

The Ups and Downs of the Brittany Challenge

Rob Oakley and Preston Ayres have returned from their survey of the entire 500-mile route of this September's Brittany Challenge. Here is their insight into what is in store for all teams who have signed up for this adventure.

Overall route comments

Not a mountain in sight – no Vosges, Black Forest, Switzerland or Luxembourg, no 5-6 mile



climbs of 7-10% – so this will be a ride in the park or simply promenading alongside the Normandy beaches.

Well.....actually No! Over the three days we have over 26,000' of elevation gains which are spread fairly evenly over the entire route. There are many short hills (and a few longer ones) and we will mark those over 10% on the route

notes!

Other features include:

- Many Brittany churches with a variety of different tower designs
- A few chateaux en route
- Some great views of the English Channel and some of the north coast bays of France
- Very few drives in and out of cities to reduce cycling in busy towns
- Two nights in Rennes and an opportunity to look around the city
- A much shorter drive back to Calais than in previous years.

Hotels

In Chartres on Thursday night, most of us are in the Novotel with a few of us in the adjoining Petit-Dej Hotel. We will all eat dinner and breakfast in the Novotel.

In Rennes we have exclusive occupancy (a first for Extra Mile) of Novotel Rennes Alma. We all eat there on Friday night. On Saturday, dinner will be at your choice of restaurant in Rennes (hotel restaurant is closed). There are two benefits to this, firstly it creates the opportunity for you to see Rennes and secondly, you will not be subjected to any speech by Preston!

In Caen we are split between Mercure Cote de Nacre (where we are holding our Gala Dinner) and Novotel Cote de Nacre. Both hotels are north of the city, just over a mile apart, which is two stops on the tram (which does run late into Sunday evening).

Our Route in a little more detail

Thursday

We get the Channel Tunnel late morning and then have a 214 mile drive to Chartres – our recommended route is via Rouen, not Paris. The striking cathedral can be seen for many miles before we get to Chartres. The journey should take approximately 4 hours and you should be in the hotel bar well before dinner timed for 7.45pm. Dinner will be followed by our mandatory safety briefing.

Friday – Day 1 Cycling – 171 miles – 9886ft elevation gains



We travel due west today and cycle through many forests to provide a little protection (either from the hot sun or perhaps a westerly breeze). We spend many miles in the Commune du Parc du Peche – look out for chateaux, ruins and fish lakes. By choosing the best roads to cycle, we finish short of Rennes in a square by a cafe in the village of



Port Brillet. We then have a 40 minute drive to our hotel.

Saturday – Day 2 Cycling – 174 miles – 7388ft elevation gains

We have a 35 minute drive to our cycle start at Caulnes (east north-east of Rennes). We head north to the Brittany coast (our first picture above is at the start of the climb to the cliff top at Cap Frehel). This is Extra Mile's first ever trip to the seaside. We drop inland and cross the river Rance south of Dinard/St Malo before we return to the Emerald Coast and the Bay of Mont St Michel. Then it's back to Rennes for dinner in town.

Sunday – Day 3 Cycling – 165 miles – 8,948ft elevation gains



Normandy D-Day Landing beaches. On the way we have an interesting 12% climb from the bottom to the top of the Barrage de Vezins (see pictures).

We cycle out of Rennes early Sunday morning and again head north – this time towards the





Our last 30 miles take us past “Omaha”, “Gold” and “Juno” beaches, past many monuments, a few tanks, pontoon bridges, the Arromanches caissons and a few interesting buildings.

We finish in the coastal town of Courseulles adjacent to the Juno

Museum which pays tribute to the Canadian troops who fell in June 1944. It is then a short drive into the north side of Caen.

A quick story to put the last 30 miles into context. On the Monday morning at the hotel we chatted to two 91-year old war veterans proudly displaying their many medals having been just 17 when they first landed on the Normandy beaches.

Monday

The drive back to Calais is just 210 miles, about 3 ½ hours driving time. Channel crossings are booked for late afternoon allowing a couple of hours sightseeing in Caen (castle, cathedral, port), back to the landing beaches or a quick stop at Honfleur on the return journey. We return across the Pont de Normandie (where Rob insisted on driving in the left lane as it was further from the edge!).



Routes

Since our route check, I have updated the cycling routes on [ridewithgps](https://ridewithgps.com). They can be viewed at:

- Day 1 <https://ridewithgps.com/routes/20596872>
- Day 2 <https://ridewithgps.com/routes/20601051>
- Day 3 <https://ridewithgps.com/routes/20602940>

Have a look, the scale can easily be amended to view more detail.

We look forward to seeing you in Brittany for another amazing Extra Mile Challenge and perhaps on one or two training rides before September (which will be announced shortly).

If you have not yet entered the Brittany Challenge, at the time of writing there are still a few team places available. But enter without delay because our hotel in Rennes defines our absolute maximum number of teams at 43 this year.

Happy training

Preston Ayres & Rob Oakley

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