



BRIANÇON

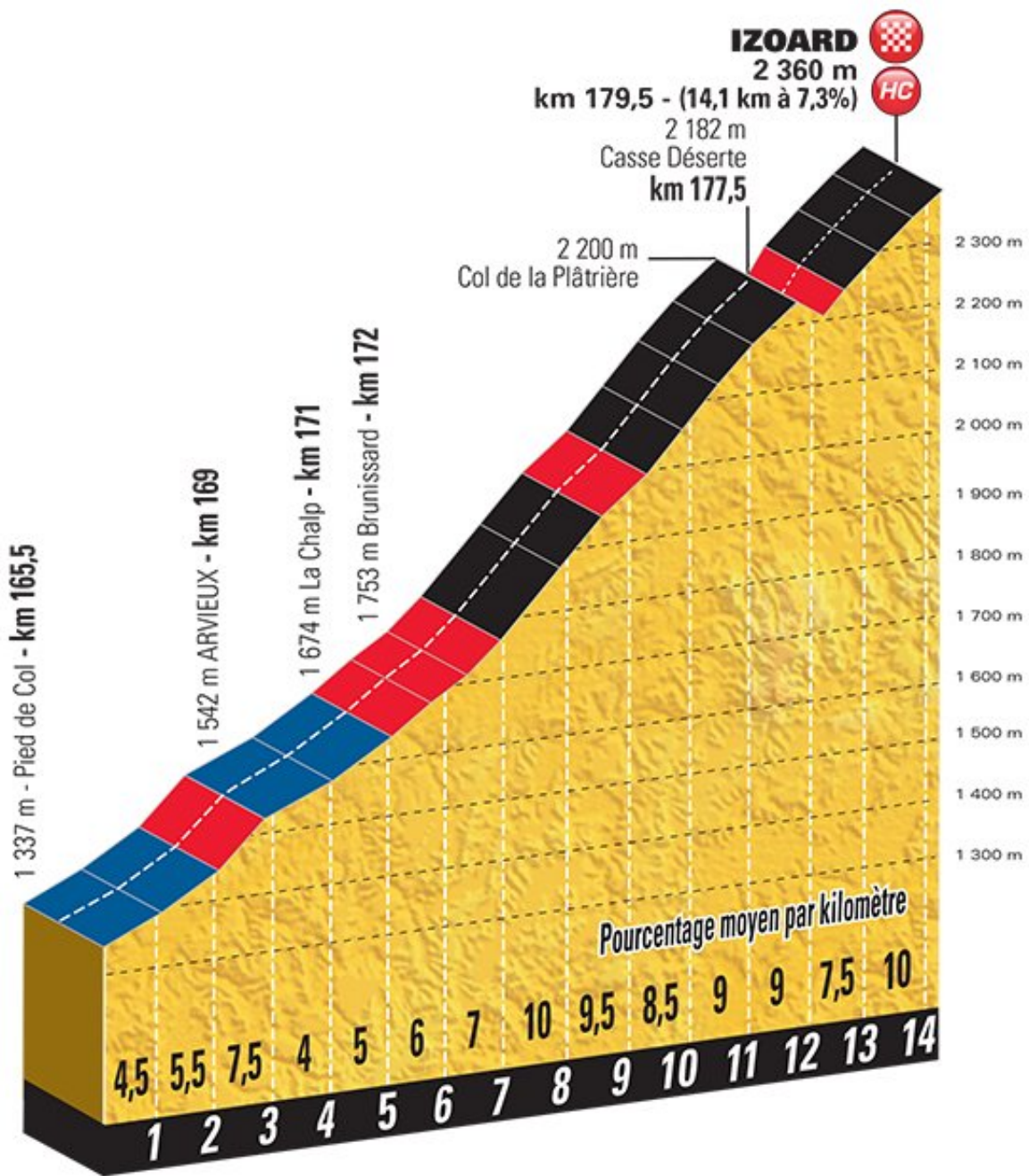
1 170 m



IZOARD

Col d'Izoard
2 360 m







So, over the time of the Tour de France, I have had some random thoughts. So many random thoughts come flooding out of my mind when I think about the Tour de France, and my experience in Dusseldorf, and following from home. You all know that my mind is filled with random thoughts on most occasions so you will not be surprised. Here is a sample:

Aix la Chapelle, or Aachen, was the site of Charlemagne's imperial city. Charlemagne was crowned first Holy Roman Emperor on Christmas Day in the year 800 at St. Peter's Basilica. That was the old Basilica, built by Constantine, and replaced in the 1500s. There is a round maroon stone just inside the doors there, from the old basilica, it is a perfect circle, and is in the center of the back of the basilica. It was there that Charlemagne knelt as he was crowned.

