FRANCE

Classic Cols Of The Pyrenees

Duration: **6 days**

KING OF THE MOUNTAINS CYCLE

Cycle the mountains made famous by the Tour de France! This prestigious and extremely tough cycling challenge sees us tackling some of the most legendary cols of the Pyrenees - including the Col d'Aubisque and the Col du Tourmalet – with a few newer climbs in the mix too.

From lush green valleys and picturesque villages to the barren heights among glaciers and jagged peaks, every pedal-stroke piles on the spectacular views, and the challenge. Often considered tougher than their Alpine cousins, the untamed Pyrenean roads shun steady gradients – where's the fun in that?!

Conquering these mountains will earn you a fantastic sense of achievement and give you something in common with the most elite cyclists of the past century!

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1: Meet Foix

We meet at the hotel in Foix*, in the foothills of the Pyrenees, (approx 1 hour from Toulouse). After assembling and checking your bike, any free time can be spent exploring this lovely town, dominated by its ancient hilltop castle. In the evening we gather for dinner and a trip briefing. Night hotel.

(Lunch not included)

**It is easiest to fly to Toulouse and make your own way to the hotel. If you need details of local transfers, we would be more than happy to help, just get in touch!*

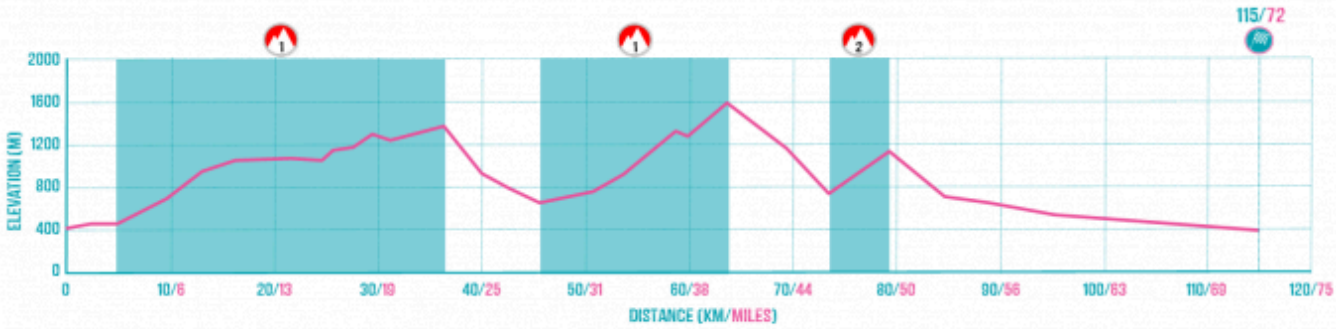
Day 2: Foix – Mur de Péguère – Col d'Agnes – Saint-Girons

Today's route starts with a steady ascent into the Lower Pyrenees, with beautiful valley views opening up as we ride on quiet roads that gradually gain height. Staying high, our route undulates over a couple of minor cols before reaching the Mur de Péguère (1365m), which featured in the Tour for the first time in 2012. This is the moderate side to ascend; the descent is steep but becomes steadier when we join the descent of the famous Col de Port, to picturesque Massat in the valley. There's not much valley; we're soon on the slopes of the Col d'Agnes (1570m), a fairly steep climb with fabulous vistas of the surrounding mountains. Sweeping downhill towards the spa village of Aulus-les-Bains, its hot springs used as treatment since the early 19th century. Our last climb of the day, to the Col de Latrape, is absolutely stunning, and the last miles roll along the gradually-descending valley to Saint-Girons. Night hotel.

