

DOT WATCHERS BLOG 1: GERAARDSBERGEN

July 29, 2018

Tonight, Geraardsbergen plays host to the 6th edition of the Transcontinental Race. At 10pm CEST the race will start again, and the riders will commence a neutralised loop of the town of Geraardsbergen before climbing the famous cobble-stoned Kapelmuur and setting off in search of Check Point 1, and ultimately, Meteora. As the riders check in, grab their caps and gather to listen to a debrief, dot watchers across the world are grabbing their laptops, snacks, and strapping in for one of the most exciting events of the cycling calendar.

The Transcontinental Race is a beautifully hard bicycle race, simple in design but complex in execution. Riders must manage self-reliance, logistics, navigation, judgement, and the physical impact of such long distances. The strongest riders excel and redefine what we think possible while many experienced riders only hope to finish. Every year the completion rate increases, as does the number of riders who enter, but in true Mike Hall style, so does the intensity of the course, which is why the possibilities of this race are wide open.

This blog will give you an honest dot-watcher's perspective with a view of the front, middle and back of the race, a mention of every single rider if possible, with an injection of fun. For those of you new to dot-watching, you don't know what you've let yourself in for. Here's a breakdown of what's about to happen to you:

- **ADDICTION:** Dot-watching is like opening a can of Pringles, once you start you won't be able to stop.
- **SLEEP:** Remember when you used to sleep at a normal hour? Expect 1am, 2am and sometimes 5am bedtimes now.
- **FOOD:** Remember when you used to eat a balanced diet? You'll soon fill your cupboards with any food that requires no cooking whatsoever, ideally something you can shove directly into your mouth without having to move your eyes off the screen in front of you.
- **OBSESSIVE REFRESH:** You will refresh your browser more times in the next 2-3 weeks than you have in the past 2-3 years.
- **FRUSTRATION:** Ever watched a TV game show and you know someone's answered a question incorrectly, and you're screaming at the screen "You idiot! It was Buzz Aldrin not Buzz Aldridge!" (see my appearance on Tipping Point for reference), but the person cannot hear your screams of idiocy? It's a similar feeling of frustration you'll experience when you watch in horror as your dot takes a wrong turn, doesn't move for hours or gets overtaken by a rival.
- **SHEER PANIC:** Your dot will stop moving and you'll have a complete freak out as to why it's stopped. Remember to breathe deeply through these times and try not to overreact. They are often sleeping, have no battery on their phones, have no battery on their trackers, or have been eaten by a bear.
- **WORK:** Within a week your entire office will have the Trackleaders screen up from the moment you arrive to the moment you leave. Some will attempt to get it up on a big screen so you can all stare at it together whilst you share your pearls of cycling wisdom amongst each other.
- **SMELL:** As the structure of the day completely unfolds, so will your routine and personal hygiene.
- **PERSPECTIVE:** Your current ideas on what you can achieve will go completely out of the window. Suddenly you'll realise you need to realign your own goals once you see what your normal human friends are capable of.
- **RELATIVES & FRIENDS:** You'll explain the race to some friends and relatives, and they'll look at you in confusion. You'll try (and fail) to explain the race to them in terms of distance, endurance and adventure. They'll continue to look at you with a furrowed brow and ask if it's similar to Tour De France. You'll slap your forehead, roll your eyes and walk backwards slowly.

- **MORE FRUSTRATION:** The worst part for a dot-watcher, the most crucial part, is that you CANNOT offer any help or support during these times. This is a fundamental element of the race and any racer who receives outside support can be penalised. Offer only words of encouragement and your rider will thank you for it.

As for new riders reading this, multiply the above by 1000 and you'll get some idea of what will happen. You'll get no sleep, your diet will go out of the window, day will become night and night will become day with no 24 hour structure, you will feel frustrated and obsessed, your perspective will alter and you'll stink, oh boy will you stink. There will be tears of pain and tears of elation, bum rashes, dog chases, wind, rain, sun, lightening and hail, amazing views, terrible road surfaces and the seven day croissant will bring you such joy you'll love it like your first born. Just remember that we're all in complete awe of you and in times of loneliness remember that we're always watching you... (not in a creepy way. Well, sort of.)

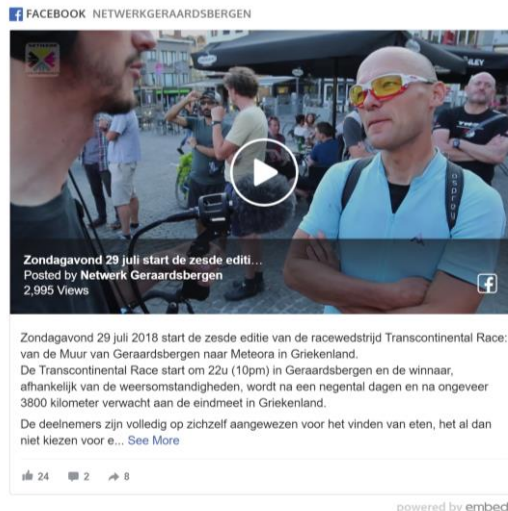
Ones to watch

We like to do a little prediction of those to look out for before the race starts, even though it never looks anything like the finish line.

The big favourite this year is of course, TCRNo5 winner and all-round legend James Hayden. A strong TT rider, James was a bit of a wildcard 3 years ago, he came in super strong and people started to notice him. He rode so hard that he got Shermer's Neck and despite trying to strap it up and continue to ride like this, he had to scratch. 2016 saw him put in another huge effort only to get a chest infection and have to rest up at CP1. This didn't stop James though as he checked into a hotel, got himself better and continued to ride, from a position towards the back, so strong and hard that he finished overall in 4th place. 2017 was James's year, he absolutely smashed his way through to win with a time of 8 days 23 hours. James learnt a lot in his two previous attempts, [this is what he says](#) about his 2017 performance:

"Racing in 2015 and 2016 allowed me to find my limit, which was the greatest possible effort that I could do. In ultra-endurance racing, that limit doesn't last a few seconds or even minutes. It can last for hours. Finding it involved severe suffering. That experience gave me the skills to be more efficient and successful. In 2017 I looked after myself well. [In 2017] I rested, sleeping mostly in hotel beds. Having a shower. Having breakfast. I recovered."

Bjorn Lenhard is James's known rival this year having come second in TCRNo5. Bjorn won the Transatlantic Way in June this year (again) and we all know that this is the man that won Paris Brest Paris all on a single Nutella Baguette. Here he is being interviewed yesterday by [Netwerk Geraardsbergen](#):



This year sees a fairly fresh set of names, but a few riders we've identified who have previously made a top ten position are Matthew Falconer (5th TCRNo5), Alexander Bourgeonier (2nd TCRNo4) and Stephane Ouaja (9th TCRNo5) - Ouaja famously rides a fixed wheel so we'll all be interested to see what bike set up he has this year. In March he finished second in the individually attempted Indian pacific wheel race so he has good form for TCRNo6.

There are more ladies than ever this year and we want to make it absolutely clear that there technically isn't a ladies category. In ultra-endurance cycling female riders have proven themselves to be in the same league as male riders, it's something that makes ultra-endurance races so unique. So look out for Isobel Jobling who was second lady in Transatlantic Way 2017 and Meg Pugh came third in Transatlantic Way this year.

Other ladies to look out for are Sheila Woollam and Anna Petters who both have clearly put in the miles this year if we're stalking them correctly on Strava.

In terms of pairs, we've heard good things about Anton Lindberg and Amy Lippe (251 a&b), and James Craven and Jonathan Rankin (253a&b).

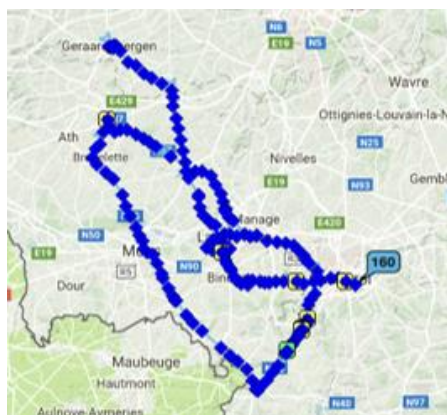
There are so many to mention and we've probably missed out some really obvious riders, but it's time for us to put our feet up and get the tracker on as the race has just started. Good luck everyone!

DOT WATCHERS BLOG 2: FOUR COUNTRIES IN 24 HOURS

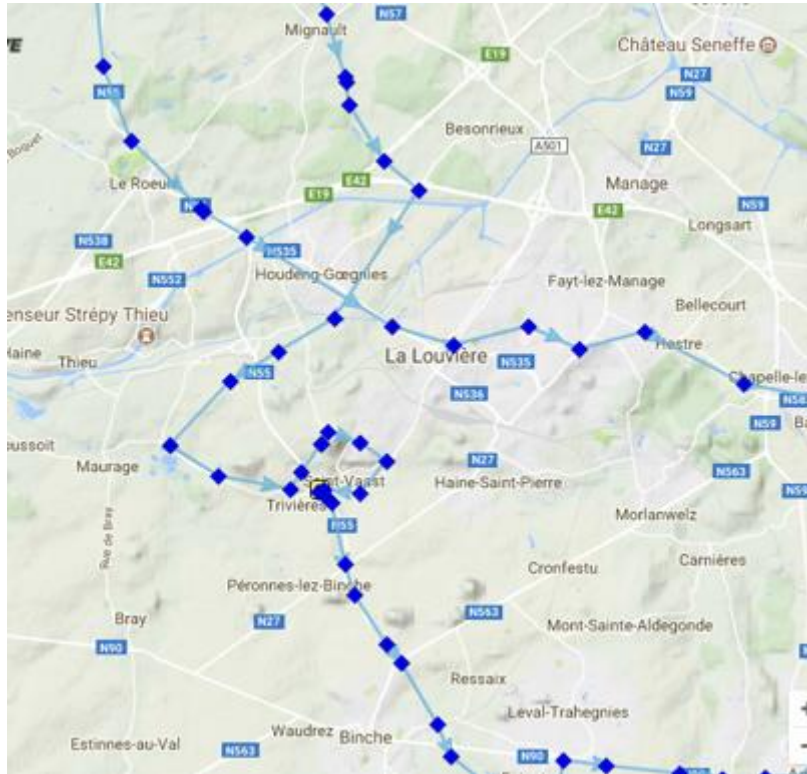
July 30, 2018

It's been 24 hours since the race began and already the majority of riders have visited four countries. The peloton has chosen what would seem the most logical route, through Luxembourg and along the French/German border towards Liechtenstein and CP1. However a grupetto of riders have chosen to branch off East out of Belgium - at first we wondered if they had decided to go to CP3 before CP1 but we've been informed that this year the checkpoints must be visited in order, and in fact the group are simply seeking a flatter, less windy route along the Rhine. Will the increased speeds this route will allow make up for the extra distance? Probably not.

The first few hours saw (Australian born, Thailand living) Craig Bachelor (#197) lead the pack, so naturally we found out all we could about him. Craig only started cycling 4 years ago but has already made a name for himself in Asia, riding in the NICH-100Plus Cycling team in Tour de Phuket and famous for riding solo and non-stop 5-day routes in 25 hours. He plans to ride around 450km a day - this is the same target as James Hayden in 2017 - and with plenty of bike packing experience we think he's got what's needed to achieve his plan. As his regular riding haunts are Thailand and Laos, we expect the heat the riders are currently suffering with won't phase him either, although Craig admits that "This route is one of the toughest anywhere". Currently sat in third position behind Bjorn Lenard (#2) and James Hayden (#1). Only 21km behind Craig is Cristoph Fuhbach (#146), Thomas Dupin (#157), Matthew Falconer (#5), Stephane Ouaja (#12) and René Bonn (#158). No one has had a sleep at this stage so it's all to play for.



Although it looks like Arjan Zwanenburg (#160) is being chased by bees all over Belgium, he is in fact is having a hell of a time - 50 miles into the race and he gets his first mechanical and apparently had to walk 10 miles with his bike. In his haste to finally get going he didn't notice that his GPS had rerouted back to Geraardsbergen, and rode north for what looks like a good 30 miles before realising his mistake. Soul destroying.



Correcting himself, he started South East again but his GPS seems to have lost the plot once more as he veers South West and takes a loop around Saint-Vaast, south of La Louvière. Perhaps here he bought a compass and map because he's finally pointing the right direction. It takes amazing strength of character to keep going after something like that, so good on you Arjan, put it behind you and keep moving towards the sunrise, that should see you right.



Jurgen Knupe taken from @Lupoeagle Instagram

Another who had a rather difficult start is Jurgen Knupe (#46). After a security alert in Munich, no passenger could access their luggage for 48 hours, which included Jurgen's, somewhat essential, bike. He knew he wouldn't make the 10pm start in Geraardsbergen, but made his way to the start anyway and began as soon as he could, which in the end was only about 2 hours later than everyone else. Jurgen is already in the middle of the pack and we expect to see a great performance from him - he's a strong rider who last year won the first edition of Tuscany Road, so at the very least, he should make the finishers party.



Anisa Aubin (#21) with Chris Thomas (#18) at the start line.

Anisa Aubin (#21) deserves a special mention, and possibly an extra 7day croissant. She has just finished the North Cape (Finland) to Tarifia (Spain) bike race which was 7,300kms, in which we've heard she came ninth in overall. She then decided last minute to make her way to Geraardsbergen and ride TCRNo6. After all, what's an extra 4000kms. Plus, she is making good time, currently middle of the pack. What. A. Machine.

One of the big stories of the first day is surely "The Transbromptental", better known as Roger Seaton (#34). A Brompton is one of those fold up bikes that you often see commuters use. We haven't been this excited about a bike alternative since Ultan Coyle turned up on a time trial back in TCRn03. We have absolutely no idea if this is going to outpace the wild dogs in Bosnia, but at least he'll look stylish whilst it happens.



Image by @Transconfan on Instagram



Photo by @RogerSeaton on Instagram

Matt Swain (#156) decided the first thing he would do after hitting the Muur was... hit the pillow back at his hotel in Geraardsbergen. In an unusual strategy he went back to bed for 3 hours and got going again at 1:30am. A very bold move, we'll see if it pays off when everyone takes their first proper sleep this evening.

In other news...

Some of this year's sleep spots look 5 star!



Mark Lison's sweet spot (#23)



Neil Matthew's Boho Chic room (#171)

Some opted for 3 star...



Matt Mills (#178) You don't have to wear that dress tonight



David Fairweather (#187) got a room with a view

Other's was a bit more rustic...



Pillow luxury for Karim and Sam Wiesmann (#245a&b)



Saulius Vizbaras (#116) chose a gravel path. At least it's flat.

Magnums and Burgers are the order of the day:



Timothy Lang (#225)



Adam Popovec (#71) wins the golden cup!



Mark Lison (#23)



Tom Hudders (#90) stacking his Magnums

And finally... this intense heat has done funny things to a few riders...



The Animagus Paul Ferguson (#212) promptly changed back into a human after this photo was taken.



Hay Andis Aboltins (#141) why the long face?



Denis Uzdiaev (#163) went a little coco nuts before the race



Only 1% of the population can see a pig in Mikko Makipaa's (#4) photo

Au revoir, until tomorrow!

