

### **Tour 3: Tour of the Pyrenees – Pau to Saint-Girons**



#### **Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> August to Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> August**

The Pyrenees are the cyclist's Mecca. Much more compact and smaller than the Alps, the Pyrenees crowd so many mountain passes into such a small area. Any tour here has a multitude of options and the majority are on quiet country roads and any car drivers show much respect and support. It is common to be cheered on by passing motorists and applauded by tourists at the roadside. So it is here in August that Team Infinity have organised an impressive tour – the Tour of the Pyrenees – taking us from the towns Pau to Saint Girons. In the process we explore many famous cols, and also quite a few lesser known ones.

The Tour of the Pyrenees is a week long ride taking in more than 10 of the iconic passes of the Tour de France. With 6 days back-to-back riding covering a total distance of 652km and ascending 21,812m this really is a Grand Tour-like challenge. Riding this tour with Team Infinity will have the feel of a pro-team experience.

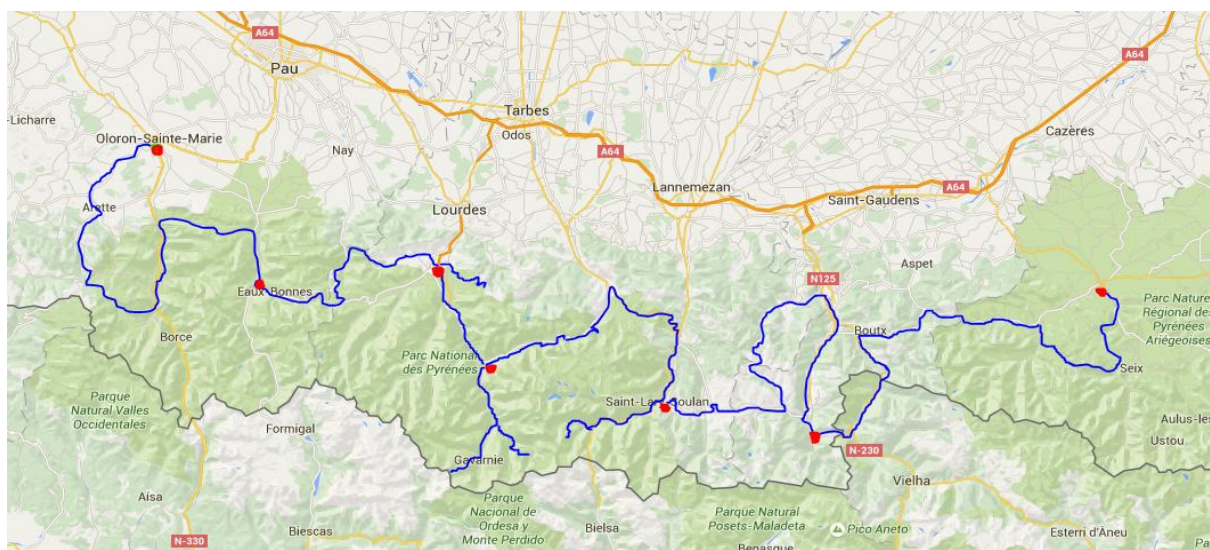
The Tour of the Pyrenees will take place from Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> to Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> August (ride days are Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> to Friday 12<sup>th</sup> August). The weather is perfect for riding at this time of year – warm sunshine can be expected, although beware that as in any mountain range there is always a chance of wet days. Just 2 weeks after the 2016 Tour de France finishes the Pyrenees will be cycling crazy – what better time to visit and get into the atmosphere of the Grand Tour with Team Infinity.

