

Alps vs West Old LaHonda? Grenoble Patisserie vs Donut King?



Some obvious questions, but the answers, not quite so obvious! Kevin and I returned home from France late Monday night, too late to make it to the Tuesday-morning ride. In fact, I suffered pretty badly from jet lag all the way through Wednesday, with this morning (Thursday) being the first I've felt normal since, well, since watching the "Tour finale on the Champs Elysee in Paris last Sunday.

But it felt good getting back on my normal bike, it felt good riding up over Jefferson, it even felt good riding up through the steeper sections of Huddart Park, where I rarely feel good. Keep in mind there's a difference between feeling good and being fast though. I don't even know if I could have been fast, because I had to hold up a bit for Kevin, who was adapting to another change in his meds. Maybe that was why I felt good, because I could out-ride Kevin this morning. This too shall pass.

It was inevitable that I'd be making comparisons between the riding in France and what we have here at home. Heading up Kings, less than a quarter of the way up, where you might normally be thinking, yikes, I feel like this and I have that much further to go... well, in France that would be 6k (kilometers) from the top, and it would feel like you're almost there because it was an 18k or so climb. So is that a point in favor of our shorter local climbs, or the much-longer French climbs?

How about the temperatures? It was mid-60s this morning on Kings. In fact, it was mid-60s the entire ride, things kept cool by the coastal fog trying to make inroads. In France, the first 6 days of riding were in the low-90s to 102 degrees. OK, 101.8 was the highest I saw. Oh, and that 101.8 degree day was heading into a strong headwind too.

Road quality? Variable here, variable in the Alps. I've generally been very impressed with the roads used by the Tour de France, but maybe not so much this year. Seems like they tried to introduce a certain grittiness to the "Tour this year, maybe a bit of that throwback quality that's defined the Giro.

Regarding food, well, there's no Donut King in France. The local Patisseries are pretty good, and because the pastries really are French their decadence somehow comes with less judgment than a chocolate old fashioned donut. Something to be said for that.

But there's something special about France and bicycles. When you're cycling on the roads in France, you're a normal part of the traffic. People act like you belong there (unless it's someone from the US in a rental car). There's a rail system that goes off in all directions and there's always room for bikes on-board. The French idea of fast food is way better than what we have here, with Kebabs cheap & plentiful. And the weather? You get used to absurdly-hot temps after a few days, and there's this strange thing called rain the frequently comes in the evenings, often accompanied rather dramatically by thunder & lightning. Interesting stuff.

The comparisons would tilt far more favorably towards France if we were talking about the Pyrenees instead of the Alps. More on that later. For now, it's time to ride. Wherever you are, wherever you're going. There's no better way to experience life than on a bike. --Mike--