

Ever felt like riding 780km from Geneva to Nice...the hard way...via 19 cols ascending 21000m (2.5x Everest) in some scorching heat...including a time trial up Alpe d'Huez as your rest day...here is how I experienced it.....I hope you like the story !

Day	Stage - Stats	Cols	Descents	Stage/Overall Position	Feelings
1 - Sunday 19/08/2012	Genève > Megève (120km, 2700+m)	<p>Started pretty hard - mmmmh...have I bitten off more than I can chew? This is my 1st cyclosportive and it happens to be the hardest, toughest in the world...</p> <p>Will 1364km and 7 weeks of preparation be enough to stay in the game with the impressive athletes that surround me... ?</p> <p>My last ride before July 7th this year...was up Alpe d'Huez on the day of the Tour de France in 2011. Will my overall fitness, 7 weeks training in the Alps and my long past history triathlon & road racing experience kick in enough to get me to Nice?</p> <p>Brief History: (Nice Ironman (2008, 12.21:23) Semi-pro triathlete/team cyclist (South Australia), Australian Championship Age & National Tour Triathlon - late 1990s)</p>		Key: Global Solo Women = GSW Age Group Women = AGW Global Solo = GS OF = Official Finishers	<p>Pre-race butterflies. Little sleep. Excitement of meeting team & getting started. Feeling fresh. A huge wall of 21,000m awaits.</p> <p>Breathe. Plan: One day at time.</p> <p>Goal 1: Finish in Nice Goal 2: Finish race within time limits i.e become an Official Finisher (OF) Haute Route Goal 3: Place top 10 age group women</p> <p>Dream goal; Top 20 women.</p>

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	<p>Col du Romme (2nd class) Dist: 9.5k Elev: 815m Summit Altitude: 1297 Avg. grad: 8.8% Max grad: 13%</p> <p>Pre-race video avail.</p>	<p>Trained on this Col 2x. (video) Steepest @ Start & Finish.</p> <p>I remind people to look at the view on the way. It is beautiful.</p> <p>We are entering the country of abundance cheese & Chartreuse.</p>	<p>Relaxed descent. Gravel on road. Faire attention.</p>		<p>Col du Romme going fairly hard for the first day...mmmmh...too hard?</p> <p>As we are climbing Col du Romme some guy has enough breath to idly mention he solo kayaked the Atlantic.</p> <p>I am in the company of some BIG athletes. Take it easy, it's the first col of 19. 18 to go.</p>
	<p>Col de la Colombière (2nd class) Dist: 8k (we are doing second part - the hardest portion) Elev: 626m Summit Altitude: 1613 Avg. grad: 9% Max grad: 10.5%</p> <p>Pre-race video avail.</p>	<p>Col du Colombière - I know this col, too as I have climbed it before...it kicks up to 10% in the last few kms & seems to last forever. It's hot under the sun. The views to the left are simply stunning.</p>	<p>Help a Brazilian guy on descent (Emerson). He tells me the mountains in Rio are hills compared to this descent & nicknames me "The Descender". I have always been fast down hill. I tell him to follow my line as we make our way down towards Grand- Bornand.</p>		

Day	Stage - Stats	Cols	Descents	Stage/Overall Position	Feelings
	Col des Aravis (3rd class) Dist: 8 Elev: 526 Summit Altitude: 1486 Avg. grad: 5% Max grad: 9%	Col Unknown to me. Definitely a hot day now - a spectator shouts out "dixième femme" . I am in doubt "vraiment?" "Oui, Oui, allez, allez!" The competitive spirit now urges me onwards and I skip the last refreshment station - it's a risk and I know it. (Later I find out I am actually appx 20th women at this time)			Doing much better than I expected, I am a little pumped and in race mode.
		Final Climb into Megève - don't underestimate it.			I bonk 5km out of Megève...the lack of miles in my legs & perhaps missing the last refreshment stop? Fortunately, I hear the words my new Brazilian friend (Emerson) call out from behind "Hey Descender" I can barely reply. He catches me, daring me to catch the girl in front but I am only managing to turn the pedals over and failing fast. This is only Day 1. He shares a gel & we roll together to the finish line. The team spirit of the Haute Route has begun.
				GSW: 22/49 AGW: 7 GS: 380/559 Time: 4:57:27	Pleasantly surprised to find I am 22 woman, however it is Day 1 and I know I overcooked it! Breathe! One word for today: RESPECT! for the course, for the athletes, for the volunteers, organizers...this is going to be Epic!