DOT-WATCHER'S BLOG 3: KEEPING COOL ON THE "DREAM ROAD OF THE ALPS"

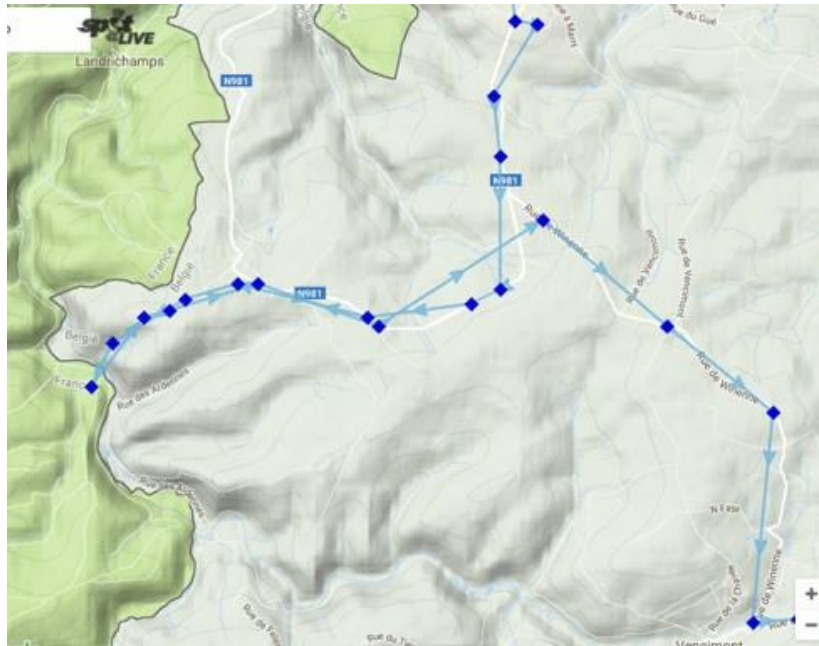
July 31, 2018

Approximately 850 km from the Muur, the first Control Point lies at the foot of 'the dream road of the Alps'. After getting their brevet card stamped at the Explorer Hotel, in the town of Gaschurn, riders will commence the parcours, along the Silvretta Hochalpenstraße, considered to be one of the most beautiful and popular panoramic roads in the Austrian Alps. It's 22.3 km long and leads in 34 curves up to the 2.032 m high, providing unique views in a wonderful natural landscape. At the summit is the Silvretta reservoir which dominates the Bierlerhöhe. From here they'll descend into the picturesque town of Tirol, Austria, an onwards towards CP2 in Slovenia.

Day two starts with Craig Bachelor (#197) who in the early hours was in an accident on a cycle path as he passed Lake Constance. Stephane Ouaja (#12) was not far behind so was able to assist and called an ambulance, and now Craig is in hospital with a reported broken leg. Craig is devastated, and understandably so. Craig applied for TCRNo5 but was disappointed to not receive an entry. Around the same time he was diagnosed with Mononucleosis which gave him chronic fatigue symptoms for the next year. He has fought back to full health and to be in a position to competitively race TCRNo6, so this accident is a cruel blow. We really hope Craig recovers quickly and returns next year.

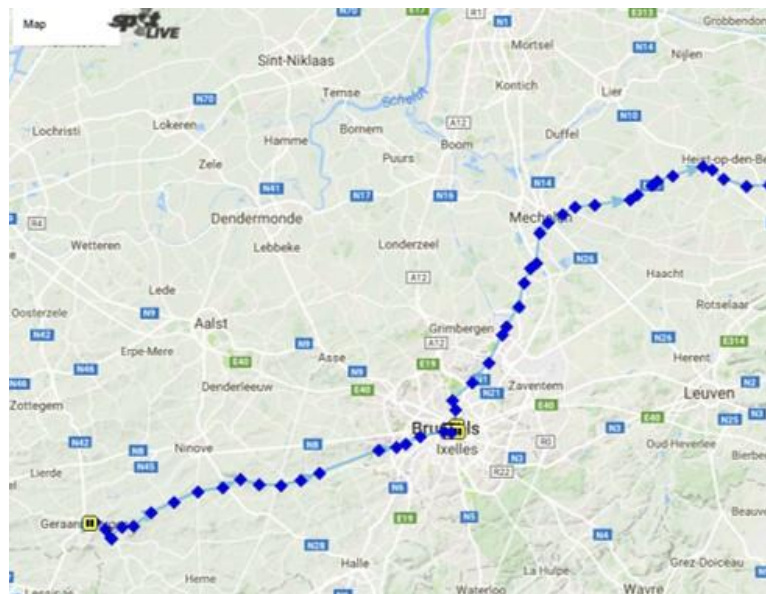
Some of you may be wondering why dot number 15 suddenly appeared in the leading pack overnight - Bernd Paul (#15) had unknowingly lost his tracker, and by chance a control car passed him and asked him where his tracker was. They quickly fitted him with a new one and just like that we had a new rider in the leader midst. Bernd Paul was in fact the first rider to pass through CP1 at about 6:45am. Half an hour later he was joined by Stephane Ouaja (#12) and then Bjorn Lenhard (#2). The rest of the top ten were close behind and by midday it had become a constant stream of riders checking in. The lead riders are now fast approaching CP2, with James Hayden (#1) back in the top 3 after a rest.

In terms of route there seems to be only one way from CP1 to CP2 which is via Innsbruck, but let's wait to see what happens when the bulk of riders pass through as there does seem to be the opportunity of going south via Passo del Rombo, which would of course be a monumental mistake, and the kind of thing that would fill us all with devilish glee.



What's down here then? Oh, nothing.

Looking towards the back of the pack, we can breathe a sigh of relief that Arjan Zwanenburg (#160) is finally back on the straight and narrow, though not without one final jaunt down a dead end. Just to keep us on our toes.



We were so busy watching #160 that we failed to notice Osvaldo Navia (#75) leave Geraardsbergen and go on an unconventional route to CP1 via Brussels, sitting in the capital until almost 3pm on Monday. Possible mechanical problems, possible tracker issues, probable waffle buying. He then went even further North skirting Antwerp. He's now made his way to the Rhine route but there's a chance he'll pop into Frankfurt for some Sauerkraut before finally heading south.

Bruno Ferraro (#159) posted on Instagram "Trying to do my best beside the bad luck. I'm a lost dot but I'll appear next days in a quite good position." so we think he's having some mechanical issues.

We're delighted to see that the Grupetto Gang have now joined the Peloton at Lake Constance, with Mark Charles (#99) leading the way into the valley.

In other news...

Today has been hot, hot, hot. Some riders have been reporting temperatures reaching 38 degrees, some have even had a bit of sun stroke. The riders have been doing what they can to keep cool:

Buying multiple bottles of water is just the start...

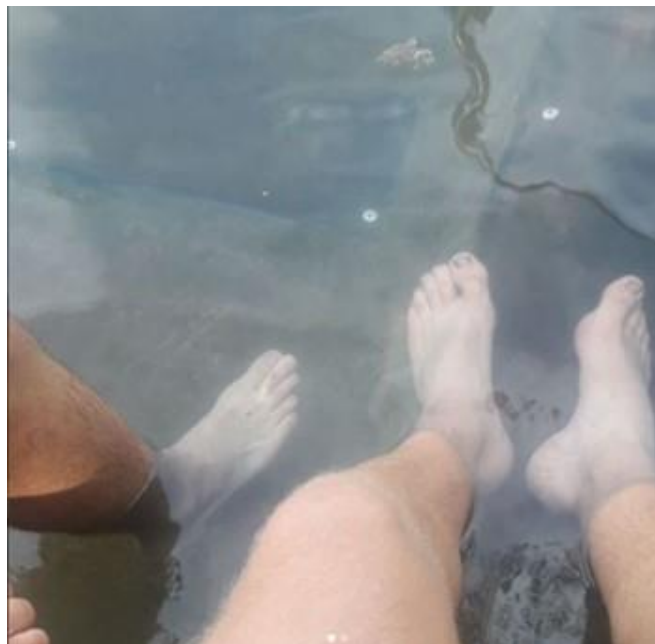


Gianluca Morini (#69)



Patch Doyle (#257)

They also took a moment to wash their stinky bits...



Luca Somm and Oliver Bieri (#259a&b)



Jakub Dvorak (#218)



Andis Aboltins #141

...and to have a bath in the local water fountains...



Sharing a pool with the frogs Alan Parkinson (#60)



Taking the plunge Derek Boocock (#113)



Are you sure this isn't just someone's jacuzzi Erika Rowens (#100)?



Now THAT is more like it Innes Ogilvie (#231)

...and taking showers in the town's water features. I'm sure the locals are delighted.



Sprinkler systems are Andreas Wittkemper's (#8) friend



The town sees art, Tom Hudders (#90) sees a shower



Leos Hradek (#83)

Frankly going through the car wash doesn't seem the worst idea a rider's had:



It's Francisco Afonso (#164), bitches

In fact it's so hot they are literally leaking salt:



Salty fingers Erika Rowen (#100)



Salty arms Richard Gates (#161)



Salty brains Paul Alderson (#219)

You know it's hot when you start strapping frozen vegetables to your body:



James Illman (#131)



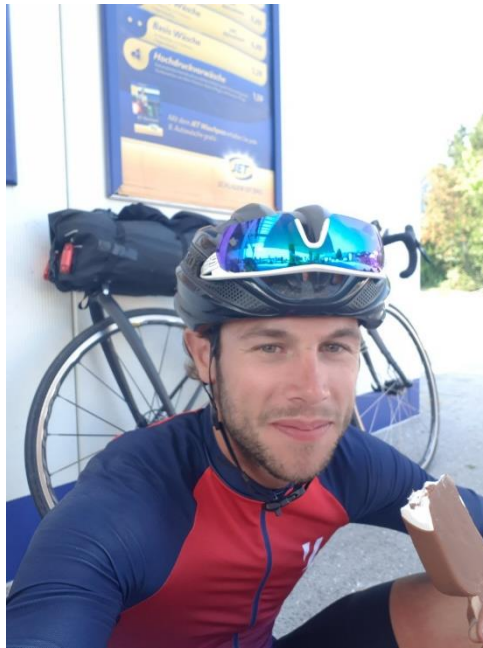
Clement Venus (#82)

Wishing you all a cool evening, adios until tomorrow!

DOT WATCHER'S BLOG 4: THE TROUBLE WITH THE ALPS

August 2, 2018

Dot-watchers: If you haven't yet discovered the wonders of the 'replay' button on Trackleaders stop what you are doing and go and watch as it's a joy to behold. You can wind back the time and watch as the riders conjoin to form a scaly blue snake munching its way through the mountains, with James, Bjorn and Bernd at the head.



Ben Davies (#195)

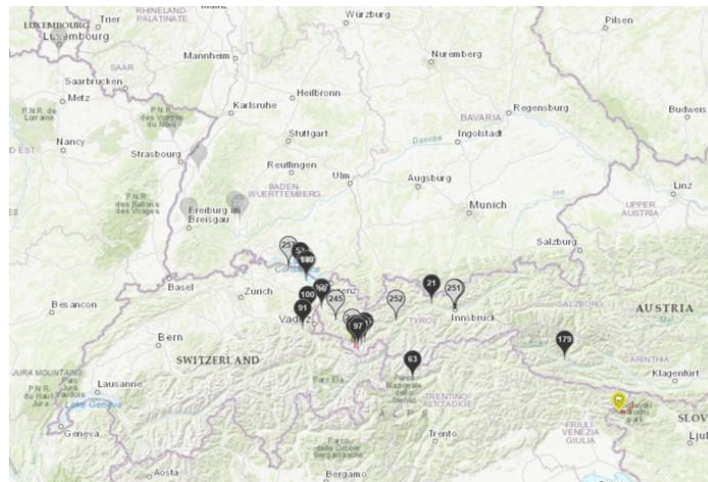
The blue snake lost a few scales on the way - Ben Davies (#195) was the first to break away from the group and take a more Northerly route via the highest mountain in Austria - the Großglockner. This was not due to a wrong turn; it was in fact his plan to take this route in an attempt to avoid any banned roads. At least he was rewarded with spectacular views and an experience him and his legs will never forget.

We were watching through our fingers as the second routing casualty of the day Adrian Hegedus (#80) left CP1 and started going even further North than Ben, right up past Kitzbuhel. This morning he wrote on Instagram (read in a weary voice) "After 48 hours, 700km+ and lots of meters climbed, I've got to CP1." Well Adrian, if you enjoyed that, you're in luck...

Karolina Maciejewska (#63) avoided the morning soup by taking a route straight through what is known as... the Ötztal Alps. It also looked like Constantin Schutt (#84) did exactly what I yesterday predicted someone may do and went South, taking another completely unnecessary switchback in the form of the Passo del Rombo, during which time I made a lovely cup of tea in my favourite 'I told you so' mug.

The mountains play havoc with the trackers so it's not easy to see the exact route the riders are taking, which is why it looked like Rachel Batt (#245a) took a high zip line right across the Wildspitze mountain, reaching the South East main road where Jim Stewart (#245b) was presumably waiting with a tapping foot.

There's still about half of the riders to pass through CP1 so plenty more dot-watching fun to be had. It's not a Transcontinental Race unless a rider takes a necessary mountain pass, climbs a ski-slope in their cleats, or becomes so completely lost and disillusioned they just give up and live in a cave.

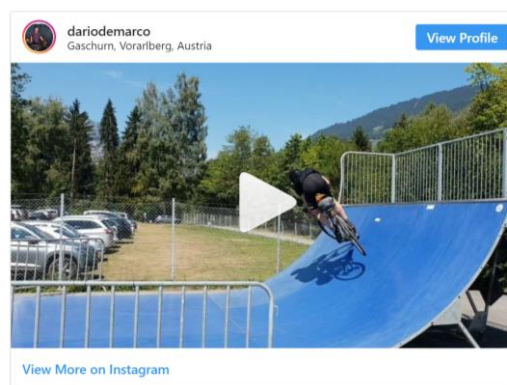


Ede Harrison (#179) was the first woman through CP1 and is currently in 32nd position overall. If you want to see a view of just the female riders, use [Free Route](#) and use the toggle in the top right hand corner to show you a layer with just the female riders. The next closest is 150km behind, Anisa Aubin (#21), who is putting in a very good show as we've reported that she came straight from the North Cape to Tariffa Bike Race to compete in TCRNo6. Karolina Maciejewska (#63) is not far behind Anisa at all, at last reporting she was only 5km behind, but she's taking a different route to CP2 and I suspect one that'll cost her.

The pairs race is being dominated by James Craven (#253a) and Jonathan Rankin (#253b) who are incredibly sitting in positions 11th and 12th overall. This is really exciting, as historically pairs have never made a top ten position this early on. It's an interesting category. On one hand you have the benefit of a teammate for encouragement and support, plus you can draft. But unless you're completely synced you have double the stops, double the faffing, double the mechanicals, and two decision makers; plus, you can only ride as fast as your weakest rider. In TCRNo3 Neil Philips and Timothy France won the pairs category and came in the top 20 overall, the following year Neil Philips did the race solo and came fourth overall. So keep your eyes on James and Jonathan for future endeavours!

In other news...

The trouble with the Alps is the unpredictable weather. Whilst some were enjoying themselves in the sun... (Dario Demarco #192)



...Others enjoyed a bath...



Alan Parkinson (#60)

...but some stayed in the bath too long



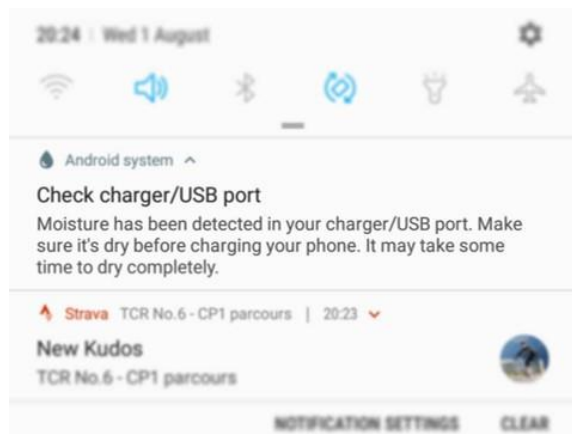
Nicole Kraus (#247a)

Sweltering:



Jason Smith (#106)

Soggy:



David Sherrington (#70)

Some are keen to let the water in:



Others are trying to keep the water out:



The other trouble with the Alps is you often have to ask the residents to mooove out of the way...