With 2 Rider Guides and 2 support vehicles per group of 12 riders you will have all the physical and moral support required to successfully complete this trip and share the fun with likeminded riders. Having followed Team Infinity's training program for the last few weeks you will be in great shape and excited to get going. Spare clothing, food, drink and mechanical support is never far away leaving you to enjoy the day's riding. Morning coffee and lunch stops will be taken to separate the

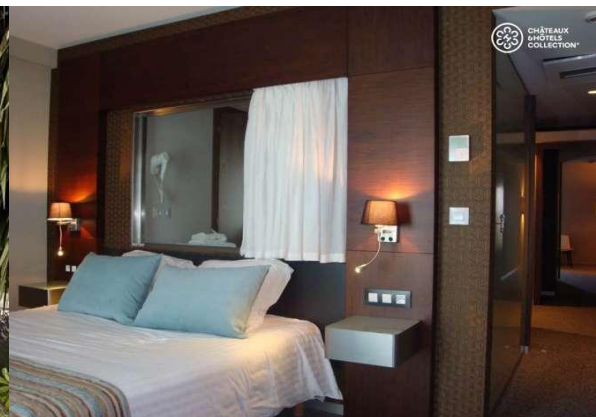
big climbs to allow some rest, recovery, refuelling and banter to take place before the rides continue into the early afternoon. Rides will finish with a warm down, stretching and protein recovery drinks.

Stage 1 is a shorter stage enabling us to warm up gently and get the feel of the place. The next 4 stages contain some big and famous climbs whereas the final stage covers some lesser known, but nonetheless beautiful passes, and is the longest stage. To whet your appetite, here is the list of climbs we go over on this Tour of the Pyrenees: -

Col de Lié  
Col de Hourataté  
Col de Marie-Blanque  
Col d'Aubisque  
Col de Soulour  
Col de Spandelles  
Hautacam  
Port de Boucharo  
Cirque de Troumouse  
Col du Tourmalet  
Hourquette d'Ancizan  
Lac de Cap de Long  
Col d'Azet  
Col de Peyresourde  
Port de Bales  
Col du Portillon  
Col de Menté  
Portet d'Aspet  
Col de la Core  
Col de Catchaudegue



Accommodation on the route is top class with three 3-star hotels and two 4-star hotels, many specifically catering for cyclists and some offering sauna and/or swimming facilities. Rooms are all twins at half board. The first hotel on the arrival night of Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> August is the 3-star rated Hotel Alysson in Oloron-Sainte-Marie, just outside Pau. This is a top quality hotel offering a friendly welcome to Team Infinity. The closest airports are Tarbes-Lourdes-Pyrenees Airport at Tarbes and Toulouse-Blagnac. Transfers to and from them are included in the price. The hotel has all the facilities you expect from such an established name but perhaps all we will have time to fully enjoy are the dining and sleeping amenities. After a warm welcome everyone will be keen to eat, get to know each other and discuss the plans for the coming days. Depending on personal preferences it may be an early morning or late night re-building and adjusting bikes. But just in case you fancy it there's an outdoor swimming pool and sauna (indoor!).



Stage 1 - <https://www.strava.com/routes/3785950>

Date: Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> August

Route: Oloron-Sainte-Marie to Laruns

Cols: Col de Lié, Col de Hourataté and Col de Marie-Blanque

Distance: - 92km

Ascent: - 2,431m.



### Pau to St Giron Stage 1

**91.7 km** **2,431 m**  
Distance Elevation Gain  
Est. Moving Time 3:48:38

From Hotel Alysson it is a short ride out of town and into the French countryside. This quiet road is a great chance for us to ride together as a peloton and get to know each other's riding style. It's 20km before the first hill and we'll use this first section to take it easy and just enjoy taking in the atmosphere and make sure everyone is okay, that the bikes have been set up right and generally let everyone settle into what is going to be a great week.

Col de Lié, the first pass of the Tour, is a Category 4 climb and at 10km long and 9% average gradient deserves some respect. It's 14 hairpins ascend to 1,200m. The descent, over the smaller Col de Hourataté, in 20km takes us to Bedous and a chance to take a break. There is a cosy little salon de thé in the village centre, ideal for such an occasion.

The route continues North down the valley following the Gave d'Aspe as far as the village of Escot. The turn for the Col de Marie-Blanque is well signposted. From this west side the col is much steeper than on the east side. The col has been used 14 times on the Tour de France in both directions. It is given a Category 1 rating on this steeper side – the shallow gradients in the first 5 kilometres being more than balanced by the gradient in the final 3 being above 10%.

The descent from the Marie-Blanque is serene. Never very steep the road meanders across high pastures where it's often necessary to pedal to maintain a decent pace. All too soon the valley is reached and flat riding returns.

