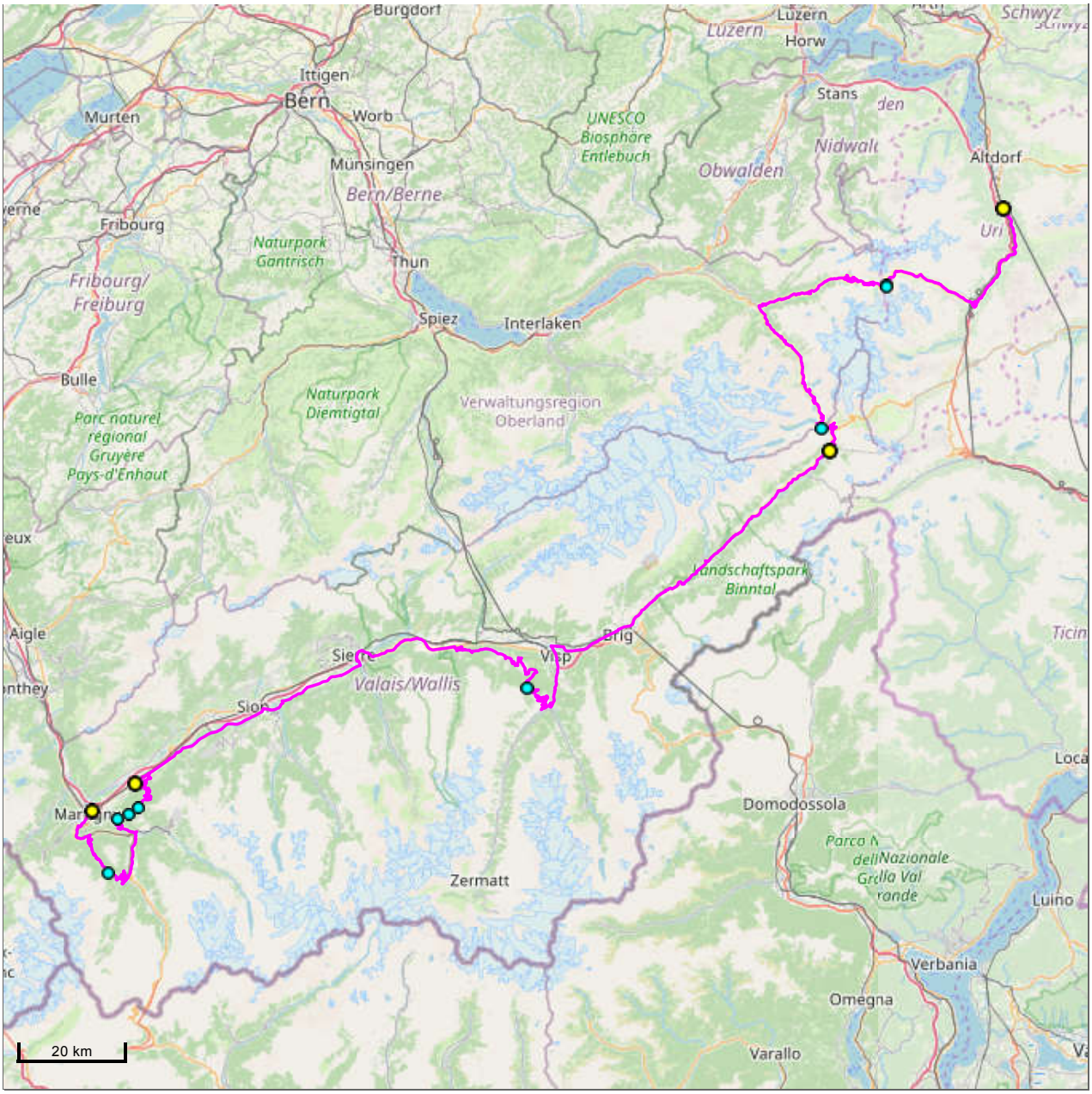
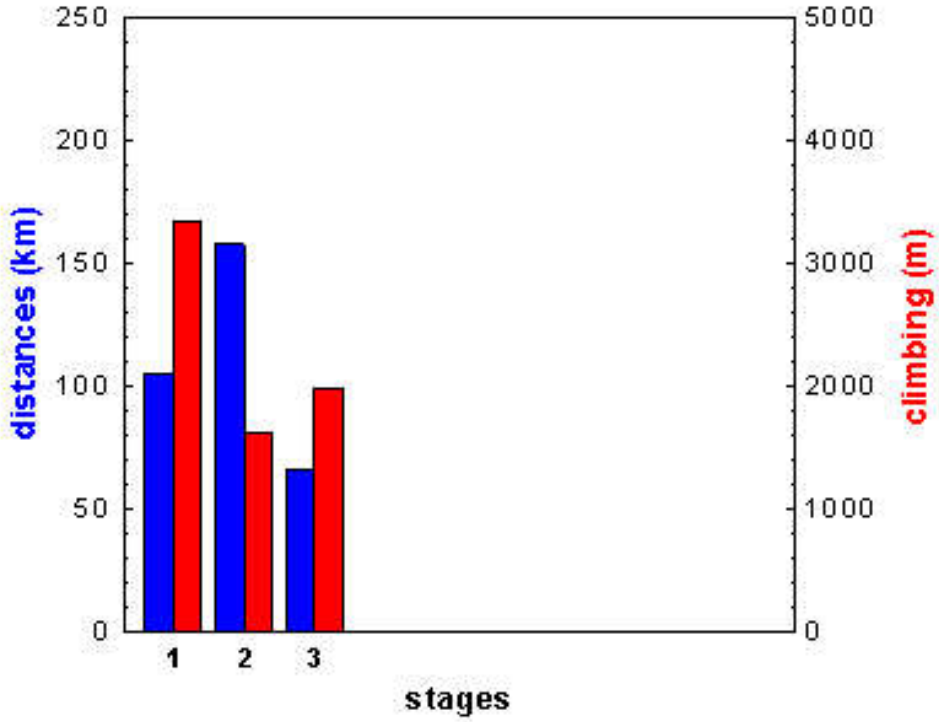
Bicycle tour 2010, 20 - 22 August

