

# **Paris-Brest-Paris 2019**

## **A Cycling Adventure**



**Malcolm Wills**

**1 February 2020**

# Paris-Brest-Paris 2019 – A Cycling Adventure

(Version 1.4)

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[www.longbikerides.info](http://www.longbikerides.info)

*Information and routes for cyclists who are interested in long bike rides*

## What is Paris-Brest-Paris?

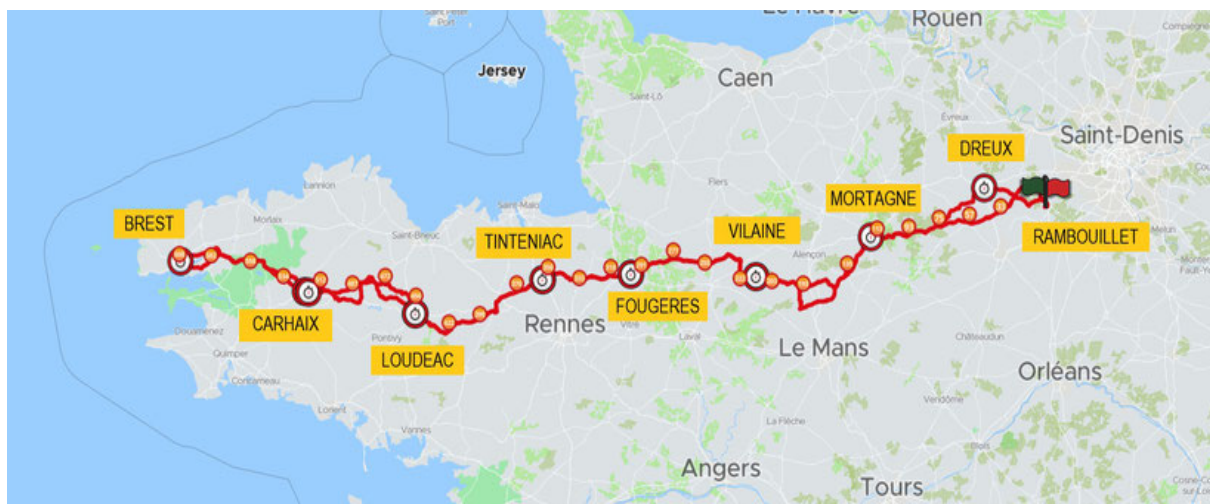
Few people have heard of Paris-Brest-Paris. Most cyclists do not know about it. Even amongst club cyclists, the initials PBP are often met with a blank expression. A quick internet search leads to some tantalising quotes.

*“The Himalayas of cycle tourism”*

*“The pinnacle of non-competitive long-distance riding”*

*“The biggest physical and mental challenge that an amateur cyclist can engage in”*

Paris-Brest-Paris (known as PBP) is a bike ride of over 1,200km, from Paris to Brest on the west coast of Brittany and back again. The route passes through a number of ‘controls’ and must be completed in a maximum of 90 hours (3 days and 18 hours).



It is the oldest cycling event still in existence, held since 1891. Initially taking place every ten years but now run every four years by Audax Club Parisien (ACP), 2019 saw the 19<sup>th</sup> edition.

PBP is not a race, any more. It is perhaps best described by the French word ‘randonnée’ which covers various forms of leisure excursion from hiking, through cross-country skiing, to cycling; usually human-powered and often long distance. Cyclists who ride PBP do so for a variety of reasons.

For me, awareness of PBP grew surreptitiously as I developed a taste for long bike rides, until I started wondering whether it was something I could attempt. The challenge, the history, the legendary local support, the international community of ‘randoneurs’ – all of these were attractive. But it seemed impossibly daunting at a time when the longest continuous ride I had done was the Dunwich Dynamo (a 180km night ride from London to the Suffolk coast).

I joined Audax UK (the long distance cyclists’ association) in 2017, in pursuit of another goal – to cycle from London to York in a day – a ride of about 400km. Having achieved this on my third attempt, and aware that the next PBP was less than two years away, I set out to ride the equivalent of the series of events which would be required for PBP qualification, “to see if I could”. In the five months from April 2018 I completed 200km, 300km, 400km and 600km Audax rides – known as a Super Randoneur series. I learnt a lot and emerged with my interest in riding PBP intact and growing.

Through Audax UK, I joined Audax Club Hackney, which provided contact with lots of experienced and friendly long-distance cyclists based in east and south east London. Although the cycling itself on the longer audax rides can be a fundamentally solitary endeavour (unless you are on a tandem!), the opportunity to meet people with a common interest is a key benefit of participation in the Audax UK calendar events and another attraction of attempting PBP.

So, conscious that I would be turning 57 in the autumn (and notwithstanding the fact that a handful of octogenarians turn out each PBP), it felt like time for me to get on with this challenge!

## **The Build Up**

### **Pre-qualification and Qualification Rides**

Unusually, for an amateur cycling event, Paris-Brest-Paris requires participants to qualify. Presumably this is because it is significantly oversubscribed. In fact, so much so that a pre-qualification process needs to be completed to be sure of getting a place.

Pre-qualification is based on your longest accredited audax ride of the previous season. In my case, this was the 600km Fenland Friends, from Essex to Yorkshire and back, which I rode in September 2018. This entitled me to pre-register for PBP when the second wave of places was released at the end of January 2019.

Thousands of places had gone in the first wave, which had opened in mid-January to riders with a pre-qualification ride of 1000km (or longer!). So, it was with some anxiety that I logged on to the PBP site at 11pm on Sunday 27 January to attempt pre-registration. Twelve minutes later, after some frantic clicking, page refreshes and payment of a 30 euro deposit, I had pre-registered for PBP 2019! I needn't have worried, as all the riders pre-registering in the 600km wave got places.

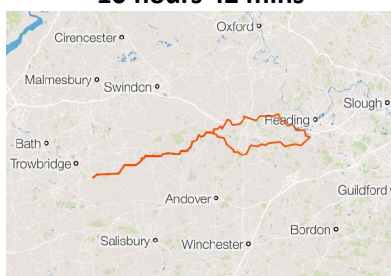
Places did run out during the subsequent waves, and ACP increased the number of pre-registrations available, albeit on the assumption that there would be a number of "defections". In fact, such a large number of riders failed to convert their pre-registration into a full registration that, towards the end of June, a further 1,500 places were released and quickly taken by those who had missed pre-registration but done the qualifying rides anyway. The official statistics from ACP, published in late January 2020, show the final number of completed registrations was 6,674.

Having pre-registered, I now had to repeat my achievement of 2018 and ride another Super Randoneur series. This time each ride had to be within specific dates mandated by ACP, with the series to be completed by 23<sup>rd</sup> June.

In common with many aspiring PBP-ers, and no doubt to the potential annoyance of event organisers, I had booked two rides at each of the qualifying distances, in case of a DNS (Did Not Start) or DNF (Did Not Finish). In fact, I managed to complete each distance on my first attempt. (In each case I then contacted the organisers of my back up events to withdraw). The rides, distances, dates and times were as follows.

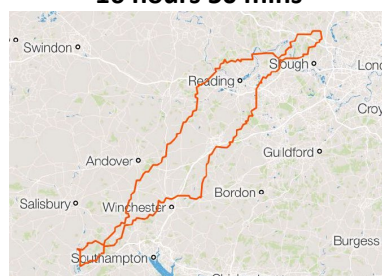


**Kennet Valley Run 207k**  
**09/03/2019**  
**10 hours 42 mins**



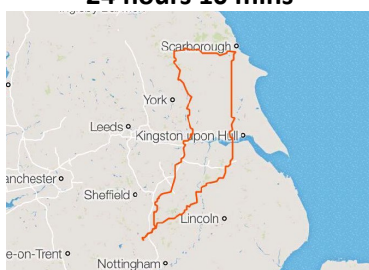
Distance	Elevation Gain
204.84 km	1,767 m

**3 Down 300k**  
**06/04/2019**  
**16 hours 50 mins**



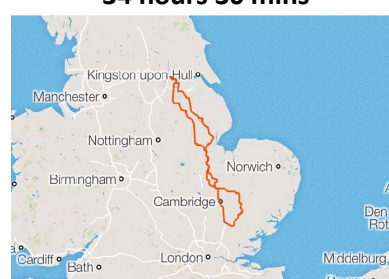
Distance	Elevation Gain
311.33 km	2,783 m

**Moors & Wolds 406k**  
**27/04/2019**  
**24 hours 10 mins**



Distance	Elevation Gain
411.17 km	3,003 m

**The Flatlands 606k**  
**18/05/2019**  
**34 hours 30 mins**



Distance	Elevation Gain
619.21 km	2,064 m

Summarising four big rides in the images above may give the impression that qualification was easy. It was not. I faced a series of problems, starting about five weeks before the Kennet Valley ride.

Returning from a wintry circuit of all of London's Royal Parks, I experienced a cramp-like feeling in my right calf, accompanied by a 1cm circular soft bulge just below the muscle. It subsided within half an hour, but I felt a trip to the doctor was in order and she sent me straight down to A&E to check for deep vein thrombosis. So started a month of medical visits which eventually concluded that "this doesn't quite qualify for a diagnosis of superficial vein thrombosis". Every practitioner I spoke to encouraged me to keep riding, which was helpful in keeping me on track for the 200km qualifier.

A calf strain, picked up on a fairly innocuous ride to Brighton, put me in doubt for the Moors and Wolds 400km. I limped (or the cycling equivalent) to catch the train to Derbyshire as I had already booked the ticket and a hotel. I only started the ride because there was nothing else to do in Alfreton on a Saturday. But, taking it slowly and steadily, one control at a time, the muscle twinges gradually reduced – until about half-way round they had completely disappeared!

The calf issue recurred intermittently through to early August, but after this experience I was confident I could ride it off. Nevertheless, I spent the run-in to PBP being extremely cautious about how I moved, worried that something as simple as getting out of a chair badly could put paid to my plans. Other physical issues overcome during the qualifying period included a swollen tendon in a finger and an infected saddle sore – further details not required!

What if I was fit but my bike wasn't? A creaking that developed on The Shark (200km run by ACH) still could not be traced after three days in the workshop. With my 300km qualifier less than a week away I was ready to hire a road bike- but I got my bike back a day before the ride when the creaking turned out to be caused by corrosion where the spokes crossed on the rear wheel.

Every ride added to my list of 'lessons learned' and I invested in a number of improvements to my bike set up. Good buys included the Carradice Super C Audax saddle bag, Technicals waterproof valuables bag (worn round the neck), Fizik Artica winter boots and the Selle Italia Flite saddle, which finally banished the chaffing inflicted on very long rides by the stitching and embossed branding on my Selle Italia Novus.

With my SR series completed, the final bit of qualification involved converting my pre-registration into a registration (and paying the balance of the 165 euro entrance fee). I found this and all the ACP online bureaucracy to work pretty well, actually.



*Post-qualification refreshments at the arrivée after The Flatlands 600k.*

One thing my qualification rides had in common was that they were all relatively flat! Also, the longest qualifier – at 600km – was only half the distance I would be attempting for Paris-Brest-Paris. And, having completed my qualifiers exactly three months before PBP, there was now a lengthy period during which it would be tempting to “twiddle my thumbs” in cycling terms, whilst shedding strength and stamina.

## **Post-Qualification Preparation**

Being the opposite of complacent, I was barely home from The Flatlands in May before I was planning how to keep the momentum going through to August. I was also turning my attention to the characteristics of the PBP ride and thinking about features that might present a particular challenge. One of these was the evening start. This, in itself, was not new to me – I had enjoyed the Dunwich Dynamo (8pm start) so much that I'd now ridden it seven times. But an evening start followed by having to ride at audax pace through four successive nights was intimidating.

So, I planned and undertook a number of additional rides between June and early August.

The most notable of these was a 550km ride from London to Land's End, at the end of June. I rode this with Julian Sharples, who has been a good companion on many rides, audax and otherwise. This was actually an attempt at the Cornish Riviera Express (CRE), a 1000km 'permanent' audax route from Paddington to Penzance and back in a time limit of 76 hours 27 minutes. We set off at 7.30pm and made good progress to Exeter. But we had underestimated the hills of Devon and Cornwall and were severely punished for it. By Penzance we were well behind schedule and an extended stop there, eating Cornish pasties and watching the Mazey Day parade, put us out of time for the CRE. So we rolled on to Land's End for photo opportunities then back to Penzance for fish and chips. Instead of riding all the way back, we caught a train from Penzance to Exeter and then rode 320km back to London the next day. We'd ridden nearly 900km in 75 hours – more than I'd ever ridden in this time before – and although my CRE attempt ended with a DNF, I'd learnt a huge amount.

My most enjoyable ride in the run up to PBP was a slow tour from Paris to Mont St Michel in mid-July. This was the idea of my partner, Ali Perotto, and we set off the day after she had finished appearing in a show. We did about 75km a day on quiet, (mostly) flat or gently rolling, roads, with late starts, proper lunch and dinner stops and decent sleeps in hotels. Heaven! In terms of PBP preparation, this acted as a bit of recce, as the Veloscenic route we were following took in Mortagne-au-Perche, one of the PBP control towns. So I got an early preview of some of the PBP roads and terrain.