Accommodation for the night is in Laruns - another 9km to the south at Hotel d'Ossau. This cosy hotel is situated right on the town square, and boasts a lively bar and restaurant opening out onto the bustling square. The twin rooms all have ensuite shower and toilet, with TV and free wifi throughout. A secure garage is available for bike storage and for carrying out any adjustments that are needed.



## Stage 2 - <https://www.strava.com/routes/3786002>

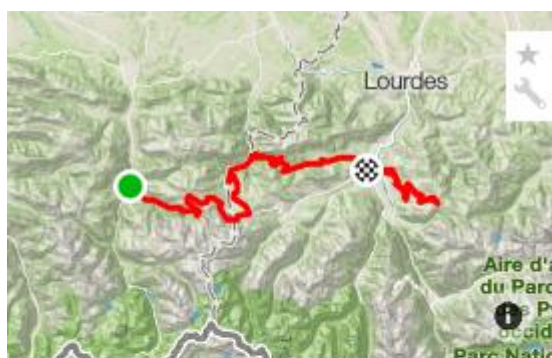
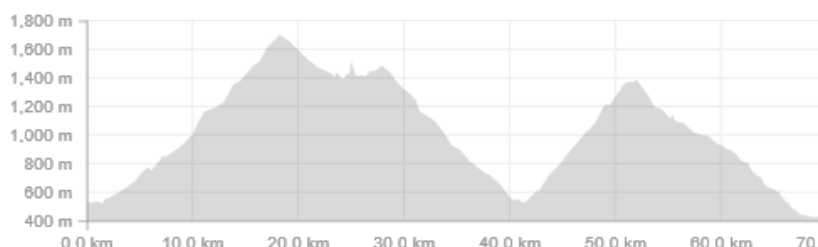
Date: Monday 8th June

Route: Laruns to Argeles-Gazost

Cols: Col d'Aubisque, Col de Soulour, Col de Spandelles, Hautacam

Distance: - 103km

Ascent: - 4177m



### Pau to St Giron Stage 2

**103.1 km** **4,177 m**  
Distance Elevation Gain

Est. Moving Time **4:17:09**

Stage 2 includes several famous Tour de France climbs but also one lesser known one. The route profile shows it to be "3-Peaks" but looking closely there is a small ascent after the first climb. Apart from that it is up and down all the way from start to finish.

The stage starts immediately from Hotel d'Ossau straight on to the famous Col d'Aubisque. A few early hairpins are followed by an almost unrelenting climb. The final third again contains a few bends and all of a sudden we are out in the open and racing for the top. At about 18km it is a long climb and averages just over 7%, with the steepest sections touching 12%-13%. So it's a rude awakening.

From the summit of the Aubisque one of the most spectacular roads in Europe takes us on a steady traverse over to the close neighbour – Col de

Soulour. It's not for the faint-hearted with a steep drop to the left and several tunnels and often wet patches on the road. So it is a place to proceed carefully. Once the climb to the Soulour begins nerves will ease. If we've not taken a break on the summit of the Aubisque it's worth having a morning coffee and snack here on the Soulour as there are few cafes between here and Argeles-Gazost at 70km.

Instead of the common descent from the Soulour to the east we are taking the quieter northerly descent into the Val de L'Ouzum. After 13km we take a right turn at Ferrieres and start the ascent of the second of three climbs of the day. Col de Spandelles is one of those lesser known climbs of the Pyrenees. At 10km long, with 16 hairpins and an average gradient of 8% the Spandelles is a tough climb. The road surface is good on this west facing side but not quite as good on the descent. But you never know – it might have been resurfaced by the time we get there! Let's hope so because the descent lasts for 18km.

At the foot of the Spandelles is the Pyrenean town of Argeles-Gazost, and our stay for the night. However, our day is not finished yet. After refuelling in one of the many cafes or bars we head out for

one more climb. This time up to the ski station of Hautacam. First used on the Tour de France in 1994 it has featured 4 times since and often being a key stage in helping determine the overall Tour winner. It is an Hors Category climb due to its length and persistent gradient. At 15km long and 7% gradient it is certainly worth its reputation. And if it's not to your liking then just think of the descent that it gives you.

