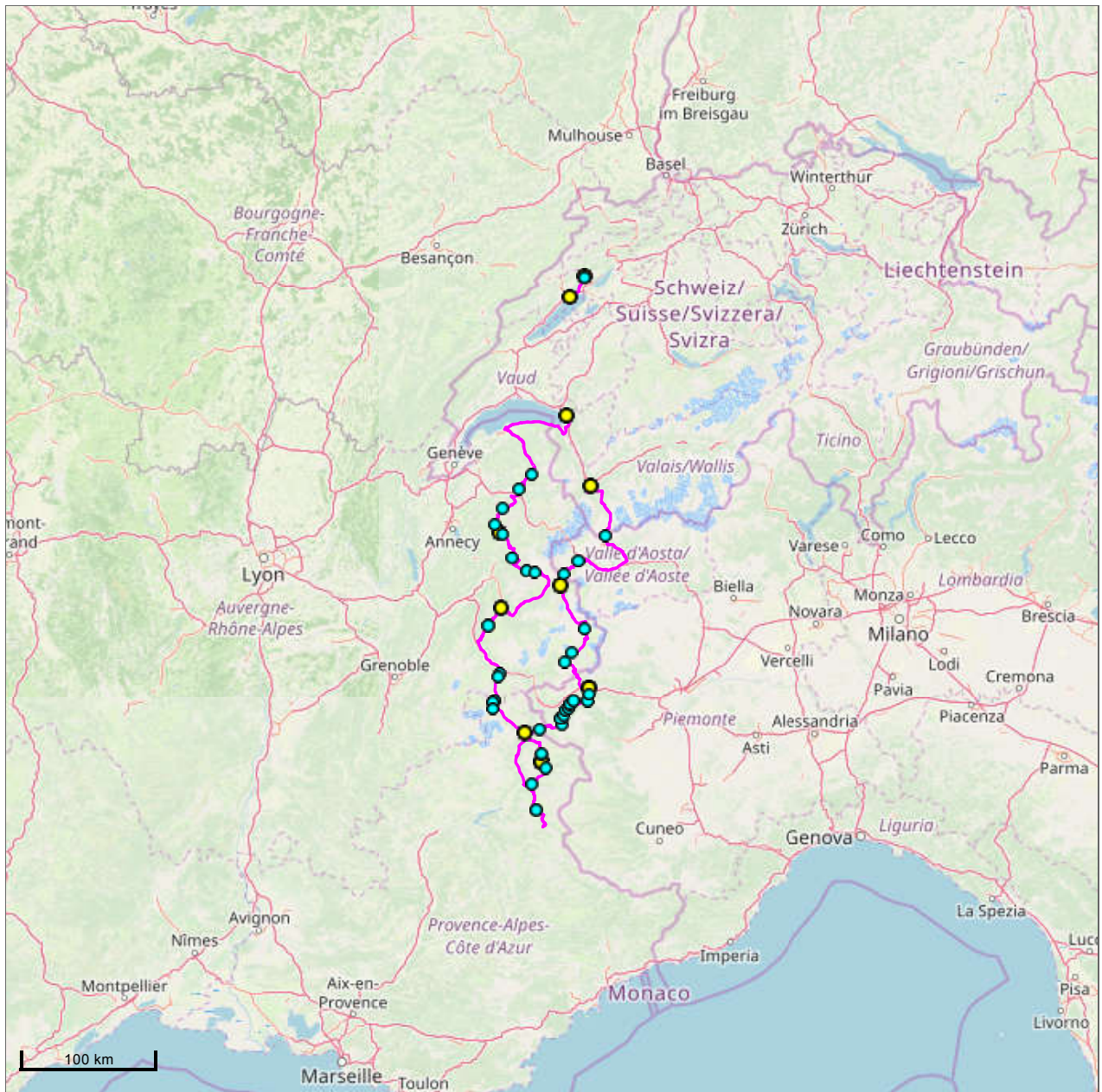
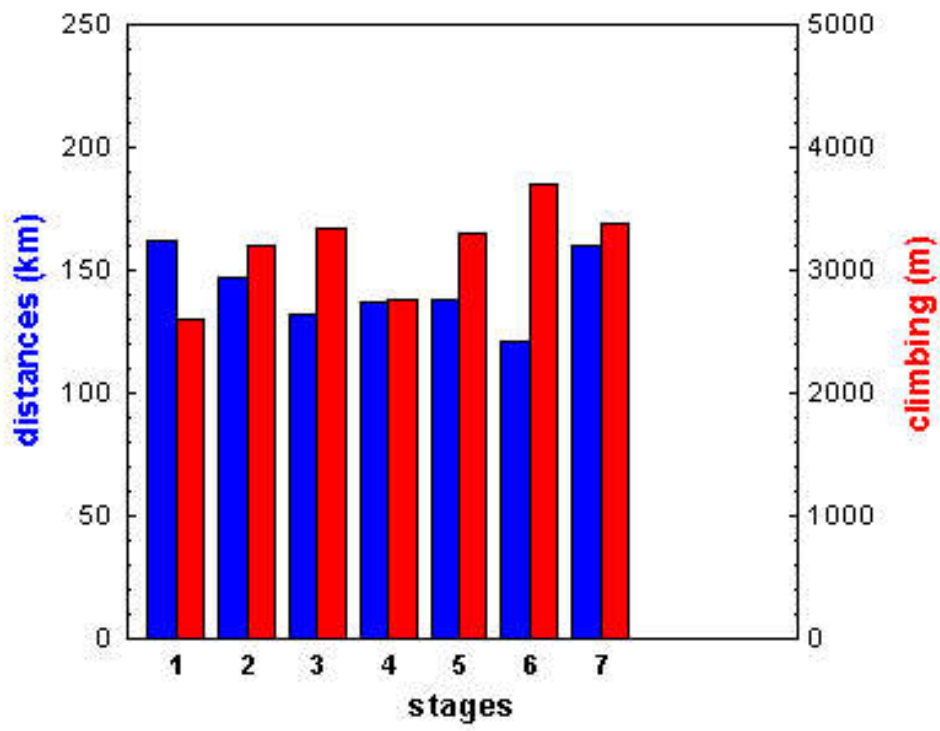