(Lunch not included)

Cycle approx 113km (70 miles)

ROUTE PROFILE



START ELEVATION	MAX ELEVATION	GAIN	CLIMBS ON ROUTE
411M 1,356FT	1,577M 5,204FT	3,658M 1,071FT	1 2 2 1

RATING	START/END POINTS	LENGTH	START/END ELEVATION	AVERAGE GRADE	NAME
1	4.55 KM/35.53 KM	27.50 KM	598 M/1,421 M	3.1%	COL DE PÉGUÈRE
1	45.54 KM/63.06 KM	17.52 KM	652 M/1,577 M	5.2%	COL D'AGNES
2	73.40 KM/78.4 KM	5.00 KM	743 M/1,108 M	7.4%	COL DE LATRAPE

Day 3: Saint-Girons – Col de Portet d'Aspet – Col de Menté – Bagnères-de-Luchon

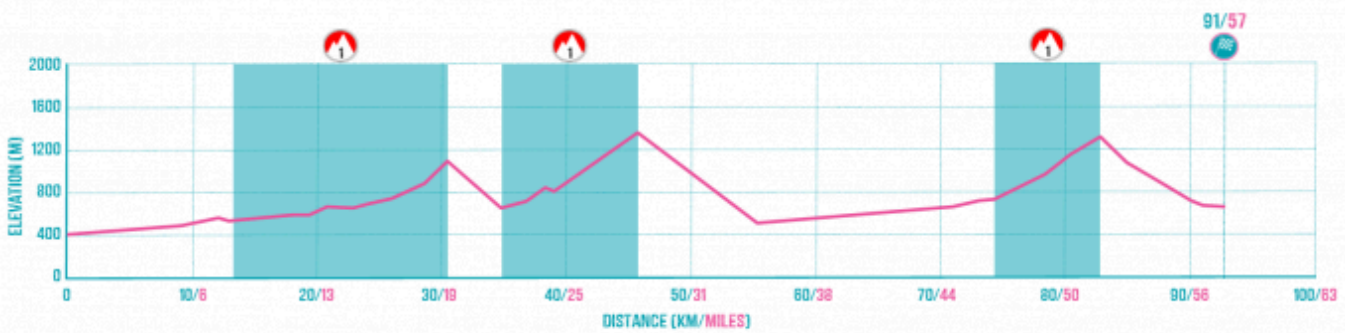
A longer day taking us into the higher peaks. We warm up with a beautiful undulating road which climbs gradually through villages and green pastures towards the Col de Portet d'Aspet (1069m). Even when the official climb starts, it's fairly steady until the gradient ramps up in the last half, with tight, steep hair-pin bends. This is our first real Tour legend, first featured in 1910. Sadly, it's equally well-known for the tragic death of young Italian rider Fabio Casartelli, who in 1995 crashed while descending on a stage of the Tour. You can stop to pay your respects at his memorial before continuing the descent, which becomes less technical after a few kilometres, allowing you to

relax and enjoy the views of the surrounding peaks. We're then straight onto the steep slopes of the Col de Menté (1349m), our highest point today. The gradient changes frequently, and it's tough, but it's a beautiful climb. A long descent follows, then a gradually rising road takes us across the Spanish border as we tackle our last climb of the day, the Col de Portillon (1293m) – which has featured regularly in the Tour since the fifties. An exhilarating descent brings us right into Bagnères-de-Luchon. Night hotel.

(Lunch not included)

Cycle approx 94km (58 miles)

ROUTE PROFILE



START ELEVATION	MAX ELEVATION	GAIN	CLIMBS ON ROUTE
393M 1,296FT	1,372M 4,528FT	2,678M 8,837FT	3

RATING	START/END POINTS	LENGTH	START/END ELEVATION	AVERAGE GRADE	NAME
1	12.80 KM/30.30 KM	17.50 KM	507 M/1,078 M	3.2%	COL DE PORTET D'ASPET
1	34.80 KM/46.30 KM	10.5 KM	706 M/1,372 M	6.1%	COL DE MENTÉ
1	74.50 KM/82.50 KM	8.0 KM	717 M/1,294 M	7.0%	COL DU PORTILLON

Day 4: Bagnères-de-Luchon – Col de Peyresourde – Col d'Aspin – Col du Tourmalet – Argelès-Gazost