Tonight we stay at the 2-star Hotel Le Cimes This hotel is a family run establishment decorated in art deco style. The twin rooms are fitted with either a bath or shower and have flat screen TVs and free wifi. There is an excellent bar and restaurant which faces onto the gardens. This is the ideal place to chill out after a hard day in the saddle, and a place to prepare for tomorrow's Stage.



### Stage 3 - <https://www.strava.com/routes/3786162>

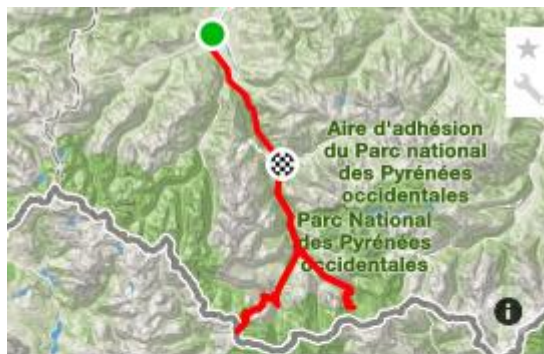
Date: Tuesday 9th August

Route: Argelès-Gazost to Luz-St\_Sauveur

Cols: Port de Boucharo, Cirque de Troumouse

Distance: - 112km

Ascent: - 4275m



#### Pau to St Giron Stage 3

**112.0 km** **4,275 m**

Distance Elevation Gain

Est. Moving Time 4:39:19

Stage 3 is an exploration day. Many will not have heard of the climbs today but that doesn't mean they are not special in themselves. What is most appealing about Stage 3 is riding into the heart of the mountains and feeling that sense of adventure; wanting to know what is round the next bend. This is a great day for riding as a Team as the roads are so quiet. You will feel we have the roads almost to ourselves.

Stage 3 starts with a gentle ride up to Luz-St-Sauveur along the Route de Luz on the banks of the Gave. It can be busy in parts but the windy road that twists around the cliffs of the gorge slows the traffic down. The busy section lasts 10km to the outskirts of Luz-St Sauveur.

From Luz the road calms and rises slightly to an average angle of 3% all the way to the tourist village

of Gavarnie. Here the road steepens and the climbing starts. The first 11km are almost constant 7% but once the Col de Tentes is reached the angle eases with a final sting in the tail at >20% the last few hundred metres up the Port de Boucharo and the Spanish Border.

Once here we turn round and head back down through Gavarnie and on to Gedre. Gavarnie is the recommended place to stop for a midday snack, but perhaps you've spotted a secluded spot on the way up. Whatever we choose it's a good idea to take a break before the second climb of the day.

From the village of Gedre the Cirque de Troumouse is a 15km climb initially up a beautiful valley before it opens out on to the hillside and some spectacular scenery. This is a special place. The final metres, like the Port de Bucharo are steep, but the views make it all worthwhile.

The descent back to Gedre and Luz can be thoroughly enjoyed knowing that all the climbing is done for the day. What awaits is charming Hotel Montaigu. This 3-star hotel is ideal for Team Infinity with plenty of twin rooms, cosy lounge, meeting room, bar, restaurant and bike garage. The menu is inspiring: puff pastry with foie gras and apples, garbure soup, mutton chops (certified Barèges-

Gavarnie mutton), duck fillet with honey, poached Jurançon trout, scallops with leek fondue...to name but a few.



