

Trip Report: Briancon

Date: 16th-23rd July 2007

Group: Hugh Anstee, Jim Grant, Lesley Arrowsmith, Mike Arrowsmith, Selina Green, Mike Willis, Bob Capes, Jenny Roberts, George Robey

Route: The Via Ferratas of the French Hautes Alpes

Total Distance: See below

Total Ascent: See below

Weather: See below

Saturday 16th June

Bunbury and a leisurely 9am start, Jim (Mike W and Selina) and Mike A (Lesley, Bob and Jenny) kindly agreed to act as our chauffeurs to Luton Airport (meeting George there). We dropped off the squad at the Airport, parking cars at Jim's brother's house (free parking) where Hugh picked us up to return to the airport for check-in at Easyjet bound for Turin. Lesley gets nobbled at Security as she is carrying a £30 bottle of Jean Paul Gautier massage oil in her carry-on bag!

We land at Turin Airport, where George discovers he has forgotten his driving license! We pick up our 3 hire cars for the two-hour drive, arriving at the chalet at 7.15pm where we meet Fabiene (Lesley can't stop swooning and dribbling) at the Chalet. Following some unpacking we go out to the nearest Pizza restaurant and have a scoop or two.

Sunday 17th June

The weather is fine and sunny and we plan our first route, which is the Via Ferrata de la Croix de Toulouse, which starts from Champ-de-Mars near Briancon. The route is graded PD and is 680m high, pretty steep and takes us just over 5 hours, Jenny romps up in fine style, not bad for her first Via Ferrata! Back down to the nearest bar for a scoop or two and a Croc Monsieur. The weather turns and we get some rain. We also discover that we are a week too early, Serre Chevalier and the telepheriques don't open until next week. We have dinner in a restaurant in Cite Vauban area of Briancon. Back to the chalet for some further light refreshment. The three solo men are banished to the Crows Nest suite at the top of the Chalet!

Monday 18th June

Weather looks fine but there is high cloud, we decide on a mountain walk. We drive round to Ailefroide via Briancon; the walk starts from Pre de Madame Carle and climbs 668m up to the Glacier Blanc Hut and back, a walk of 8km, which takes about 5 hours. The high mountains, the Barre

Des Ecrins and Mont Pelvoux, are covered in clag but we enjoy a cold beer and hot soup at the hut. Back to the chalet for showers/baths, drinks and bar snacks. Drove down to Cite Vauban to discover it was closed, we eventually found a restaurant for dinner. Back to the chalet for a nightcap and bed.

Quote of the day from Lesley, "How do you say "Via Ferrata" in French"?

Tuesday 19th June

The weather forecast is for beau temps so its back to the Via Ferratas. The chosen route is the Via Ferrata de Tournoux graded PD, 200m high. Bob has decide on a solo walk from near Puy-Saint-Vincent, the rest of the squad continue on via a very bumpy and rocky forest track to Col des Pres and the walk in starts from Col de la Pousterle. We arrive at the foot of the route, which looks and is very very steep. After a bit of faffing and some nervous chatter, Lesley, George and Selina decide, quite rightly, against doing the route. The route we embark on bears no resemblance to the route in the guidebook, it turns out to be a very steep and sustained climb of 200m and is probably graded TD! We finish the route in wonderful sunshine and have our lunch at the top of the cliff with magnificent views. We then decide to down climb the Via Ferrata descent route. This turns into an exciting descent with quite a lot of mud and a lot of trees! Jenny is inaugurated as an "honorary bloke" for having climbed this difficult route whilst still a "Via Ferrata" virgin.

We walk back to the cars to find a note on the back windscreen from Lesley/George/Selina quote: "14.22 hours. Walking down road towards where we dropped off Bob this am. See you at bar, there. PS hope you are still alive!" We arrived at cars about 10 minutes after they wrote the note. So we packed up quickly and set off to pick them up on the road down. No sign of them on the road! So we continued down to where Bob had parked his car that morning. Had a couple of beers in a bar opposite, with Mike A driving up to Puy-Saint-Vincent and waiting half an hour waiting for the "lost three". They eventually emerged at the bar having take a completely different route, that didn't include the road!

Returned to the chalet for showers/baths and beers and decided on a barby. Took a little while to cook, but consisted of Bum's special potatoes (George), various spicy sausages and Turkey kebabs (courtesy of the oven) followed by strawberries and ice cream. Heresy, we ran out of white wine, Jim's 6 Euro bucket of local red is not appreciated.

