

Old Gits Bike Tour – July 2024 –Dolomites & Black Forest

The full route of the tour. Yellow indicates overnight stops, red is a stop for more than one night.



Old Gits - Dolomites 2024									
Day		Date	From	To	Cumulative	Distance	Cumulative	Duration	Hotel
0	Thu	27-Jun	Home	Ashford North					Premier Inn (for ET, AG)
1	Fri	28-Jun	Eurotunnel	Calais					Train leaves (10:50)
									Arrive France 12:25
			Calais	Charleville-Mezieres	178	178	5	5	Campanile, Charleville-Mezieres
2	Sat	29-Jun	Charleville-Mezieres	Mulhouse	418	240	11	6	Campanile, Mulhouse Sud
3	Sun	30-Jun	Mulhouse	Annecy	635	217	17	6	Ibis Styles, Annecy Gare Centre
4	Mon	1-Jul	Annecy	Unterbach	770	135	21	4	Sporthotel Walliserhof, Unterbach
5	Tue	2-Jul	Unterbach	Sondrio	945	175	27	6	Hotel Europa, Sondrio
6	Wed	3-Jul	Sondrio	Canazei, Italy	1093	148	32	5	Albergo Conturina, Canazai
7	Thu	4-Jul							
8	Fri	5-Jul							
9	Sat	6-Jul							
10	Sun	7-Jul	Canazei, Italy	Lenz, Switzerland	154	154	5	5	La Tgoma, Lenz
11	Mon	8-Jul	Lenz, Switzerland	Seebach, Germany	364	210	11	6	Berghotel Mummelsee, Seebach
12	Tue	9-Jul							
13	Wed	10-Jul							
14	Thu	11-Jul	Seebach, Germany	Sedan, France	218	218	5.5	5.5	Kyriad Sedan, France
15	Fri	12-Jul	Sedan	St Omer	380	162	10	4.5	Ibis, Saint-Omer
16	Sat	13-Jul	St Omer	Calais	408	28	11	1	
			Calais	Eurotunnel (UK)					Train leaves (12:36)
									Arrive in UK at 12:11
						1865			
			Dolomites	Black Forest					

Old Gits Take on the Italian Dolomites: A 2,000-Mile Motorcycle Adventure

This year's much-anticipated tour saw the Old Gits embark on an exhilarating journey with a primary focus on the breath-taking Italian Dolomites. However, with work commitments making it difficult for some members to take the full two weeks off, a compromise was struck—part of the group would ride for a week, before rendezvousing with their fellow riders in Germany's iconic Black Forest for a final stretch together.

Spanning approximately 2,000 miles, the route promised a diverse mix of landscapes, winding through France, Switzerland, Italy, Liechtenstein, and Germany. For many in the group, this would be their first time navigating the dramatic peaks and hairpin bends of the Dolomites. The plan included three days dedicated to exploring its legendary mountain passes, with the world-famous Stelvio Pass—one of the highest and most challenging roads in Europe—standing out as a highlight.

Following their time in Italy, the riders would push northward to the Black Forest, where they would reunite with Simon, Chris, Marshall, Lee, and Debbie for a couple of days of camaraderie and scenic touring. From there, the final leg of the journey would begin, marking the conclusion of another unforgettable adventure on two wheels.

The Riders (full tour)

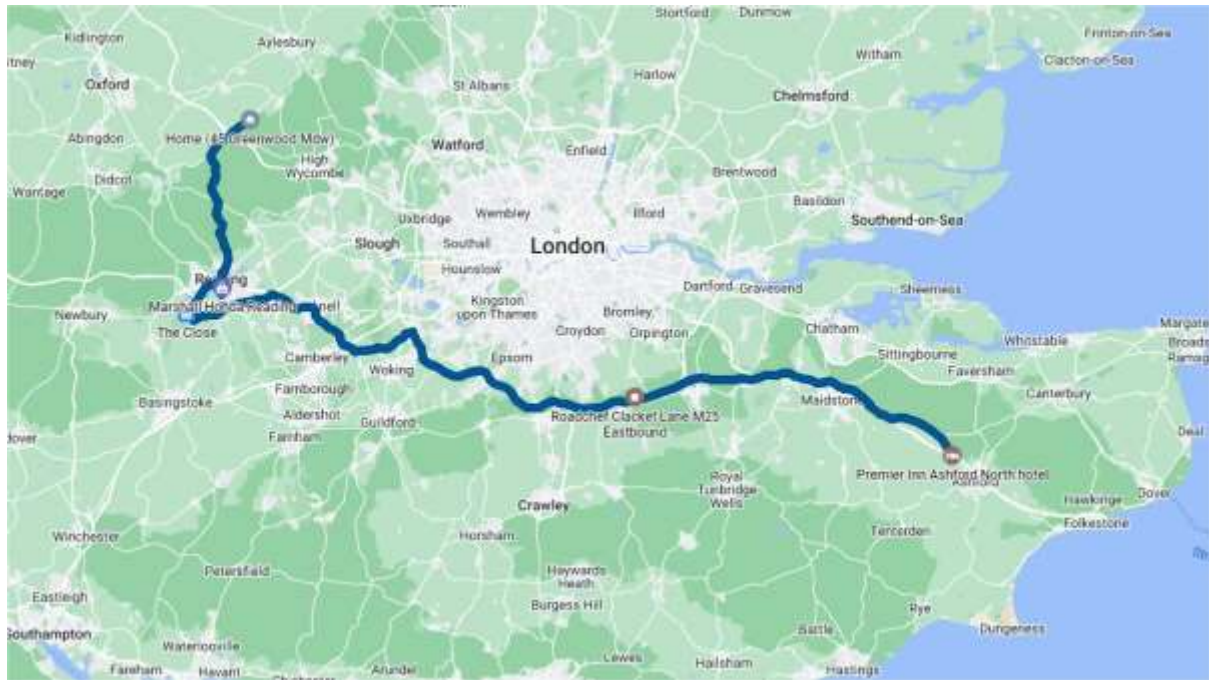


The Riders (Black Forest section)

Simon		Chris aka Cookie	
Lee		Debbie	
Marshal aka Mike			

Daily Reports

Day 0



With the Eurotunnel train booked for Friday at 10:50 a.m., an early start was essential for Alex and Eamonn to ensure a timely arrival in Folkestone. Aware of the notorious congestion on the M25, they opted for a smarter approach—traveling to Ashford the night before and staying at a Premier Inn. This strategic move meant just a short 20-minute ride to the terminal, allowing for a relaxed start to this grand tour.

The M25 lived up to its frustrating reputation, with heavy traffic significantly extending the journey time. With panniers loaded, filtering through the gridlock wasn't a viable option, leading to an unscheduled stop at Clacket Lane Services to stretch their legs. Finally arriving at our hotel just after 7 p.m., we freshened up and enjoyed a hearty meal, accompanied by a few well-earned pints.

Tomorrow, Mike would join us for an early breakfast, and the adventure would truly begin.

Day 1



Today was an easy start for Alex and Eamonn, Mike left home (north Kent) early in order to meet up at the hotel for breakfast before heading to the tunnel.



Early start for Mike



Eamonn & Alex



Eamonn & Mike

Friday morning started with a solid breakfast as Mike joined Alex and Eamonn for the ride to the Eurotunnel. Everything was going smoothly—until we reached the booking gates. A sea of vehicles



stretched ahead, resulting in an agonizing hour-long wait that saw us miss our scheduled departure. Fortunately, we were reallocated to the 11:18 train, a minor setback in the grand scheme of things.

As we originally planned for 5 hours riding to the hotel, the delays meant that we wouldn't arrive until early evening (taking into account coffee stops etc.), so we elected to use the motorways for half the journey and save an hour.

First coffee stop on the A26. Mike had a pasta - Alex and I were just having coffee and feeling righteous!!



One further stop for a coffee at a McDonalds (!) in Erquelinnes and finally arrived at the hotel Campanile in Charleville-Mezieres at 7pm.



