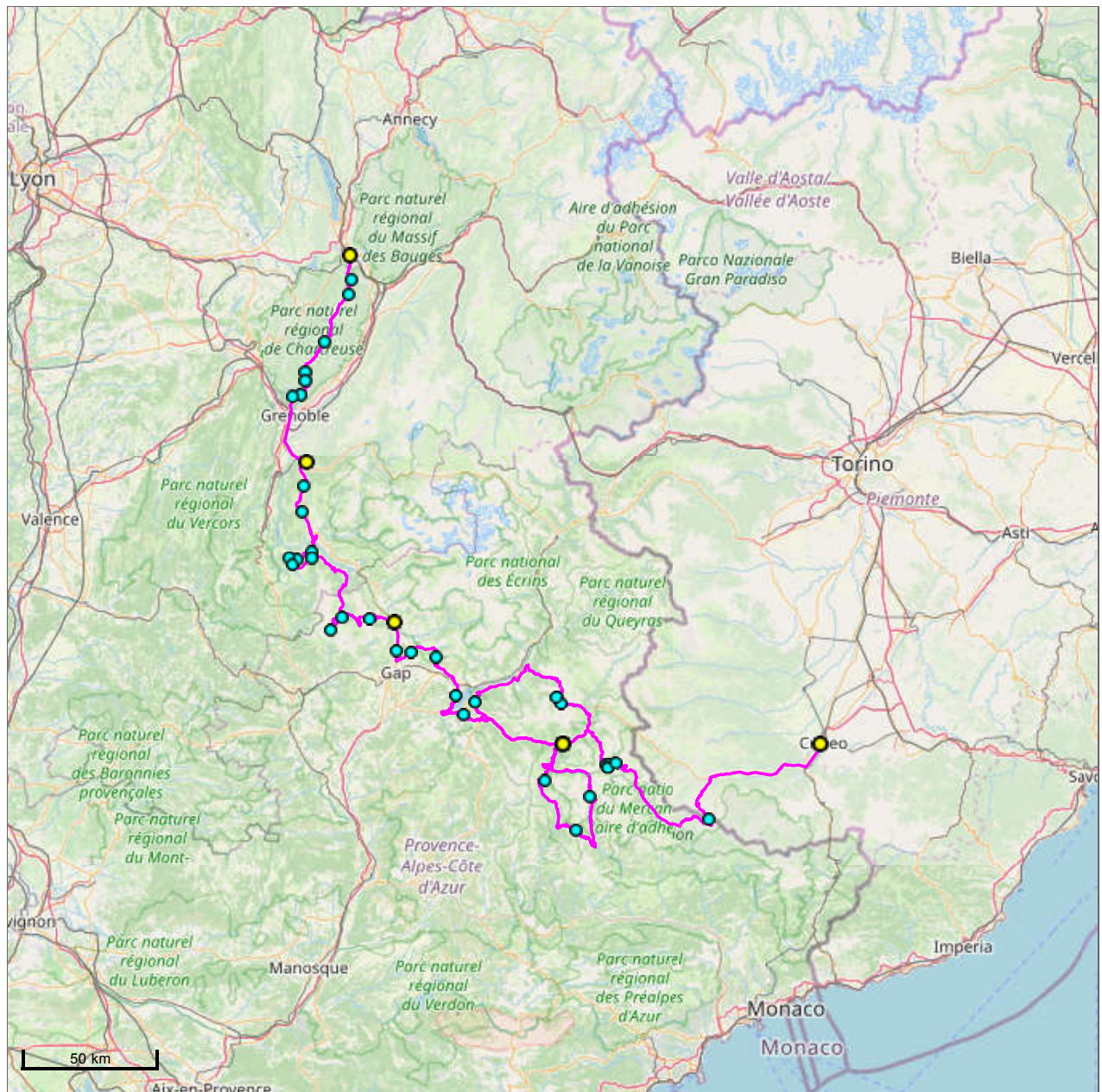
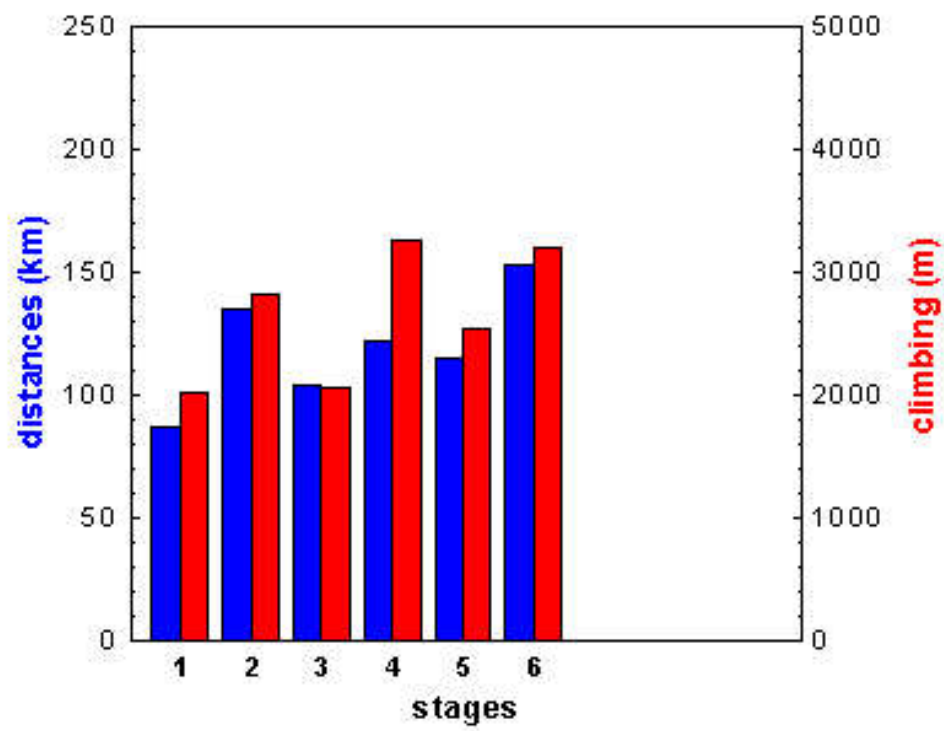


