

IMPRESSIONS SOUTHERN MILE 2025 EDITION

Saturday, September 6, 2025

Rail link to LES ARCS DRAGUIGNAN, then once the bikes are back up, head to base camp. This year, the German delegation is substantial. Only three women (Eva, Manuela, and Marguerite), but a mixed tandem of Manuela (already mentioned) and Ralph are also there (a first). The afternoon is an opportunity for our friends from across the Rhine to prepare a lot of pizza dough and a large salad bowl of vegetables for their dinner.

Matthew (the only British one) claims to have met me at the summit of Izoard during a previous edition. Faced with my skepticism, a photo on his smartphone proves his point. This brief encounter will lead him to participate in this annual event.

A French quintet composed of Alexandre B., two Pascal B.s, Patrice C., and Gilles E., dines together.

Sunday, September 7, 2025 CDB

A leisurely breakfast, a tour of the village of COTIGNAC, then a meal at the Café de l'Union for the five French people. Thierry F. and Denis S. complete our delegation. The late afternoon drags on too slowly for the late-night crowd. A short nap in the dormitory is interrupted by the arrival of a young dog. But the crates of German beer help them pass the time! By 6 p.m., a line forms in front of the stove. The Germans have pitched in to offer us something, and in quantity. Matthias G. arrives from Aix-en-Provence train station. He's had a pretty close call.

Luc and Etienne are among the late-night crowd. Due to roadworks between GUILLESTRE and CHATEAU QUEYRAS, Sophie allows the early-morning crowds to leave earlier to avoid the road closures. The bottled beer supply is being depleted by the "over-the-Rhine" crowd. A Yew tree is heavily used to drain the corpses!

Monday, September 8, 2025 COTIGNAC MOULANS / OUVEZE

Up at 4 a.m., bad night, snoring undoubtedly combined with the usual stress before setting off on long distances. Sophie is there to punch my route map. Breakfast, charge my smartphone, and I set off at 5 a.m.

As soon as I leave COTIGNAC, I can admire the sleepy but lit-up town. This year's route follows quite a few familiar roads. It's fun to climb up to MONTMEYAN like this! Very little traffic at this time, so much the better, I'm enjoying the route alone.

A variation of the route took me down a small road that allowed a German rider to be in front of me.

The Sainte Croix du Verdon's lake dam is revealed around a bend. Thierry, who left later, drops me off just before RIEZ. A quick stop to stock up on food (cheese and biscuits). Eight Germans, including Eva, join me just before ORAISON. See you next year at Base Camp? In principle, only Denis S. remains. A good steep climb to reach the D 4096 in LA BRILLANNE. I almost catch up with a German, but there's no point in forcing it; the day has barely begun, and Mont Ventoux is still a long way off.

FONTIENNE, the first checkpoint and a new variation, since I avoid crossing the village. When I take the photo, my smartphone is completely discharged.

No other choice but to try to find a stamp. By the greatest chance, I then run into Denis, whom I ask to take a photo of me and send it to me. The first check validated, the fact remains that I have to find something to fill my water bottles, but above all, consider getting photos as proof of passage, this edition is off to a bad start. Locals I contact for directions to a water point ask about the reflective bracelets around my ankles being electronic.

I do a lot of gardening to find the water point, which ultimately turns out to be located on the town hall porch. Refill stop in Saint Etienne des Orgues. Airplane mode is mandatory, of course, for the rest of the day. BANON where I meet up with the tandem. Quick moistening of arms, legs, and face at the fountain. REVEST DU BION then SAULT, the serious business of the afternoon is clearly in sight.

I'm late according to my route plan. Quick stop at the supermarket to replenish solid and liquid supplies. Some crazy people (the term for those who have completed all three climbs in one go) relieve themselves before tackling their third ascent. The wind seems favorable, although it could weaken at the end of the afternoon for the section after Chalet REYNARD. Shepherds give their meal to three patou dogs. Two eat, the third still standing guard. The last six kilometers ultimately go better than expected. Photo stop in front of the stele dedicated to Tom SIMSON then the more modest one dedicated to Pierre KRAMER, known as the Gaul, who died on April 2, 1983 on this slope (avid hiker of the Union des Audax Français club of which I was a member) https://medium.com/@m_xl/the-gaul-pierre-kraemer-ac0d9e4fe937.