Bikes parked up for the night



A welcome change of clothes and drink before heading off for a meal



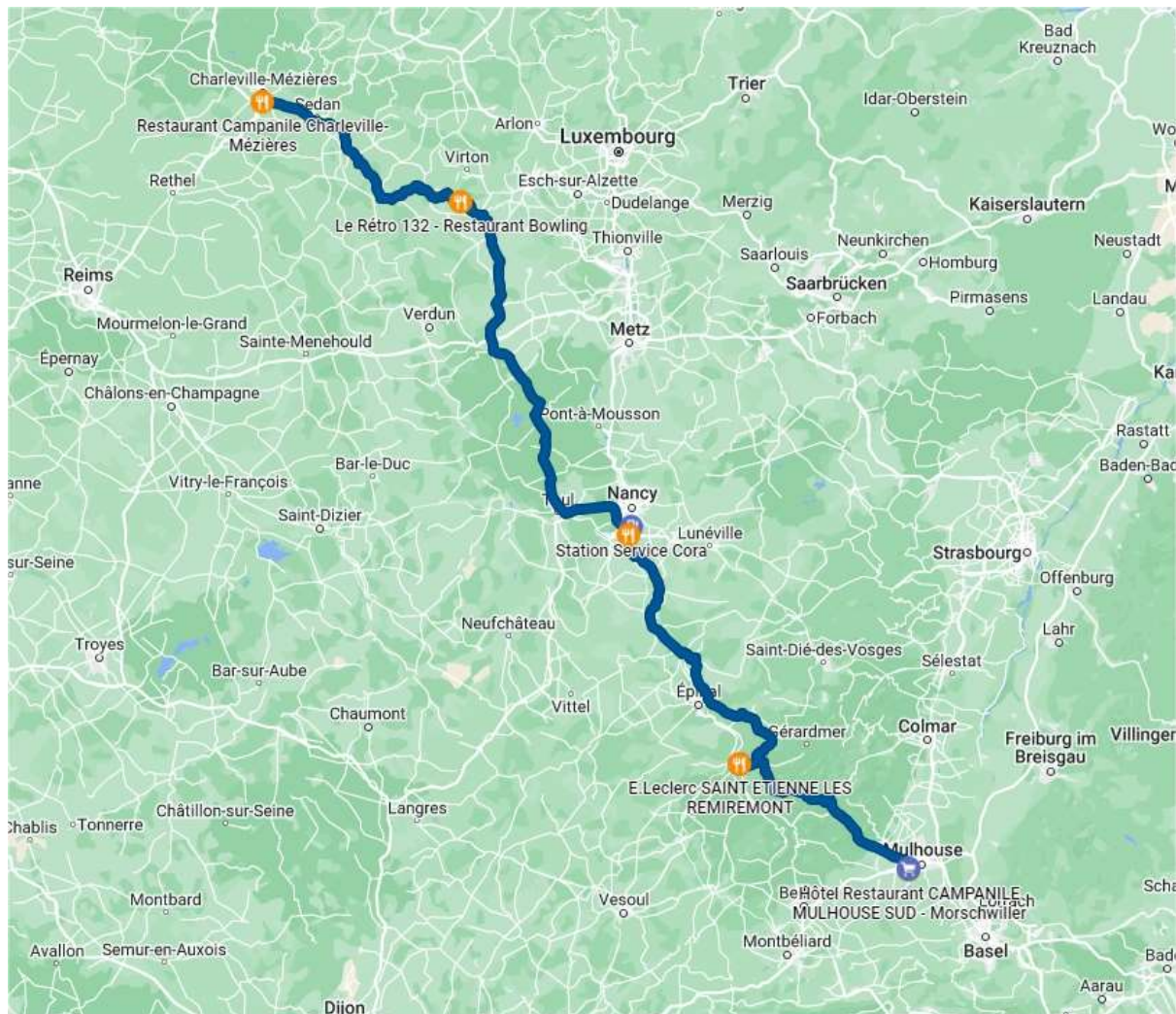
First world problems of keeping everything charged!

The hotel didn't have a restaurant open in the evening, so we were advised by the receptionist that the best place to go to was a 5 minute walk around the corner. After a pint (or two) we headed off to find the restaurant – as it was such a warm evening we sat at one of the outside tables along with many other customers.



The warm evening air made outdoor seating ideal, and the discovery of white sangria by the jug led to an impromptu indulgence. One jug became two, then three... and a very restful sleep followed.

Day 2



We left our hotel early (well early for us at 9:15!) in order get to Mulhouse before 6pm when thunderstorms are forecast. Temperature was great at the start being about 22 deg C, but forecast shows it was 32 in Mulhouse.

The initial leg of the ride was idyllic, weaving through rural landscapes, a stark contrast to the previous day's motorways. Stopping in a quaint village for coffee, we momentarily entertained the idea of lingering longer but pressed on, determined to cover ground.



Dragging ourselves away from the first coffee stop of the day, there was still many more miles to do before the next hotel. No motorways, no dual carriageways, far more interesting rural roads.

The rest of the journey was punctuated by occasional stops for coffee and fuel, most stops involved McDonalds...! No cafes were open on our route - mainly because we chose a country route through the forests. So we're at "...yet another M..." in St.Etienne with 1.5 hours to go.

It was noticeable how few coffee stops there were in the smaller villages of France compared to our previous journeys. Our guess was that after the pandemic of 2020/2021 many of the once-charming village cafés had not reopened, leading to yet another McDonald's stop for coffee. At least with a McDonalds, you're assured of a hot drink and toilets with plenty of parking spaces.

At St. Etienne, something very strange was happening... A group of girls were running around the place, cars hooting horns, shouting, all in good humour. After the group came into the McDonalds it was clearly a "hen-do" with inflatable flamingos, party hats and feathers! Alex found himself the target of an enthusiastic attack, language barriers proving no obstacle to their merriment.



As we neared our hotel in Mulhouse, a light drizzle turned the warm day (32 deg.C) into a welcome cool-down. The only negative was the bikes were covered in chalky white stuff thrown up from the road.

We arrived at the overnight hotel about 6:30pm only to find (yet again) that their restaurant was closed for the evening!

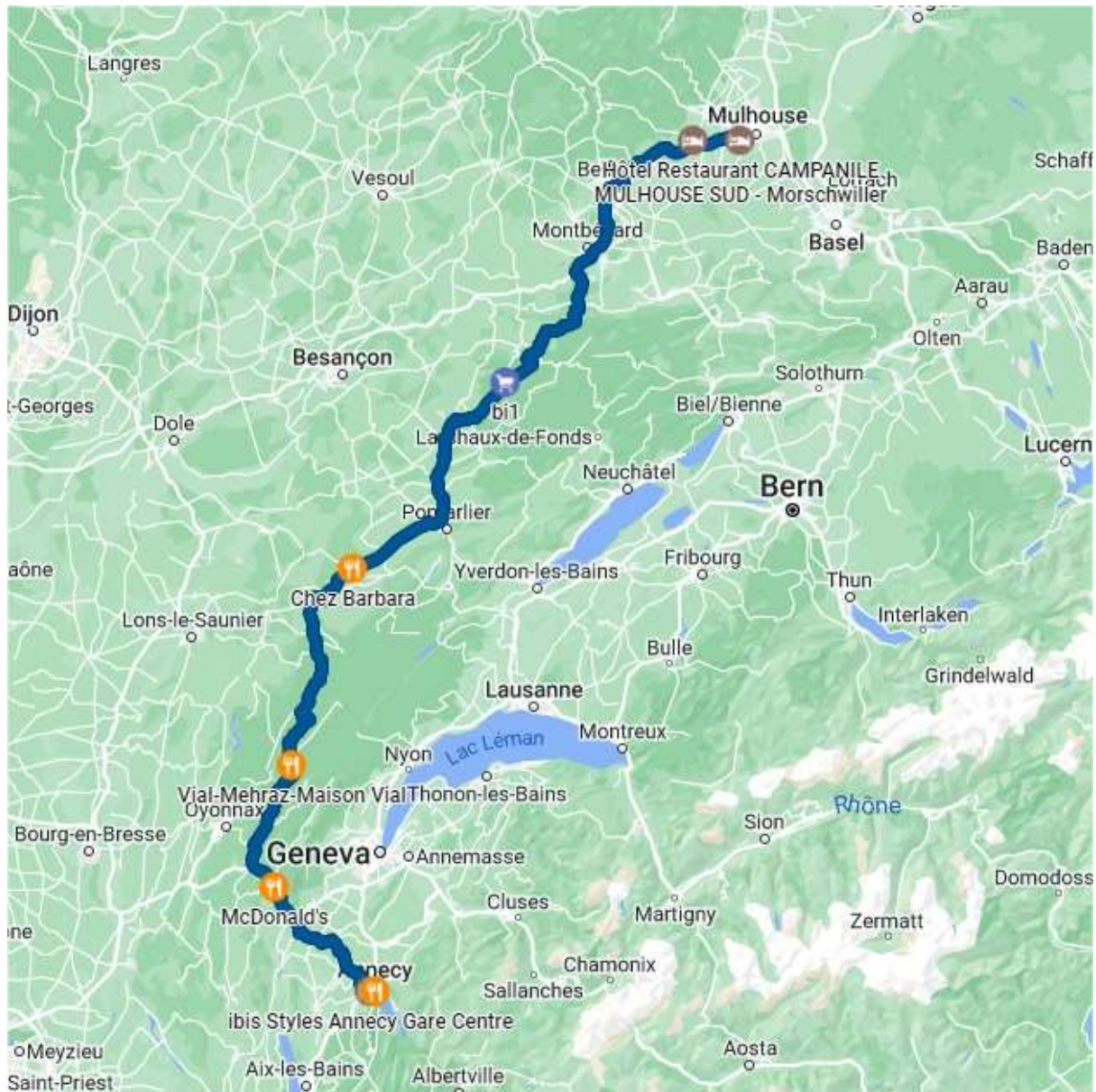


The advice for a restaurant this time was a little further walk but only 10 to 15 minutes – it turned out to be one of the large restaurants where you help yourself to whatever you want for a fixed price. Drinks were paid for separately, but it was a superb selection of choices from different cultures. We didn't sample the snails nor the frog's legs...!