Andis Aboltins (#141)



Patrick Miette (#32)

we'll leave you with some of the more interesting sleep spots found by the rider:



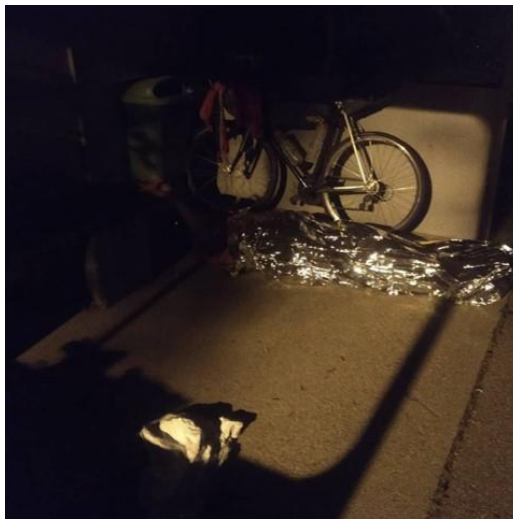
Torsten Frank (#209)

"3rd night, 3rd bivy. At least semi. Kind of.

Wanted an hotel or something to charge my devices, have a good nights rest, shower, accessibility to toilets and toiletries.

Succeeded only partially, though. Charging, showering, toilets: check. Sleep: well mass sleeping room in the youth hostel unbearable under the roof with a fan the whole night churning the heat around. Ended up on this bench outside. Once a bivy... or something like this. 🤔😄 To add insult to injury that whole place had only Edge worth of GSM signal an a non-working mTan-SMS authentication Wifi. So not able to follow any race reports or write up things.

Well, the breakfast was nice again. And the hosts where very helpful. 👍



Karin Weismann and Samuel Weidtmann (#254a&b). Less couch potato more baked potato.



@jprobertson @lezyneusa @explorer_hotels

DOT WATCHER'S BLOG 5: HEDGEHOGS AND HAIRPINS

August 3, 2018



#Apidura [Photo by @camillemcmillan]

After 4 full days on the road the bulk of the riders are passing through CP2 today. The parcours for the second Control Point begins at the top of Slovenia's highest road – Mangart Česta, which leads up to the 2,072m Mangart saddle, overlooked by Slovenia's third highest peak, Mangart itself, commanding dizzying views of the Julian Alps and Italy's Fusine lakes. The road is a classic, though comparatively unknown Alpine climb, built by Russian prisoners during the First World War, with tunnels hacked out of the mountainside, numerous switchbacks, and gradients as steep as 25% descending towards Kranjska Gora.

From Mangart Sedlo riders will descend to the checkpoint at Log Pod Mangartom, before following the Soča Valley towards the 50 tight hairpins (26 up, 24 down) of the 1,611m Vršič Pass, and then descending over the cobbles towards Kranjska Gora.

The pointy end

There have been some big changes today. As Bjorn Lenard (#2) and James Hayden (#1) left CP2 and traversed through the Kalkalpen National Park they took decidedly different routes, with Bjorn favouring the East and James the west. By afternoon Bjorn had encountered the Ždárské vrchy national park which seems to have slowed him up a little, and allowed James to take the lead for the first time in this race. Bjorn is now 80km behind James, but Bjorn is currently resting and James is yet to do so.

Bernd Paul (#15) was next through CP2 but in the early hours it was reported that he fell off his bike the night before and could hardly walk (but states it's nothing serious). He has now scratched. This must be very disappointing for Bernd who has started the Transcontinental Race three times but never finished, despite strong starts.



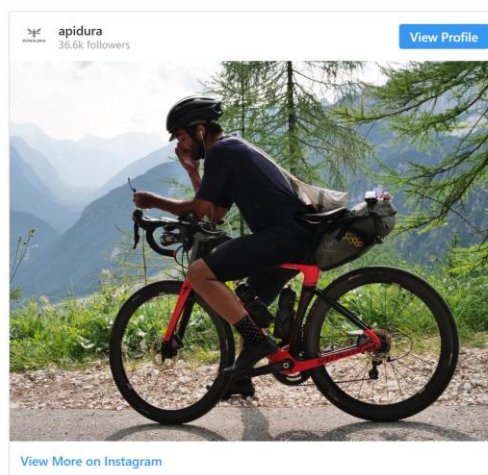
Thomas Dupin (#167)

Thomas Dupin (#157) is now in third position. Thomas is a 45 years old air traffic controller who comes from Marseille, south of France and has been cycling for over 30 years. He started competitive long-distance riding with Paris-Brest-Paris in 2015 where he came in 27th, in 2016 the Castellet circuit coming 2nd, he won the 2016 1000 du sud, and won 2017's Born To Ride. He's a very experienced ultra-distance rider with plenty of solo trips all over Europe. This is Thomas's first attempt at the Transcontinental Race.

Only a few kms behind Thomas is Paris Bike Messenger Stephane Ouaja (#12). The Transcontinental Race in Stephane's own words:

"20,000km of fast bikepacking, 7,000km of training on a 25kg bike, 100h of virtual training, 3 TCR of experience consisting of 4 attacks of dogs pack, 3 numb fingers, 2 crash while sleeping on the bike, 1 kid cheering me. Expecting to do 400km per day, with an average speed of 28km/h, riding through 14 countries, eating 12000cal/day, 8 litres of drink/day, finishing in 10 days to get in the top 10. For me though, the TCR means meeting tons of friends, rookies, volunteers, local people. A TCR will always be accompanied by stories to tell my son, four TCR helps me to know who I am, and trying to reach the highest ranks makes me stronger."

pictured below:



15kms behind Stephane is Christoph Furbach (#157). If you speak German you can [listen here](#) to some audio recordings as Christoph checked in to CP1. Christoph entered TCRNo5 and came 26th overall after he had some damage to his bike through Romania. A strong rider who deserves a top 10 position.

Matthew Falconer (#5) had maintained a top 5 position until yesterday, he's dropped into about 15th now.

On Instagram yesterday he wrote:



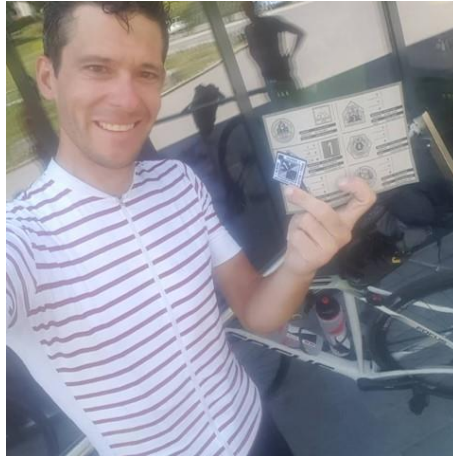
"Today was a struggle. Paid the cost for not having enough food and no power as a result. After shops opened and I had breakfast I managed a second wind but was always just on the edge. This climb made up for all that though. Tough but really beautiful place. Really tough given the heat too!
Got a bit of a plan for the rest of the race to help manage things better. Saddle sores and hot feet have been a real problem. Will have to manage them and hope they don't get out of hand."

Today's message:



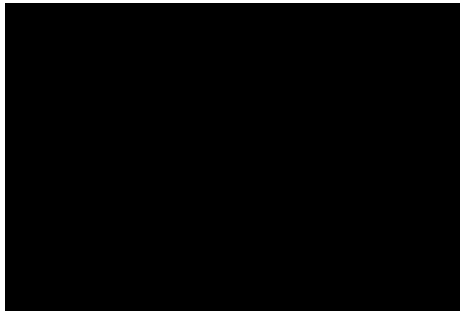
"CP2 first climb was so nice, timed it perfectly in the evening light. Really tough, but more enjoyable than the second climb that was relentless. Nice way to cap off a big day of up in some insane heat. Now to head north to Poland! Body is as expected, hurts in places but all is manageable."

Martin Temmen (#143) took the 5th spot this morning, with many riders close on his tail. Here he is just after reaching CP1:



Just reached checkpoint 1 of [@thetranscontinental](#) !
Only 3000km to go...

We're delighted to see Alexandre Bourgeonnier (#148) back in the top ten - given he came second in TCRNo3 we knew he had it in him, and have found out that he had some major mechanicals on the first day where his wheel broke 80kms in, forcing him to wait 10 hours for a bike shop to open. Here he is sounding extremely positive:



In other news:

It was Ede Harrison's (#179)'s birthday today, and friends managed to get the message to the CP2 crew just in time who sang her Happy Birthday when she arrived. Here she is with her friend James Jinks (#132).



Ede Harrison #179 and James Jinks #132

James Jinks may have had one too many jars last night as the CP2 team said "James Jinks woke up this morning not knowing who he was. When he did remember he believed Ede and himself had fallen out over some matter but couldn't remember why. Once he realised who he was and where he was, he realised everything was fine between him and Ede." Sounds like my 20s.

It was also Svenja Schrade's (#185) birthday! She's currently between CP1 and CP2.

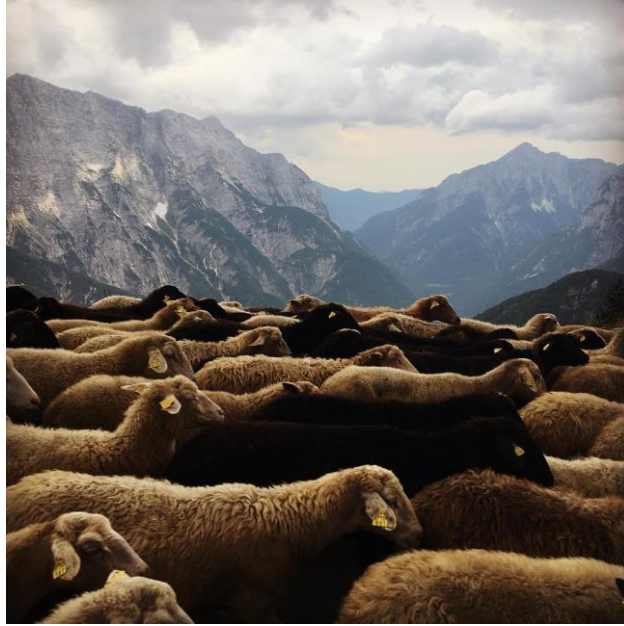


Svenja Schrade (#185)

We have reports that Paul Ferguson (#212) woke up last night to find a hedgehog making off with his jacket, which contained his passport and brevet card. The hedgehog in question was quickly apprehended and a confession was tickled out of him.



If it's not hedgehogs causing problems, it's the sheep:



It's all gone pear-sheeped for Ed Wolstenholme (#167)



[thetranscontinental#TCRNo6 CP2 traffic jam...](#) 🐑🐑🐑
📷 [@camillejcmillan](#) ⚠️ [@pedaledjapan#alphotel](#)

Or gravel paths...



It's a hard rock life for Jakob Dieckmann (#191)



Wim Ceulemans (#166) has gone mountain biking

Or steep inclines...



Keith Hicks (#10) "Having a laugh"

But gravel paths and steep inclines? That's just too much:



Jean-Yves Couet (#87)

The Achilles Heel of this race is often the, er, Achilles Heel:



Stuart Birnie (#142)



Malte Hager (#36)



Rudy Testa (#65)

But cake is the answer to all troubles:



Jean-Yvet Couet (#87) and Lars Gotzenberger (#203)



Andrea De Gruttola (#6)



Bastiaan Vlaskamp (#64)



Johanna Jahnke and Marion Dziwnk (#255a & #255b)



Alistair Ross (#117)



David Sherrington (#77)

Auf Wiedersehen for now, and riders remember, we're always watching you...





DOT WATCHER'S BLOG 6: THE RELENTLESS ROAD

August 4, 2018

In the early hours of the morning James Hayden (#1) checked in to CP3 finally taking a clear lead in this race. We read that he was a little worried about the distance between him and Bjorn Lenhard (#2) so it seems he sacrificed a night's sleep to gain the edge. Bjorn didn't move for what seemed like hours, and when he finally reached CP3 we found out why:



"Second place rider [@bjoernlenhard](#) [#TRCNo6cap2](#) has had a bad day. He was forced to walk to the CP after his tubeless tire got sliced on the parcours. The previous day was rough, traffic and a headwind was made worse when he ran out of food and water. He arrived at CP3 close to tears, yet somehow, still smiling. He's had two cakes and two sprites and he's now fixing his bike, eager to get going again. Hero!

 [@jprobertson](#)  [@kinesisbikes_uk](#) [#odrozeniehotel](#)"

At the time of writing this Bjorn is about 140kms behind James, but he has had a long break so James can't rest on his laurels yet.

The next few remain the same as yesterday but not quite in the same order - Stephane Ouaja (#12), Christoph Furbach (#146), Martin Temmen (#143), Alexandre Bourgeonnier (#148) and Thomas Lupin (#157).

Let's take a quick look at a few other riders in the top twenty.

René Bonn (#158) currently 9th, attempted TCRNo5 but got a tummy bug on the 3rd day so had to scratch. He seems to be going strong this year though even though he did ride completely past CP1 and Juliana had to holler for him to come back. He's not the first to miss a checkpoint and won't be the last...

Moroccan Mohamed El Alami (#214) is now 7th - he rode through the rain yesterday to sneak up on Sněžka from behind, approaching CP3 from the north side. The first rider to do this. It makes sense as when approached from the South riders will have to descend before they ascend, and this eliminates that. Still, his route adds to the mileage.



Mohamed El Alami

Yesterday at 2:42 PM

It's raining. Sorry I will not stop. Anyway I need a shower #tcr06cap214



Mohamed El Alami (#214)



Thomas Egger (#68)

Secondary school teacher Thomas Egger (#68) is currently sat in 17th position. A passionate cyclist who claims to especially love the mountains, which is no surprise because he lives in Switzerland and used to take part in mountain pass rides such as the Öztaler or the Alpenbrevet. He has also everested Kerenzerberg.

Alexandre Le Roux (#186) stumbled upon a curious water source earlier:



[alexleroux2](#) "Where is K?"



There you are Alex I fixed it for you

Joshua Cunningham (#98) is battling with the hills of Austria:

Joshua Cunningham @CoshJunningham · 11h
There's no shortcuts in the @transconrace. Least of all in the hills of Austria.
#tcno6



Joshua Cunningham @CoshJunningham · 11h
There's no shortcuts in the @transconrace. Least of all in the hills of Austria.
#tcno6



There you are Josh I fixed it for you

A special mention to Jürgen Knupe (#46) who, despite his delayed start sits in an incredible 18th position currently.



There you go Jürgen I fixed it for you

THE MIDDLE PACK

It's been five long, hard days on the road for these riders, and their suffering is all too real. Whether it's mechanical, physical, mental or environmental, someone out there is experiencing it. Many aren't even halfway through their race and adding to their woes is the control points packing up around of them. So this section is dedicated to those in the middle or end of the pack, who are our heroes for giving it a go, for pushing on and continuing to move their dot no matter how hard going it is. We give you full permission to have a good ol' whinge!

MECHANICAL WHINGES

I'm no bike expert but that doesn't look quite right to me:



Raymond Dulieu (103)

Anna Petters (#97) had no third plate for a while:



Anna Petters (#97)

"No more third plate... managed to stripe it to the frame and bike 20 k on it.. bike store opens at 9. It's gonna be a hard climb at CP 2 without. Dammit! Hope you are good out there, I'll catch up 😊 #veloform #tcrno6 #tcrno6cap97



Arnoldas Jaksas (#134)

Those damn punctures:

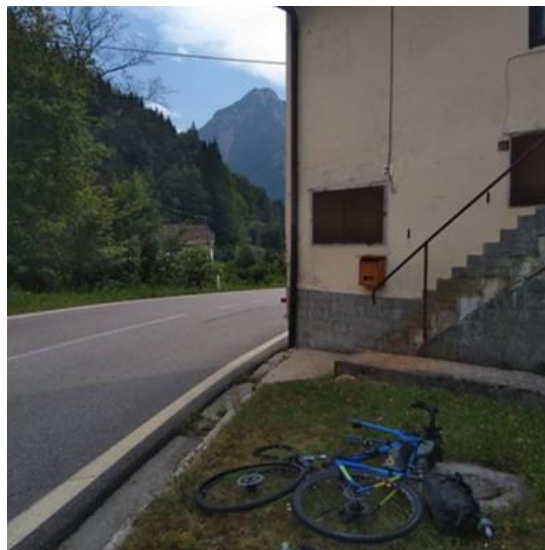
David Hawkins @dnhhawkins · 8h
Puncture had to happen at some point #TCRNo6cap40 #TCRNo6 ift.tt/2AKRwBU



David Hawkins (#40)



Jakom Dieckmann (#191) "Flat tire on the descent. One of many. More on that tomorrow."