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					Recovery: Rec. drink within 30mins, meal, ice-bath (6mins), light massage, dinner with my reassuring team mates (Shaun Doyle crashed on Colombière today is recovering & racing tomorrow) - about 4 hours sleep.
2 - Monday 20/08/2012	Megève > Courchevel (105k 2700+m)				
	Col des Saisies (2nd class) Dist: 14.5k Elev: 747m Summit Altitude: 1650m Avg. grad: 5.1% Max grad: 10.8% (Pre-race video avail)	Started easy, rode last 5k strong	Descended extremely well, feeling confident on descent.		As result of fast descent - ended up only girl in a very fast pack of guys on the flat...worked hard on the short climb in Aigueblanche to stay with them...however at what cost?

Day	Stage - Stats	Cols	Descents	Stage/Overall Position	Feelings
	Ascent to Courchevel (1st class) Dist: 25k Elev: 1369 Summit Altitude: 1850 Avg. grad: 7% Max grad: 9%	A huge challenge...I am new to this multi-day game...& to this Col. I am meeting the first 1st class col of the Haute Route spent...focus on mental discipline...keep pedaling, keep on your bike, keep cool...pouring water over back of neck...focusing on pedal strokes for 25k climb...a tough day at the office.		GSW: 25/48 AGW: 8 GS: 408/549 Total Time: 10:06:28 Stage Time: 5:09:01	A huge learning experience today, after day 1's hard push. This is going to be an adventure of unknown dimensions. It is harder than triathlon and I am concerned about the lack of miles in my legs with 6 days left. I am happy with today's result given I crawled up the ascent to Courchevel.
					Recovery: Rec. drink within 30mins, meal within 2hrs, ice-bath (6mins), dinner with team mates - sadly one of our team members (Neil Graham-injury) is leaving us today... team mate Christoph had a nasty crash..but will be on his bike tomorrow... 5 hours sleep. Nice hotel!
3 - Tuesday 21/08/12	Courchevel to Alpe d'Huez 138km (4700+m) The Marathon Day				Starting conservatively today after last 2 days efforts. Time limit however looks tight, especially with the heat today.

Day	Stage - Stats	Cols	Descents	Stage/Overall Position	Feelings
	<p>Col de la Madeleine (1st class) Dist: 26km Elev: 1540 Summit Altitude: 1993m Avg. grad: 6,3% Max grad: 11%</p>	<p>Another 1st class climb with absolutely stunning views...climbed it a little too slowly...it's warm again today.</p> <p>Climbed this before, however it was cooler & I was fresh!</p> <p>Rode with Marco - a Brazilian triathlete who I run into later visiting his friend in the medical tent.</p>	<p>Nice descent. Taking it a little easier today after 2 of my team mates have had crashes.</p>		
	<p>Col du Glandon (1st class) Dist: 22km Elev: 1449 Summit Altitude: 1860m Avg. grad: 6,3% Max grad: 11%</p>	<p>Glad for some respite from the sun in the woodlands at the beginning.</p> <p>I am in trouble though...my feet feel like they are on fire...and there is a motorbike guy who keeps checking on me. Normally I like the heat. Guys are stopping at the side of the road and dunking themselves in water troughs...the motorbike guy keeps offering me water...keep going...near the top I run in to Shaun Doyle (a team mate...who is taking photos...it is an incredible view back down the valley) but right now I am simply happy to see a friendly face.</p>	<p>Descend easily from Glandon hoping to recover before the final ascent</p>		<p>At the top of the Glandon, I am standing at the refreshment table leaning on my water bottles....my mate Shaun has to leave me and the friendly motorbike guy appears again...comes across to check on me...I realize perhaps I am in more trouble than I realize...I HAVE to make the timeframe... he asks "Kathleen, are you alright"Yes, I answer...just tell me (accurately) what is the length of the last climb to Alpe d'Huez?...he goes and checks...'12.5km and good news is some of it is in woodlands'...I can barely smile he tells me.</p> <p>He says he will be watching out for me...suddenly I don't feel so alone...I hear him encouraging and talking to others in the same soothing manner as I leave...a guardian watching over us.</p>