As we left the restaurant, the thunderstorms that we forecast arrived and we were treated to a spectacular show of lightning, but strangely very little thunder and no rain. Presumably the lightning was so far away the sound didn't travel.



Day 3



After last night's spectacular lightning storms (not much rain and no thunder to be heard!?!), we had another early start to head towards Annecy. Five hours riding, plus coffee stops, plus lunch, could be a long day!!

At the beginning it was overcast, threatening rain and breezy... We hoped the waterproof gear would not be required, but suspected we were going to be wrong...!

We were wrong, and stopped for a coffee in Pierrefontaine-les-Varans after riding for just over an hour in the rain. Time for a quick coffee and change into waterproofs.

As it was a Sunday, the only place we found open was a small shop that had a self-service coffee machine. After some discussions (in various languages) we worked it out and purchased our drinks. During this, a lady who had emigrated from the UK to France had a quick talk with us.



After leaving our coffee stop, the rain continued so the riding was curtailed and less enjoyable. However much of the landscape was flat and the roads straight so it wasn't too much of an issue.

We stopped at a bar that looked open hoping for something to eat – there were a range of bikes parked out front so we thought we would be in good company. As it turned out, the bar wasn't serving any food, but they were serving hot drinks and chocolate bars – so that was lunch..!!!

We had an afternoon stop in Saint-Claude for a drink after riding a superb twisting road, but at low speeds due to rain, fog and debris on the road.

The final coffee stop of the day was at (surprise) a McDonalds in Valserhone, the weather had cleared and it was only a short distance to complete to get to Annecy.

Although overcast it was at least now dry for the last hour to the hotel.

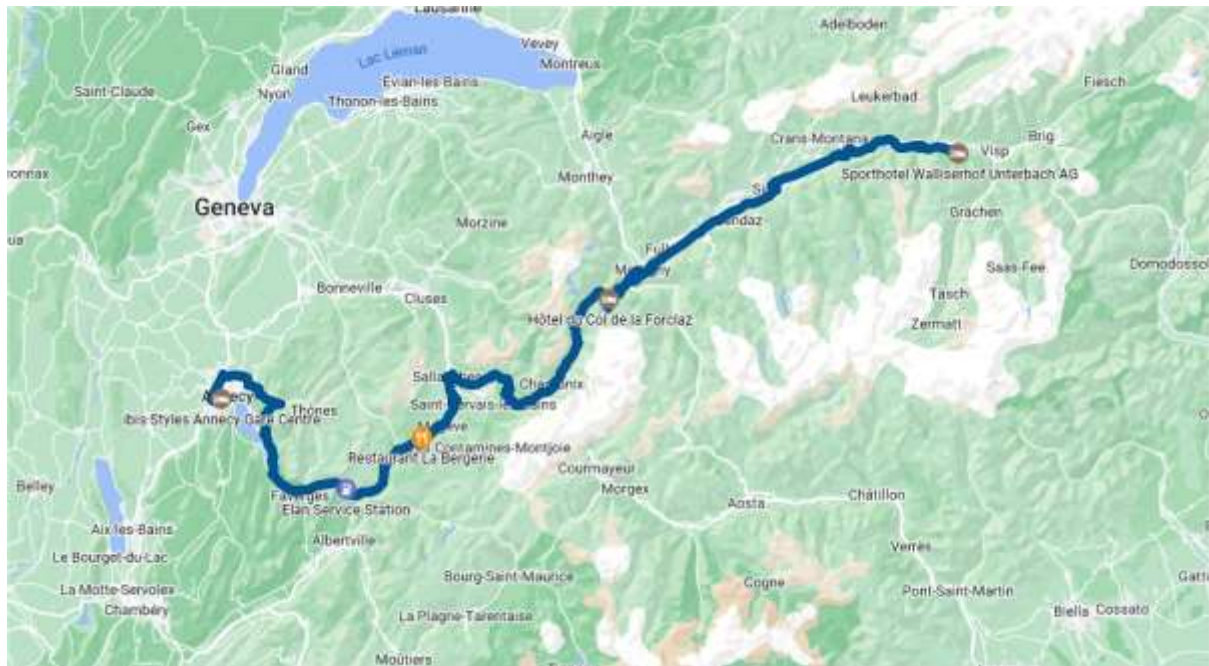
Alex and Eamonn set out to explore Annecy's famous waterways, while Mike, feeling under the weather, opted for rest. The town's picturesque charm provided a perfect end to a challenging day.



Annecy



Day 4



Today the journey continues into Switzerland, to Unterbach. We left Annecy via a number of incorrect roads (Eamonn's fault!), which included a bit of peage motorway (costing 30 cents..!), and some very nice mountain roads.

We rode alongside a lake and onto a superbly twisty road through Flumet. Our first coffee stop was La Bergerie in Praz-sur-Arly for coffees. The "coffee stop" turned into a lunch stop, partly as it was easy (and it's not a McDonalds!) and partly as it started to rain.... heavily....



The news headlines for the southern part of Switzerland showed severe flooding and it was along the roads we were about to travel. Google maps indicated we could still get through.... only time would tell...!!

Our route took us over some mountain roads to Martigny - far more interesting than the normal dual carriageways. However.... We started this lengthy track up the side of a mountain, after 2 or 3 miles we came across a sign indicating the road was closed. Recognising that turning around and going back down the mountain was not an option, we continued. One side of the road was closed

off, but otherwise open so that bikes could get through easily. But then around a corner, we found a massive digger working away at tearing up the road..!!!



The guys helping the digger indicated that we could still get through - with Adventure bikes, we took on the challenge!! Eamonn's previous off-road course came in useful!! Basically we came off the tarmac, onto gravel for 50 yards and a jump up a 15 cms ridge and onto the tarmac again. Hopefully this is captured on our dash cams for later posting.

Following this mini-adventure off-road, we resumed the mountain road without further issues.

The final coffee stop of the day was at Hotel du Col de la Forclaz just inside the Swiss border. It was still raining heavily and showed no signs of getting much better. The road down the mountain side into Martigny was tricky mainly due to the rain but also the traffic became more intense as we approached more populated areas. As we came into Martigny, the weather improved and we had the opportunity to take off the waterproofs and enjoy the roads and scenery.

The last few miles before our overnight stop were twisty and uphill – perfect for a spirited finish to the day!



We arrived at the hotel in Unterbach, with the last hour in bright sunshine. It was a family run hotel, only the chef speaking English!

On the side of a hill (mountain?) with a ski lift next to us, the hotel had some spectacular views whichever way you looked.

Day 5



After the excitement of yesterday's mountain excursions and dealing with the occasional rain storm, the morning is bright and sunny in Unterbach.

However, all is not as planned....

Checking our route last night, Google maps indicated an 11 hour ride! We expected 5 hours.... Our route was over the Simplon Pass and on to Sondrio in Italy for the next hotel, but on checking we found the pass was blocked due to the recent floods causing damages and blockages on the mountain pass.

Our only viable option was to use the Simplon tunnel, this uses trains to transport you from Brig in Switzerland to Iselle in Italy (much like the Eurotunnel). But you cannot reserve tickets for motorcycles, you have to turn up and hope there is sufficient space.

So we had an early breakfast and planned on getting to Brig by 9:30 in readiness for the 10a.m. train.

We found the train to Italy! CHF 15 each single journey, 20 mins and we'll be there.

Only problem is that you ride onto the train and into a special bike compartment, this compartment has what appeared to be a normal width door as the entrance. We were a little concerned whether our bikes would fit with the panniers on – we may have to remove them and load separately.

Eamonn rode through the doorway with a bit to spare on each side, Mike was next and made it through, finally Alex. Taking it carefully he also managed to get on-board without having any issues.

Along the sides of the carriage there were a number of small rope ties, clearly you were expected to tie your bike up yourself to stop it from moving around. So we set up tying the bikes up.

Before we could finish the job, the conductor came along and using German with a lot of hand waving, indicated there was only one door for entering and exiting – so we would have to turn the bikes around ourselves before exiting! Much struggling and shifting around, and we managed it! Never done a 30 point turn with a bike before.....



After disembarking the train, we headed off now in Italy (with less strict speed limits than Switzerland!).