Today is the most demanding of them all – three infamous tour climbs all in quick succession. The Col de Peyresourde (1569m) is another legendary climb – also a 1910 Tour first – and its steep slopes through open pasture lay down the challenge for the day. The spectacular views are good distraction from aching muscles! After the descent, enjoy the lovely (flattish) valley before pretty Arreau, where our next climb starts. The Col d'Aspin (1489m) is another classic; we climb its shorter, steeper side. Again, there are lovely views from the upper slopes. Descending though shady pine-woods to the tiny village of Saint-Marie-de-Campan, we turn back into the mountains. Our last climb of the day is the one you've been waiting for – the iconic Tourmalet. In 1910, it was unpaved and in terrible condition, and the bears that frequented the area added to the riders' nerves. Nowadays the road surface is smooth and the wildlife tamer, but the renowned length and severity of the climb are unchanged. The hair-pin bends start in earnest halfway up; we battle our way up the increasingly-barren slopes until we finally reach the steepest bends above La Mongie ski station. Unsurpassed views of glaciers and other mountain peaks await us, but our real reward is getting to the top of a climb which has inspired cyclists for

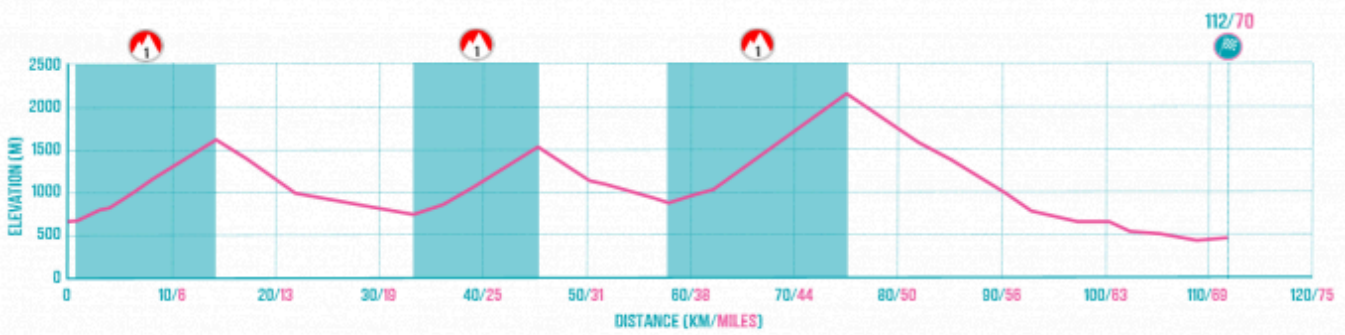
generations. Congratulations: you have just joined the elite!

After time for photos in front of the famous 'silver cyclist', the statue commemorating the first Tour cyclist to gain the summit, it's a long, twisting descent through breath-taking mountain scenery into the shady woods and small villages of the lower slopes. A cruising, scenic ride, surrounded by granite peaks with picturesque castles and churches perched on the green slopes, brings us into the lovely town of Argelès - a perfect finish to this queen day!

(Lunch not included)

Cycle approx 105km (65 miles)

ROUTE PROFILE



START ELEVATION	MAX ELEVATION	GAIN	CLIMBS ON ROUTE
646M 2,132FT	2,115M 6,979FT	3,545M 11,699FT	HC 1 1 1

RATING	START/END POINTS	LENGTH	START/END ELEVATION	AVERAGE GRADE	NAME
1	1.00 KM/14.00 KM	13.00 KM	646 M/1,576 M	7.4%	COL DE PEYRESOURDE
1	33.30 KM/45.30 KM	12.0 KM	704 M/1,483 M	6.5%	COL D'ASPIN
HC	58.10 KM/75.10 KM	17.00 KM	851M/2,115 M	7.4%	COL DU TOURMALET