A reprise of the 3 Down 300km, with an evening start and full luggage, provided a bit of a shock when it took Julian and I nearly two hours longer than it had three months earlier. When I got home I weighed my bike with all the kit on – I had managed to turn a 9.5kg bike into an 18.5kg monster!

After this, I put my bike on a diet, aiming to discard unnecessary kit, and prescribed myself some more hill training. I rode variants of a short local circuit, developed by the London Velo Café Cycle Club. One 26km route included 620m of climbing, making it twice as hilly as London to Brighton. All without straying more than 3km from my home in (what I now call) the Lewisham Alps!

When I pre-registered for PBP, I had no hesitation in picking the maximum time option of 90 hours despite the evening start. (The alternatives being 80 hours – for those racing the non-race – and 84 hours, where the benefit of a morning start on the Monday would be negated, I felt, by the risk of arriving at the controls as they are actually closing).

Some happy-go-lucky people simply turn up and ride PBP with no targets other than the final cut off time. This is not me. Especially after studying the PBP rules and the control timetable. Riders have to reach each of the 14 controls within a specified time, dictated by the audax minimum speed. This is based on the distance travelled and so is not linear. The minimum speed for most of the first half of PBP is around 15kph but by the end it is a much more generous 12kph. On a very long ride these are big differences.

So, in the final weeks before setting off for France, I created an Excel spreadsheet with the distances for each stage and a list of all the controls and rest stops. I was able to test different assumptions about my average speed and duration of stops, using Strava data from previous rides to provide benchmarks. The planning process also allowed me to think about when and where I might sleep. I had already booked a couple of hotels after internet stories about long queues and loud snoring had put me off the dormitories at the controls. But the spreadsheet planning led to a flurry of last minute



booking changes, when it became clear I would be turning up at some of the hotels between check out and check in time! My completed plan suggested a finish time of about 84 hours, with the extra six hours as contingency time.

So, with my plan, my bike and myself ready, I'm on my way...

### **...to Rambouillet**

I rode down to PBP with Julian. We had already agreed we would not ride together on the event itself, due to the cycling equivalent of “musical differences”. Small variations in riding style (speed on flats/climbs/descents, frequency and duration of rest breaks, even bladder strength!) can result in two riders proceeding at the slowest common denominator. Finding another cyclist who is perfectly compatible may be harder than finding a long-term partner!

We caught the train from London Bridge to Brighton and then rode east along the coast to Newhaven. At the ferry check in we met a cyclist (from Sheffield, I think) called Pete, with a cheery pennant flag fixed to the rear of his bike. He had also improvised an ingenious use of his Carradice saddle bag's quick release rack by filling the space between the rack and seat post with a small saddle pack mounted upside down, a trick I was keen to copy if possible.

From Dieppe, we followed Donald Hirsch's London to Paris route, which is a great “my first ride to Paris” option. Much of the first 50km is on the Avenue Verte tarmac cycle path, which follows the hill-free route of an old railway line.



*At least the bikes run on time.*

The route then heads across rolling countryside on very quiet roads. Entry to Paris takes a peaceful if circuitous path through several forests, avoiding some horrible traffic at the expense of a few kilometres on compacted stone tracks. Julian and I did suffer what I recall as the main disadvantage of this route (from a couple of previous rides) - it is *too* quiet. The lack of decent sized towns, combined with French opening hours, makes it difficult to find a suitable café or restaurant for a proper break.

The other problem on this ride was my rucksack, stuffed full with my non-cycling clothes, spare bike kit and accessories - which I was going to make a final decision on following a check of the meteo on the day of departure. The loaded rucksack weighed 6kg. Although it was barely noticeable when we set off from Dieppe at dawn, as the day wore on the extra weight on my back contributed to a level of weariness and aches well in excess of what I would normally expect on a relatively short 'long bike ride'. Nevertheless, that evening, as I checked into my hotel near Rambouillet after just shy of 200km of riding, it felt like we'd had a nice warm up for the challenges ahead.

## Where's Paris?

Actually, we only got a very distant glimpse of Paris on the way down to PBP, veering off the Donald Hirsch route about 10km before Versailles to head towards the 2019 'depart' location at Rambouillet, 50km south west of the capital.



The start of PBP has crept ever-westwards over recent years, to accommodate more riders and keep them away from the busier suburban roads. Not to worry, though; the Audax Club Parisien has made sure the overall distance remains over 1200km by introducing various wiggles to the route.

Accommodation in and around Rambouillet had been snaffled up very early on by the better-organised riders. So I was staying in La Verriere, about 20km back towards Paris. La Verriere seemed a soulless suburb, sliced in two by six lanes of the N10. The Campanile was a motel-style hotel, so absolutely no issues with keeping my bike in my room, which is an essential requirement for comfortable pre-event fettling, as well as overnight peace-of-mind. The hotel had pretty much been taken over by PBP participants but this seemed to have caught the kitchen by surprise as they had run out of dinner by 8pm. I was very fortunate that I went straight to the restaurant on my first evening at the hotel, as I got the last main course left.

On the second evening I ventured out to La Verriere's concrete centre, chasing culinary delights suggested by Google Maps. My disappointment, as I hurried back to the Campanile's restaurant with an empty stomach, was partly offset by the fact I had managed to find the Decathlon store and buy a small saddle pack with the aim of imitating Pete's luggage trick. I did enjoy the company of other

PBP riders at the Campanile, particular those from Velo Club 167, who shared PBP tips and anecdotes.

Perhaps the best thing about La Verriere was its excellent rail connections, which meant it was very easy to escape to Rambouillet on Saturday for the bike check and collection of my Brevet card.

## The Swarming of the MAMILs

It is fair to say that, as a middle-aged man, I was a member of the most common demographic gathering in Rambouillet on an extremely damp Saturday. Only 8% of starters were women. At least the participants had a genuinely international flavour, due to PBP's global renown in the community of long-distance cyclists.

The ACP required riders to present themselves and their bikes at the depart at the Bergerie National (the French national sheepfold - do we have one of those?!) the day before setting off, for a bike check and to collect various important items. The bike check seemed perfunctory, although the ACP weren't impressed by Julian's Poundshop rear lights and demanded evidence of something more powerful.



*'Will this pass the bike check?' wonders Julian*

There was a long queue in the rain to funnel into a small barn and scrummage for our rider packs. At least the sheep had been relocated for the occasion. The rider packs included the following items:

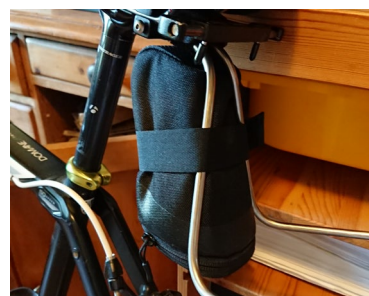
- Brevet Card – an old-school audax card for collecting proof-of-passage stamps en route
- Frame Plate – with your rider number and timing chip
- Bidon – a stylish PBP-branded red and white drinks bottle
- Gilet Jaune – compulsory at night and in low light, with time penalties for miscreants
- PBP 2019 cycling jersey – 32 euros extra, but acquiring this was a major incentive to enter!
- Yellow Sports Bag – a cheap and tacky thing which proved incredibly useful on the ride
- Brevet / Valuables Bag – nasty vinyl - I used my comfortable 'Technicals' bag instead.



With that, we were free to go, with over 24 hours before our departure slots. Despite the best efforts of the ACP (including an exhibition of special bikes, which I wished I had visited when I read about it in a cycling magazine later), the continuing downpour made the Bergerie Nationale an unappealing option for the rest of Saturday afternoon.

Julian and I set off towards Rambouillet station in search of somewhere for a drink and snack but thousands of other soggy cyclists had the same idea and, with all the cafés full, we ended up on the train and back at my Campanile in La Verriere. After a quick coffee Julian headed back to his Campanile (another 10km back towards Paris) and I did some further fettling before dinner.

I fitted the small saddle pack from Decathlon, in the position pioneered by Pete from Sheffield, and put my spare inner tubes and tyre levers in it. This was taking a risk, as my experience has been that it is not a good idea to set off on an important ride with a new set up – i.e. any aspect of the bike, equipment or clothing that you haven't tested in something approaching the conditions for the ride itself. However, my wish to avoid riding up hills with too much weight trumped this - and the new saddle pack meant I could remove my much-loved Ortlieb bar bag, saving 500 grams.



Of course, one thing leads to another...the bar bag had a route-sheet window in its lid, perfect for reading directions on the move. After removing the bag, this was no longer available. I had brought along a Klickfix route-sheet holder, as an alternative, which I now fitted - despite having never used it before. This change became quite annoying on the ride, as I had not tested the position of the Klickfix which turned out to interfere with my right hand when riding 'on the tops'.



*In fine fettle?*

Another knock-on effect of removing the bar bag was that I had to bungee a yellow drybag to the handlebars to store my spare layers of clothing. This looked a bit messy but actually worked OK.

I had been tempted to ride with just one bidon to save weight but was advised against this by so many people that I took both, whilst vowing to save weight by not overfilling the second bottle. Finally (after the photo was taken) I did a last check of the meteoFrance.com forecast, crossed my fingers, and removed the front mudguard. The rear had already been left at home in London on the grounds that the Carradice saddle bag was ample protection (for me at least) from any spray off the rear wheel. The bike and luggage now weighed just under 16kg. (An estimate, based on weighing the loaded bike before I left London and knowing the weight of the items I took off / added in France).

I had been wondering what to do with the eight hours between checkout from the Campanile and my PBP start time at 19:15. And also where to leave my rucksack whilst away riding for four days. Both problems were solved when I had the idea of re-checking hotel availability in Rambouillet, and found that the Ibis now had rooms. I booked for two nights – Sunday and Thursday - cancelling my booking at another hotel for the latter. This meant the Ibis would store my bag whilst I was away.

So, after checking out of the Campanile on the Sunday morning of the PBP depart, I made my way by train and bike to the Ibis hotel on the southern edge of Rambouillet. The room wasn't ready but fortunately the nearby Mona Lisa restaurant was. This surreal industrial estate dining destination had mock-cave walls and was full of cyclists (and a few long-suffering family members) carb-loading before the big ride. I had a huge pizza and then a plate of tagliatelle and salmon. Back at the hotel, I distinguished myself by misreading the number on my key card and trying to get into the wrong room, to the consternation of the occupant (who turned out to be Jason, of Audax Club Mid Essex, who appears later in this story!). Once in the correct room (and trying to get as much value as possible from the 69 euros I had spent on a hotel I would not actually be staying in overnight), I rested for a couple of hours. At about 5pm I checked out, leaving my rucksack in the secure storage provided by the Ibis, and set off for the depart.

As I rode back through the centre of Rambouillet, smiling at other PBP participants arriving for the start, I realised the preparation was over and the adventure was really beginning.



*Follow the yellow-gilet road...*

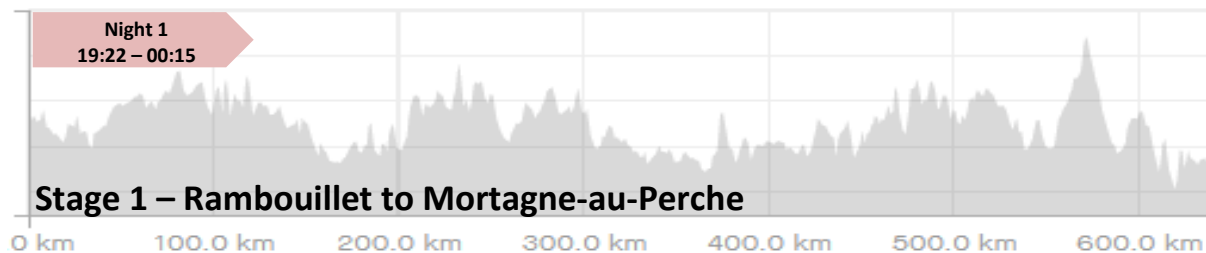


## The Ride

### The Depart

The event had taken over a great big park at the Bergerie Nationale, adjoining the chocolate-box Chateau de Rambouillet. This provided plenty of space to despatch thousands of cyclists, like lambs to the audax (?!), in the space of a few hours starting on the afternoon of Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> August.

The remnants of yesterday's downpour had blown over by lunchtime, which contributed to the cheery mood. Riders queued up according to the letter pre-fixing their rider number, which indicated the 15-minute departure window allocated. In my case 'N', for 19:15. The line shuffled along, eventually reaching a control where Brevet cards were stamped with exemplary efficiency. You then get on your bike and start riding through the grounds of the Bergerie Nationale, arriving, after several hundred metres, at an inflatable arch marking the timing mat and then out through the park gates and onto the open roads, heading west towards the sunset.



A fast start! Lots of people at the side of the roads to watch us go by. Direction provided by plentiful pink and yellow signs to Brest. Inspiration provided by the stars and a waning but powerful moon that was to be our companion for the next four nights.