Bicycle tour 2001, 21 - 27 July

Patrick Schleppe

stage	distance (km)	climbing (m)
Lignières - Neuchâtel + Montreux - Les Gets - La Colombière - Les Aravis	162	2640
Les Aravis - Les Saisies - Cormet de Roselend - Bonneval	147	3200
Bonneval - La Madeleine - Le Galibier - Briançon	132	3390
Briançon - Vars - La Condamine - Vars - La Chalp	137	2810
La Chalp - Izoard - Montgenèvre - Assietta - Susa	138	3380
Susa - Mont Cenis - Iseran - La Rosière	121	3840
La Rosière - Grand St-Bernard - Martigny + Neuchâtel - Lignières	160	3240
total	997	22500





The Guisane valley, descending from the Lautaret pass towards Briançon



The gravity dam of Mont-Cenis



Val d'Isère as seen from the road to the Iseran pass



South side of the Grand-St-Bernard pass

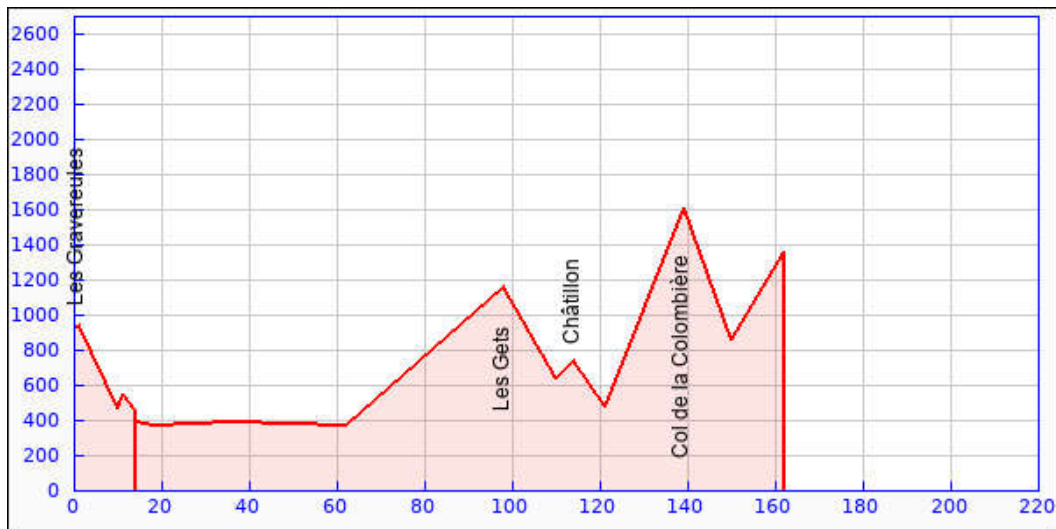
Stage 1 (21 July 2001): Lignières - Neuchâtel + Montreux - Les Gets - La Colombière - Les Aravis