We stopped at Albergo Il Vapore in Gonte on the shores of Lake Maggiore for lunch. It was a fixed menu of either pasta or pork ribs, all seemed out of place in the 28 deg C sunshine. What a contrast to the rain we had the previous day.



View from the lunch stop

As we followed the shoreline of Lake Maggiore, we crossed back into Switzerland again then headed south towards Lake Lugano. We stopped for a short break and photos beside the lake and whilst parked up we noticed that one of Mike's spotlights had come loose and was pointing straight down to the road. Out came the spanners and sticky tape – it was quickly solved!



Now at Porlezza on the Northern shore of Lake Lugano for Smoothies and water.

Only 50 more miles to the hotel.

We arrived at our hotel in Sondrio and at reception we were directed into their special underground park for the bikes. It was a steep ramp down, but very secure and the receptionist had his Ducati already parked there!

Quick shower and change then out into town for some beers and food (yet again no open restaurant in the hotel!)

We found a piazza nearby with a couple of restaurants and enjoyed a good evening meal.

Coincidentally in one of the nearby shop windows the was an old Moto Guzzi on display



View from the hotel room

Day 6

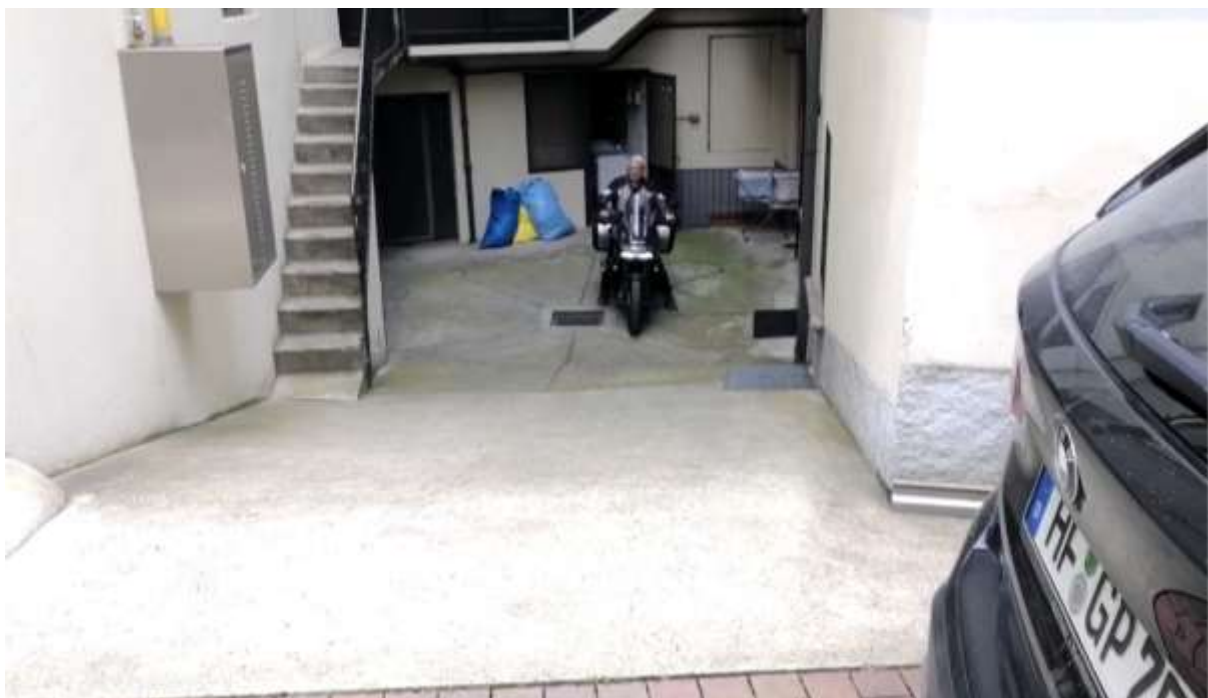


Today our journey takes us from Sondrio to our Dolomites hotel near Canazei.

The day started with getting the bikes out of the underground park. Easy for some, then there was Alex, taking it very carefully.....



A happy breakfast time!



The route was a bit longer than planned as we took a few minutes off piste to try to find a replacement charging cable for Mike's phone. His phone charger on the bike had stopped working yesterday and it was found to be the socket on the bike having failed. We tried to find a replacement socket, but ended up taking a power connection from the top-box to the front of the bike. Once sorted, we were soon back on track and heading for the famous Stelvio Pass.

The pass did not disappoint!!! Absolutely incredible..!!! Up one side of the mountain and down the other. Quite a few people on push bikes but not too many cars. There was one bus though!!!

The photo shows the view to go down, I lost count of the number of 180 degree turns we did.....



Also along the way were photographers on the corners taking photos of the passing bikes, cars, etc. for sale later.



Chilly at the top of the Stelvio Pass





Second coffee stop of the day was at a small shop in Latsch – coffee and panini.

Although we were in Northern Italy, the waitress spoke German, the till receipt was in German, the shelf edge labels were German, the road signs were German at the top with Italian underneath. This area of the South Tyrol has been argued over between Germany and Italy since the Napoleonic wars, only since after the First World War has there been an agreement between the two countries to allow both communities to co-exist.



Our final coffee stop of the day was in Ponte Nova. There was a man at the next table with the traditional Tyrolean hat (including feather), but no lederhosen...!!

It was overcast and showers threatened within the next hour – we decided to not spend too much time resting to try to avoid the showers.



Arrived at the hotel, the last 40 minutes were wet but not too bad. Hotel looked excellent, with an underground locked park for the bikes. It was full of approximately 20 bikes (plus our 3), but they left the following day so all the more space for us!

Day 7



Today we started a three day stay in the Dolomite area of North Italy. We had a number of optional rides to try out with lots of mountain passes to check out. The underground garage that was packed out with bikes when we arrived, had all left by the time we had breakfast. It appears they were mostly Americans on a group trip, riding BMW's.

Hotel is working out exceptionally well, we had scrambled eggs and bacon this morning! Anything not on the standard menu, they will cook it for you!! Our Romanian waiter (Bogdan) was exceptionally helpful.



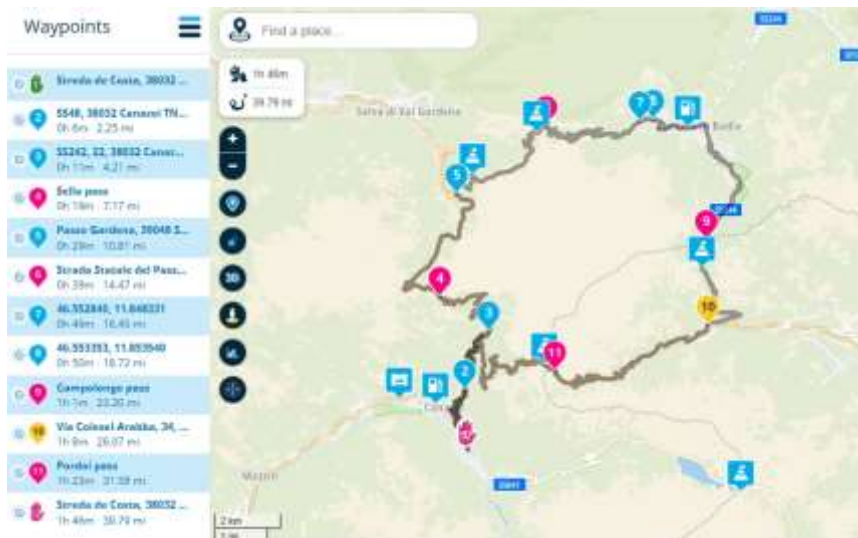


So after a bit of re-packing as we didn't need the panniers on the bikes for day trips, we set off to explore the roads. The first trip was to head north from the hotel to the Sella pass. The roads and the scenery didn't disappoint – the roads were twisty and very good condition with plenty of switchbacks to keep you alert. There were quite a lot of cyclists about, but they didn't cause too much of an issue as long as they didn't wobble around the hairpin bends!



Top of Sella pass

The route we're taking is approximately two hours long and only 40 miles - a short morning trip and a different two hour trip for the afternoon. Of course it's taking longer than two hours due to occasional traffic jams and coffee stops, but that's no problem.



The first route for the morning was to the north of the hotel covering the Sella Pass, Gardena Pass, Campolongo Pass and Pordoi Pass.

Each pass was just as exhilarating as each other and it's difficult to choose a preferred one.