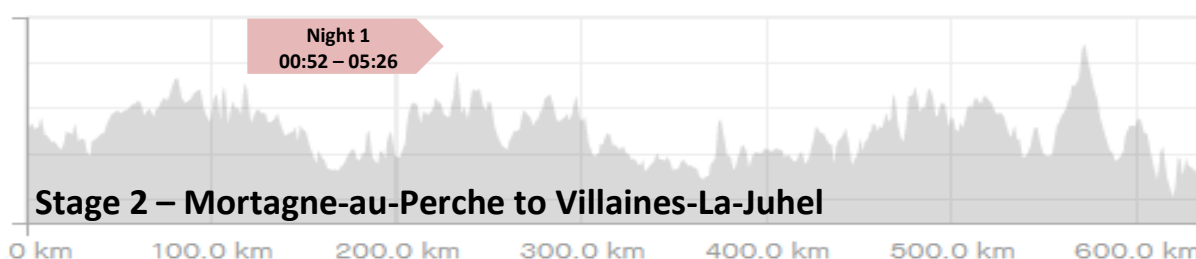
With plenty of night trains (ad hoc peletons) I arrived at the first rest stop, at Mortagne-au-Perche, shortly after midnight - an hour earlier than planned. I ate soup and pasta, dispensed by energetic volunteers running a well-organised operation.

I had a craving for a 'proper' chocolate bar. Luckily, there were a few for sale at a sort of reception desk on the way in to the building where the restaurant was located.



*Waiter, there's a cyclist in my soup...*

This was the only place on the ride where I found it was possible to buy a standard-sized bar of one of the familiar brands that are ubiquitous on shelves of the garages and mini-markets frequented by audaxers in the UK. Here the choice was limited - Mars on the way out, Twix on the way back.

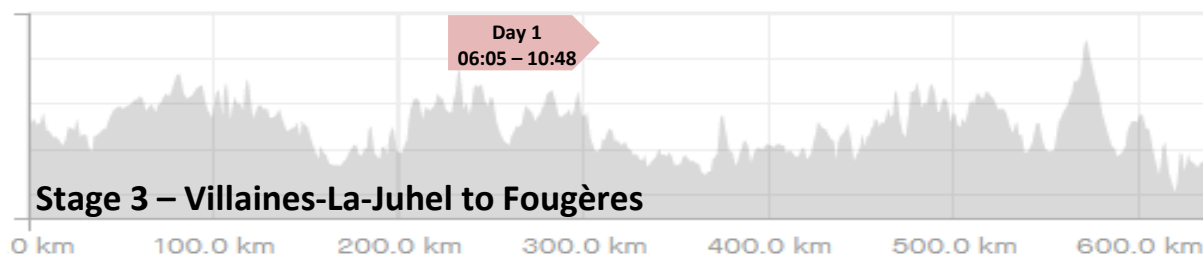


More night trains! A French rider complained that my rear light was too bright. I adjusted it and we had a friendly chat. I stopped by a church in the dead of night, somewhere in the Alpes Mancelle area, and ate a snack whilst watching riders coping with a rare pothole - several lights failed the bounce test here. I wonder if I picked up some bad karma for not warning approaching riders?

I benefited from my first postcard pop-up at St Aubin de Locquenay, just south of Fresnay sur Sarthe. Free coffee and cake and a request from the hosts to send them a postcard when I got home (a promise I was very happy to keep).

The village of Averton, just before Villaines, was a deserted delight as I passed through shortly before first light. The entire length of the village was lined with imaginatively decorated old bicycles and surreal plastic bottle sculptures. I can't be hallucinating yet, I thought, until I passed a giant cyclist made of hay bales as I left the village.

It was still dark when I arrived at the Villaines control. After getting my Brevet card stamped, I couldn't see anywhere particularly comfortable to rest, so I had an espresso at the café on the way out of town and carried on as dawn arrived.



A crash! Just 5km after the control, entering the tiny village of Loupfougères, I was riding two-abreast at about 25kph and approaching a rider travelling much slower. As we started to overtake, the rider on my right edged ahead of me, blocking my line. I could see that there were no cars coming towards us, so I pulled out further across the centre line of the road – except it wasn't a line anymore; the white paint had been replaced by one of the many marvels of French traffic calming – in this case a cobbled ridge along the centre of the road. As my PBP training had not included practicing grinding in the skate park, the bike slipped from under me and I slid along the top of the ridge. Actually the ridge was a bonus, as it meant relatively minimal contact with hard surfaces and a reasonably gradual deceleration was achieved.

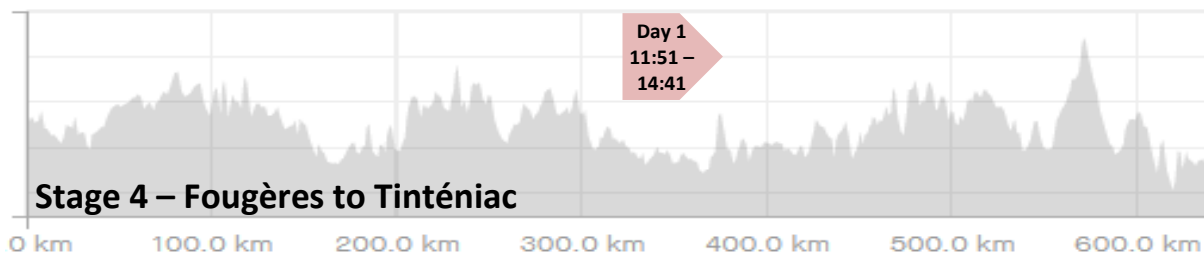


*Welcome to Loupfougères! The offending feat of traffic engineering lies in wait*

*Photo from Google Maps*

After the initial shock, I stood up, span the wheels which appeared to be true and was relieved to find only minor grazing to my right hip and, amazingly, no damage to my Gore jacket. At this point, I heard a shout of "Dangereux, Dangereux!" and saw an elderly man limping at speed towards me, waving his stick. He explained that I was the second cyclist in half an hour to experience this particular accident and that he had told the council about this hazard when they installed it. Thanks a lot! Then, coincidentally, the PBP motorbike marshals appeared so I flagged them down and spent five minutes persuading them to log the accident, in case this proved important later.

After 10 minutes I was on my way again – feeling extremely lucky, but also nervous in case of as yet undiscovered damage to bike or self. On the next series of descents, the brakes were making a clicking noise and I spent 10 minutes adjusting them, which seemed to improve things. I also stopped at the Le Ribay rest point where the mechanic on duty couldn't find anything wrong. This reassurance cost me nothing but another 10 minutes on the clock. At the Fougères control I tried to get a mechanical second opinion, but there was a long wait and the bike had now done 80km since the crash without any sign of serious problems. So I ate a plate of pasta and carried on.

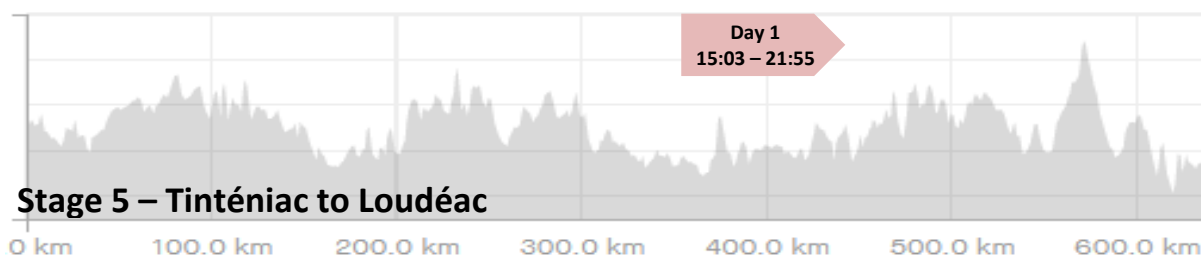


After three long stages, a shorter stage. I had crossed into Brittany about 15km before Fougères without much obvious ceremony but that changed heading west and many of the roadside supporters were waving Breton flags. The riding on this section was dominated by what has been characterised in some accounts of PBP2019 as a “brutal” headwind, although I didn’t find it too bad compared with the Kennet Valley and Flatlands qualifiers. I rode this stage with Jason (who had forgiven me for trying to gate-crash his hotel room), and his company made the miles pass quicker.

We stopped at a Huit-a-Huit (a sort of 7-11 with shorter opening hours) where the food I wanted – in particular Madeleines, little scallop-shaped sponge cakes - came in bumper packs. I stuffed as much as I could into the cheap-and-nasty yellow PBP bag (which I now realised was a cut-price musette - a bag for food to consume on the bike) and gave the rest away to fellow cyclists. At the Tinténiaac control the entertainment included Breton dancing – I was tempted to join in, but my legs weren’t.



*“Shut Up, Legs!”*



I am going to stick to the PBP official stage numbering here, but in fact this section was broken up by the first of my hotel stops, the Brit Hotel (!) at St Meen Le Grand. I paused for a couple of minutes at the official rest stop at Quédillac but there seemed to be nothing to it and I was hoping for greater luxury a few kilometres further on. The hotel was only 1km off the route, but in an out-of-town

commercial area and I got lost trying to find it, riding an unnecessary 3km rather slowly. At the hotel, I spent 10 minutes arguing with the receptionist about taking my bike into my hotel room (I had phoned a few weeks before and they had agreed this would be possible) and then 10 minutes washing my bike, which was the price the receptionist exacted from me before conceding.

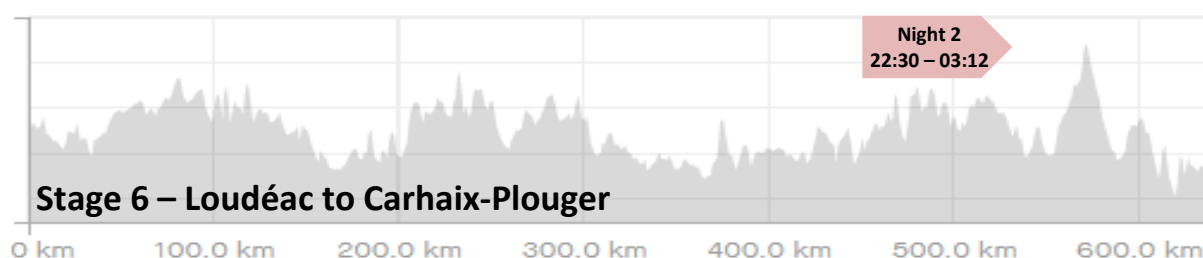
Once in my room, I showered, washed my kit, wrung it and hung it, then set the alarm for an hour's time and slept, deeply. On waking, I completed my faffing (a 'technical' term describing the process of sorting out bike, accessories, luggage and kit) before heading to the cold and unwelcoming hotel restaurant for a plate of pasta and cheese. Just the same as the meals provided at controls, but five times the price! The whole stop, from leaving the official route to rejoining it at the same point (more time penalties if caught skipping even a tiny section) took 2 hours 40 minutes for my one hour of sleep - this did not feel very efficient.

It was after 7pm when I left the hotel, and the sky had turned dark and threatening. Sure enough, on the next stretch I experienced the only rain of my ride. But the weather's bark was worse than its bite – a few short sharp showers, then the rain was blown past by the strong westerly.

I had, however, woken with a very sore left wrist. I concluded this was a delayed effect (12 hours on) of the crash, provoked by lying still for the hour I had been sleeping. The resumption of movement on the bike helped but, as I am left-handed, I had to adapt to lead with my right hand when changing from the hoods to the drops, to reduce the risk of losing control if I hit an unexpected bump.

The wrist was still tender when I arrived at the Loudéac control at about 10pm. I remembered something about medical assistance being provided at controls, so off I went to ask for an icepack and some anti-inflammatory gel. I had to go through a whole form-filling and triage process to get this, so it cost me another 15 minutes, but everyone was very friendly and the treatment definitely helped my wrist.

The Loudéac control had a nice compact layout around a central square for the bike parking where I bumped into Brad Owen from Audax Club Hackney – great to see a familiar face amongst the hundreds in my part of the PBP 'bulge'.



I can't recall much about the riding, which was in the middle of the second night. A Danish rider and I had a discussion about Brexit (in English, of course). This stage was pretty hilly – I seem to remember at one point fearing that it felt ominously similar to my Devon and Cornwall experience. I do have a strong memory of St Nicolas-Du-Pélem, which was billed as a rest stop but turned out to be a Secret Control. (An audax thing, presumably designed to catch out riders taking a short cut between the

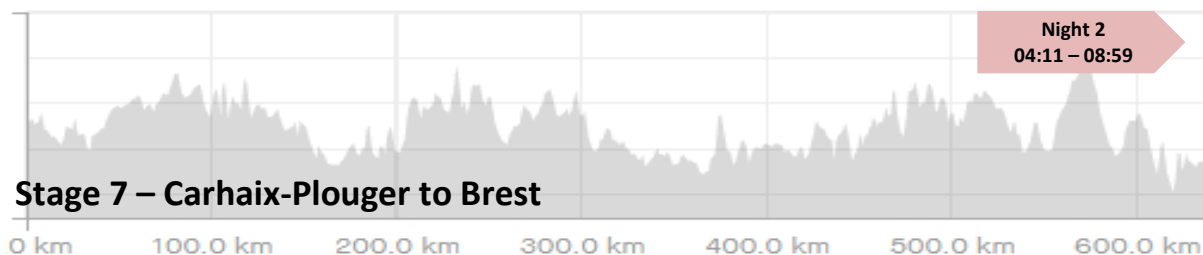


advertised controls!). The restaurant was in an interesting industrial building that may have been an old garage and everything felt very easy and relaxed compared with some of the bigger controls.

