

2023 Ardennes Cycle Challenge

Route Survey by Rob & Preston



It's time to check this year's Extra Mile Challenges cycle route for safety and to clarify all hotel arrangements. In April, Rob Oakley (cyclist, Team One) and Preston Ayres (route co-ordinator) set off to drive each day's pre-planned route and make any changes where felt appropriate to improve safety and the route generally. In addition, meetings were held at both hotels to sort out detailed arrangements.

As ever at Extra Mile, the route is mostly on quiet rural roads, this year in the French/Belgian border area of the Ardennes. We eliminated some rough roads with poor road surfaces and a few rough cobbles. Did we eliminate all the cobbles – well just read on!

Thursday & Friday nights (21 & 22 Sept) are based at the Novotel, Valenciennes (where we stayed for the penultimate night of the Flanders Challenge). Saturday & Sunday nights are at the newly refurbished (about €5m worth) Mercure Casino Hotel in Namur, Belgium. This magnificent hotel is situated beneath the Citadel and overlooking the river Meuse, less than 15 minute walk to the old town.

Friday Cycling – Day 1 <https://ridewithgps.com/routes/42534429>

Today your team cycles 176 miles with 7,500ft of elevations

The route heads south through much open farmland and through many very quiet villages in rural France to just south of Laon, circling around this old city and then back north to Valenciennes. We pass a typical cross section of buildings from the old deserted to



mansions and the odd chateau. On our return home we cross the Canal de la Sambre five times. Today has the longest mileage and fewest climbs with a maximum gradient of 9%.



Saturday Cycling Day 2 <https://ridewithgps.com/routes/42544533>

169 miles 9,600 ft of elevations max gradient 9%

A very different terrain today as we head south east from Valenciennes through the Parc Naturel Régional de L'Avesnois and then the Parc Naturel Régional des Ardennes. To leave Valenciennes today we eliminated a rough cobbled lane....and replaced it with a slightly smoother one (with tarmac on the crown) – remember we are in “Paris-Roubaix country”. During our first 100 miles we cross the French/Belgian border four times before heading north towards Namur. With 50 miles to go we make our final crossing into Belgium, the country for the remainder of the challenge. Much more forestry today and hence almost inevitably more hills and climbs – but no ridiculous gradients. Picturesque all day we finish with the last 12 miles alongside the river Meuse (indeed the last 20 miles are very gentle).

Sunday Cycling Day 3 <https://ridewithgps.com/routes/42557399>

158 miles 10,800 ft of elevations max gradient 10%



Fewer miles today to allow you to return to the hotel in plenty of time for our Gala Dinner in the evening, although Ridewithgps does show 16 climbs along the way! Our Mercure Casino Hotel is just south of the city so to avoid the city traffic we again use the banks of the Meuse from the start and to the finish. Once across the Meuse we head east through quiet rural Belgium following a

number of valley roads (and most are following the rivers downstream – that’s good planning!). Another absolutely cracking days cycling in store through beautiful countryside.

This year, our proximity to the channel tunnel means that our Thursday journey in France should be less than two hours and the return from Namur to the tunnel under three hours.

As ever, we have an amazing, picturesque and convivial long weekend planned.

Rob & Preston