After two weeks waiting for better weather forecasts, i finally left Lignières this Saturday morning. The sky had cleared up during the night and it was really cold (5 degrees). First, i rode down to Neuchâtel, where i took the train at 7 towards Lausanne and then Montreux.

The French Alps were the goal of this tour, but the first part, to Thonon, was flat, just around the lake of Geneva. Then i turned left, towards the mountains, along the Drance valley. There were several groups of people on the river, either with river rafts or with canoes. The road was first climbing very gently along this river, then more and more. Because i had had breakfast very early, i was already getting hungry. I noticed it not only in my stomach but also in my legs. A stop at a bakery was necessary. And a second stop at noon, as i arrived at **Les Gets**. After this first pass, i continued more or less to the south, over Taninges, Cluses and then to the **Colombière** pass. This was a very nice climb, on a small road with not too much traffic and a beautiful mountain landscape. There is a village called Le Reposoir below the pass, meaning a place to rest. I didn't rest there, but i understand why it may sometimes be necessary: the three last kilometres

of the climb were really steeper. Even if La Colombière is not very high in elevation, it is for sure not an easy pass. The descent was also nice. I decided then to climb towards the next pass of this tour, but to see on the way if i could find a place to stay. I was very lucky to find the last free room in a small auberge below Les Aravis. Beautiful mountains, nice people, hearty and tasty supper (all guests together), then the sound of the cow bells under the stars: i liked that place and slept very well.

	distance (km)	altitude (m)	climbing (m)
Les Prés (Lignières)	0	920	
Les Graveréules	1	940	20
St-Blaise	10	470	
La Coudre	11	550	80
Neuchâtel	14	460	
>>> Montreux	14	390	
Villeneuve	18	370	
St-Gingolph	36	390	20
Thonon	62	370	
Les Gets	98	1160	790
Taninges	110	640	
Châtillon	114	740	100
Cluses	121	480	
Col de la Colombière	139	1610	1130
Le Villaret	150	860	
Les Quatre-Vents	162	1360	500
total	162		2640