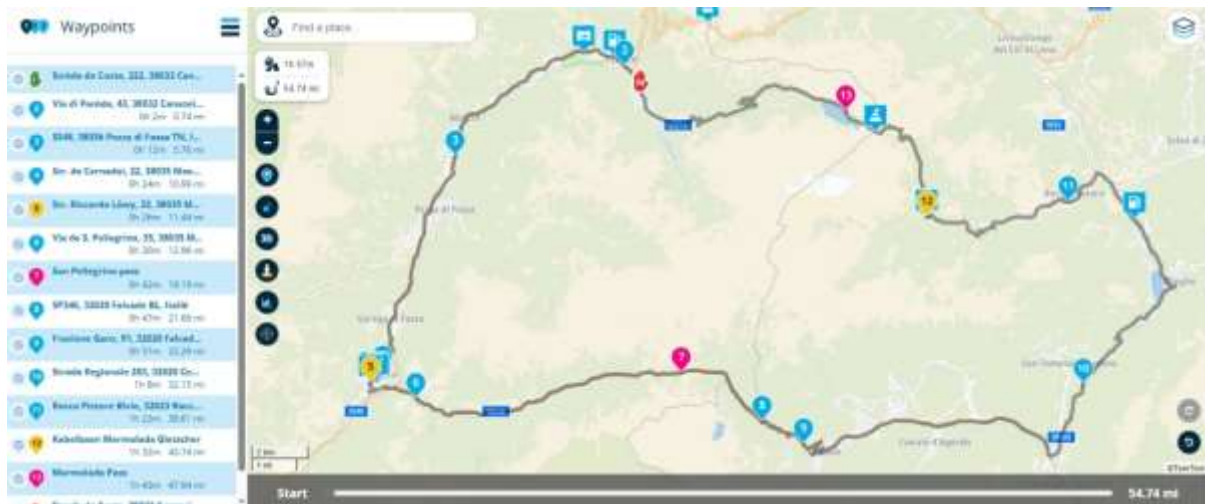
Today was composed of two separate tours - one to the north of the hotel and one to the south. Both were spectacular in terms of views and roads, I just cannot find the words to describe the feeling of riding through the passes, it's emotional and joyous - like flying on two wheels. I will definitely visit this area again.



After the first mini-tour, we stopped for lunch at a hotel in Canazei (Hotel Ei Ciasel).

Just a few snacks and drinks in readiness for the afternoon ride.

The afternoon route was to the south of our base hotel encompassing the San Pellegrino pass (point 7 on the map) and Marmolada Pass (point 13). The Marmolada pass was used in stage 20 of the Giro D'Italia 2022.



The only afternoon stop was at the Marmolada Pass for a coffee followed by a short ride back to our hotel.



Back at the hotel having changed clothes and suitably cleaned up, we had a couple of drinks before our evening meal. One feature of the hotel was that when you ordered drinks, you also received either small chocolates or some battered shrimps as an aperitif – no extra cost!

At first we were concerned at the seemingly small portion sizes, but the flavours and quality of the food was superb and perfectly proportioned.



Aperitifs



Starter



Main course of steak medallions



Disassembled crumble with ice cream



Day 8



Today we rode to the famous Tre Cime di Lavaredo. It's about two hours from our hotel, lots of passes and curves interspersed with the usual groups of cyclists going up and down the hills. Just like the UK the cyclists tend to ignore any traffic lights, ride 2 or 3 abreast (sometimes into corners) - showing little regard to other road users. Fortunately as we're on 2 wheels it's not really a problem, but for the other cars and buses they do have difficulties.



We stopped in Cortina d'Ampezzo for a short break and a coffee with another 30 mins to our destination. Another beautiful day riding through the Sella Pass and Gardena Pass (again – it never gets boring!)



Our lunch stop was at Misurana Lake one of the best spots for viewing the Tre Cimi without paying extra toll fees for the private road that goes close to the summit.

It has a very busy car park, but enough space for bikes alongside the roads and outside the restaurants.



And finally at the Sella Pass on our return journey for the hotel.

Some frustrations due to cyclists and various lorries unloading equipment for an event in one of the towns. We noted there were a lot of large lorries unloading railings and other paraphernalia in readiness for an event the next day. We later found out that there was to be a cycle race for teams to race up and down the passes – this explained why there were so many cyclists yesterday and



today, all practicing for the weekend race.



After riding for an hour and a half, we had a short break at the top of the Gardena Pass.

Just a 20 minute break to stretch the legs!



After the Gardena Pass, we stopped at the top of the Sella Pass for coffees and orange juices, to find the parking area had been marked out by manufacturer!

Harley Davidson



Honda



Triumph



Only another 30 minutes to the hotel, but plenty of twisties to enjoy!



Once back at the hotel, we decided to try a different restaurant just 15 minutes walk away from the hotel that specialised in pizzas. The restaurant was very busy, but as it was a warm evening the staff were able to organise a table for us outside. An excellent meal, followed by a short walk back to our hotel in order to finish the evening with a few more beers!

Day 9



No lengthy rides today, the owner of the hotel recommend to try going up the cable car at the Pordoi Pass. Apparently the views are spectacular from the top and you can see for many miles around.

To get to the pass, we had to ride through the Sella Pass (yet again! – it never disappoints...) and we parked up in front of the restaurant that leads to the cable car for the top of the mountain.



Sitting at the cafe at the bottom of the lift we could see a lot of fog above us!! So we decided to have a coffee and wait to see if it cleared up.

Although the clouds moved quite quickly, so we hoped there would be a chance of getting a good view at the top between the clouds as they passed by.

Time passed and we ended up remaining in the cafe waiting for the clouds to pass!!

Eventually we decided to risk the trip and go up to the top. After all we could wait in the restaurant at the top for the clouds to clear just as easily as waiting at the base station. So we left the base station and boarded the cable car on our way to the top. Much of the ride was in the mist and clouds, so there was a restricted view. However, it did clear at times and a few reasonable photos were taken.





Once at the top, we had a quick look around (obligatory selfie of course) and manage to grab a couple of other photos when the mist dissipated a little. Unfortunately, it never cleared properly so as predicted we moved to the restaurant to have an early lunch whilst hoping the mist would clear...

Attached is a photo of the table mat, it shows the cafe where we were sitting and what we should have been able to see...!!



So the visit to the top was a little disappointing due to the clouds moving in, they never really cleared but the meal in the restaurant was good!

As we couldn't see the spectacular views, we joined the cable car down. During the descent the clouds cleared and we had a better view of the pass and surrounding roads.

From the cable car, we noticed a road in the distance that looked like it could be an interesting route alongside another mountain. So once down we could then investigate this road to see where it goes.



With the cable car journey finished and back on the bikes we moved off to investigate the road we spotted earlier. It turned out to be a sandy track, only one vehicle wide that appeared to only be used by mountain bikes. So we continued on past and rode through the passes for another day.

This time our ride took us through some forestry areas with yet more switchbacks, though in places the road surface wasn't as good as the main roads. Still very enjoyable from both riding and scenery perspective.

We stopped for a coffee break at Hotel La Montanina in Caprile on a route that takes us back to the hotel via the Marmolada Pass.

Back at the hotel, we settled in for a few beers and our final evening meal at Hotel Conturina.

Day 10



Today was tinged with sadness as we had to leave our hotel in the Dolomites and head back into Switzerland on our way to meet the other group of “Old Gits” in the Black Forest.

The hotel and its staff had been exceptional in both the facilities and their help in making our stay comfortable. Leaving was made all the more difficult due to the forecast of rain on the next part of our journey back to Bolzano and over the Stelvio Pass. If it's raining on the Stelvio, it isn't much fun!!

We packed up our luggage, paid the bill, and set out on the road to find coffee stops...!!!!

It turned out to be an eventful morning...!

Just after filling up with fuel, we turned off the main road and onto the road heading northwards only to find two Carabinieri (police) officers waving us in to stop. They wanted to check our documentation for both the bikes (V5C) and our licences. It didn't go unnoticed that both officers carried guns.... so we gave them Simon's name when asked.....

Actually, the officers were very polite and efficient wishing us well on the rest of our holiday. Perhaps Alex's bribes of peppermint sweets helped, though the lady officer was a little put out at Alex's bike not looking like a traditional Harley Davidson! There was a little concern that all the speed cameras we had passed were in fact working correctly and the cumulative of fines would have mean an extended stay!!!

A short stop before reaching the Stelvio for a pizza at Pizzeria Ennemoser in Rabla, then with bodies refuelled we set off. At the bottom of the pass it started to drizzle, so stopped again for jumpers and waterproofs.

There was no significant rain although the roads were wet from previous showers. There was hardly any other traffic! We only had to pass half dozen cars, one van and one small lorry. It certainly looked as though most people decided not to come on the pass today.... Very different to when we arrived in the other direction.

At the top of the pass, quite a lot of snow still on the ground and cold for riding. Coming down the Swiss side of the pass we have the road to ourselves. Stopping occasionally to look at the view, in one layby there was a waste bin with a label stating that all rubbish should be put in the bin otherwise the bears will eat it...!!!!





With another 2 hours to go for our hotel, we anticipated getting there about 18:30. We hoped there was a restaurant open...