## Stage 4 - <https://www.strava.com/routes/3786315>

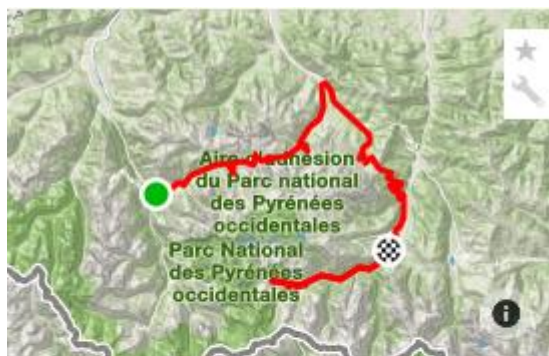
Date: Wednesday 10th August

Route: St-Sauveur to Saint-Lary-Soulan

Cols: Col du Tourmalet, Hourquette d'Ancizan and Lac de Cap de Long

Distance: - 110km

Ascent: - 4065m



### Pau to St Giron Stage 4

**109.6 km** **4,065 m**  
Distance Elevation Gain

Est. Moving Time 4:33:18

Stage 4 is a Classic Day in the Pyrenees. Over the most famous pass in cycling – the Col du Tourmalet. It has been used many times in the Tour de France, more than any other climb, the first time being as far back as 1910. It is set to be used again on Stage 8 of the 2016 race from Pau to Bagnères –de-Luchon. Our route on Stage 4 takes in 2 of the climbs of the 2016 Tour – the Tourmalet and Hourquette d'Ancizan.

The climbing starts from the hotel door and continues at 7 to 8% all the way to the summit of the Tourmalet, 19km away. This is a steady climb and the best way is to set a pace from the beginning that we can maintain to the very top. The lower slopes are tree covered but higher up the view opens out. We have chosen to take the Voie Laurent Fignon road that separates from the main road after 10km. This deviation is a quiet route dedicated to cyclists. The final section immediately below the pass is steeper

but the pull of the finish raises the spirits and the presence of crowds of tourists will give the place the feel of race day. Once at the pass we will be ready for a break and refreshments and perhaps to view the memorabilia.

The descent from the Tourmalet is fast with some long straight sections and some roofed sections. Take care. It's not a race and there are no prizes. It's 17km of downhill to the town of Sainte-Marie-de-Campan. The final few kilometres are less steep and fun to ride. At Sainte-Marie-de-Campan we take a right turn and start the approach to the Hourquette. It's the common approach to Col d'Aspin and the more frequently used route of the Tour de France. Like the 2016 Tour we have chosen the quieter, more interesting and picturesque pass of the Hourquette d'Ancizan. The route winds its way through open pine woods passing lakes and over into a second valley before the final push to its summit. In contrast to the summit of the Tourmalet there is no buzzing crowd here. The descent to the east is via a tree-lined road and this can be fast, with the odd blind bend. All too soon we will hit the valley road where we will regroup.

A 6km ride up the valley brings us to St-Lary-Soulan. This is our home for the night, but before we can rest there is one final climb of the day to Lac de Cap de Long. At 2,160 metres, the route to the lake is one of the highest paved roads in the French Pyrenées – higher than Col du Tourmalet. And it's just a beautiful place to cycle. The first part of the ride is up through a gorge alongside a gently tumbling river. The road then climbs through two stretches of hairpin bends. With each bend the view gets better and better. The Lac itself is stunning and there are a couple of little cafes in which to rest and recover. Probably the best cycle climb in the Pyrenees.

So, then it's back to Saint-Lary-Soulan and to Hotel Mercure Sensoria. This is a 4-Star hotel and restaurant and a perfect way to end such a fantastic and challenging day.



Stage 5 - <https://www.strava.com/routes/3787546>

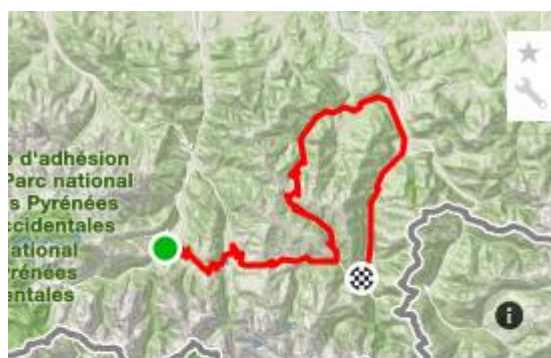
Date: Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> August

Route: St-Lary-Soulan to Bagnères-de-Luchon

Cols: Col d'Azet, Col de Peyresourde and Port de Bales

Distance: - 102km

Ascent: - 3010m



### Pau to St Giron Stage 5

**102.4 km** **3,010 m**

Distance Elevation Gain

Est. Moving Time 4:15:22

The penultimate day, more famous climbs, and a continuation of Stage 16 of the 2016 Tour de France. The pro riders on Stage 16 will have already ridden from Pau, over the Tourmalet and Hourquette before reaching St-Lary where, like us, they will start the ascent of Col d'Azet and then Col de Peyresourde.