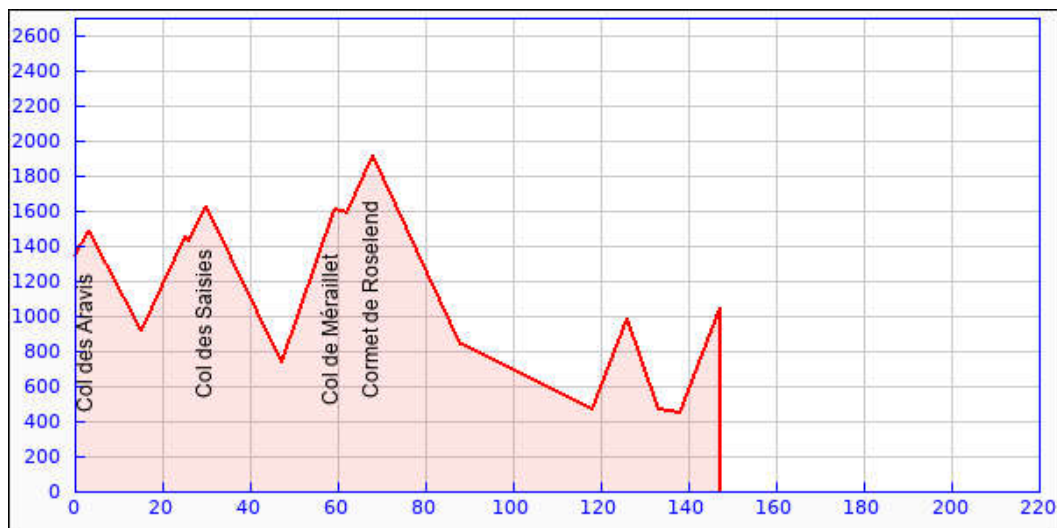


Stage 2 (22 July 2001): Les Aravis - Les Saisies - Cornet de Roselend - Bonneval

I woke up just early enough to be on time for the opening of the breakfast buffet. The other guests were going to hike in the mountains and i was therefore not the only one to eat so much for breakfast. Having already done most of the climb to [Les Aravis](#) the day before, it was no longer a hard task to reach the pass. From there, i rode directly down to Flumet, where i crossed the way of my [1996 tour](#). This time, i went up to [Les Saisies](#), but there again i didn't stop at the pass, simply because i didn't like so much this place with so many tourists and cars. In the descent, i left the main road near Hauteluce and took a very small road down to the valley, joining the main road again just before Beaufort. At Beaufort, i didn't buy some of its famous cheese, but pastries, which i put into the pockets of my jersey. I stopped at a picnic place in the forest above to eat them. There i met an absolutely astonishing man, in his seventies: Yves Blanchin. Seeing me arriving by bike, he began to tell me a bit about his life as a passionate cyclist. Among other things summing up to 350000 km (!) he had done Paris-Brest-Paris, 1200 km in 3 days and 2 nights. Or the popular race of Paris-Roubaix in 37th position (out of more than 4000) as he was already 55. Or Albertville-Barcelona for the olympic games. Then he showed me one of his old bikes which was in his small car. It had been built in 1903 and had a so-called retro-peddalling: the chain goes over two independent free wheels in such a way that you can pedal normally on a flat road... and change to a shorter gear simply by pedalling back when the road goes up. Must be funny to see it in action!

But then i had to go back to my (almost) modern bike and pedal (forward!) to the [Méraillet](#) pass near the barrage of Roselend. Because it was Sunday, there were all kind of tourists around, biking, hiking, sailing or just lying in the sun or sitting in the car. The climb, however, went right on to the [Cornet de Roselend](#). It was not very difficult but rather long and the descent to Bourg-St-Maurice was nice. Then, however, i had to ride along the Tarentaise valley and had some (dry) headwind. It is around 3 that i arrived at Aigueblanche. I started to climb to Doucy in order to ride over a ridge and join then the road to the Madeleine pass. Unfortunately, the road between Doucy and Celliers was cut because of a big landslide. And this was not indicated at the bottom of the climb, at least not there where i went. On the contrary, at Aigueblanche there was still a sign indicating the Madeleine pass, three or four years after the landslide! Anyway, it is only at Doucy that, asking for the way, i heard from two ladies that i had to go back to the valley. They also told me that i was by far not the first one to fall into this trap. Very disappointed about the French road services, i turned back and went to the usual road to the Madeleine. I was already tired and my motivation was also a bit down because of this detour, but i didn't want to stay in the valley. So i rode up to the first village on the way to the pass, and even left this road to find a nice and quiet little hamlet to stay overnight.

	distance (km)	altitude (m)	climbing (m)
Les Quatre-Vents	0	1350	
Col des Aravis	3	1490	140
Flumet	15	920	
Arcanière	25	1460	540
Nant Rouge	26	1430	
Col des Saisies	30	1630	200
Beaufort	47	740	
Col de Méraillet	59	1610	870
Lac de Roselend	62	1590	
Cornet de Roselend	68	1920	330
Bourg-St-Maurice	88	840	
Aigueblanche	118	470	
Doucy	126	990	520
St-Laurent	133	470	
La Léchère	138	450	
Bonneval-l'Église	147	1050	600
total	147		3200