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	Ascent to Alpe d'Huez via Villard Reculas Dist: 12.5km Elev: 756m Summit Altitude: 1850 Avg. grad: 5.6% Max grad: 9%	A nice group of guys in the Chube Team cheer me up on this climb...we are all down to 7.5kph...they are wearing green & even the colour of their jerseys somehow soothes. They get me up to the last refreshment stop...I get water quickly & have to keep moving...if I stop I am done...one of them is Mark Webber's performance coach...he looks at me & he understands I HAVE to keep going...they will catch me later in the last few kms going into Alpe d'Huez...the green cavalry.		GSW: 30/43 AGW: 10 GS: 434/498 finishers Total Time: 18:06:38 Stage Time: 8:00:10	At the finish of Alpe d'Huez....I am exhausted...physically, mentally & emotionally one of the most challenging days of my life...short of losing a loved one...it's the hardest thing I have ever done. It's not clear if I made the timeframe or not...there is some confusion. I meet up with our motorcycle guardian, surrounded by people thanking him. After soaking under the taps with the green knights I wander up to him and get a massive hug. Gerard turns out to be a gendarme from Paris, who is responsible for safety in the Tour de France...we are all in his debt today. Merci
					Recovery: Rec. Drink....Lunch with Christoph...who tells me riding today after his crash, he only has flash backs to part of the day. and apparently he collapsed on the red carpet afterwards...he is 6' 4"....I would have liked to see that! Christoph is off to get his dressings changed at the medical tent..so not to be out done...I start getting incredibly cold and shaking as the effort from today kicks in. He takes my hands turns them over... they are blue... he takes me to the medical tent... I can't remember getting there but the golden space blanket makes me feel better and I won't let go of Christoph's hand.

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					<p>The doctor's are fussing...and apparently I am babbling away...(and according to Christoph... offering to marry a fair majority of men in the room... particularly, the 3 Brazilian Triathletes - also Ironman finishers)... one of whom is shaking, hyperventilating and on a drip. The other his friend, Marco, who I rode the Col du Madeleine with this morning.</p> <p>We all agree this is much harder than any Ironman we have done and Ironman Nice is no walk in the park. At Nice Ironman in 2008 people crashed and collapsed in the marathon with heat exhaustion.</p> <p>Emerson (my friend from Day 1) - he is friends with my Brazilian friends and a Doctor.</p> <p>We are all friends now, the Brazilian triathletes, the Doctors, Christoph and I. I am recovering well under the golden space blanket. Even helping my neighbour the Brazilian who is still hyperventilating to slow his breathing. My yoga & meditation training always comes in useful.</p> <p>The Doctors want me to see me in the morning to weigh me and check my pulse before the Time trial. I negotiate with them as my team has a Doctor in it (it is true) he can take care of me, and they let me off the morning visit.</p>

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					<p>I am very cautious with my cold water recovery that evening, I get a massage from Andrea Hart in the Haute Route massage area.</p> <p>Dinner with team, we now lose our best team member Alain Blanc Paque to injury...he is going home to Chamonix (I am sad as he has been gently providing words of wisdom each night and I really feel for him) We all have concerns about making the cut offs.</p> <p>I have given all I can today. Exhausted, physically, emotionally & mentally. I only manage 5.5hrs sleep. My most so far this race. :-)</p>
4 - Wednesday 22/08/2012	Alpe d'Huez Time Trial (14k, 1000m +)	Ascent to Alpe d'Huez from Bourg d'Oisans (1st Class) Happy to be still within the timeframes...going to enjoy this climb...the famous Alpe d'Huez. I take the first 3 bends easy, looking after myself today...finish hard at the end.		GSW: 30/43 OFW AGW: 10 GS: 433/482 OF Total Time: 19:35:44 Stage Time: 1:29:06	Feeling stronger after yesterday and my skills and experience are starting to come back to me...I am sticking to my plan today and enjoying the view. Tomorrow will be another big day. Recovery is an ice bath and I am caught in a thunderstorm after dinner with my teammates. Delicious, fresh mountain air ...slept 6hrs. :-)

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5 - Thursday 23/08/2012	L'Alpe d'Huez to Risoul (136, 3700+m - amended official start as Col de Sarenne to dangerous)				Loaned a couple of guys my pump this morning as I was leaving for the start. A little act of generosity which will flow back later.
	Col de Sarenne (untimed)	<p>Legs like lead. Staying with peloton is a struggle but I did.</p> <p>I see a sheep farmer and an amazing dog...who stayed focused on it's job despite being surrounded by cyclists/motor bikes. His master was less than impressed to encounter 500+ cyclists on the back roads.</p>			Going to take a while to warm up today.....
	Col du Lautaret (2nd class) Dist: 24.5k Elev: 1018 Summit Altitude: 2058m Avg. grad: 3.3% Max grad: 6.9%	So, the easy climb for today ends up WINDY!!!			Thank goodness I loaned my pump to Bubba who came through to help me in the final 6-7k (in to the wind) on this col. Friends in the pack, that is what a girl needs. A few girls are riding the Haute Route on the wheel of a boyfriend or teammate but as my team are all different strengths I am riding alone, so a Big Thanks to Bubba for his help on Lautaret today.