I really can't remember anything about the 33km section from St Nicolas to Carhaix-Plouger. Arriving at about 3am, this control was full of sleeping figures. I seem to have spent an hour there and think I probably put my head on the table for a 15 minute nap, although I was careful to set two alarms.



*No room in the dorms*



Onwards through the small hours, and I started this section with a small group of British riders, who were going faster than I would have managed solo, on a flattish winding section between towering wooded ridges. The valley came to an end abruptly and the road ramped up. I felt an unexpected burst of energy and kicked away from the group, feeling like a chamois as I passed several other riders for a magical stretch of night-climbing on a winding forest road to the aptly-named village of Huelgoat. For me, this was one of the most enjoyable sections of the whole ride.

Unfortunately, the elation dissipated as the route arrived at the much bigger D764 and it became clear this was by no means the top of the climb. There was a further 7km of climbing on a tedious but dangerous dual carriageway, where the first lorries of the next day were appearing. This would take us to the highest point of the ride at 350m – the Roc'h Trevezel. But the reality of fatigue was bearing down on me, making every pedal stroke wearier than the last one, until I slowed to a point where I had to get off. I stood by the side of D764, a shadow of the cyclist who had been dancing on the pedals fifteen minutes earlier. It took me quite a while to summon the strength to get back on the bike and continue sluggishly to the top of a rather anti-climactic plateau, decorated with

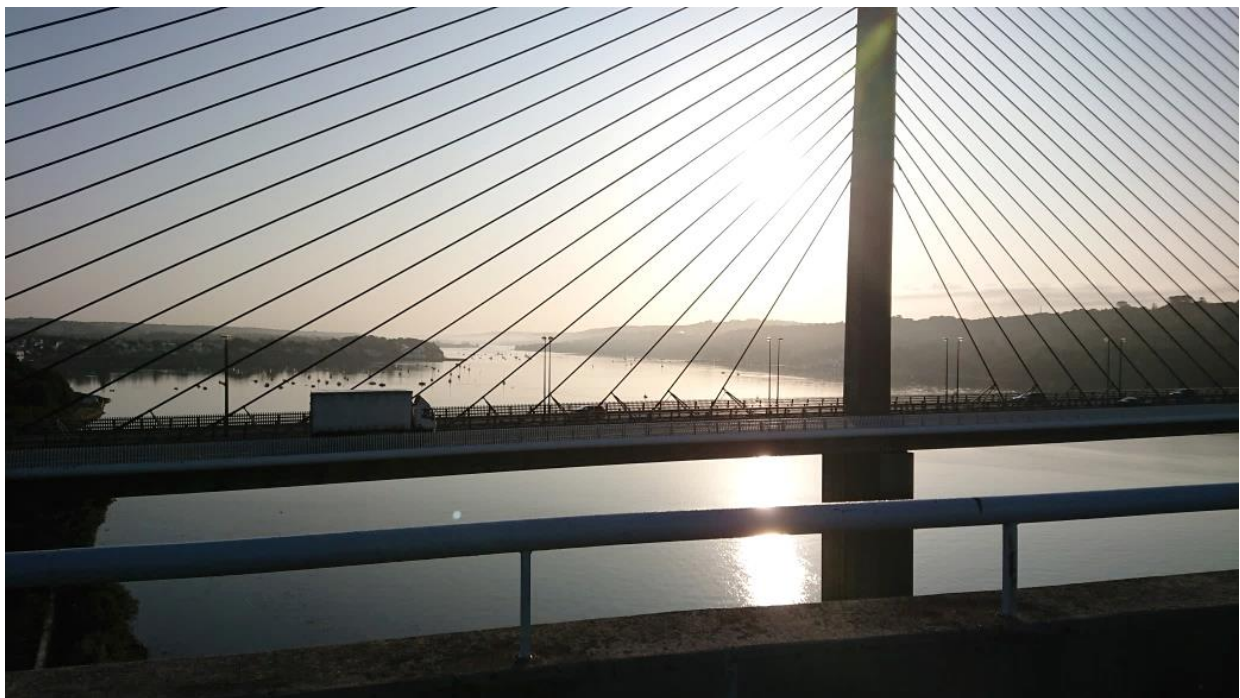
campervans that looked suspiciously like support vehicles (time penalty, if caught receiving support here!). I had now been underway for about 36 hours and had slept for just over one hour.

A weary first light embraced me as I started the descent off the Roc into a cold mist. This time the fatigue struck quickly. I just wanted to get off the bike but I couldn't see anywhere to rest. After about 5 minutes of descent, I spotted a grubby plastic chair by the road in Ty Douar, a spattering of grey houses. I got off and dozed there for an unknown period of time – possibly as little as 10 minutes but maybe much more.

The cold stopped me going into deep sleep and my attention was caught by a fluttering pennant on a bike speeding past. I recognised this as the flag sported by Pete who I had met on the ferry out from Newhaven. The thought of saying hello spurred me into action and I jumped on my bike and set off down the rest of the hill in pursuit. We rode together for the next 8km, fighting the cold with conversation, until we reached Sizun where we shivered into a condensation-filled café.

Twenty minutes later, restored by croissants and coffee and the return of the daylight, Pete and I set off for a fast(ish) run in to Brest. I was still fending off the impulse to sleep though, and listened to a radio programme about driverless cars, the only spoken material on my phone, to help fight this.

Crossing the gossamer-strung bridge in the early morning light, on the way in to Brest after 600km and 37.5 hours, was a truly uplifting experience.



*Job half done!*

Some people may have been downhearted at the fact that arrival at Brest signified a requirement to turn around and cycle the same distance back again. But one thing made this moment highly motivating for me – as I left the Brest control, the iconic signs that I had been following for the last two nights and a day were now directing me to Paris.



*Back you go...*

At Brest I had the second of my pre-booked hotels. So, after getting the precious stamp in my Brevet card, I 'bounced' the control and diverted a rather fiddly and hilly 1.5km off the route to find the Kyriad Hotel.

Unfortunately, I did not feel I had enough of a time-buffer to make the most of what was an extremely nice corner room in a comfortable and modern hotel. After showering, washing my kit and sorting out the contents of my luggage, I decided I had no time available to sleep. I picked up a not very satisfying breakfast and sat in the room eating, whilst wafting the hair-dryer in the direction of my damp shorts. I also fixed up the right lens of my cycling glasses with electrical tape, as it had been threatening to fall out since yesterday's crash.

Less than two hours after arriving in Brest I was on my way again – now nearly 40 hours in to the ride and still with less than two hours sleep so far.



*A glimpse of the Atlantic Ocean in the background*



Day 2  
10:55 – 15:01

## Stage 8 – Brest to Carhaix-Plouger

m 700.0 km 800.0 km 900.0 km 1,000.0 km 1,100.0 km 1,200.0 km

This stage was statistically the hilliest of the whole route – with an average of 12.8 metres of climbing for every kilometre ridden. I remember thinking it did not feel as hilly as I had expected – probably because the climbing was more concentrated, including the reverse ascent of the Roc. It also helped that it was a nice sunny morning. In fact, it became so pleasantly warm that I braved a 15 minute nap on a comfy grass bank by the road.



*Nap time*

Unfortunately, instead of retracing through Huelgoat and the lovely wooded slopes, the last part of this stage continued on the awful D764.

At the Carhaix control, I lay on the floor at the quiet end of the canteen for another nap, this time for half an hour. I realised that I was in the process of messing up my sleep, but I had another hotel booked just before Loudéac and was now counting on having enough time for a longer sleep there, as the average speed required between controls becomes more generous in the second half of the ride (“race out, tour back” is a PBP maxim that I was hoping would prove to be true).

Day 2  
16:35 – 23:06

## Stage 9 – Carhaix-Plouger to Loudéac

m 700.0 km 800.0 km 900.0 km 1,000.0 km 1,100.0 km 1,200.0 km

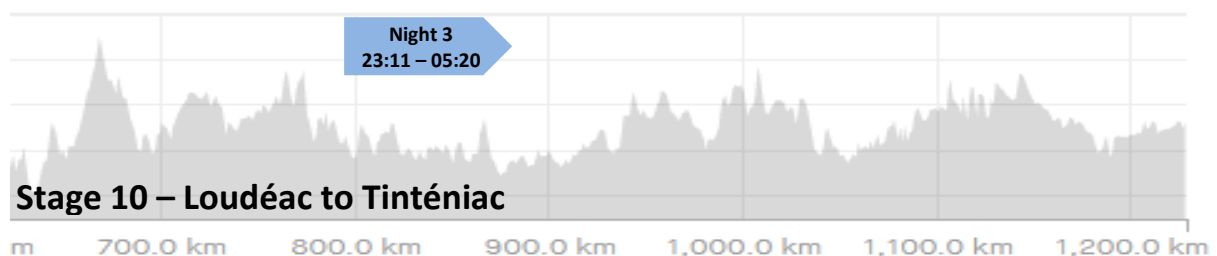
St Nicholas-du-Pélem was a Secret Control again. I was pleased to be back in the garage building, with soup and a hot drink. I was now getting the idea of the ubiquitous baguettes – buy one at each control, stuff it in your back pocket or yellow bag and then chew at it whilst riding the next stage.

My third hotel booking was at Trévé, five kilometres before the Loudéac control and right on the route. I had nearly cancelled this booking before the depart, thinking I would not need it. But, as I approached, I knew that a stop was essential. After nearly 50 hours and 790km, I had managed only one hour of 'proper' sleep and just over an hour's worth of short naps.

The owners of Les Genets D'Or at Trévé were quite happy for me to take my bike into my room – although they found it hilarious that I would want to. It turned out this was because the room was on the second floor, up a very tight winding staircase!

Upon arrival at Trévé I was 2 hours ahead of a schedule that included - at that point - a 2.5 hour buffer against the Loudéac control-cut off time. So I had 4.5 hours in hand altogether. I decided to spend 1.5 hours of my credit at the hotel and use the balance to increase my buffer. So, having hauled my bike up to the room, I showered, washed my kit and then slept for an hour (again!). I had asked Madame to wake me in case my alarms failed, but they both worked and I peered out of my room just as she was about to knock on the door - and nearly got hit in the face!

At the Loudéac control I went straight in and out in less than five minutes, my fastest control of the whole route. I left Loudéac at 23:11, three hours ahead of the control cut off time, and set off into my third night of riding.



A long (90km) overnight stage, with some flatish sections providing a bit of respite from the climbing.

I remember thinking I could see the word 'FIN' spelt out by the reflective strips on the gilets of people in front of me. The figures seemed to be riding scooters rather than bikes, as black leg-warmers made their legs invisible so I could just see their upper-bodies gliding along the road.

Quédillac, about two-thirds into the stage, offered an unscheduled rest stop – and this time both mind and body were insisting I took advantage of this, whatever the printed out Excel plan in my Carradice was saying about buffer time.

After a plate of pasta in a rather chilly tent, I ventured into the sports hall which was serving as a dorm. Hundreds of snoozing cyclists were dimly visible, laid out in numbered rows and columns like the spreadsheet I was turning my back on. The volunteer in charge of the dorm asked me what time I wanted to be woken up, wrote it down and asked me to confirm to avoid any linguistic misunderstandings. He then led me to my 'cell', where a mat and blanket were waiting. I took off shoes and the top couple of layers then lay down into instant sleep. Half an hour later (yes, I hadn't really said goodbye to my buffer) I was woken expertly, without disturbance to my sleeping neighbours, by another volunteer. My first experiment with a PBP dorm had gone extremely well.



The last 30km of this stage was magical. The night was punctuated by a mysterious flashing light, visible on leaving Quédillac, which eventually revealed itself as a beacon at the top of the towering communications mast on the hill crowned by Bécherel, self-proclaimed 'Petite Cité de Caractère' (or city of little character, as we referred to it when visiting my parents, who had a holiday cottage nearby).

The ride in the dark up and over this hill and into Bécherel was another highlight of PBP for me. For old times' sake, I stopped for a photo and a snack in the bus shelter in the town.



The first of my four power banks became discharged during the night and, still obsessing about the weight of my luggage, I disposed of it in a not-very-environmentally-friendly way, saving nearly a quarter of a kilo. I was soon feeling very guilty about this behaviour and did not repeat it.

On reaching the Tinténia control just before first light, I was disappointed but not surprised to see that the Breton dancers were off-duty. The restaurant seemed to be in a ridiculous location, at the back and upstairs, so I didn't hang about.



Talking can be a good defence against tiredness and on an audax ride in the UK you can usually find another cyclist willing to chat if you want. One of the unexpected features of PBP was how little conversation was taking place. My theory is that the mental effort of coping with the linguistic babel of the multi-national participants was putting people off striking up conversations. The PBP gilet – mandatory at night - wasn't helping matters, as you would normally get clues about the origins of a rider from their cycling shirt.

So it was with gratitude that I came across Stephen, having spotted the Yorkshire rose sticker on his mudguard, and I rode some of this stage with him. Amongst other things, we talked about the Paris-Brest pastry. I had seen a sign by the road about this and Stephen had actually tried one, before travelling to France, at a café near his office in Victoria (he is a civil servant, like me).