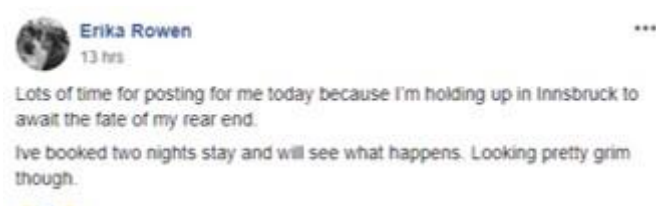
Meg Pugh (#138) "Puncture. But Slovenia and CP2 around the corner..."



Anna Petters (#97) is having a run of bad luck

PHYSICAL WHINGES

Erika Rowen's (#100) sore rear end has got us all twitching in our seats:



Svenja Schrade (#185) is struggling with neck pain, but she must ride through the night if she is to make it to CP2 before it closes.



Svenja Schrade (#185)

Ouchies:



Karolina Maciejewska (#63)

Michal Plech's swollen hands have caused him to scratch:

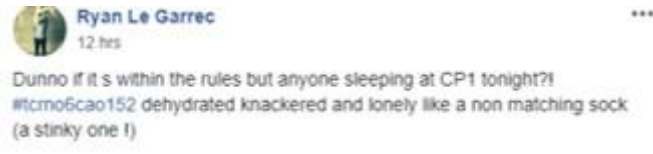


"I'd like to announce with regret that I have to scratch from [@thetranscontinental](#) [#tcerno6](#) I have been paying a heavy price for the first three days of super hot weather. Yesterday was ok but last night cycle just pushed me over the limit. My hands has swollen and simply holding to my handlebars feels like someone tries to put nails through them. Today the sun is already high up and the roads from now on will only get worst... so time to go to sleep and recover. [#tcerno6cap57](#)"

Sometimes you just need a bit of company:



Alessandro Perri (#226)



Ryan Le Garrec (#152)

It's an emotional roller coaster:



Yannick Banville (#78) "By far the most emotionally hard day of the last 5 days... I love the climbs but when it takes you like 6h to cover 25km it's just hard. 190km with 3600m of elevation gain.. #TCRno6 #TCRNo6cap78"

Other riders are simply losing their minds:



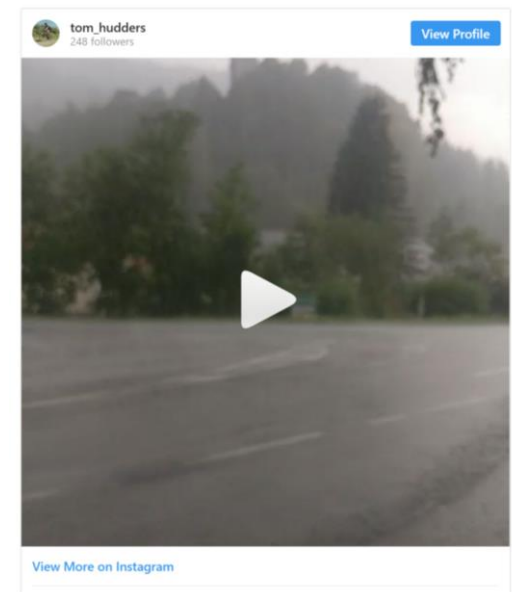
WEATHER WHINGES

When it's raining it's RAINING:



Andreas Wittkemper (#8)

But when it's hot, it is HOT:



Nicholas Finch (#174) "In Bovec, it's baking hot"



James Illman (#131)

The headwinds:



Doug Thomson (#147)



Tom Probert (#135) "Pushing up north through Austria. Looks good doesn't it? What you can't see is the savage head wind! "

TERRAIN WHINGES

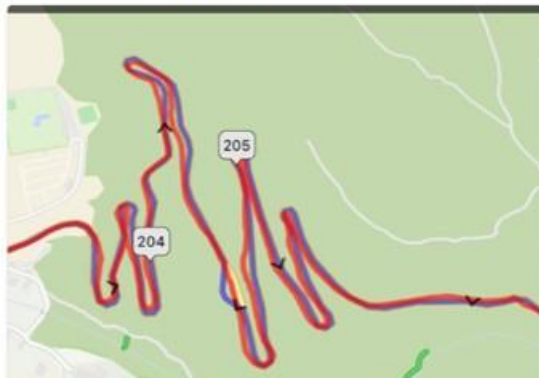
The hills, oh the hills:

Mark Charles @MrMarkCharles · 7h
The memory that I take away from Slovenia is one of suffering. #TCRNo6
#TCRNo6cap99



Mark Charles (#99)

Jason Smith @ChallengerWSM · 14h
Could have quite easily been my actual heart rate while ascending.....#tcno6
#tcno6cap106 #flatlining #heartascent



Jason Smith (#106)

The gravel:



Stuart Birnie (#142)



Caroline Item (#91)

Perhaps gravel isn't looking so bad now Caroline:



Caroline Item (#91)

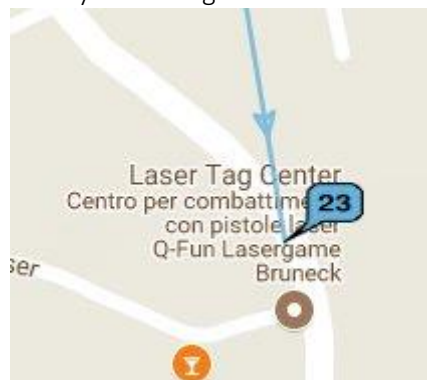
Everyone needs a release once in a while:



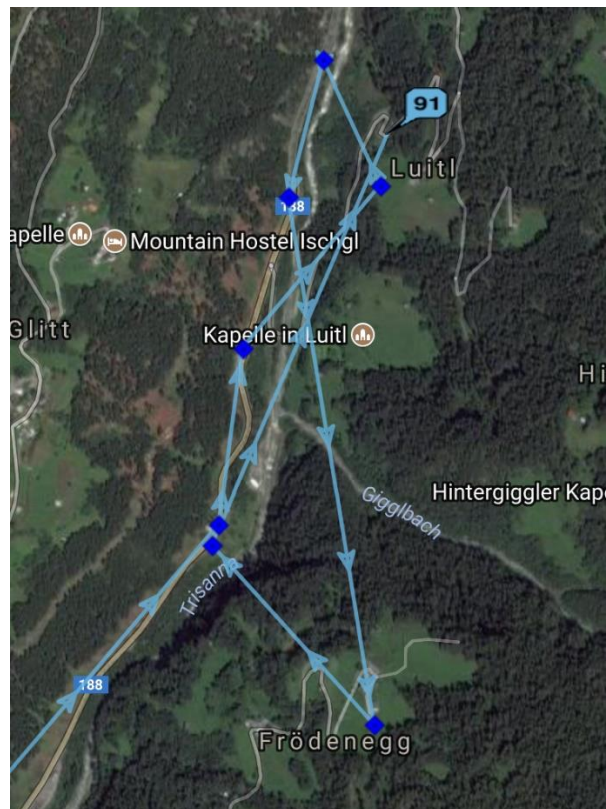
Richard Gate (#161)

IN OTHER NEWS...

Our beady eyed dot-watchers are always watching. Here's what our riders have really been up to:

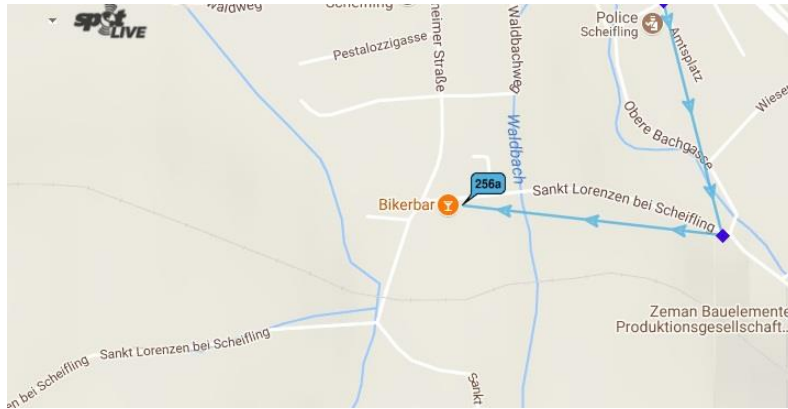


Mark Lison (#23)



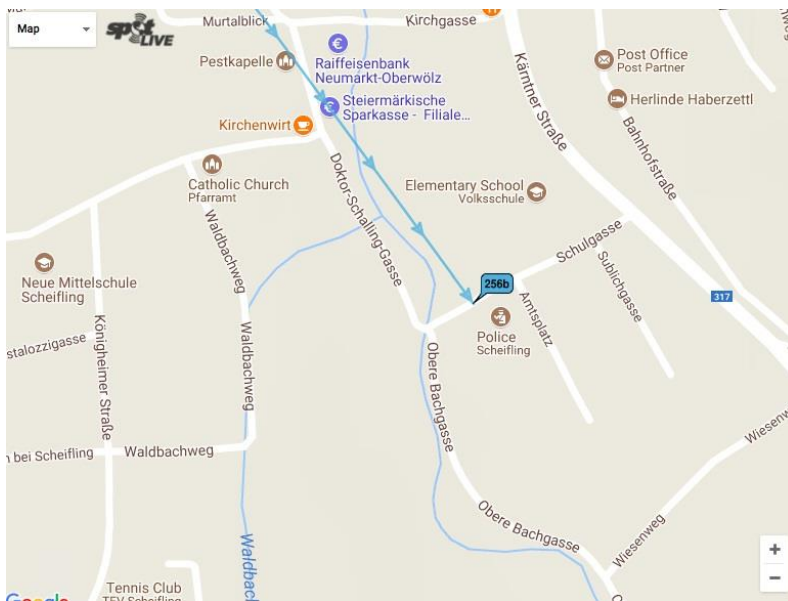
Caroline Item (#91) searching for her sanity

Charles Christiansen went to the pub:



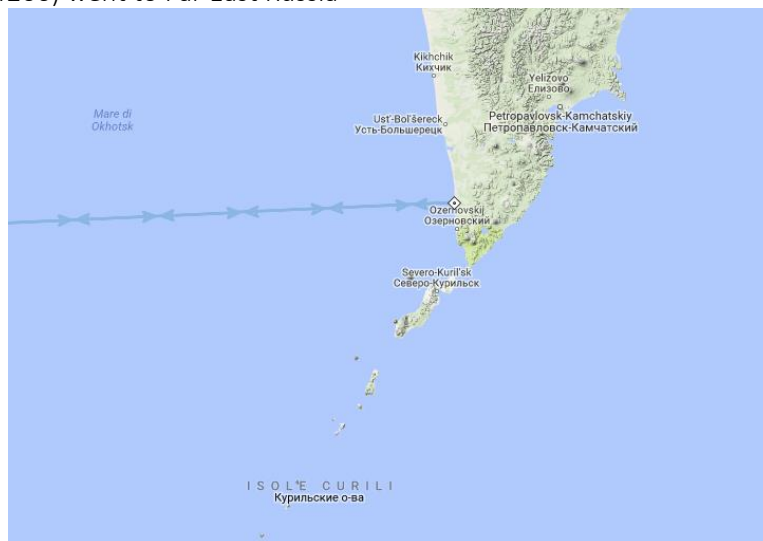
Charles Christiansen (#256a)

Whilst his partner Nico went to the police:



Nico Deportago-Cabrera (#256b)

And Frank Thies (#206) went to Far East Russia



Frank Thies (#206)

But you can find Luca Somm (#259a) and Oliver Bieri (259b) here every year:



Bye for now, next blog will be Sunday!

DOT WATCHER'S BLOG 7: SEVEN NIGHTS AND 7DAYS

August 6, 2018

Today the bulk of riders made their way to the Karkonosze, part of the Sudetes mountain range bordering Poland and the Czech Republic. Starting in Podgórzyn, Poland, the riders must take the road over Karkonoszka Pass, to Spindleruv Mlyn in Czech Republic. Boasted to be the steepest climb in Poland, it is popular with cyclists and closed to motor traffic.



[@jprobertson](#)  [@kinesisbikes_uk](#)

Hidden deep in the forest, this fearsome climb was originally intended as a service road to aid the construction of a set of switchbacks - which was then abandoned, leaving only this line of ragged tarmac whose gradient reaches 28% in places, before it tips over the top of the Karkonoszka Pass and winds its way down into the Czech Republic.

The 11.5 km ascent is straight, long and unforgiving, with rough, broken road surfaces and steep gradients. The climb switchbacks gradually through the National Natural Park, and riders will grit their teeth at the relentless 10-14% gradients going deeper into the forest, with the final 2-3 km assault at 14-20%. The reward is a stunning meadow at the top with mountain views.

It must be such a wonderful feeling to finally be able to head South after visiting CP3, knowing the finish is there if you just keep going in the same direction, and this is the case (at time of writing) for 59 riders. James Hayden (#1) has checked in to CP4, with Bjorn Lenhard (#2) 175km behind. 144 riders are on their way to CP3, 13 are yet to check in to CP2.

Two riders who have yet to reach CP1. Not much movement in the last few days from Ralf Hemmann (#38) but Neil Matthews (#171) is making progress, and last made a comment this afternoon to encourage Alian Killan (#53) to keep going:



Neil Matthews Keep going..... You are miles ahead of me..... the heat is a very big problem and carrying far too much stuff but a rookie error for me #TCRno6cap171 bringing up the rear!



"If this race wasn't hard enough after a three complete soakings yesterday and the incredible heat its a big blow when your cap gets pinched while you sleep. It feels like there is nothing to race for now, its a battle to get the cap in the first place and an even bigger one to keep it. Bringing up the rear! #TCRno6#TCRno6cap171 #NeverEverQuit#transcontinentalrace @thetranscontinental!"



"After really long talk with [Michal Serafin](#) yesterday, I decided to continue my journey 😊 Maybe I am not as fast as usual, maybe I can reach points after time... but... Pinkie Pie is still on her way 😊 Huge hugs to everyone!"

Two bits of big news over the last few days, the first is that James Craven (#253a) has had to split from partner Jonathan Rankin (#253b) due to illness, later confirmed as pneumonia. What a disappointment for the pair who were doing extremely well winning the pairs race. That puts Charles Christiansen (#256a) and Nico Deportago-Cabrera (#256b) in poll position for the pairs title, but Rachel Batt (#245a) and Jim Stewart (#245b) are only 40km behind.



The other news is that the "Transbromptental" Roger Seaton (#34) has had to scratch due to an ongoing mechanical.

"Scratched #TCRNo6 at 1203.5km on the @chpt3#TransBromptental....and what an amazing adventure I had.
I'm obviously disappointed I couldn't continue as legs, body and mind are feeling great but an issue with the Alfine hub which started on the Silvretta made the last 250km really tough and continuing unviable at the speed I was reduce to. We attempted something that hadn't been done, have tested kit to extremes, learnt a load about a lot and had fun doing it.."

Ede Harrison (#179) continues to impress us by remaining in position 33 currently. Some dot watchers rode out to Karkonosze Pass today to meets the riders, what a great boost!



Her nearest female rival is Anisa Aubin who is 200km behind in 66th.
Let's check in with some riders at the back of the pack that we've not mentioned yet.



John Cooke (#227) is currently resting between CP1 and CP2 resting in Schabs. His nickname is "Six-Inch-Nail" but we don't know why, perhaps something he found in his tyre once? Let's hope not on this ride.

German Gary Cunningham (#29) is enjoying the wide-open spaces of the mountain roads:



"Feeling a bit walled in! #TCRNo6cap29 #TCRNo6"

The legend that is Lionel Bobb (#44) is usually much more active on social media during his races (he has ridden TCRNo4 and TCRNo3) so we wondered was going on. We don't know the full story (and really want to hear it) but we can see that he's had some sort of accident, but he's still riding. It looks like his arm may have gone through that door:



"If you think you're having a bad day."