Wednesday 20th June

Beau temps is the forecast so we decide on a "big mountain" Via Ferrata. Early start is planned and we are away from the chalet by 8.30am park at Le Pont de L'Alpe just above the village of Le Lauzet. Our route is the Via Ferrata de l'Aiguillette du Lauzet, graded PD 900m metres of ascent and over a kilometre long to the summit at 2611m.

We start the one-hour walk at 10.15am following a well-trodden path through beautiful Alpine meadows to Alpe du Lauzet, another hike up leads to the start of the route. The route is superb, following a rising traverse across a series of airy ledges and steep walls, with one interesting letterbox move! The original route finishes up a steep chossy gully. Jim, Mike and Mike decide to continue up a new piece of Ferrata that finishes on the summit of The Aiguillette du Lauzet at 2611m, we then drop back down to the col where we all have lunch. The return route traverses back across the face of the mountain, en route we see a number of Ibex arriving back at the cars at 4.30pm.

Back to the Chalet for more liquid refreshments and a shower, dinner at a nice restaurant in Briancon. Lesley's second quote of the week "I haven't heard a muff from their room all week!" she is referring to Mike and Selina's bedroom!

Thursday 21st June

We have had rain overnight, and the morning starts with a cloudy and threatening sky. We decide a big mountain walk is called for, Bob and Jenny opt for something easier and Hugh decides to have a rest day. The walk is the 10km long ridge called Les Cretes de Peyrolle. This starts from the Col de Granon at 2404m and follows a ridge over the summits of the Croix de la Cime (2606m) Le Grande Peyrolle (2645m) Le Petite Peyroll (2618m) and Serre de Aigles (2567m) before a steep descent to the end of the ridge, which finishes at La Croix de Toulouse (1962m). A steep path then drops down to Cite Vauban where we meet up with Hugh for a few beers and bowls of Pomme Frites. Usual routine back to the chalet and another good meal in Briancon

Friday 22nd June

Very cloudy start with the weather looking threatening. George is going home today and packs up to leave at 10am. The rest of the squad split into two groups. Mike W, Hugh and Jim head for the Gorges de la Durance in Argentiere La Bessee. The plan is to attempt the Via Ferrata des Gorges de la Durance, at one time the hardest Via Ferrata in France! The weather still looks threatening and we decide we don't like the idea of getting caught in the rain on this long, steep and serious route. We opt

instead to do a route that turns out to be about PD a 200m long airy traverse across the gorge wall above the river Durance, it does spit with rain, so we are glad about the decision we made. Do bit of shopping in Argentiere La Besse and Cite Vauban before returning to the chalet for Lunch.

Mike W, Lesley, Selina, Bob and Jenny head a short way up the valley to Villeneuve-la-Salle and climb the Via Ferrata du Rocher du Bez a route graded F, 100m of ascent.

We all meet up at the chalet and have lunch round the pool in the warm sunshine and chill for a couple of hours, we are adopted by a cat that sports a Club Med 18-30 collar! We then set out in the cars for some sight seeing going up to the Col du Lauteret (2057m) and the Col du Galibier (2647m) made famous by the Tour de France. Dozens of lycra clad Italian cyclists turning round on the Col du Galibier; we have to drag Lesley away before she does something naughty!

We have a few scoops and dinner at our favourite restaurant in Briancon, a couple of awards are made, Bob gets the coveted "Marmot" award (previously held by Scotchio) for being the Whittlemeister and keeping our finances under control all week and a new award "the mountain goat" which Jenny won hands down following losing her Via Ferrata virginity during the week.

All in bed by 11.30pm, most people are bushed after a long hard week.

Saturday 23rd June

Going home day, so have breakfast and finish clearing up the apartment and packing gear. Lesley is eagerly awaiting her final encounter with Fabiene and sprints to meet him as he arrives on his quad bike.

We leave at 12 noon and have a very uneventful drive across the Col de Montgenevre and into Italy until we arrive in Turin. We then discover that at the turn off for the Airport the slip road is closed! In true Italian tradition there is no sign posted diversion so after lengthy driving in the wrong direction we eventually get back on the right road. The next unexpected challenge is to try and fill the hire cars up with diesel using an Italian automatic petrol station. It takes all 8 of us and a lot of faffing, swapping cars and assorted manoeuvres to achieve this.

Check-in is very quick and eventually we are loaded onto our Easyjet plane and are then told that bad weather en route means we will be held on the ground in Turin for an hour. We land at Luton one hour late at 7.10pm and after collecting our cars an uneventful journey sees us back in Bunbury at 10.20pm. Another fantastic trip with the Bum's.

Jim G