Bicycle tour 2012, 22 - 27 June

Patrick Schleppi

stage	distance (km)	climbing (m)
Chambéry - St-Pierre-d'Entremont - Grenoble - Vizille	87	2030
Vizille - La Mure - Mens - Le Noyer - St-Bonnet-en-Champsaur	135	2820
St-Bonnet-en-Champsaur - Chorges - Espinasses - Barcelonnette	104	2060
Barcelonnette - Allos - Cayolle - Barcelonnette	122	3270
Barcelonnette - Parpaillon - Pontis - Barcelonnette	115	2540
Barcelonnette - Bonette - Isola - Lombarde - Cuneo	153	3210
total	716	15930





Col du Noyer, slope of St-Étienne-en-Dévoluy



Estenc, south of the Cayolle pass



The sheepfold of Grand Parpaillon



La Bonette road, north slope

Stage 1 (22 June 2012): Chambéry - St-Pierre-d'Entremont - Grenoble - Vizille

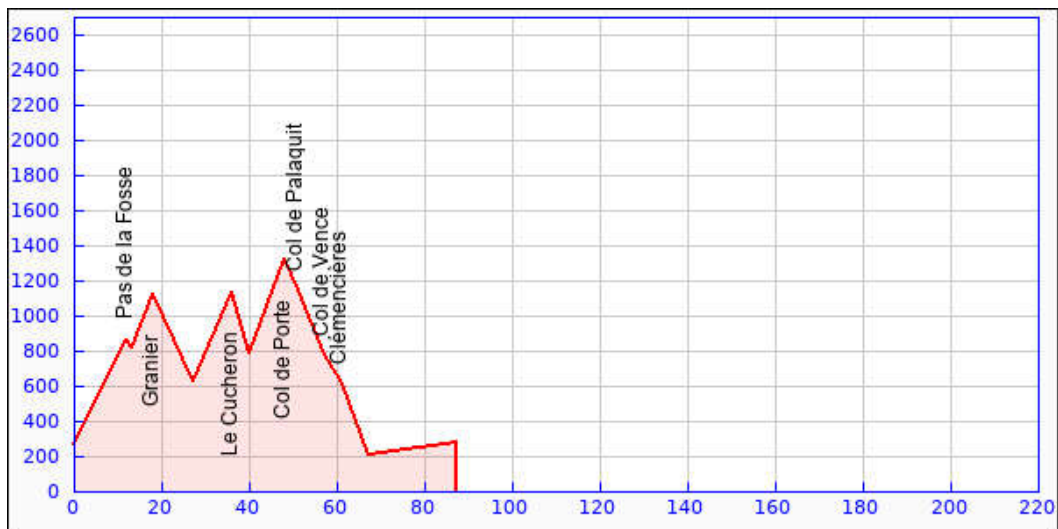
Big surprise to start this tour! I wanted to take a train to Grenoble via Geneva and had found a good connection on the web page of the Swiss railways, all with trains taking bicycles onboard. At the station in Zurich, they could not issue a corresponding ticket because the last train would be... a bus. I had time in Geneva to ask again, and they told me that this was because of construction works lasting the whole summer. All right, but why could they not adapt the electronic time table? No answer. Well, the train ride ended in Chambéry.