*A French pun*

Photo from <https://poohitan.com/p/paris-brest-paris-through-a-film-camera/en>

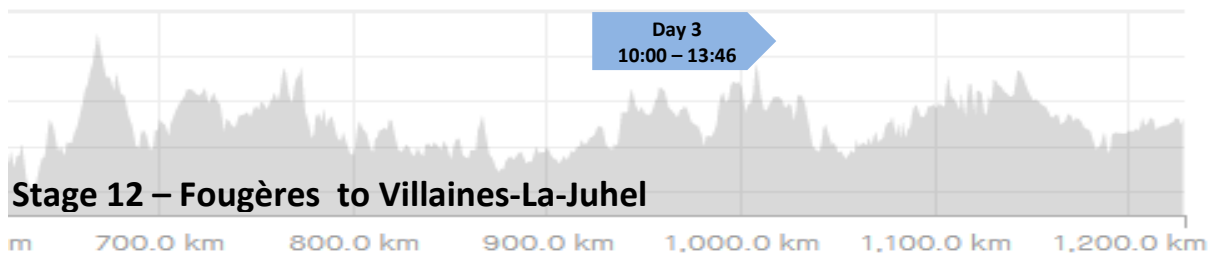
This stage saw the start of my third day on the road, which featured the best of the four sunrises I saw whilst riding PBP. I got off and took pictures, as did every other rider who was passing at the same time.



As we approached Fougères, the tiredness got too much for me again, and I said goodbye to Stephen and spent a while lying on a rather narrow bench in a grubby bus shelter – I'd only give this particular 'audax hotel' one star!

Somehow, despite the plan becoming increasingly theoretical, I arrived at the Fougères control literally one minute before my expected arrival time! But I spent far too long there – a whole hour instead of the planned 20 minutes.

Ostensibly this was because I saw a few people I knew (or had met on the ride) and decided to be sociable – but I think the reality is that, three-quarters of the way round and after 61 hours with only four hours sleep in total, I was looking for reasons to put off the moment when I had to get back on my bike.



I left the Fougères control at 10am, three hours before the cut-off time, and rode some of the early parts of this 90km stage with Robert Hanwell of ACH. After three nights of riding, fatigue was setting in all round. I had a fourth hotel booked towards the end of the stage, but I couldn't work out how I was going to fit in the 'proper sleep' that my plan included and my body was demanding. About three hours of actual sleep (as opposed to faffing) would see me right, I was sure, but that would use up my entire buffer and leave me racing against the control cut off times.



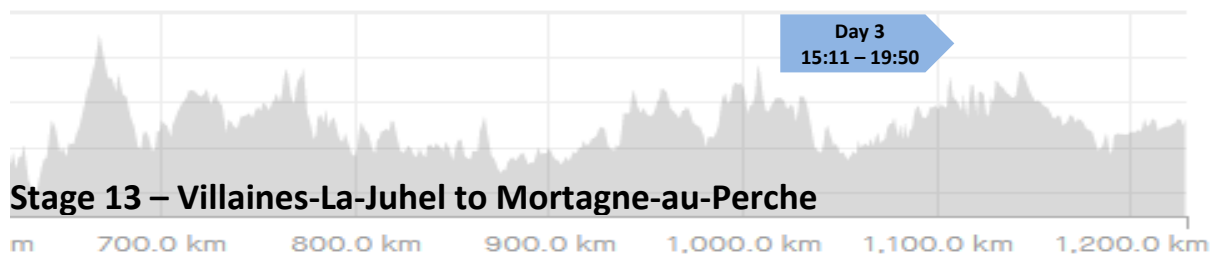
*The house of nod...*

This was a low point as time seemed to be slipping away from me. I was lucky to be riding with Rob, a very experienced audaxer, who was of the firm view that my planned stop at the hotel would be a big mistake. He advised me to keep moving to the next control and to join a train if there were any left at this point in the event. So, as I latched on to a Ukrainian-led train, this was the point where I metaphorically ripped up my plan. I stayed with the train for about 20km, taking my turn at the front, as it took me speeding past the hotel I had booked (and already paid for!).

Riding in the train was exhilarating but also gruelling – not just physically but also mentally because it was a real struggle to maintain the level of concentration required for group riding in my advanced state of exhaustion. But, by riding faster for a while and skipping my planned hotel stop, I arrived at Villaines-La-Juhel over six hours ahead of the control cut off!

The exhilaration of the run-in was amplified by the atmosphere in Villaines. This town is famous for embracing the PBP spirit and it was living up to its reputation on this sunny August afternoon. The control had taken over the main street, which was lined with friendly spectators engaging with the participants as a commentator pointed out interesting features of the cyclists and their bikes over the loud speakers.

I substituted my proper sleep in a hotel bed with another half an hour in the control dorm – a squash-court sized hall that was empty in the middle of the day. Then to the restaurant where cyclists were being ushered to the front of the queue by local school children, who then carried our trays of pasta to the dining tables!



Why do so many French towns have hyphenated names? This is just one of the many mysteries that was not answered for me by riding PBP.

I left Villaines in a very good mood – still tired, of course, but with about 200km to go and nearly five hours of buffer, I felt the ride was do-able again. It was mid-afternoon and the temperature must have been somewhere in the high 20s – about 25 degrees higher than it had been when I was descending the Roc the previous day – but it felt quite bearable. The wind that had blown at us from the west on the way out had turned round, creating a double-whammy not usually suffered on an ‘out and back’ ride. But, since this had been predicted quite accurately by the weather forecast before the depart, it was anticipated and so wasn’t too dispiriting.

Another problem overcome was a sore foot, that had developed on the run in to Villaines due to pressure from my right boot. At the control I removed the footbed from the boot and applied a blister plaster. A very minor issue compared with some tales of PBP discomfort.

The section from Averton was particularly beautiful in the afternoon sun - there was a long gentle descent into the Sarthe valley with fantastic views across to the next high ground a considerable distance away. Another highlight of the ride, for me.

This was followed by an incredibly boring straight section of about 10km, where the route crossed the A28 south of Alencon. I found a nice shady patch of lush grass and succumbed to another 15 minute nap by the road. This was soon followed by a stop at an excellent pop up in the central square at Mamers – great because they actually had proper pieces of dark chocolate *and* real orange segments. I ate a fair few, rather messily.

The fatigue was kicking in again for the last 10km or so to the control at Mortagne, at the top of a hill (of course) but nothing I couldn’t handle at this point. I was pleased to arrive over seven hours ahead



of the cut off – I don't think I was riding any faster though; this was simply the reduction in the average speed required by ACP finally starting to manifest itself.

I felt confident enough to book into the dorm for another hour's sleep. This was the biggest dorm I visited, and at 8pm it was empty except for me and one other rider.



*Bulge, what bulge? The dorm at Mortagne-au-Perche at 8pm on the fourth evening*



After another soup and pasta supper I set off as it was getting dark, with just over five and a half hours in hand.

This was a very tedious stage. It passed extremely slowly - partly because I wasn't turning the pedals very quickly, but also because of the landscape. After leaving the Perche region, the route passed through enormous fields that had been full of wheat when Ali and I were there on holiday six weeks earlier but were now bare and entirely featureless in the dark. The moon had been busily waning since we set off and offered scant light now.

I was grateful for the tent pop up just over half way (at Senonches) where a coffee helped fend off the cold of my fourth night on the road. I was worrying about my front lights running out of power and the final control at Dreux seemed to take forever to arrive.



At Dreux I managed to find sockets to plug in a light and a phone, then ate unmemorable food in a cold restaurant before sleeping for an hour and a quarter. Unlike previous dormitories, the waking system seemed illogical and chaotic and did not inspire confidence, so I set two alarms which woke me at about 4:30am.

At some point the little lever on the bracket holding my front light had snapped off. I normally carry a spare bracket on very long rides but had ditched it before the depart, as part of my efforts to save weight. So changing lights became a lot more of a faff, as I had to fiddle about with the screwdriver blade on my multitool to release the discharged light and swap it for the charged one.



The effect on my mental capacity of 80 hours on the road was evident from the deterioration in the standard of my spoken French and the difficulty I was having doing basic calculations involving times and distances. However, I was very clear that I wanted to depart from Dreux early enough to avoid crowds of (other) incompetently tired cyclists and rush hour traffic on the final stage. This worked well and I am very glad I did it.

I left the Dreux control in darkness, just before 5am, and enjoyed an atmospheric couple of hours of near-solitude on the road until daybreak. Audax Club Parisien's last minute route change on the final stage didn't present any problems as I just followed the arrows carefully.

## Arrivée!



The last kilometre of the ride, past the chateau and through the park, was deserted except for a few early rising PBP 'friends and family' venturing out of the camper vans bordering the road. Then there was a short climb before the final straight to the Bergerie Nationale.

A handful of people clapped me through the PBP arch and into the courtyard, where the organisers had decided it would be amusing to make exhausted cyclists do a circuit of some extremely rough cobbles before crossing the timing mat. It was two minutes to seven, just after sunrise.

I got off my bike, commenting to anyone who was listening (no-one was) that I would need a new bike after riding over those cobbles. I remembered to press 'finish' on my main Strava recording and also managed to recall the combination for my café lock as I left my bike in the parking area.

I headed into the marquee where a cheery faun-like man presented me with a satisfyingly heavy medal and a final stamp in the Brevet card. I was aghast when he then took the Brevet card away from me, explaining it had to go off to be 'homologated' by the ACP. In common with many riders, I whipped out my phone and took pictures of it, just in case!



As I shuffled out of the marquee on my cyclist's sea-legs, I found myself alone by the presentation stage. I took a few selfies then sat on the step and composed a message of thanks to everyone and everything and posted it along with my ride details on Strava (which amazingly finished syncing the 1230km ride in less than 10 minutes). My unofficial (pre-homologation) PBP time was 83 hours, 35 minutes and 30 seconds.



This selfie was taken about fifteen minutes after arriving. Out of half a dozen, it is the one where I look *least* tired and spaced-out.

I sat on the steps of the stage for a few minutes and had a bit of an emotional moment. Then I felt very cold and headed back into the tent where meals were being served to finishers. I augmented the food with a half of cider in a PBP 2019 commemorative beaker.



## After the Ride

### The Day of the Arrivée

As the day warmed up, I ventured out of the marquee. There was plenty of atmosphere to be soaked up as cyclists streamed in from Dreux. Every so often I would be hit by a wave of tiredness and would try out a new corner of the Bergerie Nationale as a spot for a nap. There was a dorm provided for finishers but it was crowded, and sounded and smelled exactly as you would expect given its occupants. Leaning against a wall in the sun proved a better option.

I had a rambling chat with a young Italian cyclist based on the observation that we were both wearing Gore Shakedry cycling jackets (not exactly an unusual choice in these circles). Then I remembered Julian and wondered how he had got on. Pete from Sheffield had told me Julian had passed him fairly early on during the first night, which was surprising given that he had started in one of the last slots on the Sunday evening. I texted him and got an immediate reply saying he had finished the previous afternoon and was now back at his hotel getting ready to set off for Dieppe. A quick check of the ACP rider-tracking website revealed Julian's finish time as 67 hours 31 minutes and 14 seconds. This was astonishingly quick and I looked forward to catching up with him to find out how he had achieved this. (We had booked different crossings back to England, and it would be some weeks before we met again).

The next few hours are a blur, but around midday I decided to head to the Ibis hotel. The woman at reception informed me the reservation I had made on booking.com had not worked, but before the awful implications of this could sink in, she cheerily continued that this was not a problem and she could find a room for me. I ate another double lunch in the Mona Lisa whilst waiting for the room to be ready. Once in the room, at about 2pm, I showered and was deeply asleep within ten minutes.

I had set the alarm for about 4pm, though, as there was more excitement to be had at the Bergerie Nationale. As I rode back up to the sheepfold I didn't particularly appreciate being clapped through the inflatable arch for a second time – surely it was clear to onlookers I had finished hours ago?

I found Audax Club Hackney enjoying beers in the sun and joined them for an hour. Everyone was too tired to recount much about the ride at this point.

Then I joined the modest crowd in front of the stage for the end of event presentations and speeches, wondering if I might see one of the more famous participants of the 19<sup>th</sup> edition of PBP, such as Fiona Kolbinger (who had won the 4000km Transcontinental Race a couple of weeks earlier, then carried on to do PBP) or Jasmijn Muller, 24 hour Time Trial world champion 2017. No such luck, but we did hear from Thierry Rivet, the unassuming President of the ACP, who I felt deserved huge respect and thanks for leading the organisation that had organised PBP. (And also for replying personally to an email query I had sent in before the event!)

Listening to the speeches was straining my fatigue-drained language skills, but I was helped by a lovely French guy I was standing next to who translated the hard bits for me. When I glumly speculated on the impact Brexit might have on my opportunities to enjoy the fantastic cycling in France, he graciously said "you will always be welcome here".



Towards the end of the presentations an excitable guy, looking like an off-duty property developer in crisp white shirt, beard and shades, appeared on stage and kind-of took over proceedings. My French neighbour informed me he was a local politician, “who has never cycled to Brest”. In fact it looked like his preferred mode of transport would be a Ferrari.



There was an awkward moment when the politician was due to present a large trophy for the country that had seen the greatest increase in PBP participation. The people on stage looked confused and someone asked for help from the crowd to find a “male Asian”. Several uncomfortable minutes later, a young man was ushered on stage – surprised but also very pleased to be up there receiving the sparkling trophy. I have no idea if he was actually from Malaysia.

