m (150k with option).

Ride Rating: 7. Col du Galibier (8.5k/5m, 7%). Optional Col du Lauterets (28k/17m, 3%)

Friday, June 25

Our circuit today is spectacular, beginning with a calm, flat 20k warm-up rolling out of Albertville up the Tarentaise Valley. Before Moutiers and the roads leading to the ski resorts, we veer right and we're on our way up the long side of the Col de la Madeleine. Though now a familiar passage for Tour riders, it wasn't used by the race until 1969, just weeks after the road was finally completed. There are a few clusters of houses part way up, but most of the climb is done in splendid isolation, with wide-open Alpine expanses for the final ten kilometers. After our descent back to the Maurienne Valley, it's a nice roll-out for the legs to Albertville.

Ride Distance: 110k/68m.

Ride Rating: 8. Col de la Madeleine, 25k/15m, 6.3%.

Saturday, June 26

Though Lake Annecy and our next hotel are not far away, our route is a classic "not-a-shortcut" to take in often-used Tour tandem climbs of the Saisies and the Aravis. It's a steady climb out of Albertville to the base of the first climb, a good warm-up stretch at the right pace. Just before the cheese-capitol of Beaufort, we turn left and the real climbing starts and it's up or down all day until we reach the shores of beautiful Lake Annecy.

Ride Distance: 100k, 62m.

Ride Rating: 7. Col des Saisies 15k/9m, 6.5%, Col des Aravis 12k/7m, 5%.

Sunday, June 27

For anyone who has had enough climbing, there's always the option of a nice 50k loop around the lake, followed by an afternoon on the water. For those looking for just a few more climbs, we have a choice of circuits, with our longest including the beautiful Gorges du Bronze and the Col de la Colombiere. Then we wrap up the tour with our farewell dinner, where you may want to enjoy the fresh catch of the day.

Ride Distance: 120k/74m

Ride Rating: 8. Col des Fleuries, Col de la Colombiere 16k/10m, 6.8%.

Monday, June 28

After covering many of the most difficult and historic Tour de France climbs in the Alps and taking in views that few ever enjoy from a bike, it's finally time to head home. We hope one and all depart with grand memories of their journey from the northern Provence through the Alps.