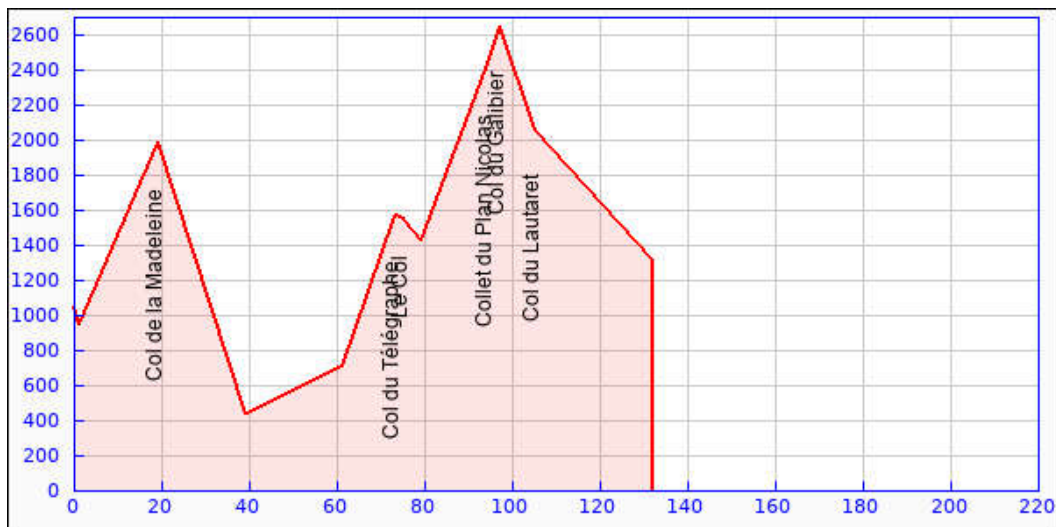


Stage 3 (23 July 2001): Bonneval - La Madeleine - Le Galibier - Briançon

Thanks to the good meal of the evening before and to a good night, i started to ride to the [Madeleine](#) pass with all my strength back. It was still a long climb but i could enjoy it. On the left side of the valley when riding up, i could see the landslide which had caused me a detour; it would really not have been possible to get through, even by foot. It was still early and there was almost no traffic up to the pass. In the first part of the descent, i had to be careful not to slip over the numerous cow droppings. Once down in the Maurienne valley, i was happy to see the new highway. Not that i intended to ride on it with my bike, but because most of the trucks were on this highway, making the main road much less terrible than the first time i had been there (for my [1996 tour](#)).

With a little help from the wind, i could ride at a good pace towards St-Michel. I bought a picnic and stopped at a little square in that town to eat it. I saw a motorcycle with a licence plate from Neuchâtel and i talked to the couple riding this motorcycle. They were actually preparing a future bicycle tour. It was noon as i left St-Michel to the [Télégraphe](#) pass. I was glad that the road was largely in the shade of the forest. As i arrived at Valloire (together with two German cyclists), the grocery store was closed and i went to a restaurant to have a drink, just to change a bit from plain water or those drinks prepared from powder in the bike bottles. Then i rode up to the [Galibier](#), one of the highest passes in the Alps. The slope was irregular and especially hard in the last few kilometres. Fortunately, i had kept enough energy for this last part (my altimeter-watch had been useful to always know how much climbing remained). Now there were clouds around the mountains; from the pass, some lightning and rain could be seen. That's to say that i didn't stay long on the pass. The first part of the descent was really nice, but before arriving at the [Lautaret](#) pass, the road was wet. And then there was also more traffic, making the security more concern than speed. On the last, less steep stretch to Briançon, i rode together with a cyclist from that city. Once there, i looked for an hotel. The first one where i stopped had just one room still available. I was lucky again.

	distance (km)	altitude (m)	climbing (m)
Bonneval-l'Église	0	1050	
Bonneval	1	950	
Col de la Madeleine	19	1990	1040
St-Avre Baillat	39	440	
St-Michel-de-Maurienne	61	710	270
Col du Télégraphe	73	1570	860
Le Col	75	1550	
Valloire	79	1430	
Collet du Plan Nicolas	94	2410	980
Col du Galibier	97	2650	240
Col du Lautaret	105	2060	
Forville (Briançon)	132	1320	
total	132		3390