After the speeches there were Audax Club Parisien cocktails on offer, apparently, but I couldn’t cope with working out when and where they were to be found, a failure I now regret as I would have liked to say thank you in person to Thierry Rivet and the ACP. There was talk of an ACH trip to get pizzas and this was enough to stir me to leave. I joined the stream of cyclists drifting away from the Bergerie Nationale, like an army after a battle, as the light started to shift from day to evening.



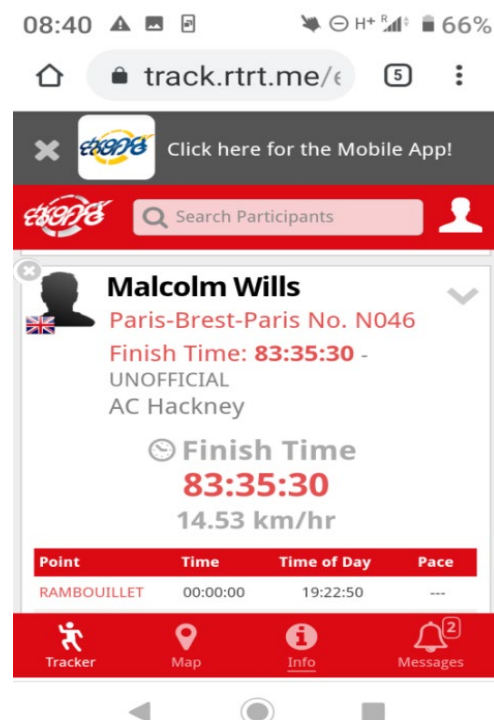
Post-campaign debilitation meant the ACH pizza group did not coalesce until much later in the evening, by which time I had installed myself solo back at the Mona Lisa. Fortunately this turned out to be where at least some of ACH were heading, and so I joined Justin, Chris ('Gadge') and others for a late night chat.

Then back to the hotel for a proper sleep. Sleep. Sleep.

## The Day after the Arrivée

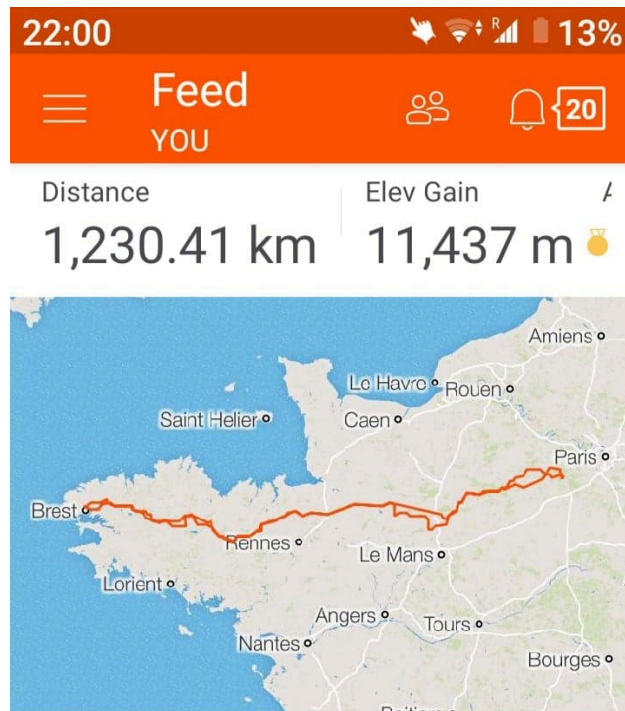
Did I say that PBP is not a race? Well, it isn't. But human nature being what it is, that doesn't stop some of us being interested in the numbers. Although I had taken nearly twice as long as the fastest ever PBP rider, I was very happy with my time of 83 hours 35 minutes, recorded on the PBP Tracker.

Incredibly, my arrival time of 6.58am was just three minutes off the arrival time predicted by my Excel plan. Given all the 'snakes and ladders' along the way, causing significant variations from the schedule, I am still not sure that I understand how this happened!



Finishing in under 84 hours was satisfying, although to have ridden against the 84 hour control cut-offs would have felt far too stressful for me.

I was also pleased with the online souvenir of the ride created by my Strava recording, which had kept going for the whole ride except for about 50km around Villaines on the way back (the drop-out appears as a straight line above Le Mans in the next screenshot).



The Strava recording also told me how long I spent off the bike – 21.5 hours, or about 25% of the total time. The time off the bike included about 7 hours of sleep (see estimates below) with the remaining 14 hours spent mostly eating and faffing. The crash at Villaines probably cost me about 30 minutes extra time off the bike as well as a reduced speed for the next stage.

Sleep Location	Sleep Minutes
After Tinténia (Brit Hotel)	60
Carhaix (head on table in control canteen)	15
Roadside (plastic chair on Roc descent)	15
Brest (Kyriad Hotel)	0
Roadside (before Carhaix)	15
Carhaix (canteen floor)	30
Trévé (Genets D'Or Hotel)	60
Quédillac (dorm at the control)	30
Bus Shelter (before Fougères )	15
Villaines (dorm at the control)	30
Roadside (after Villaines, before Mamers)	15
Mortagne-au-Perche (dorm at the control)	60
Dreux (dorm at the control)	75
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>420 minutes / 7 hours</b>

I don't know what time I woke up on the day after the arrivée, but I do recall feeling very relaxed and happy. I had anticipated that it might not be a great idea to put myself under pressure to get back to Dieppe on the Friday after finishing PBP, and this proved to be a good decision. I had booked my ferry crossing for Saturday lunchtime and given very little thought to when and how I would travel the 200km back to the channel. I had not even booked accommodation for the Friday night. For once I actually relished the feeling of not having a plan.

Whilst others were scrambling for trains and ferries, I enjoyed my lie-in. The weather looked lovely from the window of my room in the Ibis. An idea started to form that it might be quite fun to cycle back overnight to Dieppe. This would avoid the hassle of finding accommodation and would save money, to boot. And I had a feeling there might be an earlier crossing that I could just walk on to if I got there in time.

I would need to solve the problem of the heavy rucksack, though. Surely it must be possible to post some of my luggage back to London? When a quick google revealed that this was indeed a service offered by La Poste, and the main office in Rambouillet was just a five minute walk away, I felt as if I had consumed Harry Potter's Felix Felicis.

My luck ran out, however, when I went to the bathroom. Despite a considerable, pent up, urge to poo, nothing was possible! I have so far spared the reader such details of the ride, but they become relevant at this point. My toilet strategy had been based on the hotel stops, the last of which was nearly 60 hours ago, at Trévé.

I went to reception and explained (to the same woman who had sorted out the room mix up) the nature of the problem and asked whether it might be possible for my checkout time to be extended an hour or so. She was, once again, extremely helpful, and also pointed me in the direction of the pharmacy. This didn't disappoint either – offering a choice between pills (three to four hours) and suppositories (five minutes). The circumstances dictated the latter.

I was now able to return to the question of my rucksack. With everything laid out on the bed, I sorted items into a virtual two-by-two box. Possessions that I did not want to risk losing and were light were coming back with me on the bike. Those that were both heavy and could be easily replaced would be posted. The 150 gram PBP medal was a dilemma – wearing it whilst riding would be uncomfortable and would look daft, but I couldn't risk losing something so hard-won - so it went into the saddle bag.

At La Poste I transferred the selected items from my rucksack into a box provided at the counter. This was weighed and the charge for the box and postage was 55 euros. I now felt lighter in all respects and headed back to the hotel, walking on air, to check out, about two hours late.

I enjoyed a relaxed ride into Rambouillet, waving to the handful of stray PBP riders still haunting the scene of the battle. The crêperie on the main street, which had been full to bursting on the Sunday of the depart, was nearly empty. I took a table outside and polished off three main courses, chatting to a young American rider and his girlfriend.

As I headed back to the station, the streets were enlivened not by cyclists but by 1940s cars and Second World War jeeps, with drivers and passengers in vintage dress. Today, the 23<sup>rd</sup> August, was the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the day the order was given by General de Gaulle, from his headquarters in the Chateau de Rambouillet, for the free French army to march on Paris.



## Back to Dieppe

I caught the train from Rambouillet to Versailles, where I was able to cycle through the grounds of the palace before picking up the Donald Hirsch London to Paris route in reverse. Making sure to turn left to London rather than right to Paris, I set off in the late afternoon sun and was soon retracing familiar pedal strokes through the domaniale forests and over the river at Triel-sur-Seine. The route then turned north and I was cycling through the rolling terrain of the Vexin, as the evening sun sent its dappled light across the fields of cabbages and spinach.



*A shadow of my former self...?*

My lucky day was back on track when I arrived at Marines in time for a dinner of creamy pasta at La Trattoria (which had been closed for its 'fermeture annuelle' when Julian and I passed by a week earlier). Then I was on my way again and cycling into the night on deserted roads.

My head torch fell out of its bracket and disappeared into the grass verge. It should have been retained by its lanyard, but it turned out this had (silently) fallen off at some earlier stage. Fortunately I was climbing a steep hill at the time of the loss and so there was a limited area of grass to search and the torch was found within seconds. Just as well, as the PBP moon was all used up now and the countryside was very dark.

It was nearing midnight as I approached Gournay-en-Bray, the next town on the route. At the outskirts, the golden arch of McDonalds offered the hope of a warm drink but it was five minutes after closing time. Désolé.

I toured the town centre and even got off my bike and ventured into a couple of bars, but the staff were preoccupied with evicting the last few drunk locals before the patrolling gendarmes got a sniff of a licencing infraction. So I pressed on, abandoning Donald Hirsch's quiet lanes for the surprisingly busy (for the early hours of the morning) D915.

I knew that a real treat awaited me 20km further on, at Forges-les-Eaux. On the way down, I had spotted something I didn't even know existed - a 24 hour hole-in-the-wall pizza machine. Maybe this

was the real reason I had decided to ride back, as 2am in the middle of a 200km overnight ride was the ideal opportunity to try an automatic pizza machine. It worked perfectly and I had a very happy time sitting on some stone steps overlooking the main square and eating my pizza.



### *24 hour pizza people...*

For the last 50km of the ride I was back on the Avenue Verte, monotonous in the dark. From my experience coming the other way at 4am on my first ride to Paris in 2012, I knew this would be very boring riding. Even with my Northern Soul playlist on repeat, I was struggling to stay awake.

The thought of an early ferry from Dieppe drove me on and I arrived at the port shortly after 5am. There was indeed a ferry just arriving and I was confident I would be on it and heading across the channel soon. This hope was dashed when I presented myself at the DFDS check in. They confirmed that this was the ferry I would be crossing on, but it wasn't leaving until the scheduled time of 12:30 – in about seven hours! This marked the end of my short experiment in not planning journeys. Insult was added to injury when the staff announced they were shutting the terminal until check in started at 11am.

I wheeled my bike dejectedly through the car park, where about 30 of the passengers who had just disembarked were gathering with their bikes before setting off on a charity ride to Paris. They were listening to a briefing on the challenges that awaited them on today's fully-supported 100km stage!

I cycled into the chilly centre of Dieppe where nothing was open, not even a bakery. I called in to the Ibis Budget where I had stayed on my first night in France, but this was full. The internet suggested the first hotel in Dieppe to open for breakfast was the Mercure on the seafront, so I picked my way, shivering, through the streets of the centre where stall holders were starting to set up for the Saturday market. The Mercure receptionist didn't seem very keen to relieve me of 16 euros for a buffet breakfast, but I persisted and then pointed out that, as I was now a customer of the hotel, I must be allowed to take my bike into the secure underground parking.

A glance in the mirror, whilst I was getting changed in the loo, suggested why the receptionist may have been wary of letting me in. After a wash and a change of clothes I felt much more presentable

and, once I was installed at a table taking in the view of dawn over the channel and sipping coffee, everything was great again.

I stretched my breakfast out for two hours. The Mercure was hosting more English cyclists who were preparing to set off for Paris, and I wished them bon route before I left the hotel.



The sun was warming Dieppe as I wheeled my bike along the seafront and through the now-bustling market. After buying some presents to take home, I felt in need of a performance enhancing Calvados and found a bar overlooking the harbour, where I passed the remaining half an hour until the ferry check-in opened.



Whilst waiting to board I met a couple of other PBP stragglers. One of them had completed the ride on an impressive tricycle. The other had DNF'd after a serious crash; he had fallen asleep on his bike, ridden into a ditch containing a concrete drainage channel, hit his head and woken up in hospital, ride over. Poor chap.

On the ferry, I dozed through a lecture on whales and was soon watching Seaford and Newhaven getting closer. I can't remember anything of the train journey to London Bridge and my ride back to south east London. I guess it must have gone smoothly, and, shortly before 6pm, on the tenth and final day of my PBP adventure, I was carrying my bike up the front steps and into our house.



## Home

I wasn't too sure what to expect on arrival, as my family has a busy non-cycling life. But I was very grateful to find that everyone was there to welcome me back with champagne and a special dinner and – following a spot of inspired sourcing by Martha – the eponymous Paris-Brest pastries.