Taking a quick look at the map, i easily found an interesting road from Chambéry to Grenoble over the Chartreuse massif. I changed thus my plans and rode first towards the Granier pass. I knew this climb from my [2004 tour](#), but this time i enjoyed it better. The sky was blue but the air was fresh, just perfect to ride. To make some change compared to the previous time, i did not just cross the Fosse tunnel but climbed on a gravel road to the real [Pas de la Fosse](#), just some 30 m

higher in elevation. After this pass and the [Granier](#), i continued straight down to St-Pierre-d'Entremont, then up to the [Cucheron](#) pass. There was very few traffic and it was a very nice ride. Because they don't always have much fantasy in France, the town after the next descent was again named St-Pierre, this time St-Pierre-de-Chartreuse. Still keeping the same general direction, i climbed the to the [Col de Porte](#), the highest point of this day. In the descent, i crossed three further passes without having to climb at all, first [Col de Palaquit](#), then [Col de Vence](#), and finally [Col de Clémencières](#).

At the bottom of the descent, however, there was a big change in the landscape, not only that it was flat for the first time of the day, but mainly because it was now a big city, Grenoble. Bicycle roads were very easy to find throughout the city, but not so easy to ride. There were first many construction works, and then the bicycle paths were not well paved. Nevertheless, i did not take me too long to cross the city from the north to the south. I reached Vizille at roughly 17:30 and decided to stop there rather than to start the long climb to Laffrey. Seven passes in an improvised afternoon ride: why should i complain about wrong train time tables?

	distance (km)	altitude (m)	climbing (m)
Chambéry	0	270	
Pas de la Fosse	12	870	600
Tunnel de la Fosse	13	820	
Granier	18	1130	310
St-Pierre-d'Entremont	27	630	
Le Cucheron	36	1140	510
Le Diat	40	790	
Col de Porte	48	1330	540
Col de Palaquit	51	1150	
Col de Vence	57	780	
Clémencières	61	620	
St-Martin-le-Vinoux	67	210	
Vizille	87	280	70
total	87		2030



Stage 2 (23 June 2012): Vizille - La Mure - Mens - Le Noyer - St-Bonnet-en-Champsaur

The route of this second day was something serious right from the start: i had to climb to Laffrey on the national road, which is part of the *Route Napoléon*. The good thing on this Saturday morning was that there was not yet too much traffic. At Laffrey, i had a good reason to leave the main road since it would give me the opportunity to ride over two small passes, [Pas des Blanches](#) and [Col de la Festinière](#). I joined the main road again when arriving at the nice town of La Mure. Then, however, i took a small road down to Ponsonnas. After this village, the road became so narrow and with so many potholes that i was wondering if it would bring me anywhere or if i would have to climb all the way back to La Mure. Fortunately, my map was right and i joined a larger road that brought me to a high bridge over the Drac River. On the other side, i wanted to climb to the mountains of Trièves to find some passes. However, one of the roads was closed. I had to change the itinerary and went in this order: [Col de Laye](#), [Col de Masserange](#), [Col Accarias](#), [Col de Cornillon](#) and [Col du Thaud](#). After climbing to the first one, it was very easy to reach the next ones. Then i went down to Mens and stopped at a bar for a mini-pizza and a drink. The next pass was again not far away, [Col St-Sébastien](#). This brought me to a sort of high plateau above the Drac River. Some tributaries of the Drac, however, forced the road to make some detours and to go down and up again. Later, i entered the valley of one of these tributaries, the Souloise River. I rode to St-Disdier, then further up to the [Festre](#) pass. I did not want to cross the pass, but i don't like either to go forth and back on the same way, so i tried to make a loop. I took a very small road over Lachaup, but then it was not paved beyond this hamlet and i had a few kilometres of gravel road. As i reached the Festre, i bought a drink and went back to the north, this time on the regular road. Then i turned right over the [Rioupes](#) pass and down to the Souloise valley. The road went along a deep canyon before arriving at the town of St-Étienne. I felt still enough energy to go over a last pass, [Col du Noyer](#). It was quite an easy climb from this side, while the other slope is steeper and longer. As during the whole day, the landscape was changing all the time, with mountains of different shapes and colours, with diverse crops, with forests and multicolour meadows. With the nice weather i had, this was so beautiful that i had to stop quite often to take pictures. After the descent from the Noyer pass, however, the only remaining challenge was to find a place to stay for the night. It was really some challenge, but finally i managed it successfully, at St-Bonnet.