Photo at the summit, dressing session, and the descent begins. It seems to me that the surface has been partially resurfaced. Having reached MALAUCENE, it's time to call my host. Arrived on time thanks to a good average speed on the descent. Bike stored in the entrance of the cottage against the fireplace, shower, then meal already prepared in the kitchen and bed.

Tuesday, September 9, 2025 MOULANS / OUVEZE MENS

Up at 4:00 a.m., breakfast, smartphone fully charged, and off at 4:45 a.m. for BUIS LES BARONNIES and the Col de SOUBEYRAND. Weather still favorable. Food stop at the organic supermarket in LUC EN DIOIS. A poster explaining the participation in the "Let's Block Everything" day planned for the next day was found in front of the cash register. Country ham, cheese, and soy yogurt—enough to boost my energy for the Col de MENE. Passing through the tunnel was less chilly than expected. All that remained was to descend to MENS. I arrived way too early. A chance to stop by the supermarket and wash my things before dinner. The bike was well protected, so I kept the key. Tonight's pizza won't be remembered as a good experience. A guest at the hostel, seeing my frame plate, informed me that he had participated in an edition of the MDS but had not managed to complete it.

Wednesday, September 10, 2025, MENS-MOLANS, QUEYRAS.

Breakfast is ready in the breakfast room as planned. As I leave to retrieve and load my bike, an old lady is on the steps in front of the hostel. She tells me she's been on the street for several hours. Her words aren't very coherent, so I think she's actually

left the nursing home located in MENS. I let her in, and she soon falls asleep on one of the armchairs in the entrance hall. I scribble a note of explanation on a piece of paper for the hostel staff, who should find her upon their arrival. There's a fair amount of lightning as I take the roads leading to Cordeac, Les Pays, and Pellafoll. I can barely make out the luminous markers of the wind turbines, the fog is so dense at the end of the night. No Col de Festre on the agenda again this year. The descent to AMBEL must be cautious because several animals are surprised by my lighting. Taking the N85 after LE MOTTY marks a return to the busy life. The traffic is very heavy, and I have to stay on the right side of the road. I ignore the signs for the Col du NOYER.

I take a slight detour to find something to eat in FARE-EN-CHAMPSAUR. The roundabout on the RN is busy, and a leaflet distribution is organized. A food stop, then a rather steep climb to rejoin the route on the D945. CHABOTTES marks the foot of the ascent of the Col de MOISSIERE. The weather is still fine. ANCELLE reminds me of my encounter with Nicolas EIBNER (a participant with a recumbent bike in the 2013 edition, if I remember correctly). A photo check at the summit. Then I cross the place called LES AUBINS, where I'm delighted by the number of wooden houses.

SAINT APPOLINAIRE is still a bit steep on the approach, but the view of the lake remains magnificent. It's a shame not to linger there too long. The clouds hanging over the peaks don't bode well. A shelter in LE VILLARD will be welcome to change into the appropriate clothing. We continue in heavy rain. Once we reach EMBRUN, the tarpaulin must be removed. The connection to GUILLESTRE is a bit hilly but in the sun. I leave CREVOUX on the right (the start of the PARPAILLON!). I reach MOLINES EN QUEYRAS and its Auberge des 1000 lacs (!) in time to share dinner with three hikers. Alone in the dormitory for eight, but on the 4th floor! The bike is well protected, and I keep the key for the next morning.

Thursday, September 11, 2025 MOLINES LA BRIGUE

Breakfast with the kitten in the dining room. Forgetting a glove allows me to climb the four floors, as if for a warm-up, in fact. We set off at night to cross Pierre Grosse and then continue towards the Col Agnel. Little traffic but no early morning marmots. Too bad, the road sign announced their presence for 15 km. A full moon, a chance to appreciate the contours of the surrounding mountains. A photo stop before the summit to immortalize the view of the snow-capped peaks. I don't linger longer than necessary at the summit (photo and rain jacket, balaclava, and long gloves). Wind and 1 degree Celsius, the GPS tells me. The workers are preparing a platform (future parking lot or shop?), but I can only see the tip of their noses. If the first switchbacks are sunny, it doesn't last. As in 2023, I'm making a detour to rediscover the picturesque village of Chianale. But the restaurant I discovered back then isn't open yet, which is a shame.