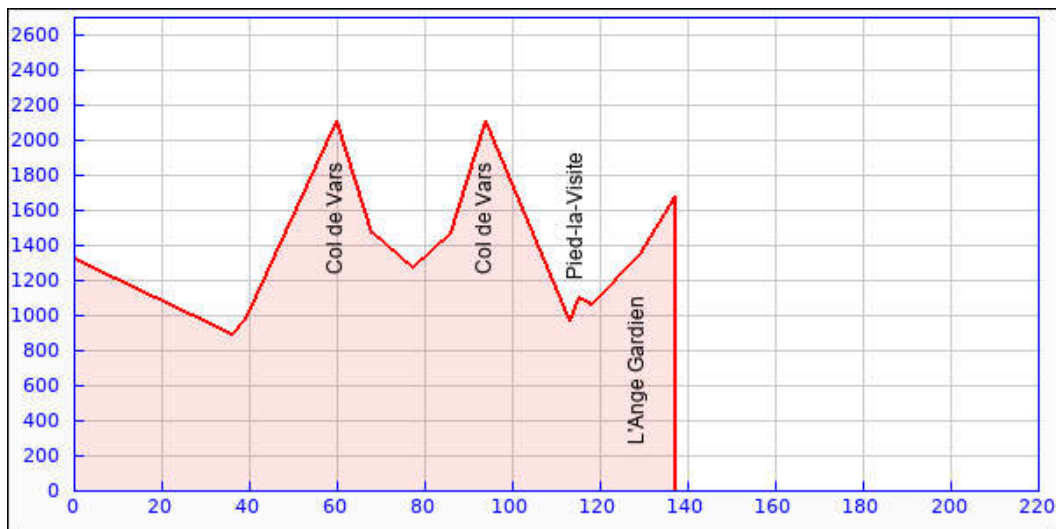
Stage 4 (24 July 2001): Briançon - Vars - La Condamine - Vars - La Chalp

I took advantage of being in a city to go to a bar with internet access and to read and send e-mails. I also sent a few postcards.

From Briançon, i took the main road to the south, along the Durance river. Then i went left to Guillestre and up to Vars. The slope was changing again and again, but i reached the Vars pass without any problem. On the other side, the first kilometres had a new macadam, allowing a good speed without risks. Then there were road works, and finally the older surface with many bumps and some potholes. After St-Paul, i was not sure which way to take, having thought of several options. The circumstances decided for me: the road to Larche was forbidden for bicycles. Someone told me to try the old way on the other side of the valley, joining the regular road on the other side of the forbidden passage. I went there, but the gravel road was really too bad for my 23-mm tires. I had also asked about the Parpaillon pass, but everybody told me that it was, on that side,

only for mountain bikes. I finally decided to ride back over the Col de Vars. Because of the heat, the tires were gluing to the road. But this became really bad as i reached the zone with road works. A whole group of cyclists descending from the pass had just ridden into the brand new macadam and they were trying to clean their wheels. I had been lucky to be earlier to ride there downhill. Now, to go uphill, i preferred to walk in the grass on the roadside for a while. Even so, i could not avoid to have also gravel gluing to my tires. On the other side of the pass, there were also two places with road works, but nothing so bad. The remaining of the descent was easy. Back to Guillestre, i took now to the right, entering the canyon of the Guil. With some tailwind, i was able to ride above 30 km/h. But then i went up into the Izoard valley and the slope became much more serious. I stopped at La Chalp, a part of Arvieux known for its steep road, steep not only for Tour-de-France riders but also for amateurs like me. There again, i found a nice little auberge and had time for writing notes about the stage before having dinner with other guests.

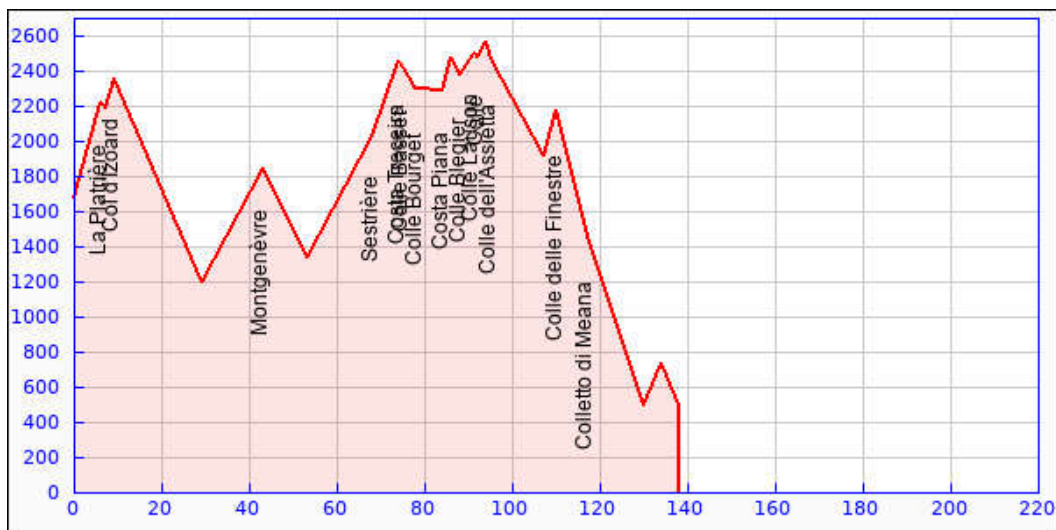
	distance (km)	altitude (m)	climbing (m)
Forville (Briançon)	0	1320	
La Gagière	36	890	
Guillestre	39	980	90
Col de Vars	60	2110	1130
St-Paul-sur-Ubaye	68	1470	
La Condamine	77	1270	
St-Paul-sur-Ubaye	86	1470	200
Col de Vars	94	2110	640
Guillestre Riou-Bel	113	970	
Pied-la-Visite	115	1100	130
Le Pont-de-Pierre	118	1060	
L'Ange Gardien	129	1350	290
La Chalp	137	1680	330
total	137		2810