Col d'Azet is a short climb in comparison to yesterday's efforts. The first 3 kilometres are quite gentle at less than 5%, with the upper section through a few hairpins for 8km is a steady 8%. We don't descend quite back down to the starting altitude and, hence, join the Col de Peyresourde part way up. This famous pass has been frequently crossed by the Tour de France and sometimes, like in 2012, used twice in the same event. It is normally given a category 1 grade. There are not so many

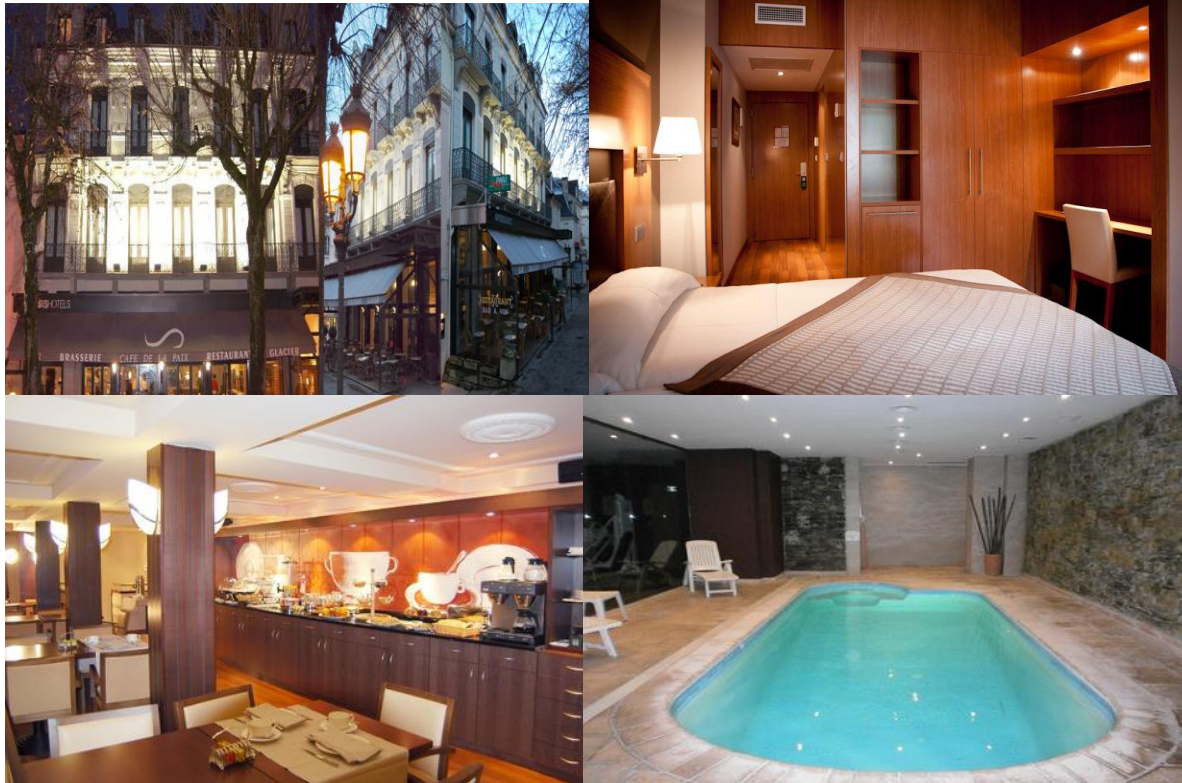
bends in the road which means the summit can be seen for a long way and never seems to get closer. But we will reach the summit and the reward is a treat at the creperie that has served many thousands of cyclists passing through.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> and final climb of the day is Port de Bales. A relative newcomer to the Tour de France it made its first appearance in 2007, but has featured 3 times since then as well as a guest appearance in the 2013 Vuelta a España. It has never been ascended on these pro-tours from the south as we are, but the characteristics are much the same. From the D618 the climb is 15km long with an average gradient of 6%. This hides the fact that for much of the ascent in the middle section the gradient is around 2% but both the initial and final sections reach 11%.

