

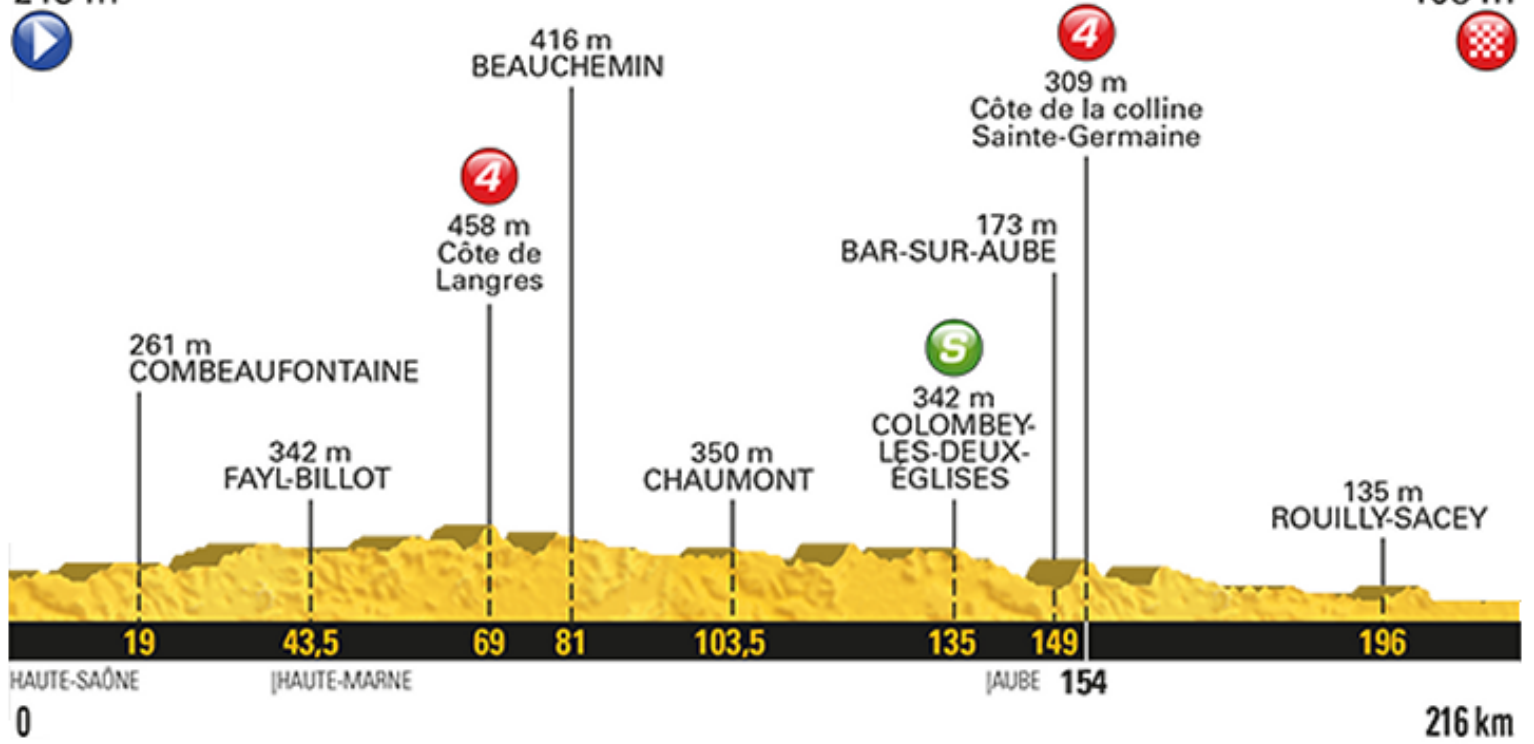


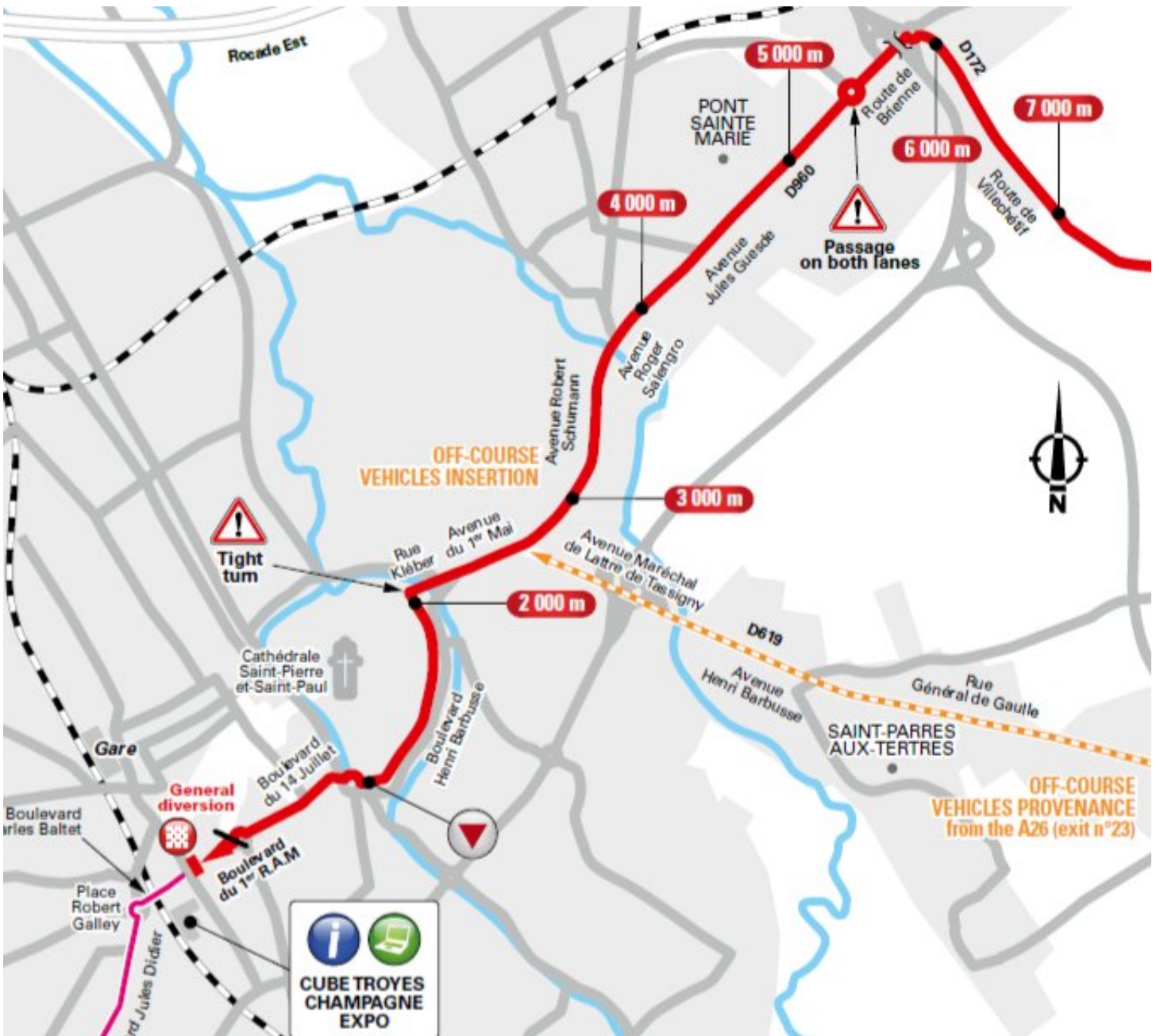


VESOUL
213 m



TROYES
108 m







In the history of the world, it is not uncommon to see small countries peppered among the large countries, and even sometimes to find enclaves or exclaves of one country within another. Sometimes these exist because of developments in history. Andorra, perhaps, or San Marino, Monaco, or even the Vatican City, all are autonomous because of historical developments. Other countries have been established, or have been allowed to remain in existence, because they serve the useful purpose of buffering major powers from each other. The Saarland was certainly established as such, falling as it does between Germany and France, but they decided they did not quite like buffer status, and voted to join Germany in 1955.

Belgium, historically considered unified but not officially so for many centuries, was finally returned to autonomous status in 1830, a status it had lost after the time of the Romans. The Walloons, those of Germanic stock in Belgium spoke a French based language or dialect, while those of Mediterranean background (mostly of French and Spanish stock) spoke the Germanic language called Flemish (always considered a language, until Dutch gained official status when the common market was founded). Both tribes, along with their unified center, Brussels, which as capital of Brabant brought the pastiche all together, were considered curious to those around them, so they clung to each other. Many considered Belgium to be a buffer between France, the U.K., the Netherlands and Germany. Perhaps Luxembourg could also be considered, then, such a buffer country, not created, certainly, for that purpose, but perhaps allowed to remain because of the purpose it filled.

The French Revolution certainly caused awe, and a bit of fear, in the neighbors of the French, and its aftermath, with Napoleon deposing kings and princes, and imposing his own disreputable brothers as "new kings" throughout Europe, even more nervousness. So, when Napoleon was finally defeated, other buffer countries were created, between France and its neighbors, including a principality established in the east of France, a free county of Vosges, with its capital at Vesoul, departure city for today's stage. Vesoul is considered the "most athletic city in France" as it has 8000 registered