Stage 5 (25 July 2001): La Chalp - Izoard - Montgenèvre - Assietta - Susa

I could appreciate again the advantages of being early to climb a pass: fresh air and very few traffic. Unfortunately, the small museum on cycling at the [Izoard](#) pass was closed. After the climb, i could enjoy the descent on a good road. I arrived again in Briançon and this time started to climb to Montgenèvre. From the lower town of Briançon, i had already seen the old forts, but now i had a better opportunity to look at them from the road. After an easy climb across pine woods, i arrived at [Montgenèvre](#), pass and border to Italy, around 11. This pass was fortunately closed to heavy traffic during the day and only cars were disturbing (those French diesel cars and their bad smells!) The descent to Cesana was on a good and broad road, with almost no need to touch the brakes. Then i climbed again, towards [Sestrière](#). This was a very quiet ride, but the difficulties were ahead. I wanted to try riding over the Assietta mountain ridge and then to cross to Susa, in the other valley, over the Finestre pass. I knew that this was a gravel road, but one which can be done with a road bicycle. Well, this was not wrong, and i actually managed this long ride across several small passes without any damage or puncture. There were even other cyclists with road bikes along this trail, but i would not do it again. The view was nice, but i had few opportunities to look around, the road capturing all of my attention. The worst was for the shoulders because the handlebar was badly shaking. So it went over the passes [Basset](#), [Bourget](#), [Cotte Plane](#), [Blegier](#), [Lauson](#), [Assietta](#) and finally [Finestre](#)! Only the lower part of the descent to Susa was on macadam again, and then over an incredible number of hairpin curves in the forest. Once in Susa, i still had to ride around to find a place to stay for the night, but it was good to pedal again on normal roads!

	distance (km)	altitude (m)	climbing (m)
La Chalp	0	1680	
La Platrière	6	2220	540
Casse Déserte	7	2190	
Col d'Izoard	9	2360	170
Briançon	29	1200	
Montgenèvre	43	1850	650
Cesana Torinese	53	1340	
Sestrière	68	2030	690
Costa Treceira	74	2460	430
Colle Basset	75	2420	
Colle Bourget	78	2300	
Costa Piana	84	2290	
Monte Genevris	86	2480	190
Colle Blegier	88	2380	
Colle Lauson	91	2500	120
Colle	92	2480	
Testa dell'Assietta	94	2570	90
Colle dell'Assietta	95	2470	
Montagne d'Usseaux	107	1920	
Colle delle Finestre	110	2180	260
Colletto di Meana	117	1460	
Susa	130	500	
Giaglione	134	740	240
Susa	138	500	
total	138		3380