BROSSASCO, finally a café open. Still in familiar territory, this section on the flats. BORGO, it's time to think about refueling. While wandering through the town, I find a pizzeria and decide on a longer stop. If I leave the pizza on the plate, I'm greeted by another one when I start off again because my flat front tire refuses to turn. Knee and thigh bloodied, I take the time to repair. The long false flat begins. In LIMONTE

PIEMONTE, I meet a Bosnian mountain biker who is doing TURIN NICE (the high salt road?) with a trail option. He shows me his race on his GPS and asks me if he can reach NICE by the following evening. Time for a selfie with a self-timer and we set off again, each at our own pace. The only word he said to me in French: FRANCOIS MITTERRAND! Given his photo stops and perhaps his track option to reach the Col de TENDE, I only see him again when leaving LA MARMOTTE. Photo control and the gravel section to reach the Baisse de PIERREFIQUE begins with a fairly rolling descent. Quite a bit of mist in this area, but no rain.

On reflection, I preferred the stony sections to the remaining patchwork of road surface. Although the descent to CASTERINO is not the most "comfortable". The continuation with hairpin bends, some of which have been redone following more or less recent storms. SAINT DALMAS EN TENDE and its train station reached then diversion to reach LA BRIGUE (our starting point for the reconnaissance carried out in 2020 of the Routes Blanches with Stéphane GIBON and consorts). A little animation on the main square. A very appreciable half-board formula later, it is time to take care of the rear end which is starting to make itself felt and to close the eyes.

Friday, September 12, 2025, La Brigue Ilonse

Another beautiful stage in sight. We start with a long, false flat descent at night. The two tunnels have retained the daytime heat. The Col de Brouis leads to Sospel, where I try, but fail, to warm up on the terrace of a bakery with a side of cheese and coffee. All that's left is to hit the road again for Turini. The climb—most of it shaded—is punctuated by several convoys of high-end Italian and German vehicles. That's a real heat engine! No point lingering in the middle of so many cars once the photo check is done. A beautiful descent towards the BOLLENE VESUBIE. I take the sandwich I bought in SOSPEL out of my bag and enjoy a bit of shade in ROQUEBILIERE. Major reshaping work on the bed of the VESUBIE is still underway on both sides of SAINT MARTIN DE VESUBIE. During the climb to the Col de SAINT MARTIN, I have the opportunity to better understand the extent of the said work. A stretch of main road and it's the climb to the Col de la SINNE. The cloud cover makes the end of the stage less hot. This time, the discovery of ILONSE is not limited to the fountain. A nice stop at the Auberge du GRUGGIO. Discussion that will continue after dinner with a local hiker and a young couple of mountain guides from the area around GUILLESTRE on a cycle tour.

Saturday, September 13, 2025, Ilonse-Le-Bourguet

A pseudo-lie-in, breakfast, and digestion begin as I reach the Col de la Sinne. The last kilometer is well worth it. The descent is much less rugged than I remember (probably due to age and the confusion of life). Puget-Theniers is waking up, and a bakery offers a short snack break. Once I've crossed the Col de Saint-Raphaël, the worst of this year's climb is behind me. There are no shops since Puget. A light rain is setting in. So, I stop in Briançonnet, and the couple who run the community café share their meal with me. An endive with ham is better than nothing. Castellane, I can't resist the pleasure of returning to the supermarket at the entrance.

The sky is getting increasingly cloudy. The inn in LE BOURGUET is a former hotel restored by the town hall to boost local tourism. Tonight, there's no dinner, but a

restaurant that delivers to your door. The lasagna, once heated in the microwave, is very tasty and filling, not to mention the apple-cinnamon crumble. It's enough to start a good night's sleep without the rumbling.

Sunday, September 14th, LE BOURGUET COTIGNAC

Another "lie-in." It's quite chilly this morning. So, I put on my rain jacket to keep warm. After COMPS, the final stretch is in full swing. I meet two cycle campers during a photo stop. The discussion turns to the sustainability of the work undertaken in the valleys marked by Storm Alex in 2020. His opinion on the quality and awarding of certain contracts is quite strong. Unfortunately, our paths quickly diverge. TOURTOUR: I can't resist checking out the mini-market, whose storefront is quite remarkable. Its interior is no different. A flea market enlivens the village center. From now on, I could almost do without the GPS to finish this edition. However, I keep an eye on it during the final climb: 15% nonetheless!

Sophie and Bernard, along with two of Bernard's children, are there. One is a caterer and a deal has been made for him to cater for future editions. Yay.