*C'est du gâteaux!*

I remember getting through the meal in a blissed-out state, then I must have been demonstrating my head-on-the-table PBP sleeping technique because the next thing I knew I was being woken up and it was dark outside.



*Welcome Home!*



## The Hindsight of an Ancien de PBP

The term 'Ancien de PBP' is used to describe cyclists who have successfully completed the Paris-Brest-Paris randonée. Other than having your name added to the ACP's list of finishers, being an Ancien de PBP doesn't entitle you to any privileges and since, as I observed at the start of this story, most people haven't a clue what PBP is, it is clearly not going to help me next time I am trying to get served in a crowded cycling café.

The main motivation for writing this was to capture my memories of riding PBP. The process of putting together this account, of reliving on paper the 83.5 hours and the 15 stages, has brought back many details that I thought had been lost to exhaustion on the road. If anyone who reads this is thinking of embarking on a similar cycling adventure, then I hope the following 'lessons learned' might prove useful.

**Lesson 1 – Always make your own decisions.** Listen to stories and tips from other riders, but know yourself, your body and your bike.

**Lesson 2 – Do the right amount of planning.** This will be different for each individual. With the benefit of experience, I would dial-down the complexity of my spreadsheeting for any future ride of this scale. However, whilst "leave the control before the cut off time" is a simpler approach it seems risky on its own, as the cut off times are determined by audax regulations on distance, without taking account of the terrain. As most riders are slower on hilly stages, this is a material feature of the route that I will continue to factor into planning by assuming slower average speeds.

**Lesson 3 – Faffing is not sleeping.** My sleep during PBP was very fragmented, which, even at the time, felt like dicing with danger. Reviewing my pre-ride plan, I see that I had only allowed 2.5 hours and 1.5 hours for my first two hotel stops (at 390km and 610km). These are remarkably close to my actual stop times. But I was unrealistic about the amount of sleeping time I could achieve, compared with time spent finding the hotel, checking in, eating and, of course, faffing. It may have been better to combine the two stops into one with a higher ratio of sleeping to faffing. And even better to...

**Lesson 4 – ...Embrace the Dorms.** A revelation, as the ride progressed, was how time-efficient the control dorms were – provided you avoided them at peak times (see Lesson 5). A mix of dorms (for shorter time-efficient sleeps) and hotels (for a proper wash of self and kit) might be best. To avoid wasting time, you need hotels right on the route and *after* the control (to benefit from the extra time-buffer that should be accruing as the ride goes on).

**Lesson 5 – It is possible to survive the Bulge.** Although I was in the middle of the famous PBP bulge, I experienced next to no time delays as a result. A tribute to PBP's efficient organisation, but also due to some flexibility on my part – avoiding the parts of the controls which seemed crowded, and not choosing peak times for sleeping.

**Lesson 6 – If you can, throw some money at it.** PBP is difficult and there are so many things that can go wrong to prevent you finishing, or even starting. Money spent on achieving this goal - getting the bike and kit right, prevention/treatment of injuries, new Schwalbe Durano Plus tyres for every big ride (I am working through my collection of part-used tyres several months later) and even the cost of hotels I didn't stay in – was all a worthwhile investment. Did I spend more than I needed to? Yes -

but not as much as I could have done; I met one rider during qualification who had hired a personal coach to prepare him for PBP!

**Lesson 7 – *Vive la différence!*** The superior road surfaces and considerate drivers of France have long been an object of admiration among the UK's long distance cycling community. But there are some other big contrasts between PBP and a long audax in the UK, which it is worth being aware of. Hardly any navigation was needed, with good signage and a large number of participants to follow. Shops close early and the 24 hour garage shops which UK audaxers rely on do not exist. Instead, stock up during the day and at the PBP controls, which are major operations. The roadside pop-ups are fun but you can't rely on them having anything you want to eat. If you are riding on your own, be prepared for long stretches without talking to anyone, as the language barrier inhibits conversation. Finally, you might want to consider opening a French bank account to take advantage of the local version of the audax hotel – as shown in the picture below. It's probably warmer than a bus shelter!



Photo from <https://www.200-lemagazine.com/>

## Thanks

I owe thanks to so many people who, wittingly or otherwise, have provided support and encouragement for my long distance cycling adventures. My family – Ali, Martha, Milo and Agnes – first and foremost, who have stayed engaged without ever letting me forget this activity is not normal. Donald Hirsch for showing me the way to Paris, the first time. Julian Sharples, Ben Hunziker-Neville and Jamie Williams, who have been my accomplices on some great cycling escapades. The expert mechanics - Max and James at The Cyclery, Lewisham and their former colleagues at London Velo - who have looked after my bike. Jo Bingham, as I continue to try to live up to the standards of core strength and stability she teaches in her pilates class. Peter Simpson, whose osteopathic wisdom has helped to keep me active at a level and for longer than I imagined possible. Ronan Descy of Form bike fit. Nick Wilkinson of Cambridge Audax for his PBP Pubinars, which demystified many aspects of the event for me. Members of Audax Club Hackney and the wider Audax UK community. The London Velo Café Cycle Club, which embraces all types of riding with passion. And to all the other riders I've chatted to on and off the bike, who have contributed to my understanding of the possibilities of cycling. Thanks are due, of course, to ACP for running this brilliant event. Finally, a special thanks to the unknown rider in the PBP 2011 shirt who I chatted to on Lambeth Bridge on one of my commutes many years ago, and who may, therefore, be responsible for all of this!

There were a few points in this story where a picture felt essential but I had not managed to take one. Fortunately the virtual PBP community showed the foresight I lacked on the ride! The sources for the handful of third-party photos I used are listed by way of acknowledgement and thanks.

## PBP Post-scripts

*PBP plus one week.* The overflow contents of my rucksack are delivered. I unearth the commemorative beaker and raise a glass to the postal service!

*PBP plus two weeks.* I am on a social ride with the London Velo Café Cycle Club, for the first time in nine months (having avoided club rides in the run up to PBP because of the different style of riding). Most people's faces were blank as I responded to the question "have you been on any good rides over the summer" with the answer "Yes, Paris-Brest-Paris".

*PBP plus three weeks.* I am back in France heading for the Lot area for a late summer holiday (with family, without bike). We are driving on the A28, passing over the PBP route between Villaines and Mamers. I am feeling very lucky to have ridden PBP. These pages of the Michelin map will always be special.

*PBP plus eight weeks.* I am riding what should be a relatively easy 200km audax, the Cambridge Autumnal. I am feeling much more exhausted than I should. Three weeks earlier I rode a 300km and came close to packing due to general weariness. On the Cambridge ride, problems that I thought I'd fixed the year before PBP are recurring – gastro-intestinal distress, shoulder and neck problems, sore Achilles tendons. I realise the extent to which I have been depleted by riding PBP and that the recovery process is not a normal recovery process. I speak to others PBP riders who have not been back on their bikes for any significant distance since August.

*PBP plus four months.* I have ridden a couple of 200km rides where I felt close to being back to normal. My wrist is OK, no more twinges from the crash. The scar on my right hip from the grazing is fading, although still quite visible. It looks like that will be hanging around for a while as a souvenir of PBP. I am coming to the end of this story and am starting to think about future riding goals – selected audax events, yes, but maybe more multi-day rides at touring speed, not needing to push myself to prove anything. Definitely more riding in France...come to think of it, I quite fancy the idea of riding from the north coast to the south coast of the country – the Channel to the Med. Now there's a randonée to inspire me through the winter and into the 2020 season.



## Appendices

### Appendix A - Tracking and Statistics

Not everyone cares about ride data, but I have found it helpful as a way of learning lessons about what I can achieve on a bike which feed into planning future rides, increasing the chances of success. Unfortunately, I do not have the time and/or patience and/or experience and/or technical skills to do this easily and efficiently, so this is a rather low-tech take on the topic.

I carried two smartphones on PBP - both Sony Xperia Minis. These have relatively good battery life and, as the name suggests, are not too big. One was for navigation (hardly needed, as it turned out) using Open Street Map and also for recording the whole ride on Strava. I just started the ap at the depart and pressed stop and finish at the end. Amazingly this worked, apart from one drop out of 50km on the way back, so I have a nearly-perfect Strava log of my 1230km ride. I also took some screenshots to record 'split' times at various points, as a cross-reference for later.

The other phone was used for stage-by-stage Strava recordings. The intention was to check moving average speed against my plan, so I could take corrective action if necessary. In the event, uncertainty about the calculation method of the Strava averages and material discrepancies between it and the average speed shown by my old fashioned magnet-on-the-spokes cyclometer meant I couldn't derive any meaningful information during the ride itself. Also, sleep deprivation put paid to a number of the recordings when I couldn't find my second phone, or forget to start or stop it. The stage recordings did mean I was posting information on Strava during the event which elicited some encouraging comments from friends back home. The second phone was also my first-choice camera and a back up navigation device in case the first one failed.

In addition, I noted (with a pen!) actual arrival and stop times against a print out of my plan, and this was useful to keep track of the waxing and waning of my 'buffer' time. However, by the final night this note-taking and calculating had become mentally too taxing and my ability to interpret data and take decisions had deteriorated significantly.

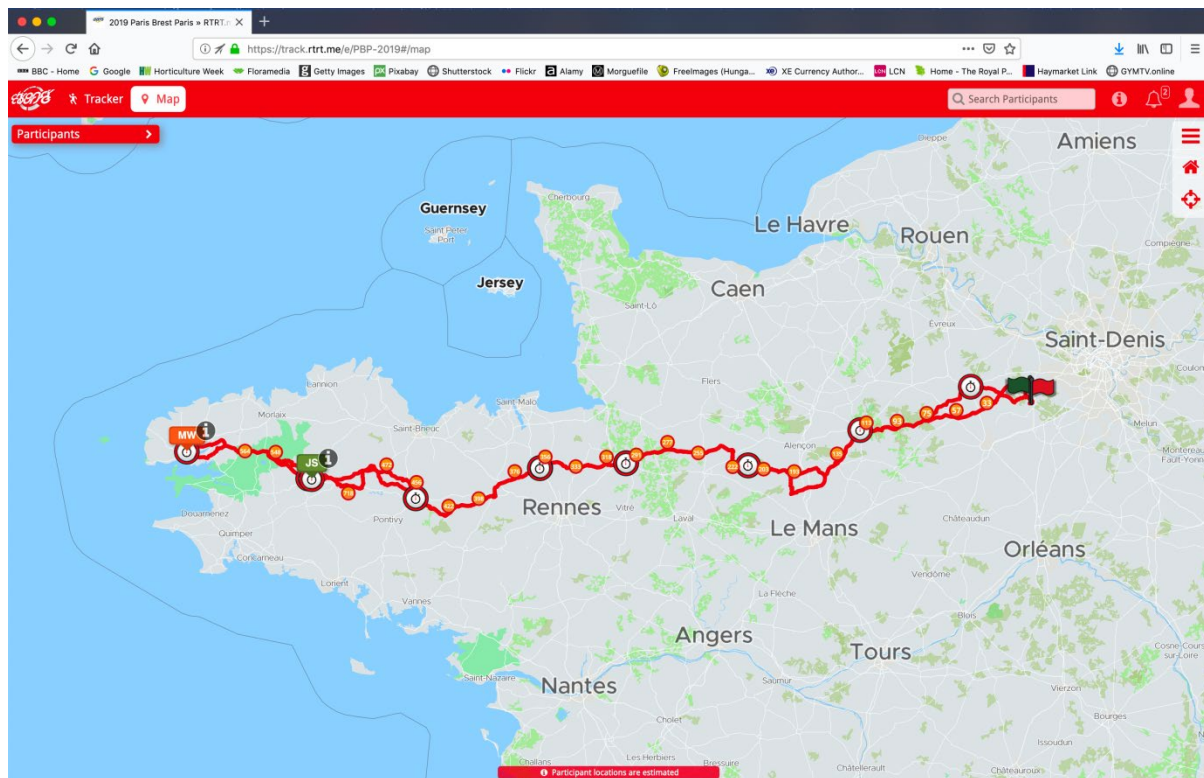
The B-TAG chip mounted on a plastic card, which you attach to your frame, allows the PBP organisers to record your arrival times at the controls.





The official PBP tracker information is fairly minimalist and some riders reported that the data was inaccurate - but mine seems about right. Of course, the chip times are different from the times hand-written in your Brevet card by the PBP officials at the controls; the difference being the amount of time it took to park your bike and find your way to the Brevet stampers.

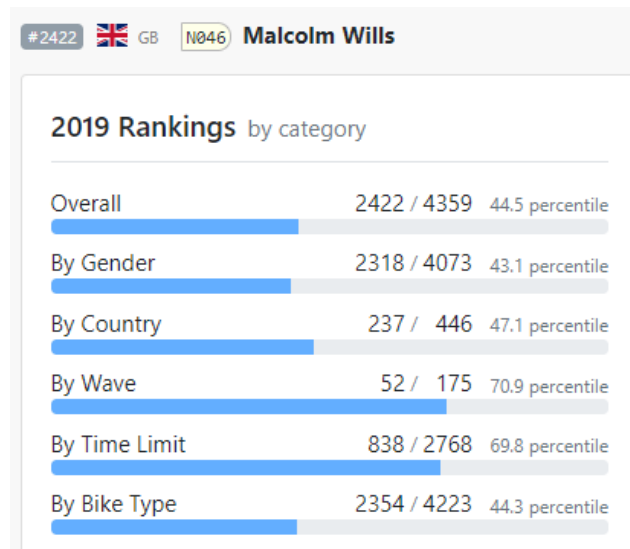
The ACP tracker had one huge benefit – it allowed anyone to track your progress, simply by entering your name / rider number on the ACP website. The example below shows Julian (JS) already well on his way back to Paris, with me (MW) still faffing in Brest.