Stage 6 (26 July 2001): Susa - Mont Cenis - Iseran - La Rosière

In the first slopes from Susa to [Mont Cenis](#), i joined a group of three French cyclists riding from Antibes to Thonon in 5 stages. I had already seen two of them the day before and we rode together for a while, but then i went ahead. The climb was not very hard but long, first in forests of broadleaf trees, the in less dense conifer woods, finally across pastures and rocks. Above the barrage and the lake, already in France again, the road went a bit down and up to finally reach the pass. It was 10 o'clock as i arrived there. The descent was no problem, except that my hands were aching on the handlebar every time the road was uneven: a consequence from the bad treatment of the previous stage. At Lanslevillard, i took right to the [Madeleine](#) pass. Not the same Madeleine as in the [third stage](#) of this tour! The first hairpin curves were steep and my knees also began to ache a bit, another after-effect of the Assietta ridge. After a very short descent, the road went along the valley and climbed very gently towards Bonneval. I stopped in this well preserved, very picturesque village and bought something to eat at the bakery. Next thing on my programme was the [Iseran](#) pass, the highest of this tour and one of the highest of the Alps. It was an absolutely beautiful climb, with views over the valley and to the glaciers on the mountains building the border to Italy. There were many other cyclists on the way over this famous pass. And many on the top, enjoying the nice weather and the pride of their climb. The ride down to Val d'Isère was fun, but then there were more motor vehicles, a flat part along the lake of Tignes and also some road works. I did not go further down than Ste-Foy but took instead a small road climbing to Montvalezan. It was now hot and i was glad that there are many fountains in this part of the Alps. Finally my road joined the road to the Petit-St-Bernard and, after three hairpins of this very gentle climb, i reached La Rosière, where i could stop for the night. From the hotel room, i had a splendid view to the massif of the Arcs.

	distance (km)	altitude (m)	climbing (m)
Susa	0	500	
La Caisse	24	2060	1560
La Caisse	25	2030	
Fontainettes	27	2100	70
La Vachère	30	2040	
Col du Mont Cenis	31	2080	40
Lanslevillard	41	1460	
Col de la Madeleine	45	1720	260
l'Ille (Bessans)	47	1670	
Bonneval-sur-Arc	57	1810	140
Col de l'Iseran	71	2760	950
Val-d'Isère	87	1830	
La Daille	89	1790	
Tunnel du Chevril	93	1820	30
Ste-Foy	107	1060	
La Rosière	121	1850	790
total	121		3840



Stage 7 (27 July 2001): La Rosière - Grand St-Bernard - Martigny + Neuchâtel - Lignières

The remaining of the climb to the [Petit St-Bernard](#) was also easy thanks to its gentle slope. Then, on the Italian side, it was a little bit steeper, just enough to reach good speeds between the smooth curves and enjoy the descent in the morning sun. Arriving at La Thuile, i had to ask to find the road to Arly, over the [San Carlo](#) pass. In the distance, this pass did not make a difference compared to the main road over Pré-St-Didier. It was a small but good road with few traffic, but this calm had to be paid by climbing a steep slope. Then, however, i had to join the main road to Aoste, where i arrived at 11. From there, i had 1900m to climb towards the [Grand St-Bernard](#) pass. The first part of this climb was not very interesting: traffic, heat and air pollution. The bad smells of the air pollution receded first, then the heat, and the traffic as the road to the tunnel split from the pass road. Since it was the last pass of the tour, i did not worry about saving strength for later. Instead, i rode without pause up to the pass, just taking time to refill the bottles. Then, however, i took time for a lunch at the hospice before going into the long descent to Martigny. As so often, there was much wind in the lower part of the Entremont valley. From Sembrancher, it was even necessary to pedal hard against this headwind.

	distance (km)	altitude (m)	climbing (m)
La Rosière	0	1850	
Col du Petit St-Bernard	9	2190	340
La Thuile	22	1470	
St-Charles / S. Carlo	30	1970	500
Morgex	40	960	
Aosta	67	590	
Etroubles	83	1260	670
Col du Grand St-Bernard	101	2470	1210
Bourg-St-Bernard	107	1930	
Bourg-St-Pierre	113	1650	
Orsières	126	910	
Martigny	146	470	
>>> Neuchâtel	146	460	
La Coudre	149	510	50
St-Blaise	150	470	
Les Graverueles	159	940	470
Les Prés (Lignières)	160	920	
total	160		3240

In Martigny, i just caught a train to Lausanne, where i changed to Neuchâtel. As i arrived in Neuchâtel, it was just beginning to rain a little. Because it was hot (around 30 degrees), i was actually glad about these few rain drops. I pedalled hard up to Les Prés sur Lignières and arrived just at 18 o'clock, as i had announced by telephone from Lausanne.

This tour 2001 had been a hard one considering the number of passes and the heights to climb. In spite of a few problems with closed or unpaved roads, and thanks to the very good weather, it had been a beautiful tour. The hospitality i found in this part of the Alps will also remain in good memory.

