

Plan B- A shortened, more-intense solo trip to the TdF



What makes this so compelling to see in person? The mad crush of the crowd, the noise, the hours spent waiting beforehand... it's not something a sensible person would keep going back for.

There's very little chance of my "traditional" trip to France for the Tour this year, which, 7 of the past 8 years (2007-2016) has included my son. He's got some school obligations to take care of, and it's not likely the bike shop can spare us both. That "traditional" trip has typically been 11 days, leaving on a Thursday and arriving home two Mondays later. So for example, last year Kevin and I left on July 6th (ok, that was a Wednesday) and returned on Monday, July 18th. We actually squeezed in an extra day last year.

This year, it's possible an abbreviated version could see me leaving on Sunday, July 16th, and returning just a week later on Monday, July 24th. This would allow me to see the stages in the Alps, the time trial in Marseille, and, if I desired, the finale in Paris. Alternatively I could skip Paris and spend another day or two riding in the Grenoble area. the itin below doesn't require a rental car; transportation is entirely by train (or, in one possible case, bike!).

The schedule would work out like this-

Sunday, July 16th, fly from SFO to LYS (Lyon, France), arriving Monday about 2pm. Yes, you lose a whole day flying east. Hate that! There are hourly fast trains that leave directly from Lyon airport to Grenoble.

Monday, July 17th, arrive Grenoble about 5pm and check into the fantastic Appartements Residilaverde Gare. 85 euros (about \$90)/night for a very large apartment just 100 meters from the train station. Incredibly, not just a full kitchen (not that I'd be cooking though) but also a washer/dryer combo. No need to bring more than 3 days worth of clothes. How great is that? Monday evening build the Bike Friday, eat dinner, SLEEP!

Tuesday, July 18th, is a "local riding" day. No option to catch the Tour, which is too far away to be practical. There is some AWESOME local riding in the Grenoble area though.



Climbing the Galibier during an epic loop several years ago. I'd be passing through here again if I go this year.

Wednesday, July 19th, take a train at 6:37am (but who knows what time it would actually feel like) to Saint Michel de Maurienne, arriving 8:37am. This puts you right at the base of the Galibier, on the long side... the side the Tour will be climbing about 6 hours later! [Stage details here](#). Climb to the top, see the stage on one of its most-iconic mountains, then head back down the way I came

up, catching the 7:42pm train that arrives back in Grenoble at 9:27pm. Arriving "home" this late might require having dinner at the apartment rather than eating out, although it's quite likely there would be enough time prior to the train's departure to catch dinner in Maurienne.



Local and regional trains are a great way to get around France with your bike.

Thursday, July 20th. This is where it gets interesting. For me, the most-important stage is the one going over the Izoard. Doing this without a rental car is tough. The best plan I can come up with is a two-day bike "tour" where I'd take the 8:10am train to Montdauphin, at the base of the Izoard, and ride to the summit to see the race. [The route is shown here.](#) Trouble is, there is no train available to get me back to Grenoble afterward! So, if it's possible, I'd carry an extra day's worth of clothing and, after seeing the stage, ride down the "other" side of the Izoard and spend the night in Briancon. This leads to-

Friday, July 21st. Leave Briancon and ride back to Grenoble via the Col du Lauteret. [Route shown here.](#) 72 miles, 7200ft of climbing. This would be a tough ride without carrying overnight stuff. With it... could be a long haul! The Tour de France would be doing a pretty flat ride that day, so not missing much there. After dinner, time to put the Bike Friday back into its suitcase; it won't be needed anymore.

Note: The itin could be modified to include a rental car for access to the Izoard, but it's a very long drive in each direction. I'll look into this a bit more though. Fortunately Grenoble has an excellent Sixt location near the train station.

Saturday, July 22nd. Take the 9:30am TGV train to Marseille to watch the time trial. Arrive 12:20. See Time Trial, return on 6:21pm train arriving back in Grenoble at 9:48am. Since these are TGV, it's likely not practical to bring the Bike Friday, which would have made it easy to ride around the course to get pictures.

Sunday, July 23rd. If crazy enough to want to see the finale, then I'd probably take the 8:21 train to Paris, arriving about noon (there's a much better direct option that leaves at 10:15 but it's 1:15pm arrival in Paris might be a bit late). Leave at 7:41pm (unless this will be a night-time finish finale) and arrive back in Grenoble at 10:42.

Monday, take train from Grenoble to Lyon airport and fly home!

Intuitively, doing this solo wouldn't seem to be nearly as much fun as doing it with someone else. That shared experience thing makes it a bit more real. The times I've gone on my own in the past were spent, most of the time, with tour groups, and maybe just 3 or 4 days completely solo. But I've got a biking friend who moved to France recently, and it might be possible that some bike dealers I know might have an interest in sharing a room with someone known to snore. :-)