When we met up after PBP, several weeks later and back in London, I asked Julian how he achieved his very quick time of 67 hours 31 minutes and 14 seconds. He described how he became a “peleton hanger-on” not just for the first few stages but all the way round. He also noted that the terrain, rolling but nothing steep, proved perfect for the gearing on his single-speed bike. All in all, a truly impressive ride, placing Julian 519<sup>th</sup> overall and 33<sup>rd</sup> fastest of the UK riders, according to the unofficial ‘PBP Results’ website which sprang up within days of the event.

The fastest PBP so far recorded was 42 hours 26minutes, by Bjorn Lenhard in 2015. The first rider back in 2019 was Hajo Eckstein, in 43 hours 49 minutes. “But” he was riding a velomobile – a recumbent bicycle with a bullet-shaped aerodynamic fairing. The first rider back on a ‘normal’ bicycle was Robert Coquen, in 44 hours 47 minutes. And he was from Brittany – so he stole the headlines in the local press reports.

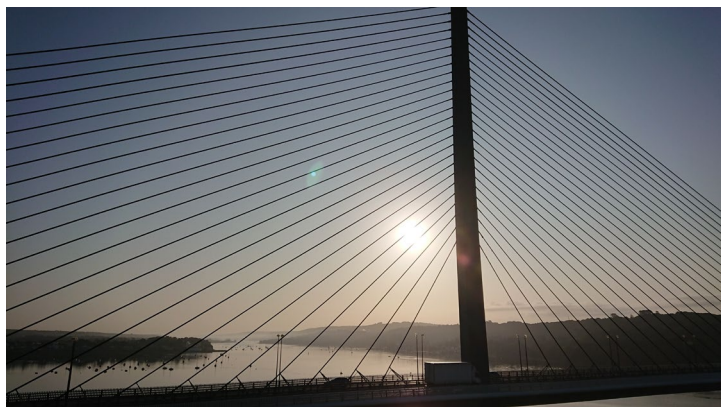
My time of 83 hours 35 minutes and 30 seconds placed me 2,422<sup>nd</sup> out of 4,359 finishers and 6,418 starters, according to the unofficial PBP Results website.



The unofficial PBP Results website imported the unhomologated ACP rider tracking data, ranked it, and provided the ability to filter, as shown above. Of course, the outputs are only as good as the data available, and, judging by the forum postings, a few riders felt there had been some problems with the timing chips. Any issues will no doubt be sorted out during homologation, which I assume involves a reconciliation between the Brevet cards and the rider data, carried out by ACP prior to release of the official results early in 2020. Some fun nights-in for the ACP officials, then!

My Strava recording provided all sorts of other statistics such as maximum speed reached (60.4kph), calories burned (22,646 – equivalent to ten 14-inch pizzas!) and average *moving* speed (19.9kph). The latter is a useful contrast to the ACP-calculated average *overall* speed, which is the total distance divided by the total duration, including all stops. This generally comes out at an unimpressively low speed for the longer audaxes. In my case, 14.53kph. At this speed I would have been paced by sub-three hour marathon runners (assuming they could keep going for 28 times longer than normal).

The 19<sup>th</sup> edition of PBP seems to have had a higher than usual attrition rate. Over 32% of the 6,418 starters are recorded as DNF, Over Time Limit or Disqualified. The last PBP with an attrition rate of this order was 2007 when there was torrential rain for an extended period. In 2019, the strong headwind on the way out was cited by some as a problem. Many of us were surprised by the low temperatures towards the end of each night, but this was possibly more of a problem for riders without experience of northern European riding conditions. And the hills were relentless for much of the route, making me very glad I had included the Land's End ride and hill training in my preparation.



## Appendix B – Stage-by-Stage Distances and Timings

The following table was pieced together after ride, drawing on the PBP chip data, Strava recordings, and my handwritten notes (where legible!). Not surprisingly, the various sources do not always triangulate, particularly around Fougères and Villaines on the way back. According to Strava, my total non-moving time was 21 hours 44 minutes – less than suggested by the total of the estimated stop times in the table below. So, all data to be taken with a large dose of “sel”.

CONTROL / Rest Stop	STAGE DISTANCE (km)	OVERALL DISTANCE (km)	PLANNED TIME OF ARRIVAL	ACTUAL TIME OF ARRIVAL	OVERALL TIME (since leaving Rambouillet)	ESTIMATED TOTAL STOP TIME (from leaving last control to leaving this control)
RAMBOUILLET	0	0	19:15	19:22	0:00	00:00
MORTAGNE-AU-PERCHE (rest stop)	118	118	01:16	00:15	4:53	00:49
VILLAINES-LA-JUHEL (control)	99	217	07:04	05:26	10:26	00:58
FOUGÈRES (control)	90	307	12:25	10:48	15:25	01:40
TINTÉNIAC (control)	55	362	16:08	14:34	19:12	00:47
QUÉDILLAC (rest stop)	27	389	17:52	16:20	20:58	00:05
ST MEEN LA GRANDE (hotel)	8	397	18:22	16:45	21:23	02:41
LOUDÉAC (control)	54	451	23:44	21:55	26:33	00:37
ST-NICOLAS-DU-PÉLEM (secret control)	44	495	02:44	01:10	29:48	00:47
CARHAIX-PLOUGER (control)	33	528	05:04	03:12	31:49	00:59
BREST (control & hotel)	91	619	09:57	08:57	37:34	02:34
CARHAIX-PLOUGER (control)	85	704	17:18	15:01	43:38	01:58
ST-NICOLAS-DU-PÉLEM (secret control)	43	747	20:35	18:35	47:13	00:38
LOUDÉAC (hotel then control)	46	793	23:32	23:06	51:44	01:36
QUÉDILLAC (rest stop)	59	852	03:18	02:20	54:58	01:30
TINTÉNIAC (control)	27	879	05:51	05:20	57:57	00:29
FOUGÈRES (control)	55	934	09:01	09:00	61:37	01:00
VILLAINES-LA-JUHEL (control)	90	1024	18:05	13:46	66:23	01:25
MORTAGNE-AU-PERCHE (control)	84	1108	23:17	19:50	72:27	01:30
DREUX (control)	77	1185	04:24	02:52	79:29	02:00
RAMBOUILLET	45	1230	07:01	06:58	83:35	n/a

## Appendix C – Packing List

This lists everything I actually carried on the PBP ride, except food and my basic clothing - which consisted of helmet, cap, cycling glasses (with corrective lenses for reading), shorts, lightweight long-sleeved top, base layer, fingerless gloves, socks, winter boots (with footbeds) and PBP gilet jaune!

Category	Item	Weight (g)	Comments
Admin	Cards / Cash (£ & Euros)	15	Cash to pay for food etc at the controls – I took about 200 euros
Admin	Passport	35	
Admin	Brevet bag	10	Technicals from Blacks, more functional than the PBP freebie
Admin	Essential Paperwork	100	Print out of Excel plan, hotel bookings
Clothing	Gore Shakedry waterproof	110	
Clothing	Summer arm skins (Castelli)	40	
Clothing	Leg warmers (Endura)	150	
Clothing	Spare socks x 2	140	Includes 'waterproof' socks
Clothing	Spare gloves x 2	110	Dissent 'waterproof' and undergloves
Clothing	Extra cycling top (summer)	140	Audax Club Hackney short-sleeved
Clothing	Extra cycling top (winter)	320	Altura long-sleeved
Lights & Phone	Front light - Ion 800	120	
Lights & Phone	Front light - Ion Pro	140	Newer model
Lights & Phone	Front light - Exposure 1 head torch	95	
Lights & Phone	Front light - Exposure 2 head torch	100	Newer model
Lights & Phone	Rear light - FWE 1 (with batteries)	60	
Lights & Phone	Rear light - FWE 2 (with batteries)	60	
Lights & Phone	Spare batteries for lights - AAA	40	
Lights & Phone	Spare batteries - 2032	10	For lights and cycle computer
Lights & Phone	USB cables for charging	80	Standard USB x 2, USB-C x 2, Exposure USB x 1
Lights & Phone	UK plugs for USB cables x2	80	Weight for 2
Lights & Phone	Continental adapters x 2	70	Weight for 2
Lights & Phone	Imuto 10k Power Bank 1	240	
Lights & Phone	Imuto 10k Power Bank 2	240	
Lights & Phone	Imuto 10k Power Bank 3	240	
Lights & Phone	Imuto 10k (Small)	240	
Lights & Phone	Kit power bank (4k)	120	Needed as this is the only thing that works for Exposure 1.
Lights & Phone	Phone 1 (new Sony Xperia Mini)	160	
Lights & Phone	Phone 2 (old Sony Xperia Mini)	140	
Lights & Phone	Decathlon Cyclometer	50	
Luggage	Carradice Super C Audax saddle bag	600	With Quick Release bracket
Luggage	Alpkit top tube bag	110	
Luggage	Small Decathlon saddle pack	65	The one I bought in France
Luggage	Dry bags x 3 and Bungee x 1	160	
Luggage	Yellow sports bag (PBP freebie)	25	
Misc	Bidon 1 (new insulated decathlon)	160	800g when full
Misc	Bidon 2 (PBP freebie)	80	740g when full
Misc	Café Lock	160	
Misc	Cheap corded headphones	10	
Pharmacy	First aid kit	30	Paracetamol, diocalm, antiseptic wipes, plasters, blister plasters
Pharmacy	Sun Cream	40	SPF50 kid's sunstick
Pharmacy	Single Use Butt Cream x 4	40	
Pharmacy	Toothbrush & small toothpaste	40	
Pharmacy	Deep freeze gel	40	
Pharmacy	Lip Balm	5	
Pharmacy	Babywipes	40	
Service	Pump - Topeak Mini Morph	180	
Service	Chain Oil - 20ml bottle	50	
Service	Spare cables (gear & brake)	40	
Service	Electrical tape	20	
Service	Multi-tool	150	
Service	Tyre levers (plastic) x 3	40	
Service	Pliers	100	
Service	Chain tool & spare chain links	120	
Service	Inner tubes x 2	210	Weight for 2
<b>TOTAL WEIGHT =</b>		<b>5.970 kg</b>	



## Appendix D - Links and References

A mixed bag, including information about PBP, stories from other riders and general cycling lore.

<http://www.paris-brest-paris.org/index2.php?cat=accueil&lang=en&page=edito> (The official website for PBP 2019)

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris%E2%80%93Brest%E2%80%93Paris> (A rather sparse wiki entry)

<https://www.apidura.com/journal/paris-brest-paris-everything-you-need-to-know/> (A slick presentation, by a company that sells high-end cycle luggage).

<http://www.damonpeacock.com/paris-brest-paris.html> (Amusing take on 'typical' PBP rider - ouch!)

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/travel/destinations/83278950/the-10-most-epic-bike-rides-you-can-ever-do> (Someone's list - includes PBP)

<http://cyclo-long-cours.fr/2018/12/09/paris-brest-paris-2019-etape-par-etape/> (Some cool maps)

<https://dotwatcher.cc/race/paris-brest-paris-2019> (The 2019 edition of PBP, as it happened)

<http://www.pbpresults.com/> (Clever site with unofficial results and rankings. But it's not a race!)

<https://www.paris-brest-paris.org/en/download/AUDAX-PBP-RESULTATS-GB-2019.pdf> (ACP's official results brochure, published in late January 2020, and added in Version 1.1 of this document)

<https://road.cc/content/news/265816-british-cyclist-becomes-third-woman-ever-complete-paris-brest-paris-fixie> (News story!)

<https://poohitan.com/p/paris-brest-paris-through-a-film-camera/en> (A Ukrainian rider's blog)

<http://www.aukweb.net/events/pbp/> (Audax UK, the UK's long distance cycling association).

<http://www.donaldhirsch.com/dieppeparis.html> (The classic 'easy' route from London to Paris)

<http://longbikerides.info/the-rides/london-to-paris-bike-ride/> (The route I devised from London to Paris, via Calais – a bit longer, but more to see and do on the way)

<https://www.200-lemagazine.com/> (Very cool French cycling magazine)

<https://www.camaudax.uk/pbp/2019/cb/pubinar-20190618/> and

<https://www.camaudax.uk/pbp/2019/cb/pubinar-20190716> (Nick Wilkinson's accounts of his two pub-based seminars on PBP, attended by cyclists from Cambridge Audax)

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/69ex0AhstebEYbH6affbZm> (Paris-Brest by Paul Fou – Spotify playlist. There is a fair bit of PBP-inspired music around, but I find this playlist quite good to cycle to)

<https://www.leighday.co.uk/Blog/August-2019/Paris-Brest-Paris-1200km-bike-ride-for-cake> (A lawyer (and cyclist) writes...)

<https://yacf.co.uk/forum/index.php?board=83.0> (Yet Another Cycling Forum – PBP 2019 posts)

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