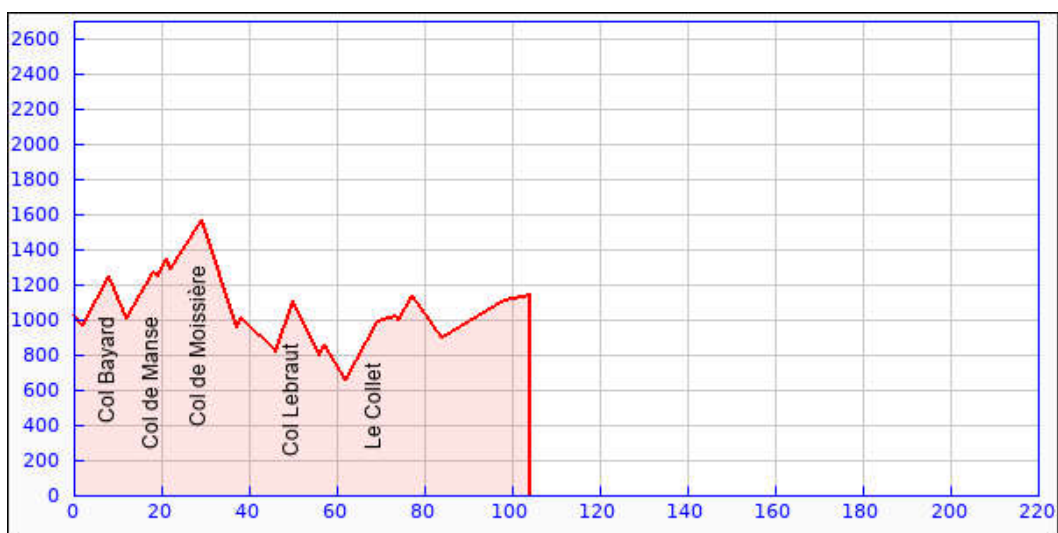
	distance (km)	altitude (m)	climbing (m)
Vizille	0	280	
Pas des Blanches	9	1010	730
Aveillans	18	920	
La Festinière	19	960	40
Pont de Ponsonnas	31	600	
Col de Masserange	40	930	330
St-Jean-d'Hérans	44	810	
Col Accarias	46	890	80
Combe d'Andrieux	49	850	
Col de Cornillon	50	890	40
Aubépin (Cornillon)	52	840	
Le Thaud	53	880	40
Moulin Jalay (Mens)	56	730	
Col St-Sébastien	61	980	250
Cordéac	66	890	
Les Achards	70	950	60
Moulin des Achards	71	870	
Les Veyres	81	1000	130
Pont de la Baume	83	910	
Col du Festre	99	1440	530
Les Combettes	102	1320	
Col de Rioupes	104	1430	110
Pont de Giers	108	1240	
Col du Noyer	118	1660	420
Les Baraques	131	970	
St-Bonnet-en-Champsaur	135	1030	60
total	135		2820



Stage 3 (24 June 2012): St-Bonnet-en-Champsaur - Chorges - Espinasses - Barcelonnette