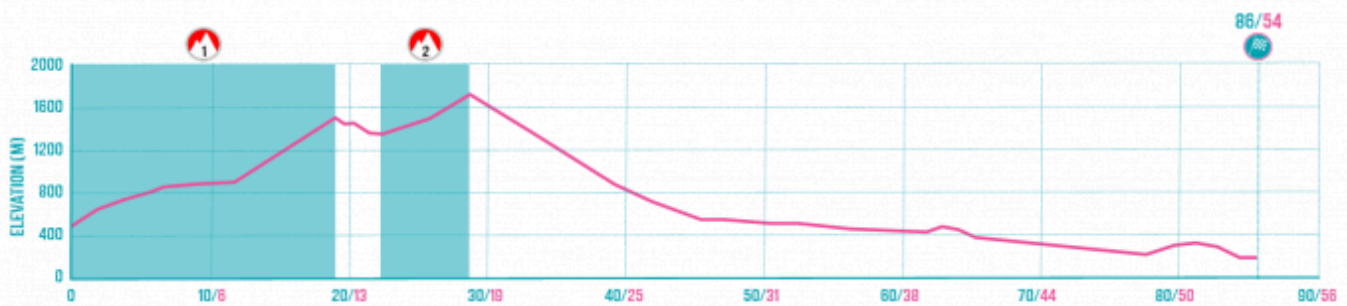
Day 5: Argelès-Gazost – Col du Soulor - Col d'Aubisque – Pau

Our last day, and one of the most spectacular! The Col d'Aubisque (1709m) is a true Tour legend, one of the toughest – and we're climbing it from the toughest side. This means first conquering the steep Col du Soulor; both have seen plenty of Tour action since 1910. Steep at first, the gradient changes frequently as we ride through villages and beautiful green pastures, then ramps up in earnest just after half-way – and doesn't let up! The Soulor's summit lies on the shoulder of the Aubisque, and we descend a little before climbing again. This section, along a narrow gorge with several short tunnels, is absolutely stunning and one of the most impressive rides you can do on a bike – which on this trip, is praise indeed. The clearing of the pass was paid for by the early Tour de France organisation, and you may have a few moments wishing they had left well alone – but savour these last kilometres of climbing! From the summit we descend steeply before cruising the more moderate lower slopes into the small town of Laruns. Then it's green valley floor to Pau, with the mountains receding behind us. Pau is one of the most popular Tour de France host towns, hosting regularly since 1930, so it's a fitting end to our journey and a great place to celebrate. Night hotel.

(Lunch not included)

Cycle approx 86km (55 miles)

ROUTE PROFILE



START ELEVATION	MAX ELEVATION	GAIN	CLIMBS ON ROUTE
646M 2,132FT	2,115M 6,979FT	3,545M 11,699FT	1 1

RATING	START/END POINTS	LENGTH	START/END ELEVATION	AVERAGE GRADE	NAME
1	0.00 KM/19.00 KM	19.00 KM	460 M/1,475 M	5.2%	COL DU SOULOR
2	21.50 KM/28.5 KM	7.00 KM	1,342 M/1,709 M	5.5%	COL D'AUBISQUE

Day 6: Depart Pau

After breakfast, say your goodbyes and head for home (depending on your own arrangements*).

**If you need details of local transfers to Pau or Biarritz airport, we would be more than happy to help, just get in touch!*

(Lunch not included)

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Meals except where specified (breakfast and dinner will be provided at hotels each day)
- Snacks en-route
- Accommodation on a twin-share basis
- Bike transport arrangements from Discover Adventure Office to the start point of the cycle
- Return bike courier service
- Discover Adventure leader and roving crew member for mechanical support/coaching and support vehicle
- Mapping, GPX files and route information

WHAT'S EXCLUDED

- Lunch (opportunity to buy lunch to carry with you, or stop in a café en-route) and any meals specified 'not included' in

the itinerary
- Travel insurance
- Flights and transport to/from start/finish point of ride
- Bicycle
- Cycle helmet (compulsory) and water bottles
- Personal spending money, souvenirs and drinks
- Fees for any optional sites, attractions or activities
- Any applicable surcharges as per Terms and Conditions

GRADE | RED

Trips are graded Yellow, Orange or Red, in increasing level of challenge. This trip lies within the **RED** range.

The grade is determined by factors such as terrain, distance, climate, altitude, etc. Each colour grade has a **spectrum** which reflects the difficulty of these factors; trip duration, accommodation and living conditions (see icon) are also taken into account.

Trip grading explained

Independent Reviews 96 %

ABTA No.Y6195

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Discover Adventure reserves the right to change the route or itinerary for safety reasons should local conditions dictate.

Please note: This document was downloaded on 29 Mar 2024, and the challenge is subject to change.