Patrick Schleppi

stage	distance (km)	climbing (m)
Erstfeld - Susten - Grimsel - Oberwald	105	3350
Oberwald - Brig - Moosalp - Sierre - Saxon	157	1660
Saxon - Pas du Lein - Orsières - Champex - Martigny	65	1990
total	**327**	**7000**





The Bernese slope of the Susten

The lake of Räterichsboden as seen from the Grimsel dam

Traditional granaries in Bürchen, with the Wilerhorn in the background

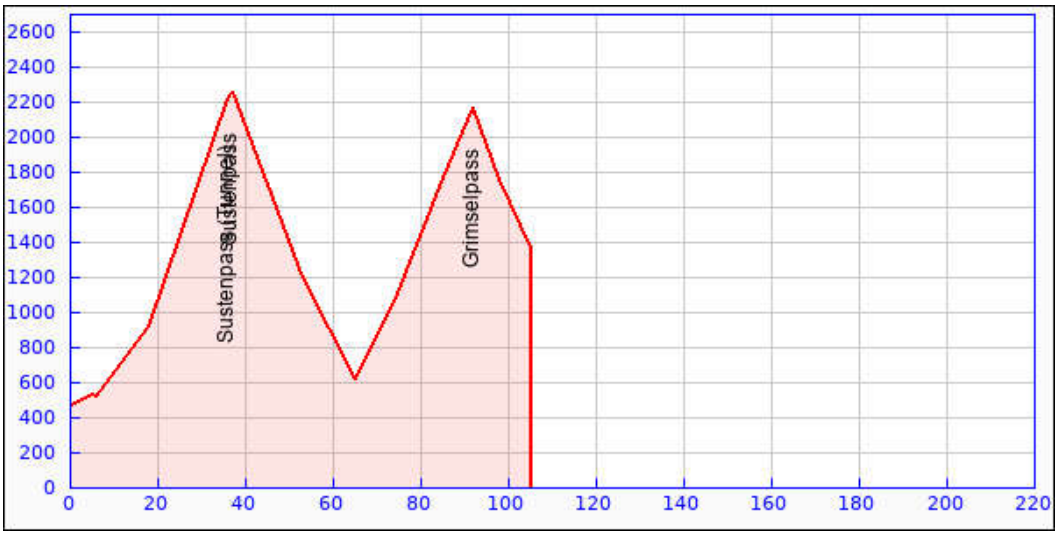
Col des Planches, view over Sembrancher

Stage 1 (20 August 2010): Erstfeld - Susten - Grimsel - Oberwald

Because of serious problems with my back (a big herniation), i did not want to go to far away for my 2010 tour. I started in the second half of August, after a few test rides during the summer vacations... and after a longer period of unstable weather. First, i took a train to Erstfeld, there where the road to the Gotthard begins to climb. Then, arriving at Wassen, i left the southbound road and started to climb towards the Susten Pass. The first part in the valley of Meien was very nice, but then the road seemed to climb forever. There are almost no hairpin curves and this makes the climb somewhat boring. Nevertheless, i reached the pass around noon, three hours after hitting the road. The Susten has a tunnel at the top. Because i wanted to reach the real pass, i went first through the tunnel and then up the small road to reach it. The descent towards Innertkirchen long, first quite spectacular, then less steep, making some pedalling against the headwind necessary.