We arrived at the hotel (La Tgoma in Lantsch), and what an unexpected gem!!! Firstly the road recommend by Google for our journey was closed... We had noticed that the check-in time was before 6pm and our ETA was 17:58 so any road closures could cause problems.... A quick remapping of Google and we found alternatives and managed to arrive on time.

Eamonn went to check-in and the man behind the bar said they were full up, no space!! Our first thought was where there hell are we going to find an alternative hotel on a Sunday night in a very quiet area of Switzerland? The lady standing next to the barman gave him a hard slap on the shoulder and told him to tell us the truth... this was Swiss humour!

He laughed, we laughed, everyone was happy! He showed us to the rooms, Eamonn had a single room - small and perfectly formed. Alex and Mike had what could only be described as a suite! Two single beds in one room, another room with two more beds, and a fully equipped kitchen..!!!

So after showers and change of clothes, it was time for beers and some traditional Swiss grisons capuns.

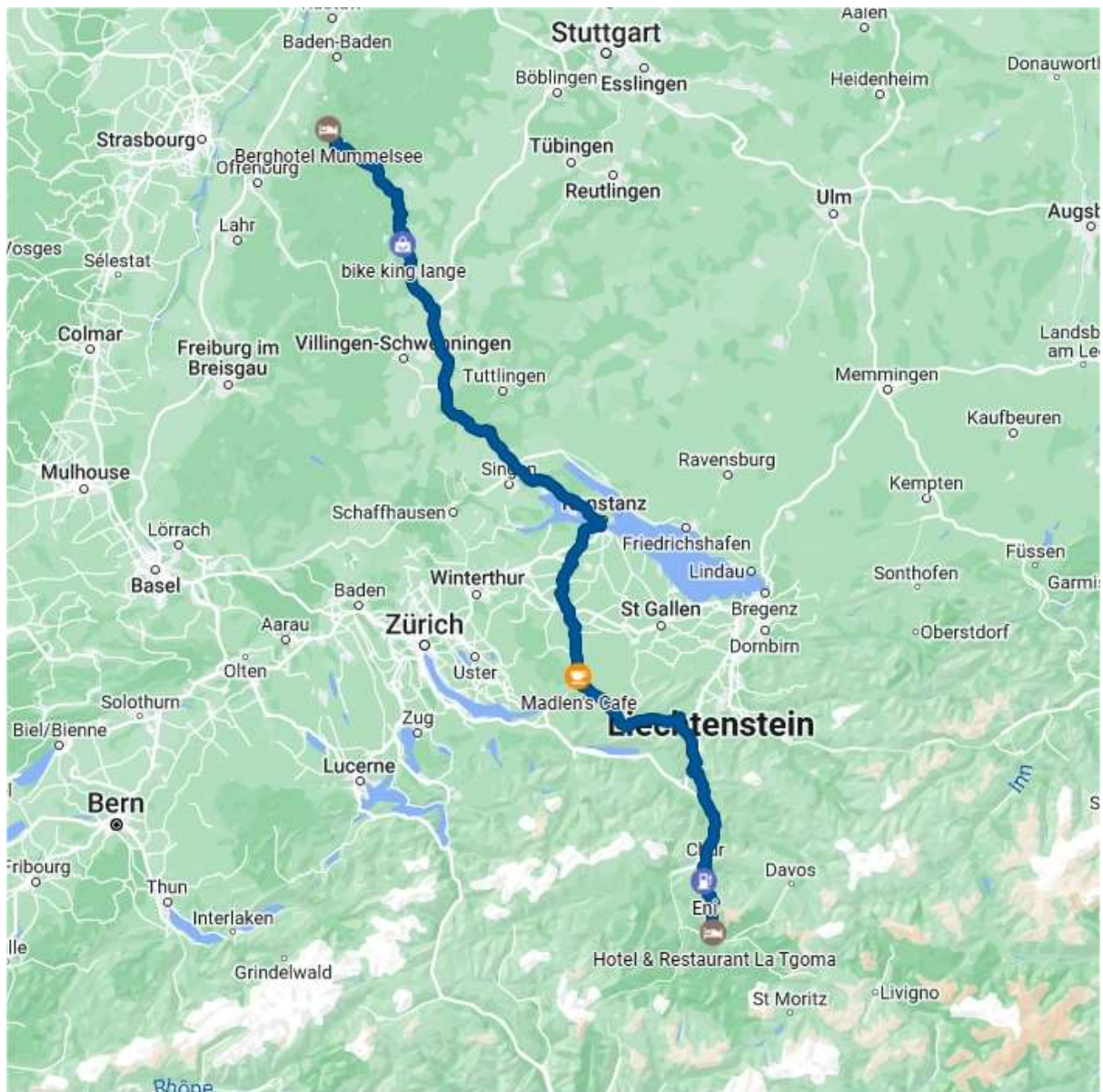
No we didn't know what they were either! A quick search on Wikipedia revealed:

"Capuns is a traditional food from the canton of Graubünden in Switzerland, predominantly made in the eastern part. They are made from Spätzle dough with pieces of dried meat, such as Bündnerfleisch and/or Salsiz, and rolled in a chard leaf. They are boiled in a gravy of bouillon, milk and water and served covered with grated cheese."

Interesting food, definitely a first and probably a last time of eating them!



Day 11



After our hotel breakfast, we took a few minutes to look around the local town square to see a church that appeared to be old, but at the same time also looked so modern and clean.

We left our hotel in the hills of Switzerland early and headed north for Lichtenstein and then to the hotel in the Black Forest.

The weather was perfect at 22 deg.C and sunny, just right for enjoying the swirling roads and the spectacular views. Just think of chocolate box covers over and over and over.....

After just over 2 hours riding we stopped for lunch, a sandwich and drink today - trying to cut down the food intake...! Obviously our bodies are adapting to life on two wheels, last week the thought of riding continuously for 2 hours would have caused laughter and a lot of swearing...

The lunch stop was at Madlen's Café in Wattwil, just a small bite to eat and top up of liquids (no not beer!). An hour later and we were on our way again.

After the lunch stop we had trouble finding a cafe that was open for afternoon refreshments. We thought we saw a place but it turned out to be a mountain bike shop. We set about trying to find a nearby café on Google, but before we could find anything, the shop owner on seeing us outside, immediately came out and offered us some beer, cola and snacks! So we had a chat with him and relaxed for a bit. Turned out he designed and built racing bikes and mountain bikes in the workshop attached to the shop – clearly another two wheeled enthusiast!

When we left for the last hour of our journey, he didn't want to take any money for the refreshments, but we gave him some anyway - a true gent in the middle of a small village in Germany.

The hotel in Mummelsee was the designated point to meet up with the other "Old Gits". Lee and Debbie had travelled to Holland on the ferry from Harwich, the others had come across via the Eurotunnel to Calais and through France.



Lee and Debbie leaving the UK



The Mummelsee hotel



Chris, Marshal, Simon, Lee and Debbie

We arrived at the hotel in Mummelsee and unloaded the bags as we were staying at the hotel for a few days.

So now to the usual ritual, shower, clean clothes, find the bar and in addition we find our friends who arrived here earlier.



View to the front of the hotel.

Day 12



Having met up with our friends last night, today we have split into two groups. Cookie and Marshall have gone on a major outing of up to 10 hours, leaving Eamonn, Alex, Mike I., Simon Lee and Debbie to take a shorter ride to Triberg.

Alex, Eamonn and Lorna had visited here on our Europe 1 trip, but the weather was much better this time!

We took scenic countryside routes to get here, through small twisty roads and compact villages.



We arrived in Triberg and parked at the Schwarzwald Museum in the middle of town. First task was to order some drinks and light lunches!

Fortunately right next to the bike park, the museum has a small café – so we didn't have to go far at all.



Across the road from the café, there is a large waterfall.



Although the tourist information claims it to be the highest water fall in Germany, it isn't! This one is 163 metres tall with seven major steps – the tallest is The Rothbachfall (470m) which ultimately flows into the Obersee lake in south-east Germany.



Entrance to the Triberg waterfall

After our lunch, we had a wander around the town and various cuckoo clocks on display and for sale. Prices ranged from £60 up to £25,000....! Triberg really specialises in cuckoo clocks.

With our fill of the average cuckoo clocks, we left town and rode just a couple of miles down the road to the location of the biggest cuckoo clock in the world. In reality, it looks as though someone has converted a house into a giant cuckoo clock! It was an ideal opportunity to take a few pictures



More information on this clock can be found at : https://youtu.be/868f_cZD1zw

The return journey from Triberg to the hotel was adventurous!!! Mostly twisty backroads, but Google maps recommended turning down this small lane.... It was very small... Sometimes it felt like we were about to ride into a private driveway!! It did however get us back to the hotel for drinks and evening meal.

After the meal, Simon persuaded us to walk up to the restaurant at the top of the hill. Alex reckons he died at least twice on the long uphill walk...!!!