"Just when it couldn't get worse.... 5 stitches and big wound on the bicep. I'm good to go again."



He's now wearing marigolds to keep his stitches dry and has been avoiding tunnels all day. He's currently in Innsbruck enjoying a well-earned fruit sundae:
"A slow frustrating day. Working out how to get around the tunnels. Found the answer, which will help tomorrow. Held up in Brunico for the night. The staff are serving me well, at Hotel Corsa Bruneck. Never done so many U turns, in my life. Feeding the machine with a treat."



Husband and wife pair Nicole Kraus (#247a) and Max Kraus (#247b) had some major mechanicals in the first few days - something was wrong with Nicole's derailleur and two bike shops later no-one was any the wiser how to fix it. In the end they'd boded it together with a juice bottle cap and cable tie:



Another husband and wife team are Patch Doyle (#257b) and Jules Stennes (#257a) from Colorado, USA. Neither have bikepacked before, the Transcontinental Race will be their first experience of it, but they competed as a pair in the 521-mile ultra-road bike race, (HooDoo 500), and set a course record for a married couple.

In other news...

The riders are getting close to nature today. Sebastien Nolens (#54) wants to be friends with the leaves:



These new friends are a little too close for comfort:



Jiminy cricket! Mikko Makipaa (#4)



Lars Gotzenberger (#203) only noticed he had a hitchhiker when he was having his breakfast rest

They've also been sharing their motivational songs, which is a fascinating insight into their current state of mind:



Bruno Ferraro shared a link.
Yesterday at 7:01 AM



Heading to CP3, this song just came through my earplugs:



YOUTUBE.COM
Infected Mushroom - Becoming Insane
Becoming Insane de Infected Mushroom

Bruno Ferraro (#159)



René Bonn shared a link.
Yesterday at 8:14 AM



Before my first TCR attempt last year I asked everyone for music suggestions. Mike recommended this. It has since become one of my favourite tunes.
If you're struggling today, listen to it and then go for a ride that would make Mike happy.



YOUTUBE.COM
Karminsky Experience Inc. - Exploration

Rene Bonn (#158)



Torsten Frank @tfrank_de · 4h



Whohoo - time trialing through lovely Czech countryside. First time fired up the music: Daft Punk Tron OST. I'm a dot, speeding through Europe... 🤖 🚗 🏎️ 🇪🇺

#TCRNo6 #TCRNo6cap209

Torsten Frank (#209)

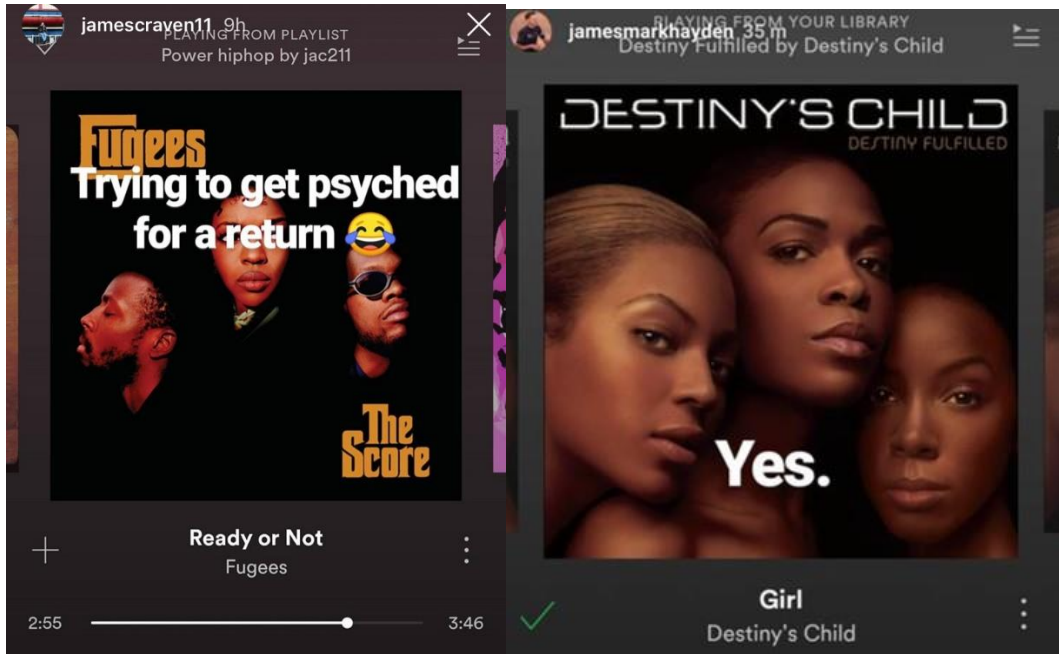
christeasdale1 14h



1:44 -2:15

A Dream of You and Me
Future Islands — Singles

Chris Teasdale (#88)



James Craven (#253a)

James Hayden (#1)

After 7 nights comes the inevitable 7days...



Martin Temmen (#143)



Torsten Frank (#209)



Alexandre Le Roux (#186)



Tom Hudders (#90)



Lee Grieve (#229)



Derek Boocock's (#113) welcome home present

The curse of the stink continues:



David Fairweather (#187)



Clement Venus (#82)

But if Richard Gate doesn't concentrate his rear end could well get a freshen up soon:



Richard Gate (#161)

And finally, a wonderful tribute from Sebastien Nolens to his wife for her birthday:



Sebastien Nolens (#54)

Do widzenia, until next time dot-watchers!

DOT WATCHER'S BLOG 8: PICTURES AND PUNCTURES

August 8, 2018

What an exciting couple of days it has been. At the time of writing, James Hayden (#1) has won TCRNo6 in 8 days, 22 hours and 56 minutes. In the end he was whole countries ahead of his next rival, speeding ahead with strength and determination. But not everything went smoothly for James, here are two of his more frustrating moments from the last few days:



James Hayden walking up the CP4 parcours " @apidura hosted CP4 may well prove the make or break for most riders this year. After a strenuous climb in the heat, the loose and shifting gravel of the parcours will threaten even the most balanced individuals." 📷 @camillejmcmillan 📍 @apidura



Earlier today...

We are yet to see who will grab one of those elusive podium spots, or indeed a top ten position, and the riders are incredibly close together. Between Björn Lenhard (#2) and René Bonn (#158) there's 80kms, but for the next eight riders there's only 20-30km in it.

On Sunday night, Björn looked set to be the next rider in to CP4 after James, but he suddenly stopped, and back tracked slowly up the way he came. The speculation is that the road was possibly an 'R' for Risky - which a number of roads through Bosnia are, and seeing as he was only 10 miles from an alternative, he took the decision to turn around. But he also slept at Borci Donji, which gave Stephane Ouaja (#12) the chance he needed to catch up.

Fresh from his sleep, Björn travelled north west towards Doboje to find a road more suitable, the same road Stephane was also on now 10 miles ahead of him in second place. At times they were neck and neck heading into CP4, but in the end Stephane was first in.

Not far behind were Thomas Dupin (#157), René Bonn (#158), Matthew Falconer (#5), and Martin Temmen (#143) who had found a route through the Sarajevo mountains, and Mohamed El Alami (#214) who was closing in from the East. By yesterday evening they had all made it to CP4 and were joined by Alexandre Le Roux (#186) with all the riders mentioned taking rest at CP4.

Björn was first to leave in the early hours, with Stephane, René and Matthew hot on his heels. This is when things started getting very hairy for Stephane.

Our hearts went out to Stephane as he had to backtrack on the R434, perhaps again it was an 'R' road, but this 8 ish mile detour cost him dearly as he was overtaken and lost positions 3,4, 5 and 6. It was then revealed that all day he'd been getting punctures, his frustrations can be felt in his status below (FB translated):

I'm suffering my 7th puncture of the day. I lost my race goal. I don't even know why I'm persistent, am alone in the world's butthole. It could piss. It's 160 degrees Thermostat 7. I just want to give up, now.

I go cry. Thank you.

During this time he was also overtaken by Jonathan Rankin (253b) (who, in case you're wondering, cannot be part of the solo race as he started as a pair), and also Josh Cunningham (#98) and Christoph Furbach (#146). Stephane is currently holed up in Pluzine feeling every emotion possible as he struggles to repair his recurrent puncture.

MID-PACK

We like to give every single rider a mention in this dot-watcher's blog if we can, but some riders are very quiet on social media, preferring to keep their heads down and concentrate on the ride. That means I have to pull out my very best stalker skills to find out something about them, (but don't worry, I am an excellent stalker.) Others like to share a running commentary of all their ups and downs, directly from brain through to fingers with no filter in between (Stuart Birnie's daily unravelling on Twitter, for instance) and we love it. So here are some mini stories, and most of it is not made up...



Lieuwe Medema (#3) is currently in position 40. He took a photo of his dinner option, and it took us a while to realise he was talking about the 7day croissant and not the motor oil. Both are similar to a food source so it's an easy mistake.

Noel McNamara (#7) emailed earlier with this message. "Rear mech caught back wheel. Smashed. Took lift to Mikulov, 15km. Intention to secure repair, retrace steps and set off tomorrow. I hope." and also this message:

"I will finish."

Go Noel!



[@kinesisbikes_uk](#) CP3. [@jprobertson](#) [@kinesisbikes_uk](#)

TCR photographer James Robertson caught a rare glimpse of the lesser spotted Danny Green (#9) stopping for breakfast on his way through Czechia.



Christopher Duffy (#11) is sat in 181th, camped in Austria at the moment with 400kms to go until he reaches CP3. Here's a smashing picture of him, we only wish we could give you more.



Simon Hayward (#14) has now scratched from the race and is now dot-watching in Ljubljana, but whilst he was racing it seemed he could magically wish for his deepest desires when a portaloo appeared out of nowhere at the felicitous moment.

I WISH FOR A DOUGHNUT I WISH FOR A DOUGHNUT Nope, not working for me.

Will Armitage (#108) has been taking photos of riders he meets along the road as part of his #facetodots collection on Instagram. They are so good in fact, that we've included a selection below. Thanks Will!



Will Armitage is a civil servant who finds escape on his bicycle. He has always ridden a bike as a means of transport clocking countless commuter miles. That led to a desire to explore further afield and push his limits whether that's cycle touring in Syria or Japan or the Pyrenees; Cat 4 racing; completing a Super Randonneur series; or riding home from London to Birmingham for Christmas in the middle of a storm to see if he can. Recently he has gotten the bug for bikepacking and gravel riding enjoying the route new kit and off-road riding offers for adventure. Off the bike he is passionate about skiing and good policymaking and stresses about Brexit. He currently has a ridiculous moustache. He has never done anything like the Transcontinental but wants to see if he can.

(Gallery)

From top left: Keith Hicks (#10), Peter Weller (#26), Daniel Szajna (#37), David Hawkins (#40), Thomas Jacquelinet (#41), Roberto Baldassi (#49), Sebastien Nolens (#54), Turgut Alper Kerpiççi (#76), Mark Hugaerts (#89), Stephane Molliet (#94), Erika Rowen (#100), Jason Smith (#106), Dermot O'Grady (#121), Wim Ceulemans (#166), Ive Weygers (#173), Aimerick Stanisiere (#181), David Fairweather (#187), Jakob Dieckmann (#191), Dario Demarco (#192), Stefan Landtau (#201), Lars Götzenberger (#203), Daniel Nicolas (#258a), Guillermo Nicolás Muñoz (258b), Loïc Nys Taymans (#17).

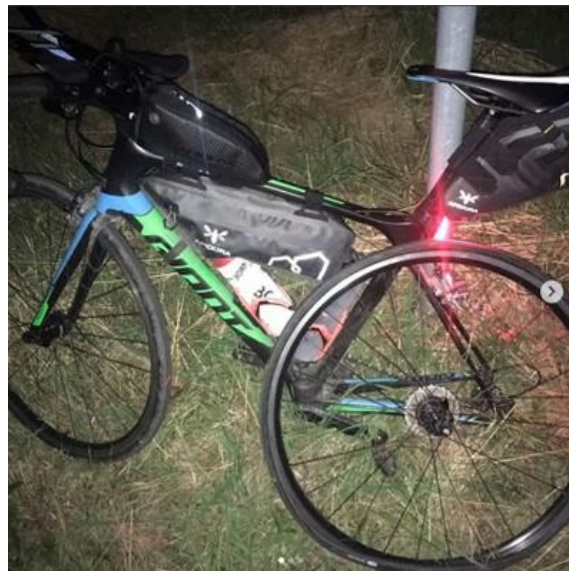
Niall Cooling (#19) had to scratch due to a knee injury. This is what he had to say: "

With a heavy heart I've scratched today due to a knee issue. Got to CP2 at lunchtime yesterday and knew the adventure was over. Spend the rest of the day and night battling the emotions and waited until this morning to make the final decision.

I'm starting now to be able to pull some positives from the adventure and overcome my feeling of failure. The rider comradery has just been astonishing. Watching people come and go at CP2 was so tough but also really special."



Sam Thomas (#20) shared his puncture 2 days ago: "Of punctures in the night, checkpoints and private lakes (very needed bath included). Ready for day 7 of [#tcrno6](#)."



Thomas Chateau (#22) was spotted in Vienna on his way to CP3.



IN OTHER NEWS...

We're delighted to see Lionel Bobb (#44) back at it, doing what he does best:



We've been seeing some rather luxurious sleep spots in the last few days...



Bruno Ferraro (#159) got the honeymoon suite



Svenja Schrade (#118) who puts blankets in bus stops? The Austrians, that's who.



Lee Grieve (#229). Not that dissimilar to my uni halls.



Francisco Afonso (#164) cosy, clean and with a maid service



Seriously Andis Aboltins (#141) I've rented flats worse than that bus stop.



I know a hedgehog that would love that bivy spot David Sherrington (#77)

Now that's more like it Peter Boynton, just a dirty floor covered in parsnips:



Peter Boynton (#208)

Which part of this screamed 'bed-time' to Lionel Bobb?



Lionel Bobb (#44)

The snack quality has taken a decidedly downward trend:



**The highly under rated
'emergency biscuit'**

Lee Grieve (#229)



Adam Krabbe (#211)

Poor Caroline Item (#91) has got the curse of the Jonah Jones (#81):



Although Jonah hasn't shaken the curse of completely:



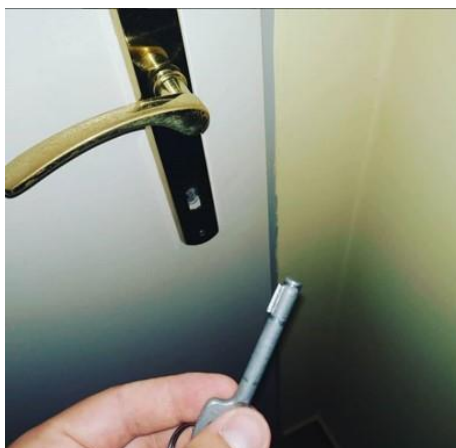


And Alan Parkinson's route looks far from ideal:



Alan Parkinson (#60)

Jean-Yves Couet's (#87) not having great luck either:

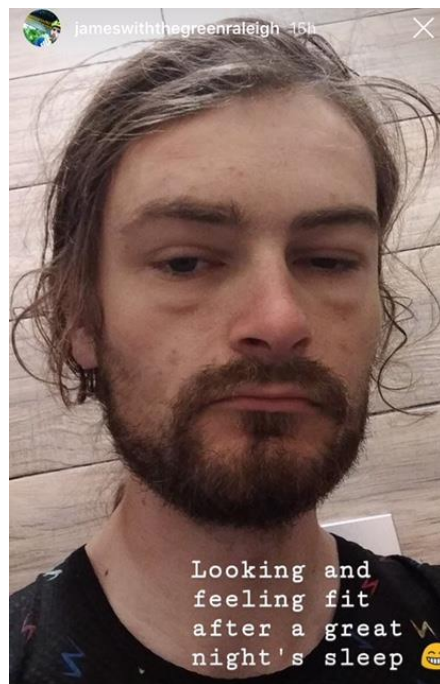


(#87) "Locked inside the room! The key broke!!! Let me out!!! I wanna bike!!!"

