

KINGS HILL WHEELERS CONQUER THE FRENCH ALPS JUNE 2019

Bonjour – Thanks to our intrepid Tour Leader Andrew Scott, a well planned cycling event to the French Alps was accomplished between Wednesday 19 June and Sunday 23 June. There were six club members, Andrew Blakeley, Andrew Scott, Paul Williams, Mat McLoughlin, Phil Coupland, Stuart Skilton, and two guest members, who were mates of Phil's, Adam Kew and Andy Smith. Much deliberation preceded the event with what cassette gearing to install to hit the mountains and how many doughnuts would it take to get up Alpe d'Huez.

DAY 1

Comprised predominantly driving from Kings Hill to Alpe d'Huez in two cars (albeit Phil had a meeting in Zurich so made his own way) and despite a small hold up at Grenoble we had a pleasant journey for the 650 miles which took about 10 hours.



On our way, Adam and Andy on the Shuttle!

We arrived at the hotel at about 7pm, settled in and had our first dinner together. The hotel was brilliant, we had twin bedrooms (some more snug than others), superb restaurant, spa and a large bike room with direct access onto the road. In anticipation of a tough day ahead we just had a few glasses of beer and/or wine and an early night of about 11pm.



View from the hotel bedroom

<https://www.hotelgrandesrousses.com/en/hotel-alpe-huez>

DAY 2

Located at the top of the mountain next to the ski lift we knew that we had to circumnavigate climbing up Alpe d'Huez on each of the three days we were cycling but this didn't necessarily mean hitting the 21 switchbacks each day as there were three ways of ascending which meant, if required, we could hit the mountain part way up from the bottom.

We cycled to a very large lake called the Lac du Chambon, bit of a climb but as it happened just a leg loosener for some hills to come!



Team at the lake



Mat, Stuart and Paul

We then reversed back stopping for a well earned lunch at the Le Cassini restaurant at Le Freney-d'Oisans for a beer and a baguette, and met our hostess Sophia



Team Lunch



Sophia

We then took the D211A, one of the most dangerous balcony roads in France but fantastic if you're not afraid of heights, one false move and your careering down the side of a 1,000 foot drop!
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cOrEaFL_7Es



Balcony road view over the edge

Alpe d'Huez switchbacks

We then linked into the Alpe d'Huez switchbacks part way up and some decided to go down to the bottom to do the whole mountain (Adam, Andrew S, Mat and Stuart) whilst the others headed straight up to the hotel for an early spa experience!



The bells, the bells, Alpe d'Huez

Mat and Andrew at the summit

Days riding = Total 52 miles 7,430 feet ascending, up to 14% gradients.

DAY 3

This was the big one, heading off by minibus and bike trailer to Saint Michel de Maurienne to tackle the three mountains of the Col d'Telegraph, Col d'Galibier and Alpe d'Huez.



Team talk, how many doughnuts have you eaten?

Unfortunately a stand in minibus driver resembling and acting like Alan from The Hangover had trouble in getting all the bikes loaded and then didn't know the way to our destination, so after a number of stops and delays we reached Valloire and decided to commence our ride from there which meant we missed out the Col d'Telegraph.

The ascent of the Galibier started well and we reached 7 Km before our first mishap. Mat had just encountered a Marmotte in front of him and stopped to share the experience with the team.



Mat's Marmotte, bit like a mini Beaver?

Upon resuming his ride his cassette failed to engage with the hub resulting in having no traction and Mat had to abandon his ascent. He partially walked/hitchhiked up and then down the Galibier whilst the team all made it to the summit.



Phil's panoramica at the Galibier summit



Team at the Galibier summit, great effort

Mat joined up with the team at the bottom of the Galibier and the team freewheeled him 10k down to La Grave for lunch and then he then caught a taxi back to Alpe d'Huez to change his wheel, thanks to Phil bringing a spare set (good planning).

In the meantime the team set off from La Grave in the rain for the Alpe d'Huez climb, Mat then cycled down Alpe d'Huez passing the team coming up and made the solo ride back to base.

Shopping for those summit jerseys and a dinner feast awaited the team!



Tour Leader in Designer Wear



Adam & Mat's Fondue Feast

Days riding = Total 51 miles 7,569 feet ascending, up to 14% gradients.

DAY 4

We thought this was going to be a comparatively easy day but we didn't account for the atrocious rainstorms which took the temperature down a notable notch!

Descent down the Alpe d'Huez towards Grenoble and then we headed up the Col d'Ornon which is a tad lower than the d'Huez. Rain started to pelt down and we took refuge for a while until a small gap in the rain, so we started our ascent. Six made it to the top in horrible conditions and then rendezvoused at the café on the summit to take in drinks and dry out.



Adam, Stuart and Mat at the summit



Adam and his black pussy

The two Andrews didn't bring their rain jackets so they turned back part way up and headed for Le Bourg de Oisans which was at the bottom of the mountain where they recovered with a drink and a pizza!



OMG look at the size of that one!

In the meantime Phil and Andy were shivering at the café and due to continued atrocious weather conditions decided to taxi it back to the hotel. The remaining four continued but at the bottom of the Ornon Mat, Paul and Stuart were shivering and all bar Adam headed back up the Alpe d'Huez.

Adam subsequently completed the planned route linking into the d'Huez and was followed by the two Andrew's on that same route.

Eventually we all rendezvoused for a few shandies at the finishing line next to the Floppy Man!



Shandies at the Floppy Man

We did it!

Days riding = Total 41 miles 6,702 feet ascending, up to 14% gradients.

What happened next, who knows, answers on a postcard please if anyone remembers!



Au revoir