At the top of the hill, beside a restaurant, there was a tower with this plaque on the side. The Hornisgrinde Tower is at the top of the highest mountain in the northern Black Forest. The tower gives many visitors the impression that it is the legacy of an old castle. Only a few people know that its existence goes back to the initiative of the Baden Black Forest Association under factory director Nauwerk from Oberachern. On 15 June 1909, he received the building permit from the Grand Ducal District Office of Achern. The copper plaque (above) is at the entrance to the tower and commemorates the completion in 1910, stating the architect.

The Hornisgrinde summit with the observation tower and the "Grindenhof" was the most popular excursion destination in the whole region until 1942 with the Mummelsee. With the confiscation by the German Air Force and later by the French military, the observation tower remained closed to the public for almost 60 years. With the repurchase of the properties in 1999, the municipality of Seebach and the Seebach forest cooperative are once again pursuing the goal of developing the Hornisgrinde into its original splendour as a popular excursion destination.

<https://www.schwarzwald-tourismus.info/attraktionen/seebach-hornisgrinde-hornisgrinde-aussichtsturm-8f09fd2d22>

Day 13



Today Lee and Debbie left us as they continued their journey on to the Nurburgring, the rest of the group were on a "Cookie" tour...! Cookie had organised a tour of two castles – Hohenzollern Castle and Schloss Lichtenstein castle.



Lee and Debbie leaving Mummelsee

At the first castle, Hohenzollern, it started to rain, so we opted for the free coach ride up the hill to the castle gates. We entered the castle as quickly as possible (to avoid the rain) and had a look around the various rooms and paraphernalia associated with castles.



Due to the rain outside, we decided to stay in the castle and have lunch in the castle restaurant. The restaurant was very grand and we felt slightly out of place!!





Ornate fireplace in one of the rooms



Alex was trying to take a “serious” picture of the church within the castle, but Mike “photo-bombed” the image!

After lunch, the rain had stopped and the weather was improving, time for a few photos.





After a visit to the outside café for an ice cream, we made our plans for the next castle. As it was 4pm, only Chris and Eamonn went on, everyone else elected to return to the hotel for relaxing drinks.

The visit to Schloss Lichtenstein was only 23 miles, but took just over 40 minutes due to the twisty roads – an excellent ride!! The name of the castle is a misnomer as the country of Liechtenstein is over 100 miles away from the castle!

Cookie and Eamonn arrived at just after 4:30pm and the castle entrance was closing at 5pm. The parking attendant was happy for us to not pay any fees as we explained we only wanted a few pictures, but the lady at the castle entrance wouldn't let us in without paying the full entrance fee. So the only pictures taken were of the outside of the castle – still looked impressive though.



This image of the castle is used extensively in the publicity shots, it's not one that we took as to get this "special" view probably requires a lengthy walk from the parking area!



As we couldn't view much of the castle, we headed back to the hotel. The ride back was spirited (!) as there were beers at the end of the journey. The route indicated by Google put us on the famous B500 road, a road that Eamonn and Alex had taken a look at earlier in the year but found large parts of it were closed off for repairs. So there was some concern that once we arrived at the B500 we would then have to divert elsewhere. We put our trust in Google maps!

As expected, Google connected us to the B500 south of the hotel with approximately 10 miles still to go. As we joined we could see that the repairs only affected one carriageway – the southbound side. This meant that the road was effectively one way traffic heading north, it was fresh tarmac, very few other vehicles (at 5:30pm many of the Germans were at home), no clear speed limit signs and no evidence of any police authorities to "advise" on the speed limit..... Normally much of the B500 is limited to 40 mph, this makes the flowing corners quite boring on a motorcycle; a greater speed is required to truly enjoy the experience. It's fair to say that Cookie and Eamonn enjoyed that section of the B500 more so than any other section!



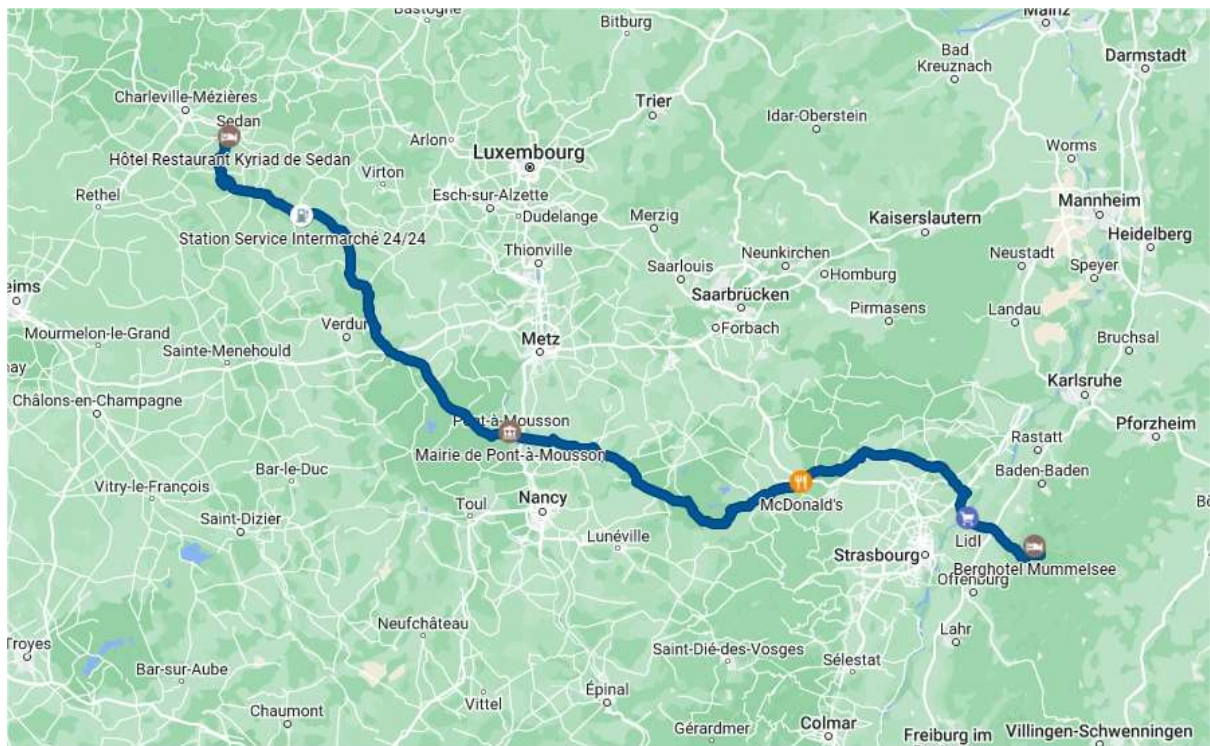
At the back of the hotel, the basement had been adapted to provide a souvenir shop and café facilities for the non-residents.

Many of the items we had seen in Triberg were also available in the Mummelsee hotel shop, but with a higher price of course!

Simon and Alex found some very different headgear in the shop that they kindly modelled in the picture here!

Once Cookie and Eamonn were back at the hotel, we slipped into the usual sequence of shower, beer, evening meal and beer. The main addition to this evening was sitting in the bar watching the semi-final football match between Netherlands and England in the Euro 2024 competition. England won the match 2 – 1, but unfortunately lost against Spain in the final held on the 14th.

Day 14



Today we leave our Black Forest Hotel.



Mike's photo of the group preparing to leave the hotel in Mummelsee



Cookie ready to go...



Simon leaving



Marshall leaving

The full tour group of Alex, Eamonn and Mike headed back into France, the Blackforest group of Simon, Cookie and Marshal went further into Germany to the Nurburgring as they were returning to the UK later than the others.

The next section for the full tour group was 220 miles and would be about 6 hours riding. If it became too much, we could use some motorways to cut the time down but the non-motorway route is far more interesting riding.

As we left, the weather was rubbish, light rain that was forecast to stop within the following hour. After that it was to be sunshine all the way!

On our earlier journey through France on the way to Switzerland, we noted that there were very few cafes open, hence the number of McDonalds visits! On this return journey, we found the same situation - on the country routes all the cafes and restaurants were closed...!!! So guess what..... it was McDonalds again....

Our first coffee/lunch stop was at Phalsbourg with another 4 hours to go until we arrived at the next hotel in Sedan. There were a few drops of rain, but otherwise all OK.

The afternoon stop was in Pont-a-Mousson where we found a real French cafe that was open!!! Whilst having coffee and refreshing drinks, we noticed one of the locals who appeared to be still living in the 70's... The make-up, clothing style and general demeanour was not unlike a character in "Allo, Allo". Note the killer orange finger nails...