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	Col d'Izouard (1st class) Dist: 23km Elev: 1156 Summit Altitude: 2361 Avg. grad: 5.7% Max grad: 11%	Stunning climb, one of legend. I helped one of my team mates and a guy I coach (Lionel Thomas) through the last 10km. Nice to have cooler weather and my legs are finally starting to warm up.			At the top of the Izouard - the mythical landscape engulfs me...it feels slightly of another world...as do I.
			Nearly lose it 3 times on the way down. I am distracted and I only filled one water bottle at the top...the wind in the valley is fierce....and I am alone again...		For the first time...I ask myself the question...what where you thinking to do this on only 7 weeks training...fortunately there is a voice inside that pipes up... "you were being courageous...and living." The mythical valley of the Izouard delivers me a magician in the name of Will Levy...who had asked me for a smile early in the day which I delivered... He now delivers me through the incredible valley.and I get to enjoy it on his wheel. Will is a strong rider.and protects me from the wind and shares his knowledge of the valley with me. It's an incredible passage to the last climb of the day. Will stops to wait for a client...and I start the final climb into Risoul.

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	Ascent to Risoul (1st class) Dist: 14km Elev: 850 Summit Altitude: 1850	Pumped from having some company in the valley and the stunning scenery...I make my way steadily to the top of this first class climb - the cooler weather is helping.		GSW: 32/41 AGW:10 GS: 445/486 Total Time: 26:11:24 Stage Time: 06:47:08	Christoph & Bruce my team mates greet me at the end. The two doctors from Wed. come across to see how I am doing. I am in heaven to have gotten through this stage with legs like lead for the first 2 hrs now a distant memory. My spirits were uplifted by friends out on the road and my team mates compliments on my performance and bravery. Feeling good. My previous experience is starting to kick in.
					Recovery: Rec. drink within 30mins, meal, change the routine...Contrast Water Therapy (hot/cold shower on legs) - no dead legs for me tomorrow. Early night after team dinner and a luxurious 7hrs sleep!
6 - Friday 24/08/2012	Col de Vars 2nd Class	got over the climb	Descended and joined group in valley. A little bit quick for me but nice to be in a group.		
	Cime de La Bonette Dist: 23km Avg. grad: 6.1% Max grad: 11% Summit Altitude: 2802	The BIG One! The highest col in Europe...they extended the road.and I know it finishes with 500m at max gradient. The briefings say this can be incredibly windy & cold - I am intimidated but determined to get over it and make the time frames which seem tighter today than yesterday.	Majestic, incredible scenery....a must on anyone's list to see...even if you drive it!		Thanks again to loaning my pump. Near the top of the climb...Bubba comes upon me...and rides with me for 5-8k...in the last 2k I tell him to go on he is obviously stronger than me...he responds "Ok you will catch me on the descent"...and off he goes the strongman...I am happy to have had some company on the Bonette...one of the doctors is at the top of the Col..."Kathleen, ça va?" "Ça va bien" I am going to make the timeframes!

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	Ascent to Auron (3rd class) Dist: 6km Elev: 450m Summit Altitude: 876m Avg. grad: 3.9% Max. grad: 6%	Woohoo...it's raining...sweet heavens...I cruise up this one into the small resort of Auron. Guess who catches me near the end - it's Bubba...we ride across the finish line together. Peaceful Happy Days!		GSW:34/38 OF AGW:12 GS: 450/477 OF Total Time: 32:19:00 Stage Time: 6:07:36	Happy. to finish with Bubba across the line after his help on the Bonette. Recovery sticking with the Contrast Water treatment and normal recovery routine. 5.5hrs sleep. I still have to get through tomorrow. It will be the the longest ride I have done since Nice Ironman 2008.
7 - Saturday 25/08/12	Auron > Nice (174k, 2900+m)... 144 timed.	We are under strict time limits today...we have to make it to Vence and leave on time for the road closure into Nice...no room for error...			Disaster....I puncture in the non-timed section....I can't believe it...the last day...the peloton sails away from me, the support cars and following traffic are disappearing up the road....my team mates are in the peloton...yet, as always the Haute Route organization is impeccable...a motorcyclist stops...the Mavic man changes my tube and puts enough air in it to get me going again...and the guardian gendarme appears as if from nowhere...somehow spiring me back to the peloton so I rejoin them before the official timed start. I am in AWE!!