Third day of nice weather on this tour. And third day of slight north-west wind to help me a bit. Carefully studying the forecasts before deciding the date of departure can help! I went first on the main road to the south, passing [Col Bayard](#). On this Sunday morning, the traffic was not too heavy and the climb was easy. In the descent down to Gap, i turned left to go over the [Manse](#) pass. The road had a good bicycle lane up to the pass and i could just enjoy the climb. There was no real descent from there as the road went along the valley towards the village of Ancelle. From there, the next pass was across the same mountain ridge as both the previous ones. [Col de Moissière](#) was just a bit higher, but the climb was neither long nor difficult. The south side, however, was longer, steeper and narrower. I continued on small roads towards Chorges. After this town, i took one of the roads running around the Serre-Ponçon Lake. It was first a bit frustrating because i could barely have a look at the lake through the vegetation. The road climbed and went around a hill, which means that there was a pass, [Lebraut](#). From then on, there were some nice view points over the lake, then also over the dam. Unfortunately, it is not possible to go over this dam and i had to ride further down to cross the Durance River which comes out of the lake, then to climb again on the other side. On the south shore, the road went also over a pass, called simply [Le Collet](#), but apart of this it went several times up and down towards the Ubaye valley. It was quite warm but the wind was favourable. I was in no hurry and reached Barcelonnette already around 3 o'clock.

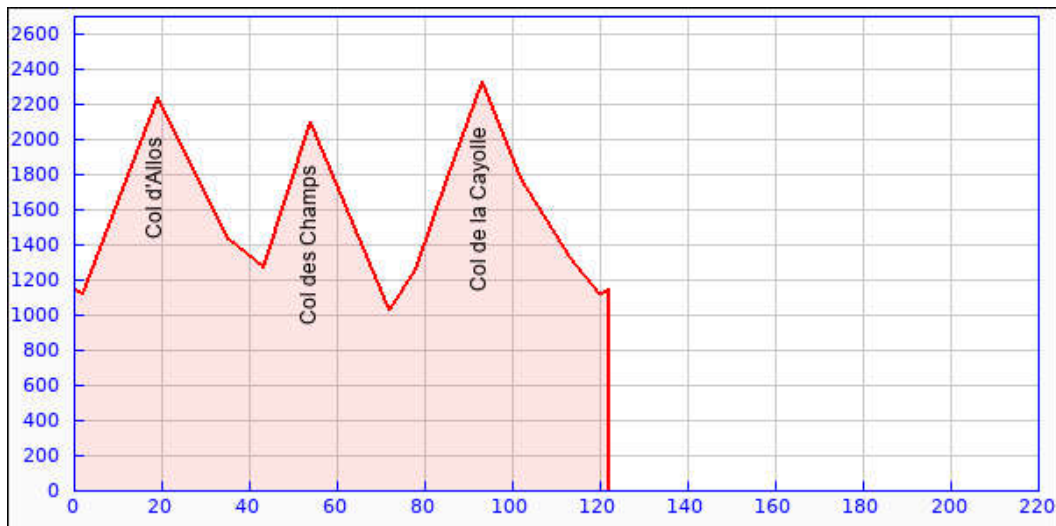
	distance (km)	altitude (m)	climbing (m)
St-Bonnet-en-Champsaur	0	1030	
Les Baraques	2	970	
Col Bayard	8	1250	280
Puymonbeau	12	1010	
Col de Manse	18	1270	260
Pré Palié	19	1250	
Les Forests	21	1350	100
Château d'Ancelle	22	1290	
Col de Moissière	29	1570	280
Les Borels	37	960	
Les Carles	38	1010	50
Le Villard	46	820	
Col Lebraut	50	1110	290
Les Lionnets	56	800	
La Croix	57	860	60
Espinasses	62	660	
Le Collet	69	990	330
Les Terrasses	73	1020	30
Le Lautaret	74	1000	
Pré-Vieux (St-Vincent)	77	1140	140
Le Lauzet-Ubaye	84	900	
Les Thuiles	98	1110	210
Barcelonnette	104	1140	30
total	104		2060