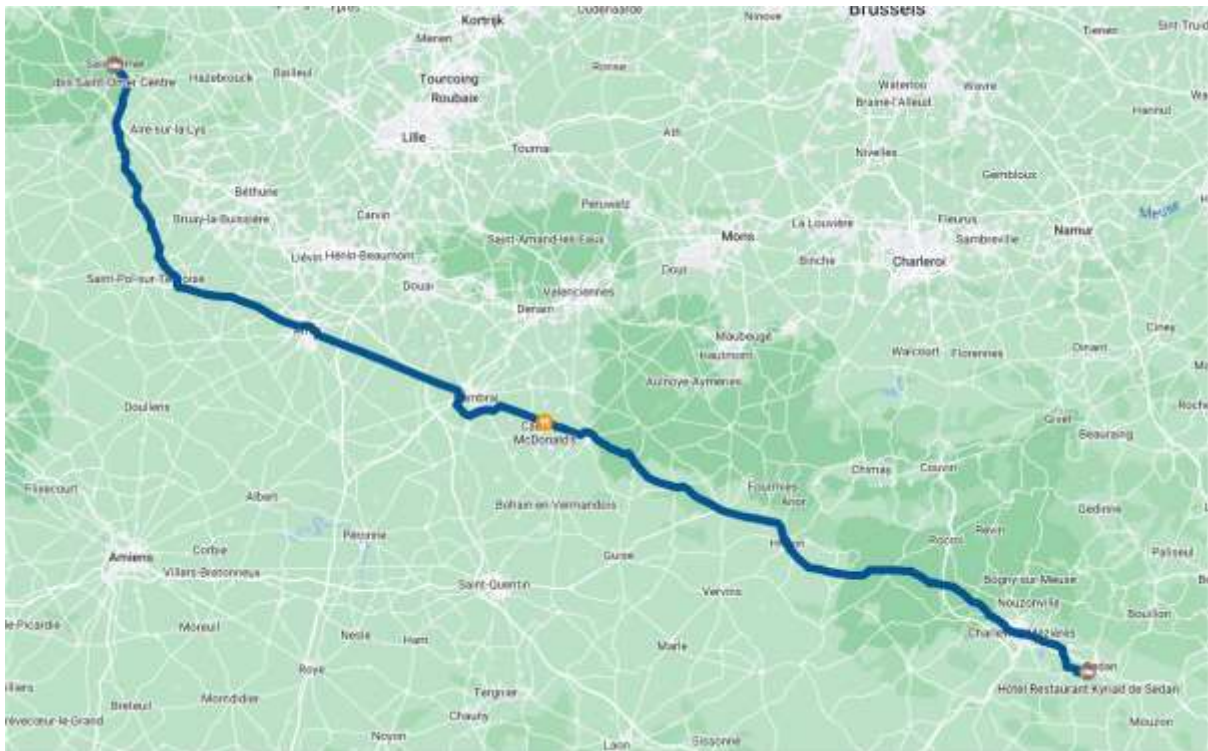
After leaving the café, the last hour of the journey was fairly uneventful apart from a couple of road closures we had to navigate through. Some very empty swooping French country roads, occasionally rough surfaces but mostly the roads made for an enjoyable "spirited" ride.

After a couple of beers and a meal, it was time to sleep in readiness for our final full day in France on this trip.

Meanwhile, the other group had reached their hotel and were already enjoying the hospitality.



Day 15



This was our last full day in France for a 160 mile ride to Saint-Omer. Rain had just stopped so we hoped for a dry ride for this section of the holiday. Time to pack up and plan the next coffee stop.

The Ardennes forest area should have been nice, but the dead straight roads between Cambrai and Arras were a bit boring! As before, we were travelling through France and looking for a nice French restaurant for lunch..... Yes, it's McDonalds again!!!!

After riding for 2 and half hours non-stop, any break is welcome. At one point, we pulled over into a layby to use Google to find a nearby restaurant and we were joined by another British biker on a Laverda just checking if we were OK. We had a quick chat before leaving on to the next McDonalds.

Once there, we saw the Laverda was also parked up, so we had chance to talk further with the Rider. He was another Mike who was riding back from Italy, he was catching a train that evening whereas we were staying in St. Omer before our train tomorrow.

So after refreshments, it was just another 2 and half hours to go.... and it was still showing showers of rain...

We arrived at Saint-Omer hotel just after 5pm. It had been a momentous day for the "Old Gits" - we had covered the full journey of 5 hours with just one stop....!! Yes, that's right – two and a half hours in the saddle for each section...

The last half hour was uncomfortable, but if required could have done another 30 mins. Our personal saddles must have become hardened and matched with the bike saddles!

It was then time for beer followed by an evening meal at one of the many restaurants in the town.

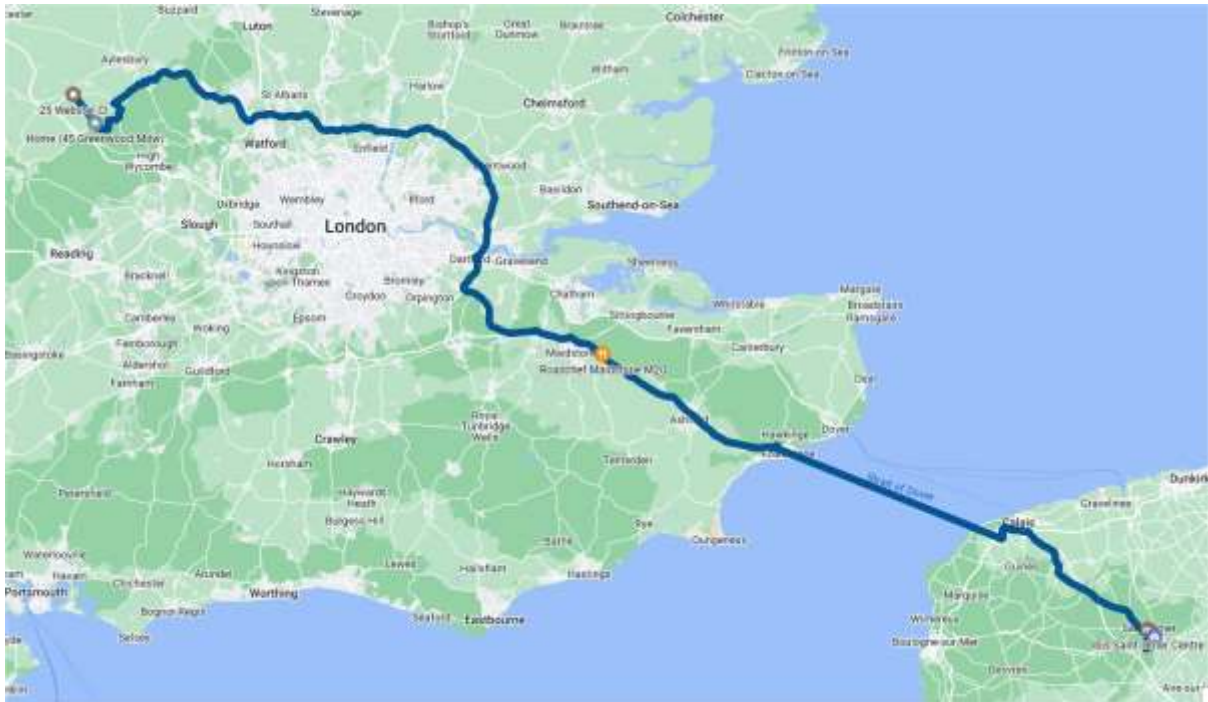




St. Omer central square – busy as usual!



Day 16



After the morning's breakfast it was a comparatively short ride of an hour to the Eurotunnel and return to the UK.

This was one of the longest trips for both duration and mileage, but it had also been one of wonderful new views, experiences and adventures. There are definitely places that we have been to on this trip that will be returned to in later years, there's so much more to experience.

We were discussing highlights of the trip last night and found it difficult to isolate a single event or place that could be nominated as "number 1". Both the mountains and views of Switzerland and the mountain passes of the Dolomites feature highly in our thoughts, but above all it's the camaraderie of riding to places with your mates that tops everything else.

We arrived in Calais Eurotunnel departure on time and were allocated space on a train nearly an hour earlier than expected!

When checking in we had the option of a train 30 mins earlier, but then there were so few people queuing we were allowed on an even earlier train....

Once back in the UK, we planned on a final coffee stop on the M20 services before we split to go our separate ways. Mike went north to his house, Eamonn continued on the M25 north to avoid the southern section closures, and Alex tried to find a southern route to avoid the M25 closures that weekend.

Total mileage covered was just under 2,800 miles.

Final Thoughts

From the Dolomites to the Black Forest, from rain-soaked passes to sun-drenched lakes, the 2024 Old Gits Tour was one for the books. Whether it was carving through Alpine roads, savouring local delicacies, or simply sharing laughs over beers, this trip was a testament to the unbreakable bond of riders and the irresistible call of the road.

--- End of Report ---