And we're seeing more and more faces like these:



Clement Venus (#82)



James Jinks (#132)

Remember riders, whatever you're dealing with right now, this is what's waiting for you:



James Hayden (#1) Photo by @jprobertson]

Until next time, zbogom!

DOT-WATCHER'S BLOG 9: FASHION, ART AND A FIGHT TO THE FINISH

August 10, 2018

Another few days of nail-biting dot-watching. Björn Lenhard (#2), who had sat in second for large chunks of the race, was looking set for the number 2 spot on the podium. He looked closer to the finish as the crowd flies, but the route Björn had taken was apparently rocky and windy, and around 20km longer, giving Matthew Falconer (#5) the opportunity to overtake. For a few hours there was hardly any distance at all between the two riders, but Matthew pushed hard and onwards, and despite a fall only 2kms from the end on the parcours, on which he had to repair both tyres (he apparently changed in record time, convinced Björn was about to overtake him in those crucial moments), he took second place. Björn arrived at the finish around an hour and a half later taking third and celebrated with a chocolate milk.



Björn Lenhard (#2) [Photo: James Robertson]

Alexandre Le Roux (#186) was only half an hour behind, snagging fourth place. The finish line volunteers had an opportunity to sleep for a few hours, with René Bonn (#158) rolling in around 5am this morning, and then Josh Cunningham (#98) arrived, just in time for breakfast. Martin Temmen (#143) took 7th, Mohamed El Alami (#214) 8th and Thomas Dupin (#157) 9th. Jonathan Rankin (253b) was next in, though as mentioned Jonathan can't take a position in the solo race as he started as pair (but of course thoroughly deserves a spot), so that means Christoph Fuhrbach (#146) is 10th. The race report covers the final hours of these top ten positions in detail, it can be [read here](#).

It's been hard to watch Stephane Ouaja's (#12) race unravel in front of our dot-watching eyes over the last few days. He was last in Pluzine desperately trying to patch up his punctures but with no luck. In the end he used car tyre patches which got him to a Nikšić bike shop, but they didn't have the inner tubes he needed. This was all happening whilst positions 2-10 were slipping through his fingers like sand. Finally, FINALLY, this morning he got the parts he needs and was back on the road.



Stephane was then in a mini race for position 11th, along with Paul Ferguson (#212), Alexandre Bourgeonnier (#148), and Ben Davies (#195). The four riders had been overtaking each other all afternoon and it looked like it might need a photo finish. Whilst we were writing this the race continued all the way to Meteora, with Paul taking 11th, Stephane 12th, Alexandre 13th and Ben 14th.

Paul's Instagram story today talks of "duking it out" with another rider who is strong at climbing (we think he means Stephane) for the last few days, and also of his gears going flat right on top of a mountain climb, at the same time he needed an emergency toilet dash. When he returned to the bike the gears had thankfully recharged and he was able to resume racing.



Meanwhile in Bosnia and Herzegovina, riders were coming in to CP4 thick and fast. The gravel parcour climb to Bjelašnica has got all the riders swearing, throwing tantrum, falling off, punctures every few metres; Juliana Buring's name is mud apparently. It is possibly the most magnificent of Bosnia's network of gravel roads, taking the riders, via a series of steep and dusty hairpins, to an exposed summit with views of Sarajevo and the Dinaric Alps.



(#105) Raymond Dulieu.

"Bjelasnica and CP4. Pretty incredible place, sadly didn't take too many photos in between falling off my bike or pushing my bike up the gravel track (@pishpoche @nick_busst it was Japan all over again) My highlight was an Italian who's cap I've forgotten, falling off, then throwing rocks off the mountain whilst screaming to the gods in Italian. One of those days. Quads still knackered, I've just been belligerent, I'm not sure how much longer that tactic will work, hopefully 600 miles more, I don't think poor Katy can take the daily calls of anguish much longer."

Ede Harrison is now in 44th position, with 660kms to Meteora. She lost some positions due to a routing error out of CP4:



Anisa Aubin (#21) is in position 61st about to approach CP4. She seems incredibly chilled out and everyone who meets her on the way remarks on her happy demeanour. We met Anisa on the This is Not a Tour Audax and she was a bundle of positive energy. Here she is at CP3:



Anisa Aubin (#21)

Karolina Maciejewska (#63) is not far behind Anisa in 69th, Isobel Jobling (#224) and Meg Pugh (#224) are 131st and 132nd respectively - approx. 480km from CP4, Anna Petters (#97) is 144th, Sheila Woollam (#127) is 157th, Alina Kilian (#53) and Caroline Item (#91) are 164th and 165th respectively, and Beate Weiland (#196) is 175th, with 180kms to go until CP3.



Alina Kilian (#53) and Caroline Item (#91)

RIDERS ROUND-UP

58-year-old Hermann Dopfer (#28) is now in Bosnia and Herzegovina, around 65kms from CP4. We know in the past he has attempted Race Around Austria, coming 5th in 2010 and Race Across Germany.



Hermann Dopfer (#28)

3 days ago, Bristol-based Daniel Nash was the first in the morning to reach CP3. Apparently, he "reckoned it wasn't so bad"! That's the stuff Daniel!



Daniel Nash (#30) [Photo: Angela Walker]

Rafael Martinez Gonzalez (#33) has just finished CP3 and now resting in Odrodzone Hotel in Karkonoska. We know that last Wednesday he got stuck in the thunderstorms across the Alps with James Illman (#131) and Aydin Bez (#101).



Rafael Martinez Gonzalez (#33) [Photo by [lieblingstourer](#)]

Marcel Amore (#35) has also just completed CP3, he has opted to ride North further into Poland and sleep in the town of Jelina Gora for the night. What we know about Marcel is that he also took part in Northcape4000 at the end of July, so may have made his way over to Geraardsbergen from the finish in Spain.

His profile says he's sponsored by Alka Seltzer; Jack Daniels and Romeo y Julieta Cigars. Here's a picture of his bike set up:



Malte Hager (#36) is an "endurance explorer". In his own words:

"My primary motivation is not really the sport itself; cycling is 'just' the mode of transport with the highest factor of efficiency x autarky x self-efficacy. I'm strongly motivated by the "exploration of the world and myself, on the largest and smallest scale", as corny as it may sound. "What's behind the next turn?", "By how much would I need to multiply today's distance to get the circumference of our planet?" "For how long have those crickets been mating", "Pizza" ... such thoughts buzz through my mind on the typical touring ride."



Malte Hager (#36) "Feel like newborn. Here in front of ,my'laundrette in Brno where I arrived in the morning, washed all my clothes and had a nap. Ready to push southward."

Rob McRitchie (#39) is at CP4 resting at the base of the Parcour. He's a London bike commuter and ex-triathlete. He fell into adventure racing, then moved on to triathlon and started road biking with a vengeance as he moved up to Ironman distance triathlon, and was doing pretty well until he broke his knee. He has completed TCRno3 and says:

"I am back for more this year, (despite being psychologically scared by encounters with Turkish dogs at midnight in a forest, and physically scared with nerve issues in the hands). I aim to make it for the finishers party. I am 50 and trying to grow old disgracefully."

Here he is in his pirate jersey which he is wearing on this race too.



Marin de Saint-Exupéry (#42) is riding a beautiful bike for TCRNo6. We'd like to see what it looks like with all the luggage too.



Marin de Saint-Exupéry (#42)

Douglas Migden (#47) is in Hungary, possibly about to bed down for the night in Szekszárd. Here he is having breakfast with Matthieu Lifschitz (#109) and Alan Parkinson (#60) 2 days ago:



Michael Kronberger (#48) might have seen the train station but he didn't take it:

"CP3 9d23h30min After being at the train station yesterday already this one's definitely the most emotional one so far. Don't know what's happening next but dot watching isn't over yet. Thanks heaps for pushing it that far."



Michael Kronberger (#48)



Michael Kronberger (#48)

South African Calvin O'Keeffe (#51) is a manager at John's Bikes in Bath. In 2011 he cycled from London to South Africa, across the deserts of Egypt and Sudan. We found a tweet where **Mark Beamont** thanking him for a speedy repair whilst Mark was doing his Round Britain in 80 days record breaking adventure.



IN OTHER NEWS...

These riders are taking 'you are what you eat' literally:



(#77)



(#117)



(#40)

A new TCR fashion is catching on:



Björn Lenhard (#2) "Woof wot dat smell?" 📷 @jprobertson



Ryan Le Garrec (#152)

Meanwhile bikepacking has never been so luxurious, or romantic:



Thomas Egger (#68)

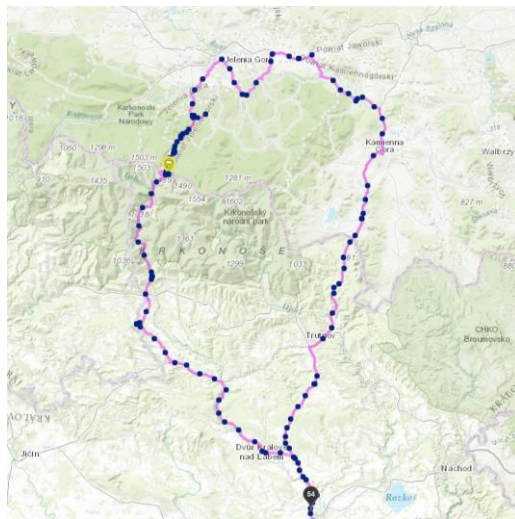
The things people stumble on out there riding are always surprising. Cesare Pedrini (#136) found this curious place, looks a bit "From Dusk to Dawn":



Jonah Jones is writing poetry, and it is fantastic:

Post-apocalyptic
Hellish hot headwinds
No breaks!
A three-legged ant gimping slowly across a vast hotplate towards an angry standing fan.
Past shrivelled husks of corn and sunflowers.
Dead.
Hanging their heads, long given up.
Shrivelled grape vines meant for zesty dancing.
Austrian whites dried to a ripasso by sun and wind.

Whilst others are making art out of their dots:



Sebastien Nolens (#54) "TODAY - I drew a giant clumsy potato heart for the 4 women of my family: my mom @nolensnelis, my wife @bagnesnita, my sister @emily.nolens and my daughter Camille. They helped me doing this TCR and, most importantly, they didn't doubt. So they deserve a place on the map!"

Mark Townsend (#189) is it, a star? Or the disjunctive perturbation of the spatial relationships within the realm of discourse and essential transitional quality of ultra-endurance racing? Or... a star?

Lamtumirë, until next time dot-watchers!

DOT-WATCHER'S BLOG 10: THE RIDERS ROUND-UP

August 13, 2018

258 riders, 80 scratches, 4 checkpoints, two weeks of intense dot-watching and one hedgehog later, the race is nearly at an end. The finishers party is on Tuesday evening which gives riders another 48 hours to try to reach Meteora, and with 60 riders already in, and 80 who have completed CP4, this is looking to be the biggest finishers party ever.

Their goal is Meteora in Greece. Meteora translates literally as 'suspended in the sky' or for the faithful, 'in the heavens above'. It is a spectacular and precarious site of six monastery complexes which survive from more than 20 built atop naturally formed stone pillars by Eastern Orthodox monks some time during the 14th century.

The formation of the monolithic pillars located next to the Pindos mountains in western Greek region of Thessaly at Meteora is a geologically rarity. Today the six remaining complexes are a UNESCO protected World Heritage site. For racers, who will begin the finishing Parcours at Vlachava in the North, they will be obscured by the ridge line until the final moments of their journey. The reveal should not fail to uplift even the weariest of souls as it marks the end of their Transcontinental voyage. To experience the calm yet magnificent theatre of Meteora it is easy to appreciate how it invokes the spiritual and will provide racers with an ideal setting in which to relax and recover once their task is complete.

A quick note of all the riders who have now finished, after the last rider we mentioned in Blog 9 (Ben Davies (#195):

Thomas Egger (#68)

Chris Thomas (#18)

Marin de Saint-Exupéry (#42)

Ed Wolstenholme (#167)

Ben Snodin (#114)

Paul Hoffmann (#210)

Raymond Dulieu (#103)

Bryce Bénat (#104)

Jani Simula (#176)

James Kirk (#162)

Karl Fournier (#67)

Michael Wacker (#72)

Stuart Birnie (#142)

Joan Carrillo (#145)

Dennis Froese (#150)

Greg Hilson (#62)

Bruno Ferraro (#159)

Adam Krabbe (#211)

2Sam Thomas (#20)

Richard Gate (#161)

Yoann Saludes (#61)

Patrick Miette (#32)

Lorenzo Gamberini (#130)

Gerhard Kossytorz (#144)

Andrea De Gruttola (#6)

Lee Grieve (#229)

Nick Spencer-Vellacott (#92)

Danny Green (#9)

Edgar Haldimann (#59)

Ede Harrison (#179) - a huge congratulations to the first woman in!

James Craven (253a)

Adam Green (#105)

Tom Probert (#135)

Constantin Schütt (#84)

Christopher Murkin (#129)

David Sherrington (#77)

Charles Christiansen (#256a)

Rob McRitchie (#39)

Daniel Nash (#30)

Loïc Nys Taymans (#17)

For those of us not lucky enough to be in Meteora we may feel a little melancholy that the race is nearly over, after all, what will we do with ourselves when the dots finally reach their destinations and no longer require our attention? We plan on putting a tracker on the cat so we can watch his dot all day instead, but that's just us.

In this penultimate blog we'll attempt a paragraph or two about each rider who has not yet had a mention.

Håkan Höglin (#56) is about 480kms away from Meteora, but in a shocking incident, his packet of Mentos has broken in half. As long as he stays well away from any loose cola he should be okay.

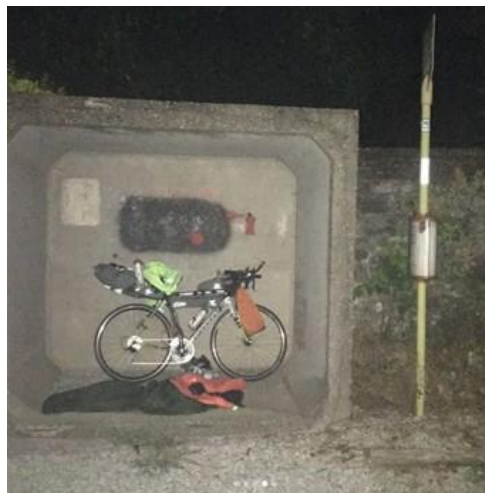


Håkan Höglin (#56)

Daniel Gregory (#58) has been riding into headwinds with Will Armitage (#108) and complained of strong headwinds between Slovenia and Poland, in Austria and in the Czech Republic. But they haven't held him back, he's now only 530km away from Meteora.



Photo by Will Armitage



A giant Lego brick makes an excellent sleep spot for Daniel Gregory (#58)

Andreas Hauser (#85) was an Austrian skier in his youth, but a horrible crash on a downhill training turned him to Ironmans, and then long-distance cycling where he raced 'Race Around Austria', a non-stop cycle race along the border of Austria. At the time of publishing he's the latest rider to cross the finish line in Meteora.



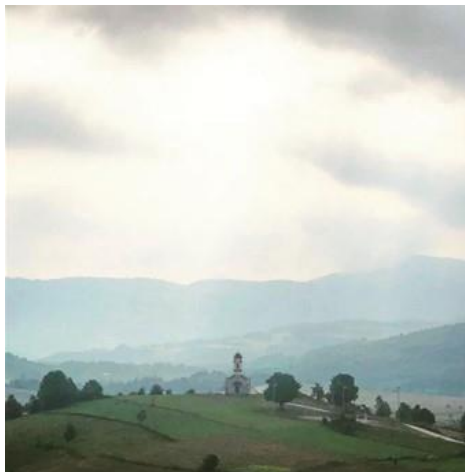
Andreas Hauser (#85)

Robert Thomson (#86) found a love of cars in his youth brought him towards bikes. He found himself searching for something that combined adventure and a challenge that would 'cleanse the soul' so he

partook in the Valleycat races and found out all about TCRno3. three years later and here he is, currently enjoying Bosnia on his way to CP3 Karkonosze Pass.