	distance (km)	altitude (m)	climbing (m)
Erstfeld	0	470	
Silenen	5	530	60
Amsteg	6	520	
Wassen	18	920	400
Sustenpass (Tunnel)	36	2220	1300
Sustenpass	37	2260	40
Gadmen	53	1200	
Innertkirchen	65	620	
Guttannen	74	1060	440
Räterichsboden	85	1770	710
Grimselpass	92	2170	400
Gletsch	98	1760	
Oberwald	105	1370	
total	**105**		**3350**

From Innertkirchen, i went up to the Grimsel Pass. The climb is also long, but i had enough time to take it easy. The weather was largely cloudy and the temperature pleasant. I reached the pass shortly after 4 o'clock. I took pictures from the Berne side with the artificial lakes and from the Valais side with the breathtaking hairpin curves of both the Grimsel and Furka roads, joining each other at Gletsch. I went down there, then further to Oberwald, where i stopped for the night.

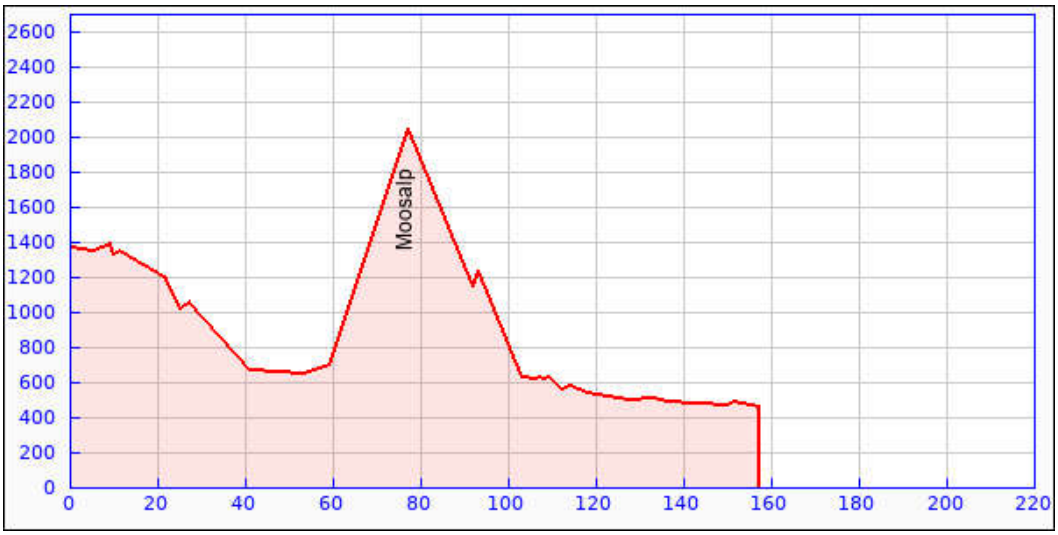


Stage 2 (21 August 2010): Oberwald - Brig - Moosalp - Sierre - Saxon

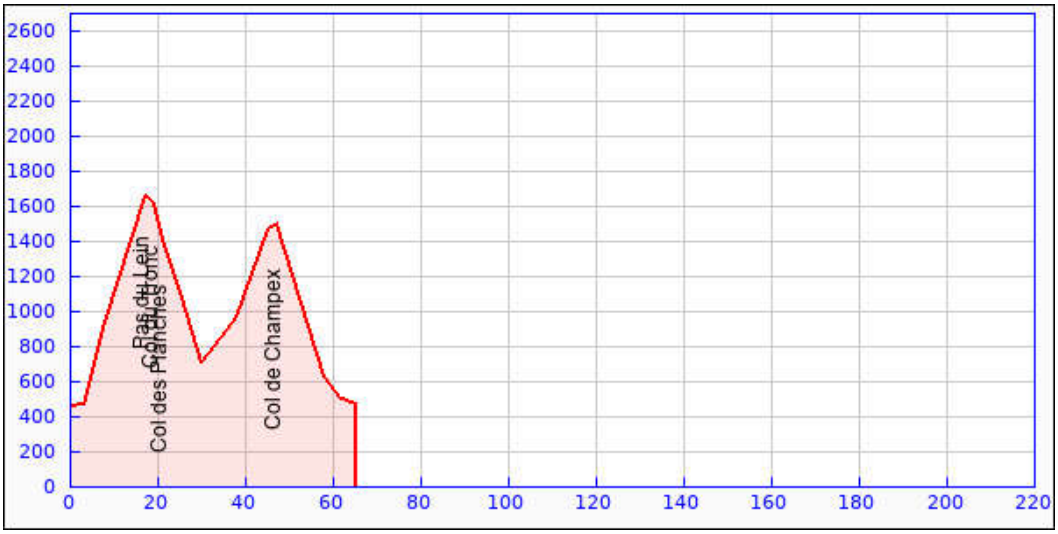
After some rain the evening before, the weather for this second day was as promised by the forecast: sunny. It did not take long on the way to notice that was Saturday as there was much traffic in this touristic region (and there was practically no way to avoid it by taking smaller roads). Except for that, the descent of the Goms valley towards Brig was nice. As i had hoped, the valley wind was not yet blowing. From Brig to Visp, i followed the bicycle way. Strangely enough, there was no sign when it was necessary to turn left to Visp. Nothing to improve my poor opinion about road signs for bicycles. At least, i had a good map.

