

(TNR mail out, late October)

An overdue follow-up to the 4th TNR -

Time flies during a bike trip, and afterwards in a different way. I was away for another two weeks' riding after the TNR but that's no excuse for a late follow-up note here. It's a bit like those emails from good friends you don't see often, emails that deserve a proper response but getting the time to write in detail means those are the mails which often go the longest without reply. That's OK sometimes though. Postcards are similar, the old slower methods can have more value these days. Anyway... I was away with work this last week and airports are a good place for pretending to work while writing this instead, nice to be thinking back to September's ride.

What a ride it was!

Thank you to everyone for making it such a great edition of the TNR. No signs at all that the ride is fading in appeal to me, 5 editions in (if we include the original tour). Still as good to be on those roads as it always has been. This year, maybe it was the tough second day that we all seemed to have that made the days under blue skies seem so good. Tuesday's epics, where you were, what route you took and so on that made for more stories to tell. I think it may have been the camaraderie between riders wherever they were that started new friendships or strengthened old ones that made it a great week. We've had stormy weather in the past and good things often seem to come of it, once we're warm and dry again that is!

It was also great for me to start the ride with Andy, we last rode together in 2015 when we explored these stradas and link roads between Turin and Nice. Quite a different ride this time, joining 160 or so others! It reminded me how far this event has come in 4 years, and how great riding bikes can be for bringing a lot of people together.

The other aspect of the 4th TNR that was special for me was that Martijn and Tess from SSF were able to join us in Turin. It was great to see them there. It's been more than 10 years since I saw him last and it's so good to see where SSF has got to in that time. Martijn had a chance to say hello to everyone at the start and as he said, this year we raised 50% of their total research budget. That's an amazing result! Thank you all again so much for your support of SSF this year. It really does mean a lot to me that this part of the ride can do so well.

By the way, if anyone is missing a patch or waiting for post still please email me here – the one aspect of the patches and donations plan that doesn't work 100% is my email/address/postage system. I have some DIY patches to post this coming week so let me know if you didn't get yours.

A photo of us at the start is attached - thanks to Cyril / Evanoui.cc for the photo!

4th TNR Calendars

Having said that about post, if you trust me to do it in time... there will be a 4th TNR / 2020 calendar, delivered for Christmas. Ordering info will be on the TNR site Contact page soon. I have some really great photos from a couple of riders already that may be used (with permission, TBD), but I need a few more. If you have a couple of shots you really like please send them to me ASAP, ideally 2-5mb size for A5 images. They'll be around £15 inc postage (TBC) and all proceeds will go to SSF. Availability will be limited (so I don't end up giving all my family and friends leftover 4th TNR calendars for Christmas...!).

I suppose that's about it for the 4th TNR. Thank you, and see you again somewhere I hope,

Cheers,
James

(FB post, 29th Sept)

I had the opportunity to take 10 days out after the TNR this September to ride back to the UK. Low impact travel yes but really just wanting to get some solo miles in, been a while since I did that. This is a cross-post from the bearbones forum and TNR facebook group, posted here as it's sort of TNR related.

There's been a few threads in mind (alongside the cobwebs) that I tried to get together on the 5hr ferry trip back. Just some thoughts re the blog link above about a travel diary - I took a biro and made some note on my TNR card, was good to get a few things down,

-It takes me a few days of riding just to settle into the patterns that make bike travel so rewarding. Day one or two and I'm still on UK day ride mentality. The TNR was as good as ever but the return ride was better for having had a mix of social and solo riding days preceding it.

-Not having a plan or time pressure might be the most benefit. I had one ride in mind then changed it completely. It meant I had no time pressure as the route was a day or two shorter. With that came less 'get the miles in' thinking and more 'let's go and see what that Cathedral is like inside', as well as the benefit of following a route I planned over a year ago where I knew there were highlights to look forward to but not the order, when etc. In the end I did some good days or covered a number of passes in a day but it only happened because I was happy to be pedaling. Other days were short by my normal 'standards' and felt fine, just right - they were good days on the bike, that's all.

-I went offline completely for 9 days. It made me realise how online stuff fits into one lifestyle OK (to a point) and seems alien to another. Thoughts about balance in life etc. Also about why people instagram daily as they ride/tour (I've done it, we probably all do and I enjoy seeing it), but to me letting go of all that isn't there in the world directly around you is a rare and valuable experience. Call or message home yes, but social media, why not save it for when you're back? That part of life doesn't need to be instant all the time - what we need is the direct relationship with our surroundings. I found myself more interested than usual in so many small things that I might have missed before, or taking time to do things that might normally not occur to me (back to that lack of time pressure point). (aware of the point that I seem to be catching up in online time during this wet weekend while feeling a bit tired!)

-Solo travel is under-rated, I still enjoy it. Always times I wish I was riding with others to share those amazing roads or a beer and restaurant meals with, but overall there's something about travelling alone that reaches part of my brain that daily life doesn't. Being OK with spending time inside your own head maybe (despite realising a long time ago that it's not as interesting as I hoped it might be

😊).

-Acceptance or appreciation of contrasts. A flat bike path alongside the Rhone is perfect, a paradise, after many days in the mountains. Rain is fresh and violent skies look incredible after days of clear blue and heat. No great point of enlightenment there I know but it really felt genuine after becoming that bit more immersed in a simple period of ride-eat-stay comfortable.

-Having time to 'just be' when riding a longer distance solo. In the past bad weather has 'spoiled what could have been a good day/trip' or 'why rain on me now FFS' etc as a reaction. If I learned (and regret) one thing from past trips and races it's that a tired me can have a short fuse and I don't like what that's meant a couple of times in the past. Being tired in bad weather on a bike that has many way of letting me down is a better test than any 9-5 job could be. It means something as well as nothing and it's only my choices that put me there.

-This time I got much closer to genuinely feeling calm about all that comes with being outside for days on end. Starting to think that is all there is to it - the peak of bike travel is to be able to act, react

and be happy whatever comes your way - 'make your decisions then move on' (I forget who said that, it may have been Mike Hall). Aidan Harding wrote something about bike riding being a test of mindfulness and this comes back to me often. There's immense reward to me in hints of the ability to be in the moment and smell the flowers as well as staying aware of all the things you and your bike need to keep moving on unimpeded but moving between the two at the right time can't be assumed. The only minor mistakes I made on this trip were from a wandering mind or a lack of attention to the moment.

-A surprise one - the thought that 2 weeks is often enough. I've ridden longer under more pressure and I seem to remember 12-14 days being the 'OK, enough' point where only momentum was keeping me going. I've often wondered what a year or 3 on the road would be like and this was the first time I thought that less could be more (maybe I'm just ageing!). The build-up of thoughts, memories, experiences etc in a trip can be so fast. Within a week to 10 days I'm struggling to remember and process it all (hence the point about the travel notes making sense). I had so many threads in mind but when I got onto the ferry and felt like the trip was done, things that were part of the 'active travel' mind seemed to become harder to hold on to as I went into recover/relax mode? Anyway ... a public brain dump really, that's all. It was a great trip - if there's one bit of trip report to add here it's that the Vercors stopped me in my tracks a few times in a way no area has done before. Turn a corner and



everything changes, brakes on, jaw dropped, "they built a road *there*?" It's so good. A few pics, between the Verdon, Luberon, Drome, Vercors, Chartreuse, 'French Kansas', Parc de Perche in the north and my Scotch and coffee (couldn't decide) at the ferry port of Caen after 7 days and 1300km.





