

28 cols in 10 days

Andrew Wright set off from the Atlantic to the Med on the Raid Pyrenean

If you're in the youth hostel in Marrakesh and hear an Englishman waxing lyrical about an ambition to do something called Le Raid Pyrenean, whistle to yourself and think of something more relaxing. I didn't and took the challenge on board.

The Raid Pyrenean is a cycle ride across the Pyrenees from the Atlantic coast town of Hendaye to the Mediterranean sea at Cerbere, covering 790km. Sounds easy enough, but 28 high cols interrupt the route and only 10 days are allowed.

I took a fully loaded touring bike with gear for wild camping in order to cut costs and beat the strong Euro. The first two cols are babies at a couple of hundred metres in altitude, but they do count to the total. Then it's the serious business of climbing the 2,000m daddies like the Col du Tourmalet. On the ascent of the Col d'Aubisque I encountered a party of Royal

Marines who were doing the Raid on lightweight racing bikes, accompanied by support vehicles.

I was travelling slower but didn't mind. The Pyrenees in late June have an amazing array of wild flowers on the roadside. I counted at least 15 different kinds, of all hues, on the Aubisque. The weather was splendid for the whole ride, although at times the strong sun made the multi-hour climbs tough. The finest col was the Col de Pailheres at 2,001m. I crossed the summit in cloud but emerged onto a beautiful series of sharp hairpin bends leading to emerald alpine pastures with brown cows and their tinkling bells.

I did ride from Hendaye to Cerbere in the end, but only took in 19 cols over 15 days. Perhaps to do the lot in 10 days it would be wise to join the Royal Marines?



The race unfolds

John Gary Cummins took part in a folding bike race through the streets of Edinburgh

In grey waistcoat with buttonhole, I went to the registration point of the Edinburgh Rapha Nocturne event. The Nocturnes are a series of evening cycle races featuring club and professional cyclists. They take place in and make the most of their urban atmosphere and location. My dapper attire was because I was part of the twilight entertainment – the folding bike race, which featured a Le Mans style sprint start and had to be contested in business wear.

A few folding bike riders had arrived before me and we shook hands and chatted. It was very casual and friendly. Then the announcement came for our start. I'd drawn number three – a bad choice as it was further to run to the bike.

I waited on the start line. Then... GO! I ran to the bike. Unfold one was good, but then I fumbled the catch and took ages to sort it. I raced away and caught the bunch on the first climb, rattling up Victoria Street as the crowds cheered. We turned right at the top, then had the descent, with a sharp U-turn by Greyfriars Bobby and a faster descent back into Grassmarket, all on granite setts.

A nasty hairpin and U-turn took me back to the start line. I was wheezing now. I stood up, hit that hill again, ground through the gears at walking pace to the top, then turned into the long descent (taking a welcome breather). Coming round Greyfriars Bobby somebody sneaked past on my inside shouting 'yeeesss!'

I overtook a couple of riders on the straight, wheezed up the climb the last time, feeling very sick, turned right and overtook one then two more. Round the final hairpin I could see the finish and was soon past it.

Was I 6th, 8th, 11th? Who cares? There were smiles, lots of handshaking and black slapping. Few folk could speak. What fun.



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