This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> and final summit of the day. With just less than 50km to go to the final destination this is a chance to relax and enjoy the descent. There is a 25km descent to Siradan and the Garonne valley, and as on any mountain descent there are the obvious hazards of cars, bends and gravel. On Port de Bales there are also free-roaming cattle, and they have some big horns! Once in the valley the route is straightforward – follow signs for Bagnères-de-Luchon, first on the D825 and then the

D125. These are wide fast roads with a slight uphill although there is likely to be a headwind so riding together is a significant advantage here.

The accommodation for the night is the 4-Star Hotel Altı Luchon in the centre of town. As expected it offers luxurious accommodation and boasts an indoor pool and Jacuzzi.



Stage 6 - <https://www.strava.com/routes/3787680>

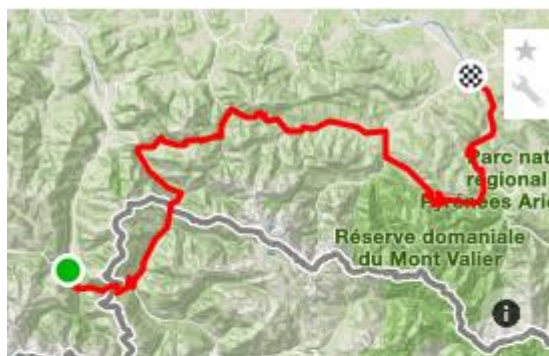
Date: Friday 12<sup>th</sup> August

Route: Bagnères-de-Luchon to St-Girons

Cols: Col du Portillon, Col de Menté, Portet d'Aspet, Col de la Core and Col de Catchaudegue

Distance: - 127km

Ascent: - 3508m



### Pau to St Girons Stage 6

**126.7 km** **3,508 m**  
Distance Elevation Gain

Est. Moving Time 5:16:00

The Final Stage! And the Longest Stage. But not the hilliest stage. This is another magnificent cycling route covering some classic Pyrenean passes. Of the 127km today 83km of them are downhill.

The first climb of the day, Col du Portillon starts 2km away. On a lovely smooth surface, the road winds its way out of the valley to meet the border with Spain on the pass. From Bagnères the climb is 10km long. Over this distance, it rises 663m at an average of 6.5%. The final 7.9km is at an average gradient of 8.4%, with the steepest section being at 13.9%. Used 19 times in the Tour de France this is certainly one to tick off.

The descent into Spain is less steep and contains many enjoyable hairpins. Once in the valley there is a 20km ride back into France alongside the Garonne all with a shallow fall on a wide road.

At Saint-Béat or at the top of the next pass it's worth having a coffee stop. The ascent of the Col de Menté is an Hors Category climb and at 10km and 9% average gradient this is a tough climb and easy to understand why it has been selected for the Tour de France on 18 occasions. The current Strava King of the Mountain is Laurens ten Dam.

10km of respite takes us to the start of the short climb to Portet d'Aspet. At 4.5km long but with an average angle of 10% it is a tough challenge, though only given a category 2 grade. It is one of the most used passes in the Tour de France history being included from as early as 1910. It is notorious for a number of crashes that have occurred, most notably the one leading to the death of Lance Armstrong's teammate Fabio Casartelli in 1995.

Once over the Portet d'Aspet Stage 6 descends the Bouigane valley for 20km until it merges with Le Lez. After a right turn onto the D4 the town of Castillon-en-Couserans is reached in 1km. This is a

suitable stop for a lunch snack and rest before the final big climb of the Stage and Tour commences. Col de la Core is another Hors Category climb and was last used on Stage 12 of the 2015 Tour de France. It's not a particularly steep climb but the scenery whilst ascending from the west is stunning.

From this last big summit all there is left to do is ride 27km to St Giron and the end of the Tour. This is all downhill except for one short 2.5km section over the Chalet Catchaudégué ascending just 100m. This road leads into a quiet country lane and down a gorge before rejoining the main road at Lacourt, just 5km from the finish.

Our last night together in St-Girons is at Hotel Eychenne. This is a 3-Star French style hotel, very traditional, but with all the modern comforts. It caters especially for cyclists and is a great place to end our Tour and celebrate in style. I doubt we will have the energy to take a dip in the heated outdoor pool when we arrive, but perhaps there will be time before breakfast in the morning!