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	<p>Col de la Couillole (1st class)</p> <p>Dist: 16k Elev: 1181m Summit Altitude: 1678 Avg grad: 9% Max grad: 10.5%</p>				<p>Extremely grateful, I now throw myself at the Col, my team mates have told me I should "Go for it"...and I am so happy to be here I do. I put everything I have into the bike and at the top of the col a few girls give me sideways glances and ask if I am ok. I say sure am and keep riding..at the top I see Mr Mavic again, and ask him to put more air in my tyre...I am racing now to see how much time I can get back.</p>
			Gorges du Cians		<p>Beautiful, almost spiritual scenery. I am enjoying this descent and thinking it was THE most beautiful of the entire week...until I came across the emergency crews....overwhelming sense of sadness...I sat up here, and rolled through the remainder of the descent with others concerned for our fellow rider (seigneur de la route) who was at the bottom of the gorge...having lost people close to me I was hoping and praying for him and also for his loved ones....a change in the overall feeling... a deep sadness.</p>
		<p>Insert here approximately 7k of climbing not singled out as a col...a 'nice' surprise to keep us on our toes...</p>			<p>Here I remind myself to stay solid, consistent, focus on the pedal strokes, keep the pressure on and keep riding. Good fortune to ride with a couple of Jersey girls on this part of the ride. Consistency was key here.</p>

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	Col de St Raphael (3rd class) Dist: 7.5k Elev: 465m Summit Altitude: 876m Avg grad: 3.9% Max grad: 6%				Climbed it well. Enjoying being the different scenery and scents of the Alpes Maritime. I can almost smell the sea.
	Col de Vence (3rd class) Dist: 17km Elevation: 312m Summit Altitude: 962 Avg grad: 2.5% Max grad: 3%	My bike seems to know it is near the end...the gears are slipping and this 'third class' col seems to be going forever. The girls I am riding with are tired too. Everyone is looking for the 10k sign and it doesn't arrive. Eventually, the 5km marker turns up and then, and only then I know I am going to make it!		GSW: 33/38 AGW: 12 GS: 450/474 Time: 38:21:25 Stage Time: 6:03:25	I relax I am going to make to be an 'official finisher' of the Haute Route. Even this morning on the last day this moment had to be realized, fought for, required the help of others, a team spirit across competitors, the wings of a guardian gendarme, the invaluable support of my fellow team mates and others who I met along the way...then the contrasting beauty of the gorges du cians with the concern for our fellow rider who lay below.

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	Vence to Nice (video team arriving in Nice avail)				<p>Arriving in Vence...who should be there to present me with my finishers' medal but our guardian gendarme. It was nice to be able to thank him for his part in my race.</p> <p>I meet up with green knights of Chube and share a coffee. I find my team mates in time to join them in the closed road convoy from Vence to Nice.</p> <p>It's fantastic to ride with them, the crowds are watching/photographing/filming us, you certainly feel like your in the Tour de France. We hit the closed Promenade d'Anglais in Nice elated. I have my iphone for this part and video my team on the Promenade d'Anglais...everyone is chatting & congratulating each other...we ride over the finish line together...and now it's time for the swim we have been dreaming of.</p> <p>The last time I was in Nice..and entered the water I was starting the 2008 Nice Ironman. This final swim after the Haute Route with Christoph and my other teammates.is such a contrast, one of the sweetest moments and I leave last 7 days of blood, sweat & tears there in the mediterranean....feeling refreshed, and very, much alive!</p>

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					<p>The highs and the lows of the Haute Route have left me a different person...stronger, and somehow wiser...knowing that when the going gets tough there is more inside of me than I ever thought possible...and this has only come from sharing this experience with others, on and off the bike. Thank-you; all.</p> <p>Peace & condolences to the family & friends of Pontus who flew on above us.</p>