From Visp, i entered the valley to Stalden, a valley which splits then up to either Zermatt of Saas Fee. There was a crazy lot of traffic. Incredible that all these tourists have to behave like sheep and go as a herd all to the same place. It was not really surprising to see how bad a Dutch bus driver behaved on such a road, but a bit more astonishing to see his colleague from an alpine country doing no better... Anyway, i was very glad as i could leave this circus behind me and climb up to Törbel. It was much, much quieter and i could finally enjoy the view. By then, it was really warm and the road was steep enough, only somewhat less for the last part before the Moosalp pass. The descent was also quite steep and the pavement not very good. I often had to stand up to absorb the shocks and save my poor back. Further down, from Eicholl to Turtmann, it was very nice. Then, however, i was back in the Rhone valley and had to ride against the (dry) wind. It was not much fun but, drinking enough, i managed it well. After Sion, however, the wind became fierce and it was really hard to keep a pace around 25. Finally, i reached Saxon and there i found a room in a sort of motel.

	distance (km)	altitude (m)	climbing (m)
Oberwald	0	1370	
Ulrichen	5	1350	
Münster	9	1390	40
Matte (Münster)	10	1330	
Gräiche (Reckingen)	11	1350	20
Fürgangen	22	1190	
Wirbelti (Fiesch)	25	1020	
Deischbach (Lax)	27	1060	40
Naters	41	670	
Visp	53	650	
Gietji (Stalden)	59	700	50
Moosalp	77	2050	1350
Unterbäch	92	1150	
Eicholl	93	1240	90
Turtmann	103	630	
Agarn	106	620	
Gampinen	107	630	10
Susten	108	620	
Pfynwald	109	630	10
Pfyn	112	560	
Bois-de-Finges	114	580	20
Sierre	118	540	
Granges	127	500	
Bramois	133	510	10
Sion	136	490	
Les Epeneys (Riddes)	150	470	
Riddes	151	490	20
Les Iles (Saxon)	157	460	
total	**157**		**1660**



Stage 3 (22 August 2010): Saxon - Pas du Lein - Orsières - Champex - Martigny

	distance (km)	altitude (m)	climbing (m)
Les Iles (Saxon)	0	460	
Saxon	3	470	10
Sapinhaut	8	940	470
Pas du Lein	17	1660	720
Col du Tronc	19	1610	
Col des Planches	21	1410	
Vens	25	1110	
Sembrancher	30	710	
Orsières	36	900	190
Som-la-Proz	38	970	70
Lac de Champex	45	1470	500
Col de Champex	47	1500	30
Les Valettes	58	630	
La Croix	62	500	
Martigny	65	470	
total	**65**		**1990**

I started early from Saxon, simply because there was no breakfast at the motel. After riding a few kilometres back along the Rhone valley, i started climbing to the Lein pass. The air was fresh and the small road was winding its curves between apricot orchards, up to an elevation of about 1000 m. (The apricots had already been harvested, so there was not too much temptation to pick some.) After the orchards, i was between forests, pastures and some chalets. The last stretch before the pass was not surfaced, but good enough for the race bicycle. At the pass, there was a herd of Hérens cows, those small, black cows bred more for fighting than for giving milk. Maybe a good idea actually, now that there are again wolves in this part of the Alps.
After the Lein pass, i continued along the crest on a good gravel road and soon reached a second pass, Col du Tronc. And to the third in a raw, Col des Planches, there was soon an asphalted road, not much distance either and it was going down. This way, i had three passes for the price of one. From Col des Planches, i took the steep descent to Sembrancher and joined the road to the Grand-St-Bernard. At Orsières, however, i left this road and went to a restaurant to finally have some small breakfast. From Orsières, i took the road up to Champex. I climbed at a good pace. The temperature also, on this south-exposed slope. I reached the lake of Champex at about half past eleven. Because it was Sunday, there were many tourists around. I did not stay long, continued to the pass and then to the long descent towards Les Valettes. The first part was very good, but further down the road was more bumpy, narrow and with more traffic. Finally, i joined again the main road and went down to Martigny. This tour was thus ending at the same place as the year before. It had been the shortest tour since 20 years that i'm doing this kind of exercise, but i was glad that it had been possible to do it at all and nearly with back pains.