

Tomorrow the 'Tour starts. Without me racing to catch up to it 10 days before the finish.



Since 2000, I've made it to every single Tour de France, except one. 2008. I don't even recall the specifics why; 2007 was the first year I'd gone with my son, so it was a bit of an abrupt pause in the sequence. OK, I just looked back to get a feel for why I wasn't there, in 2008. Looks like it was the first year that Trek didn't field a team, so I'd lost whatever connections I might have had to make things run a bit more smoothly. Which really doesn't make that much sense, given that, in 2007, Kevin's first trip with me, we were entirely on our own. But we got back to it in 2009, with an unbroken string since.

Until COVID-19 turned the world upside-down. The reality is that things have been so crazy it would have been difficult, maybe impossible, for both of us to have made it this year had the 'Tour been at its normal time in July, and even the new dates, which would have had us leaving a week from next Thursday (September 10th) and coming back September 21st, would have been tough because things haven't slowed down much. But ultimately it was precisely COVID-19 that kept us out of the 'Tour, because France isn't letting in Americans. I briefly thought hey, maybe we could somehow score an exemption! Then I read how NBC was allowed just 10 of their normal contingent of 65 for covering the race, how Phil will be working out of a studio in France, Bob Roll somewhere on the East Coast.

And then United cancelled one of the segments on our return flights; the plan was to leave from Basel, fly to Frankfurt, then home. So the good news is, because United can't arrange a flight home, we get a full refund. The bad news? Kind of felt like the final nail in the coffin.

I was ready. I felt like I really needed this; it's been a crazily-stressful year at the shop and even at home. Lots going on. I needed that 10 days away, 10 days in a country where things are just different enough to make a difference, not so different that I really have to think about things anymore. Landing in France I go into automatic mode; I know what to do, how to get around, where to eat, where to sleep. I know how the trains work, I know the airports, I know more than I wish I knew about car rentals. I know exactly where to drive, if driving is required, for the absolute perfect spot to ride from, a place that is easy to get to (despite half a million others out there to see the same thing we are) and easy to drive back from. No traffic jams. 18 or 19 times doing this and I kind of have it down now.

But not this year. And, assuming the 'Tour makes it all the way to Paris, this is going to be an AMAZING year because it won't be predictable, there won't be a dominant team or rider, and it's even possible a Frenchman could win (Pinot).

And so I'll be watching the replay every single day (no, I won't be getting up at 4am to watch it live, like Burt), but without the anticipation I'd normally feel, without trying to get a feel for how the race is going before I join it. And I've done my best to try and get my sunflowers to limp their way to at least the start of the 'Tour. Don't think they'll make it to the end.

--Mike--