Robert Thomson (#86)

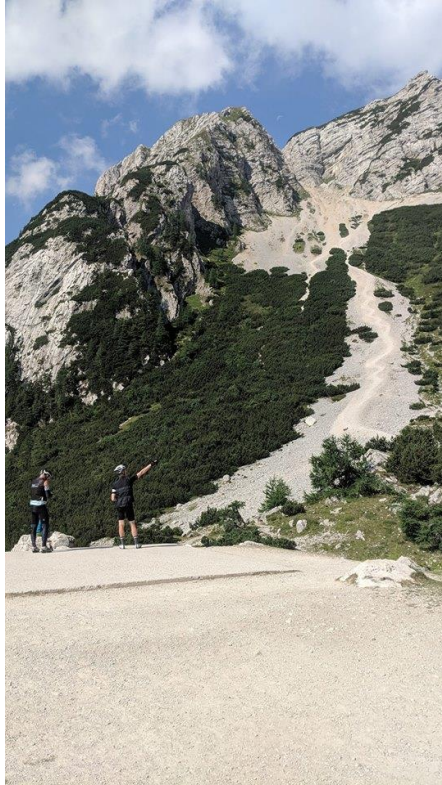


Robert Thomson (#86) "Happy Sunday from Banja Luka #Bosnia #banjaluka #fromwhereiride"

Craig Edwards (#96) is a complete enigma - the only rider still in the race that I can't find a single bean of information on. So instead I'll make it up - Craig's hobbies include licking frogs, extreme ironing (in which he competes internationally) and he owns seven ferrets, all called Eric.

Maurice Smith (#102) is resting in Sarajevo ready to take on CP3 tomorrow. Here he at Lake Constance, and another that he took looking at his next path onwards and upwards...





Spanish Industrial Engineer Antonio Baños (#111) is in Albania 270km away from Meteora.



Antonio Baños (#111)

Nico Coetzee (#123) completed CP4 4 hours ago and is resting at the base before completing the Parcours tomorrow. His last post said, "last 30 felt like the first 3000km. Almost there." He also rode past what we assume is one of the world's biggest magnets, either that or some alien megastructure forming? One cyclist doesn't look to have been so lucky.



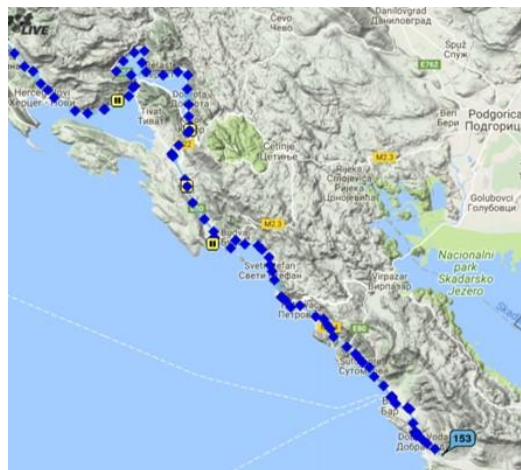
Fabian Rabe (#151) is only 275km from Meteora, in Albania, sitting in 80th position at the moment. Here's what he said after completing CP2:

"The wonders a couple hours of sleep can do :) Mood has significantly improved, headache is mostly gone, weather has cooled off after some thunderstorms.

Climbed the Hochalpenstraße in pelting rain & darkness, but once over the top things started to dry. Definitely happy with my new jacket, which kept me toasty on the descent. Riding down the inn valley was a relaxed cruise, let's hope the bike paths after the Brenner pass are of the same quality."



Thomas Weber (#153) from Heidelberg, Germany met Torsten Frank (#209) at a gas station both searching for a caffeine kick on Thursday. Thomas has taken an unusual path South via the coastal road. It adds mileage to be sure, but the scenery has got to be incredible.



Thomas Weber (#153)

John Lee (#155) is from Bristol, UK and got into long-distance cycling late, and slowly. First venturing out of Bristol to visit friends on a sit-up-and-beg, he later found himself on a Brevet Populaire ('The Tasty Cheddar'). This led, by way of 'The Bryan Chapman Memorial' (BCM), to 'Paris-Brest-Paris' (PBP), and then on to the '1001 Miglia Italia' and the '999 Miglia di Roma e del Sud'. TCR No.6 marks a return to three-letter initials, and a big step up. If the TCR had Audax points, they would go to Audax Club Bristol. When it's over, he'll return to lecturing in English at the University.



John Lee (#155)

Joseph Dorsett (#165) is approx. 300km from Meteora, in position 88. Here he is two days before the start with everything prepped and packed:



"T minus 2 days - everything prepped and packed... I hope... and enroute to Belgium. Looking forward to getting this one started - catch you on the muur [@thetranscontinental#tcrno6 #tcrno6cap165](#)"

Russian Dimitry Kumundzhiev (#175) has just entered Bosnia and Herzegovina, 204km from CP4. He warns future riding companions, when he says he knows a short cut, perhaps think twice in following him:



Dimitry Kumundzhiev (#175) "Если я вам скажу что знаю короткий путь, подумайте!"

James Robertson captured Jani Simula (#176) speeding off for an ice-cream:



 @jprobertson

Stuart White (#194) is only 94kms from Meteora and if he keeps his pace will be 64th or 65th, as Hegedus Adrian (#80) is racing him head-to-head. Behold, Stuart's red mist:



Stuart White (#194)

Frederic Laforge (#204) is on his way in to CP4, in place 141. He's from Limoges, France and is being supported by a huge fan base of French dot-watchers along with other French riders who are still racing:

Aimerick Stanisiere (#181) - in position 123rd 530kms away from finishing,
Charles Billau (#149) - 127th and 600km away from the finish,
Eric Cupo (#217) - 94th and 300km away from finishing,
Jean-Yves Coffre (#188) 132nd and 700km away from Meteora,
Jean-Yves Couet (#87) - 96th and 350km away from the finish,
Matthieu Lifschitz (#109), - 128th and 600km away from the finish,
Mehdi Otmann (#169) - 95th and 350km from the finish,
Michel Vandermeersch (#184) - 485km from CP3 Bielašnica and,
Thomas Chateau (#22) - 125th and 550km from Meteora.

A quick tale about Jean-Yves Couet and Jean-Yves Coffre, the volunteers at CP2 thought they were seeing double for a moment when both riders arrived at CP2 at exactly the same time, both handing over their brevet cards and saying their first names together, like conjoined twins. We hope this was met with synchronised stamping from the volunteers.

René Hinum (#207) was another rider who bumped into Will Armitage on the road:



René Hinum (#207) [photo by Will Armitage (#108)]

Paul Hoffmann (#210) completed TCRno6 on Saturday morning, in position 22nd. James Robertson managed to catch this picture of him climbing the hairpins of Meteora:



Paul Hoffmann (#210) "3890 unsupported kms in 12 days and 9 something hours. I'm tired... Thanks for the photo" [@jprobertson](#)

Raphael Michelangelo Grau (#213) is about 550km away from Meteora. Here he is just before Checkpoint 2 in Slovenia. "Currently in Hungary 🚲... Body Starts to give up.. Heatwave 40°C.. Bad roads"



Raphael Michelangelo Grau (#213)

British rider John Sherlock (#216) finished the race on Friday night in a very respectable 16th. Here he is at Hotel Han, Bjelašnica.



John Sherlock (#216) 📷 @camillejmcmillan 📍 @apidura

This is Eric Cupo's (#217) second Transcontinental, having finished TCRNo4 as a pair with Christopher Hung Han Yun, they came in 12th position in the pairs race, 143 overall with a time of 17d // 06h // 32m. Currently in 94th so doing much better this year.



Eric Cupo (#217)

Heath Ryan (#230) is only 160km away from the finish now, in position 69. Here he is splashing out on a decent dinner before hitting the lower slopes of Bjelašnica CP4.



[Photo credit [thealdersons](#)]

PAIRS RACE

The pairs category had an exciting start with James Craven (#253a) and Jonathan Rankin (#253b) taking a strong lead, alas it was not to be with James Craven falling ill and the pair having to split up. This opened the floor for Charles Christiansen (#256a) and Nico Deportago-Cabrera (#256b) who have been entertaining us daily on Instagram befriending stray cats, demonstrating their washing techniques and showcasing their squashed snacks. Their position was not always secure though as Luca Somm (#259a) and Oliver Bieri (#259b) were never far behind. When this pair weren't posing naked on tanks they were working hard to crunch those miles. Only 40kms to the end now! Next is Anton Lindberg (#251a) and Amy Lippe (#251b) who are only 200km from the finish now and look to be riding through the night. 50kms up the road is Rachel Batt (#245a) and Jim Stewart (#245b) who are just a few kms away from friends and fixie fans Marion Dziwnik (#255b) and Johanna Jahnke (#255a). These two formerly competed against each other in opposing teams, and TRCNo6 is their first experience racing as a pair. Johanna has added an additional challenge to her race as she is a vegan.



Anton Lindberg (#251a) and Amy Lippe (#251b) [photo Duncan Birtwhistle]



Marion Dziwnik (#255b) throttling Johanna Jahnke (#255a)

Andrea-Luca Zarotti (#250a) and Benjamin Kraehenmann (#250b) are 330km from Meteora, here they are making a Michal Switalski (#223) sandwich just before the start:



[photo by [mi.shiu](#)]



Guendalina Dal Pozzo (252a)

Guendalina Dal Pozzo (252a) and Aimone Dal Pozzo (#252b) are also only 330km from Meteora - the pairs race is really going to be close! Here's Guendalina showing her anti-theft device when taking a nap - just stick your arm through your wheel, that's bound to wake you up! Next along will be Samuel Weidtmann (#254a) and Karim Wiesmann (#254b), here they are yesterday enjoying a break.



Samuel Weidtmann (#254a) and Karim Wiesmann (#254b)



Guillermo Nicolás Muñoz (#258b) and Daniel Nicolas (#258a)

Spanish brothers Guillermo Nicolás Muñoz (#258b) and Daniel Nicolas (#258a) previously entered TCRNo4 coming 15th, TCRNo5 coming 8th and now TCRNo6 where if they continue as they are they'll achieve 9th. I just love seeing these brothers work together to achieve something magnificent, I expect their family is really proud of them. The last thing my brother and I achieved together was this snowman in 2013. Mum was proud, she said "why can't you two do anything normally".



German couple Thomas Scherer (#246a) and Petra Scherer (#246b) are 91kms from CP4. We found this picture of them from 2017. Even though it looks like they are miles apart we think there's an issue with Thomas's tracker.

IN OTHER NEWS...

No other news today as we'll be back Tuesday evening with the Dot-watcher awards, our finale blog. αντιο σας!

DOT-WATCHER'S BLOG 11: THE DOT WATCHER'S PARTY

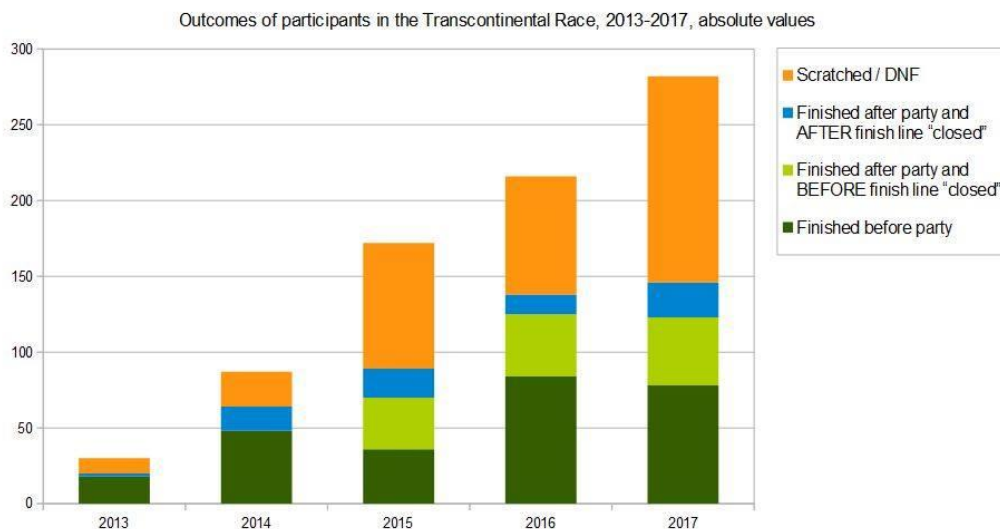
August 15, 2018

The finishers party is now in full swing at Meteora with over 100 riders, many with their families, now enjoying a thoroughly well-earned beer sharing tales of their journeys and encounters. There can surely be no better feeling than celebrating the completion of an ultra-endurance race, and with everyone together the atmosphere is sure to be electric.

If you missed the finishers party live broadcast you can [view that here](#), and we recommend you watch it before reading this as here are some spoilers!

Jonathan Rankin (#252b) and James Craven (#252a) were given the "Spirit of the Race" Award and deservedly so, for putting on such a fantastic performance and for James's efforts despite developing a chest infection along the way. We also think that Stephane Ouaja (#14) deserved the award as this race was surely one of the best performances of his life, and for dealing with a huge set back at such a critical time of the race, yet still managing to pull it together and make it to the finish.

The completion rate for this year's race is phenomenally good, Chris White has been producing fantastic stats which show the scratch and finish rates over the years slowly improving. Last year 90 riders made it in in 16 days, and 134 scratched (though last year's circumstances would see a lot more riders scratch), with this year currently reaching 102 finishers and scratches currently at 82. (Note these numbers aren't official, they're just a quick add up).



Here are the riders who made it in since last time writing:

Rodrigue Lombard (#110)

Andreas Hauser (#85)

Mark Charles (#99)

Anisa Aubin (#21)

Luca Somm (#259a)

Oliver Bieri (#259b)

Stuart White (#194)

Hegedus Adrian (#80)

Douglas Thomson (#147)

Joseph Dorsett (#165)

Heath Ryan (#230)

Paul Alderson (#219)
Malte Hager (#36)
Karolina Maciejewska (#63)
Thomas Jacquelinet (#41)
Anton Lindberg (#251a)
Amy Lippe (#251b)
Lieuwe Medema (#3)
Jakub Dvořák (#218)
Hermann Dopfer (#28)
Johanna Jahnke (#255a)
Marion Dziwnik (#255b)
Janus Jensen (#74)
Mark Hugaerts (#89)
Antonio Baños (#111)
Jim Stewart (#245b)
Rachel Batt (#254a)
Mikko Mäkipää (#4)
Fabian Rabe (#151)
Andis Aboltins (#141)
Tom Hudders (#90)
Craig Edwards (#96)
Eric Cupo (#217)
Mehdi Otmann (#169)
Aimone Dal Pozzo (#252b)
Guendalina Dal Pozzo (#252a)
Jean-Yves Couet (#87)
James Jinks (#132)
Benjamin Kraehenmann (#250b)
Andrea-Luca Zarotti (#250a)
René Hinum (#207)
Sebastien Nolens (#54)
Karim Wiesmann (#254a)
Samuel Weidtmann (#54b)
Douglas Migden (#47)
Daniel Gregory (#58)
David Fairweather (#187)
Torsten Frank (#209)
Cesare Pedrini (#136)
Noel McNamara (#7)
Dario Demarco (#192)
Bastiaan Vlaskamp (#64)
John Lee (#155)
Daniel Nicolas (#258a)

The Lanterne Rouge is awarded to the last rider in, and I think that's counted as 1am, which in GMT is 11pm, so by the time we've published this blog we should know who it is. Our guess is Meg Pugh (#114) because Will Armitage (#108) can't ride 54km in 1 hour surely. This is if our calculations are correct.

There are still 51 riders out on the road, including two riders who are yet to get to CP3 Neil Matthews (#151) and John Cooke (#227), and ten who are on their way to CP4, so the dot-watching doesn't end yet, and we know that Neil Matthews has vowed that he WILL finish!