Stage 4 (25 June 2012): Barcelonnette - Allos - Cayolle - Barcelonnette

Being in Barcelonnette, there is a standard tour that can be made over three passes to the south. The question is then: in which sense. I decided to make the counter-clockwise circuit and started thus with the [Allos](#) pass. It is a good but narrow road, not very steep but long and with few traffic. Early in the morning, there were only a handful of cars and motorcycles. The landscape is wild and gorgeous and i very much enjoyed the climb. On the other side, there is a ski resort and thus less wilderness, but i also had less time to look around while riding down. Arriving at Colmars, near the fort, i turned to [Col des Champs](#). It was again a narrow but good road, almost entirely in a forest. I climbed thus in the shade in an almost untouched nature. In the descent, i noticed that my choice of the counter-clockwise sense was good: the road was a bit broader and in a perfect state, offering a fast but secure descent. In the opposite direction, it would have been a harder climb because it was exposed to the sun. Arriving in St-Martin after these two passes, however, there was still the biggest one awaiting me, the [Cayolle](#) pass. As it would take me roughly two hours to climb, i made a drinking stop at the bottom and another in the middle, near a small lake. There was a slight head wind, but when you climb it does not make much of a difference; it had even the little advantage of some cooling. It is difficult to write more about this third pass without repeating the same things as for the previous ones. The main difference was probably a more challenging descent, on a narrow, winding and a bit bumpy road. Once it turned to the west, the valley became narrower, almost like a canyon. Altogether, this roundtrip was certainly one of the nicest rides i ever made and i was very happy as i returned to Barcelonnette after 8 hours in total and almost 7 in saddle.

	distance (km)	altitude (m)	climbing (m)
Barcelonnette	0	1140	
Le Plan	2	1120	
Col d'Allos	19	2240	1120
Allos	35	1430	
Colmars	43	1270	
Col des Champs	54	2100	830
St-Martin-d'Entraunes	72	1030	
Entraunes	78	1260	230
Estenc	85	1780	520
Col de la Cayolle	93	2330	550
Bayasse	102	1780	
Grand Pont	113	1330	
Le Plan	120	1120	
Barcelonnette	122	1140	20
total	122		3270



Stage 5 (26 June 2012): Barcelonnette - Parpaillon - Pontis - Barcelonnette

I decided to make another roundtrip from Barcelonnette, but with a mountain bike that i rented. I went to the [Parpaillon](#), a famous pass with a long gravel road and a short tunnel at the summit. I took first the road to La Condamine, then started to climb into the Parpaillon valley. At the end of the macadam at the Sainte-Anne chapel, the road was closed. Even for pedestrians, horses and cycles. This was due to of some road works, but i thought that this may be just because of insurances, not because of real dangers or hindrances. And it was. There were only two (friendly) workers and one machine, which i was able to pass easily and without any danger. This was still before leaving the forest and reaching the Parpaillon sheepfold. And from there, much remained to climb. Even if the gravel road was good, the pedalling efficiency is not the same as on a road with a race bike, and it took me till midday to finally reach the south entrance of the tunnel. After the sheepfold, i had seen only one descending mountain biker and three marmots. Apart of them, i was apparently alone in this valley. Some people in Barcelonnette had told me that the big doors of the tunnel would still be closed from the winter, but they were open. This means that i had the choice between the very steep climb in the spree to the Parpaillon pass, or the tunnel with thick ice on the ground (or mud, or water at places). Since i did not distinguished any track among the stones towards the pass, i decided to enter the tunnel. For light, i used my cell phone, something i had already done to walk during the night in a forest. Here, however, it was too weak because the light from the end of the tunnel prevented my eyes to adapt to the darkness. I managed to keep my feet dry

for about 2/3 of the tunnel, but then i stepped into a deep puddle of water. Well, better water than mud. At the end of the tunnel, i met two walkers and saw a few more further down, which means that i was no longer as alone as on the other side.

Soon after starting the descent, i took a short dirt track left towards the [Girabeau](#) pass. The other side of this pass was so steep that i preferred to come back to the Parpaillon road and to ride over La Chalp to the Durance valley. The descent was very long, first on gravel road, then (from an elevation of roughly 1850 m) on a paved road. The next part of the tour was the least interesting because of the traffic and the warm head wind. The traffic receded after the national road went on a bridge over the Serre-Ponçon Lake at Savines. The wind was no longer a problem once i took the road to the south over Pontis and [Col de Pontis](#). This pass offered some very nice views on forests, meadows, and again the lake. After the descent and its many hairpin curves, the wind became a ally. I was glad about it because this was becoming quite a long circuit.