My ancestors on one line of my father's side were Duke of Cleves and held Court at Dusseldorf. They became Protestant at the time of the Reformation, and were eventually extinct. Darn those sallic laws, and my ancestry passing from them through three female lines. Were it not for that, I might, today, be king of the mountains.

There are many hale fellows, well met, as part of the entourage which accompanies the peloton, but not a lot of time for chitchat. There is an incredible focus at that level of elite athletes, there has to be. There is also great nervousness or perhaps tension, underlying a lot of the bonhomie.

Some of you have seen the article on germs in the peloton. My experience, going back a few decades, is that the teams always have either a designated place in the dining room, or even a separate room, for their meals.

It is nice following the cyclists, it is even better following them after having had one or several conversations. A serendipitous event led me to meet Dylan vanBaarle in March, and I was glad to meet Alberto Bettiol in Dusseldorf. It has been fun following both throughout this Tour, and Dylan during the classics.

As Americans, many of us are attuned to teams, rather than individual cyclists. Cycling has very few long term teams, Quickstep comes to mind, Francaise de Jeux, where have all the old teams gone?

The rain in Dusseldorf was warm enough that people did not get chilled while watching stage one. Deo Gratias. Saturday the rain was constant. Good thing. Individual time trials can turn around when the weather turns, for better or for worse.

Saturday is the time trial in Marseilles. Marseilles is spread out along the sea, and is a beautiful, if massive, old city. While Nice is scenic and very pretty, Marseilles is scenic, but not always pretty. I had schemed about going up to France for this end of the Tour, at least for the penultimate day in Marseilles, but I already saw one time trial. If I had planned right I might have seen the antepenultimate finish, but that's tomorrow afternoon in France, and I am in Rome, and saving my pennies.

Never fly Austrian Airlines again.

I have published this one already: Without the support staff, the soigneurs, the mechanics, there is not team. They really keep everything moving, and make sure the cyclists are where they are supposed to be with cycles in the right condition, God bless them. I was close to a couple of mechanics during the time trial, as their guy

was in line, presumably already on a bike, and there were about five cars ahead of them. They jumped out of the team car, and began fiddling with one bike and then with another, and then pulling out a measuring tape and measuring things. A young German asked me why they were doing that. I said that these guys were very well attuned to UCI regulations, but also to the preferences and conditions that each cyclist needed to flourish. They both went ahead toward the start house, with both bikes. I don't know what eventually happened, but two of the bikes would have had to go back on the roof rack for emergency use...

The number one spectator sport in the world is cycling. There is no way to quantify this exactly, and no way to monetize this at all. So, cycling teams often operate, with all the players salaries included, for less than the salary of one pro soccer player (the entire peloton added might cost less than one of them) or certainly less than one NFL or NBA player. I can understand the NFL, but basketball?

Without flat stages, a grand tour would be a week.

As I said the other day, bicycling gear looks great on a cyclist on a bike, but ten feet away, not so much.

Most fans are buoyant and happy on race day. Cyclists can be lugubrious and wrathful, because of the focus of an elite athlete. Fans understand. Cyclists often understand. Often.

Will anyone find my random thoughts interesting?

Étape 18 : Briançon • Izoard

Classement étape provisoire

1	Warren Barguil		SUN	41
2	Jhon Darwin Atapuma		UAD	
3	Romain Bardet		ALM	
4	Christopher Froome		SKY	
5	Rigoberto Uran		CDT	
6	Mikel Landa		SKY	
7	Louis Meintjes		UAD	
8	Daniel Martin		QST	
9	Simon Yates		ORS	
10	Alberto Contador		TFS	

Étape 18 : Briançon • Izoard

Classement général provisoire

1	Christopher Froome		SKY	78h
2	Romain Bardet		ALM	
3	Rigoberto Uran		CDT	
4	Mikel Landa		SKY	
5	Fabio Aru		AST	
6	Daniel Martin		QST	
7	Simon Yates		ORS	
8	Louis Meintjes		UAD	
9	Warren Barguil		SUN	
10	Alberto Contador		TFS	