We wish we could give every single rider some sort of prize - not a trophy mind we're not made of money, just a mars bar, or a solid pat on the back perhaps - but only a few can get a special mention at the finishers race. That's why we like to round up the dot-watchers blog with our own awards ceremony, celebrating those moments that truly make this race unique. So here's to the riders that make this race something worth celebrating, because without them for the past two weeks we'd all be swallow-faced and bored enough to watch Love Island. Thanks for entertaining us, you make the world a better place.

MOST LUXURIOUS SLEEP SPOT AWARD

This is not a category we thought we'd be awarding, but riders have really pushed the boat out this year and found themselves some seriously luxurious accommodation. We've not included any hotel rooms as that's just cheating, only outdoor spots:

This may be full of bed bugs, but it looks extremely comfortable and so much better than a hard bench. Third prize to Jurgen Knupe (#46)



Jurgen Knupe (#46)

Derek Boocock (#113) picks up second prize for finding this sheltered, clean bus stop in Austria that has padded cushions and blankets.



Derek Boocock (#113)

First prize has to go to Andis Aboltins (#141) who not only gets a clean, sheltered bed, but a hat stand too. Essential when bivvying.

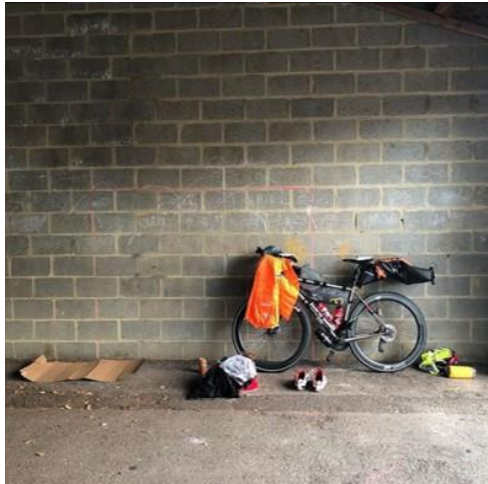


Andis Aboltins (#141)

MOST UNAPPEALING SLEEP SPOT AWARD

This was a particularly difficult category to narrow down, so many spots that made us appreciate our beds and wonder what on earth made them decide that was the spot to bed down for the night. We narrowed it down to these three:

Torsten Frank (#209) stole a tramp's bed for the night. Third prize:



Torsten Frank (#209)

Second prize goes to Arnoldas Jakstas (#134) because despite it looking relatively soft, even sheltered, it also looks creepy as hell:



Arnoldas Jakstas (#134)

Peter Boynton (#208) is definitely no princess, who could sleep on top of all those weird lumpy things and get a good night's sleep? First prize.



Peter Boynton (#208)

MOST INVENTIVE SLEEP SPOT AWARD

Andis Aboltins (#141) wins third. There are a number of hazards associated with this spot, i.e. getting wet, rolling out in the middle of the night, being swept down the stream, mosquitoes, plus the rocks looks really uncomfortable. That said, it's probably quite a relaxing and cool spot too, so he gets points for inventiveness.



Andis Aboltins (#141)

We've said it before and we'll say it again - what part of this screamed 'bed-time' to Lionel Bobb? But the tarp is clean and dry and sort of flat. Second Prize.



First prize must go to Jonah Jones (#81) because never once in our life have we thought about sleeping on compost, but perhaps we will now. Most inventive sleep spot winner.



BEST ICE-CREAM AWARD

There were a lot of ice-cream pictures shared, and they all sent us into food envy. But these stood out in particular.

Third prize to Mark Lison (#23) for finding an ice-cream many of us haven't seen before but would very much like to see again.



Mark Lison (#23)

Second prize goes to Doug Thomson (#147) for this little refreshing beauty:



Doug Thomson (#147)

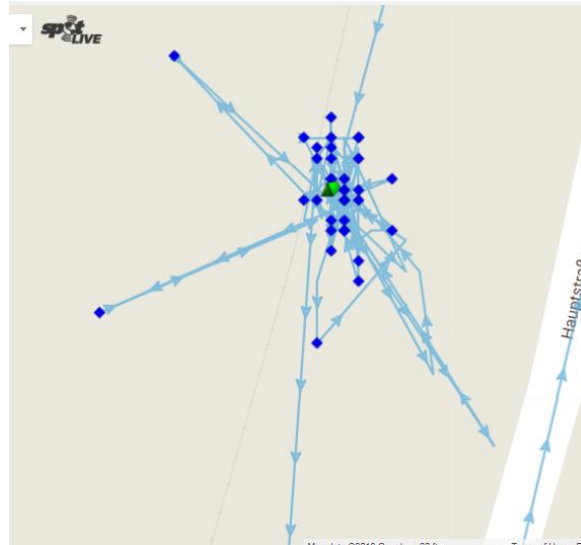
First prize goes to Lars Gotzenberger (#203) for an ice-cream that had a number of us Googling "WHAT IS THIS", because it looks marvellous!



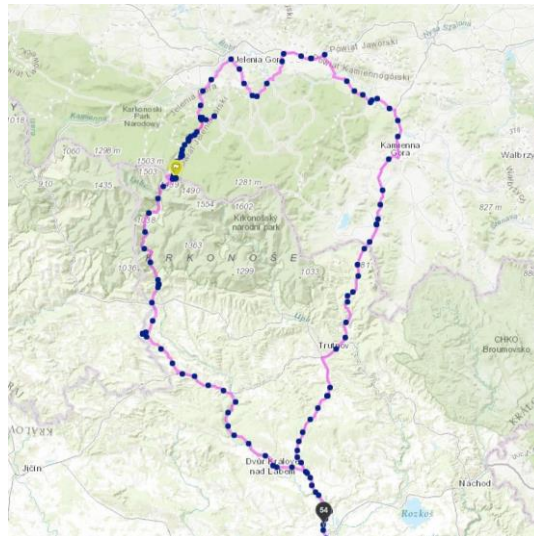
Lars Gotzenberger (#203)

ART-APPRECIATION AWARD

Mark Townsend (#189) gets third prize for this, because even though it's a masterpiece of modern art, we don't think it was intentional and is simply the result of what a tracker pinging looks like when you don't switch it off at night.



Sebastien Nolens (#54) gets a solid second prize for this potato heart that he drew for all the women who have encouraged him in the race:



Sebastien Nolens (#54)

We missed Bruno Ferraro (#159)'s kitten in our previous blog, but once we saw it, we couldn't see it. Look at the ears. Look at the tail. Look at the claws! This is a thing of beauty. First prize.



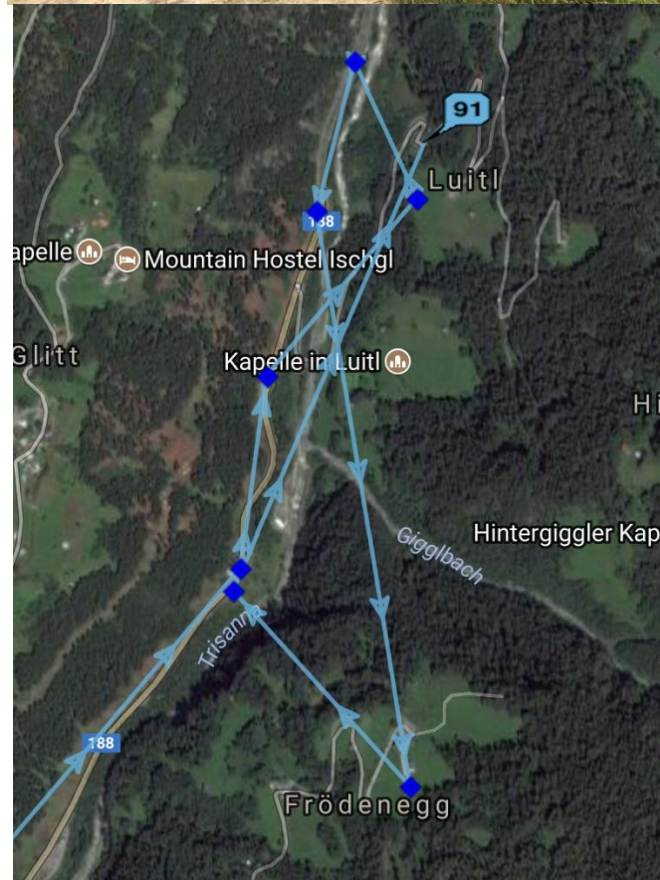
Bruno Ferraro (#159)

ROUTE MUPPET AWARD

Known for his route-muppetry, Jonah Jones (#81) didn't improve much this year, but as he's still in the race and nearly at the finish, we're giving him third prize:



Caroline Item's routing was on a different level - she encountered every dead-end road, bridge closure and gravel path, sometimes no path at all. Second prize.



First prize has to go to someone who gave us our first bit of route entertainment, going nearly all the way back to the start before he'd even really got going. In the end struggled so much (not just with route, but it was a major contributor) he scratched. First prize goes to Arjan Zwanenburg (#160)



Arjan Zwanenburg (#160)

BEST ANIMAL ADVENTURE AWARD

There were a lot of possible entries for this category, such as Paul Ferguson's cat, a number of tiny puppies, tortoises, even giraffes.

Third prize goes to Lars Gotzenberger (#203) for his slug helmet, it was an adventure for the slug too:



Lars Gotzenberger (#203)

We all think a bear encounter would be terrifying, but they do seem to actually look incredibly sweet. Second prize goes to Mikko Makipaa (#4)



Mikko Makipaa (#4)

Paul Ferguson's (#212) hedgehog story is a highlight of this year's race for us. And we're delighted that he managed to get a picture of the criminal genius before he escaped.



Paul Ferguson (#212)

MOST EXHAUSTED FACE AWARD

Neil Matthews (#171) does use quite an intense filter on his pictures to add to the moodiness, we love the styling and think it adds to the effect that Neil needs a bloody good night's sleep, and a wash too. Third prize:



Neil Matthews (#171)

Now they are what you call bags under your eyes Sebastien Nolens (#54), we don't think we've seen anything quite like it. Second Prize:



Sebastien Nolens (#54)

James Jinks (#132) looks bushed. We've seen mug shots look better than this poor soul. First prize.



BEST ROAD SIGN AWARD

Third prize goes to Richard Gate (#161) just for making us snort out our tea at the #tinnedmackerel hashtag:



Clement Venus (#82) wins second place for summing up the TCR in one photo:



There have been many signs showing gradients, so it's been a bit like Top Trumps trying to find the worst, but we think that Bastiaan Viasklamp (#64) should get first prize for not only finding the steepest gradient, but also hairpins, and falling rocks. All 11.7km of it.



HAPPIEST WOMAN AWARD

All the pictures of the women seemed to be of them beaming, and it brought a smile to our faces too. So here's the top three:

Third prize to Karolina Maciejewska (#63) because yes, it gets smilier than this!



Karolina Maciejewska (#63)

Second prize to Ede Harrison (#179) and Anisa Aubin (#21) who are bound to be happy with their race results:



Ede Harrison (#179) and Anisa Aubin (#21)

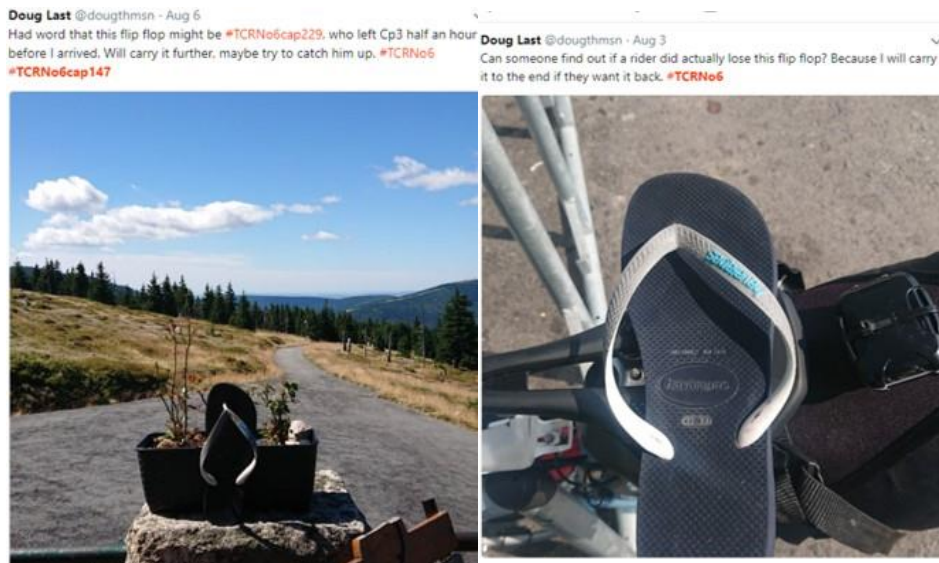
Don't you just want to be sat at this table? First prize goes to Erika Rowens (#100) Sheila Woollam (#127) and Beate Weiland (#196)



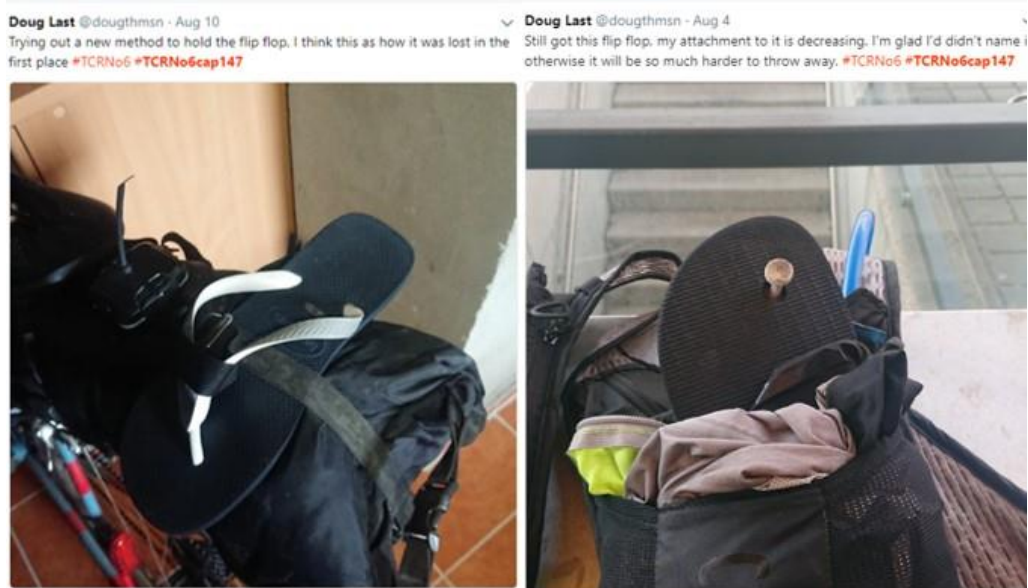
Erika Rowens (#100) Sheila Woollam (#127) and Beate Weiland (#196)

SPECIAL EFFORT AWARD

This award goes to the rider that has gone that extra mile or done something extra special that makes them stand out from the crowd. There can be no-one who deserves this more than Douglas Thomson who found a flip flop on the very first day of riding and took it with him all the way to the end, in the hope that he would reunite it with its owner. He thought it belonged to Lee Grieve (#229) but it could have belonged to anyone. Or no one. Still, he carried it, day and night:



This flip flop became Doug's "Wilson", hating it sometimes, but also loving it:



But he took it all the way to the finish, and incredibly its owner came forward and claimed it, Chris Thomas (#18)!



In a sad twist to the tale, Chris had already thrown the other one away, which makes sense really because who would carry a single flip flop across eleven countries? Doug Thomson that's who. We hope Doug gets to keep it as a memento of the madness that is The Transcontinental Race.

And so it ends, for another year. If you feel the need to watch more dots, there are plenty of rides starting in the next few days, such as the Silk Road Mountain Race starting Saturday. We hope you've enjoyed these blogs as much as we've enjoyed writing them, thank you for all your lovely feedback. See you next year, maybe.

We're off for a lie down now. Goodnight.