	distance (km)	altitude (m)	climbing (m)
Barcelonnette	0	1140	
La Condamine	14	1290	150
Chapelle Ste-Anne	20	1750	460
Tunnel du Parpaillon	31	2640	890
Les Ecuelles	33	2440	
Col de Girabeau	34	2490	50
La Chalp	45	1660	
Les Esmieux (St-André)	56	990	
Pont Neuf	60	800	
Chanchore	62	840	40
Liou	63	790	
Le Moulin	68	840	50
La Pinède	69	790	
St-Ferréol	70	840	50
Savines	71	790	
Fontbelle	76	940	150
Col de Pontis	81	1300	360
Cimetière d'Ubaye	86	800	
Le Lauzet-Ubaye	94	900	100
Les Thuiles	108	1110	210
Barcelonnette	115	1140	30
total	115		2540



Stage 6 (27 June 2012): Barcelonnette - Bonette - Isola - Lombarde - Cuneo

After my stay in Barcelonnette, i wanted to go towards Italy. Not over the Larche pass, which is forbidden for bicycles and has anyway too many trucks, but over the Bonette and Lombarde passes. I was among the very first to climb from Jausiers to the Bonette and i saw only few cars, few motorcycles and just one cyclist on the way up. And again, the landscape was great ant the weather was perfect, with just a few harmless clouds. The climb was long, but under such conditions i did not mind at all. At the elevation of approximately 2650 m, a gravel road went to the right. At this point, the road crosses a saddle of the terrain: this is the [Faux col de Restefond](#). Less than 1 km further, it becomes clear why this pass is named *false*, because then there is the true one: [Col de Restefond](#). The road, however, remains slightly below the ridge and does not cross the pass. To be able to count it, i dismounted my bicycle and pushed it to the pass itself. Then, again less than 1 km away, i arrived at the main pass, [Col de la Bonette](#). From there, i went also around the mountain, where the road climbs up to 2802 m of elevation. This little loop may be useless, i used it to make a few more pictures from the alps all around. After returning so to the Bonette pass, i went down to the fourth pass of this series, [Col des Granges Communes](#), also called Col de Raspailon. Then

	distance (km)	altitude (m)	climbing (m)
Barcelonnette	0	1140	
Jausiers	9	1210	70
Faux col de Restefond	29	2650	1440
Col de Restefond	30	2680	30
Col de la Bonette	31	2720	40
Cime de la Bonette	32	2800	80
Col de la Bonette	33	2720	
Col des Granges Communes	36	2510	
St-Étienne-de-Tinée	58	1140	
Isola	73	860	
Isola 2000	90	2000	1140
Col de la Lombarde	94	2350	350
Pratolungo	115	880	
Vinadio	116	910	30
Moiola	134	690	
Stiera (Gaiola)	135	670	
Quinto Piano (Roccasparvera)	138	700	30
Cuneo	153	550	
total	153		3210

came the long descent to St-Étienne-de-Tinée and further to Isola. After St-Étienne, there was a very strange bicycle lane on the road, with both directions on the same side of the road, but with no separation other than the painting. Did you ever try to ride between a bicycle and a car, both in the opposite direction? It does not fell safe at all...

Anyway, after a snack and a drink in Isola, i started the second serious climb of the day, only a bit shorter than the first one: i went up to the [Lombarde](#) pass. The first part was quite hot, but then the cooling effect of the elevation made it easier to ride. The road was quite broad and not too steep, at least up to the ski resort of Isola 2000 (the number indicating the elevation). This completely artificial resort, as many of them in France, was quite ugly and dead in the Summer. I barely found a bar to buy a drink. It was extremely expensive, even for somebody coming from Switzerland. The last part of the climb was above the forests in a landscape of bare rocks, scree and some grass. After a short stop at this last pass, i took the road to the Italian side. The descent to Vinadio was quite long and the narrow road made many curves. From Vinadio to Cuneo, i followed the main road. The smaller road on the other side of the river may be better for bicycles, but i missed the right road branch and then followed the easiest route. In Cuneo, i found an hotel near the train station.

The next day, the train ride back home would be the most adventurous part of the tour. I even had to ride my bicycle twice between different trains, once in Milano because of lacking connections that would take bicycles onboard, and once in the descent of the Gotthard because rockslides had cut the railway for several weeks. The good thing is that you often meet interesting people not only on bicycle but also in trains...