athletes within the environs. A village of 16,000, it is essentially what might be called a college town, with 10,000 students among its institutes of higher learning. Vesoul is first mentioned in a document dated 899, and its name is derived from a fortified watchtower around which the village was built, called "Castrum Vesulium," and that castle remains today. The city seems, early on, to have been devoted to vineyards and education. A few decades prior to the revolution, a local abbot started the town's public library, which was greatly enlarged when the nearby monasteries were sacked during the revolution, and their books taken. Local countryside also featured vineyards. Today, many of the colleges are technical schools, and in addition to other workplaces, one of the main factories of PSA Peugeot Citroën is near Vesoul.

Troyes, arrival point for today's stage, has a much more extensive history. Founded by the Romans as Augustobona Tricassium, it sat on one of the Roman roads, the Via Agrippa. The city, which has some importance historically, civilly, and ecclesiastically, is found in the Champagne region of France. Champagne, you will recall, was discovered by a monk, a certain dom Perignon, who decided to filter out the broken glass from some exploded bottles of aging wine, and drink it. Waste not, want not, don't you know. An early bishop by the name of Loup (the Diocese was formed in the 4th century) saved the city by offering himself as hostage to Attila the Hun. Troyes was at one time considered capital of France, or at least the major court city, and the Plantagenets ruled there. They ruled there, at least, until being set aside by Joan of Arc, who took the city with her troops loyal to a more, well, French, king. The city is known for its many canals, but the water did not save the city from the great fire of 1524. Afterward, the city took on a new character for which it is quite well known today, as many half-timbered houses were built throughout. Current population is around 60,000. The local soccer club plays in Ligue 2, having been relegated from Ligue 1 just last year. Specialties include champagne, Rose wine, cabbage for sauerkraut, and cheese, this is France after all.

Enjoy the Tour.

Enjoy the Day.

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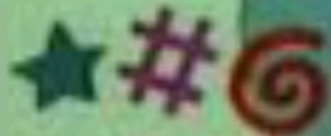


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