

Raid Pyrenean

100 hours, 741km cycling challenge from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean
with 12,940m ascent

Summary

WHERE: French Pyrenees

DISTANCE: 741km

TIME : 100 hours

PRICE: see website

WHEN: Jun & Sept



The Raid Pyrenean

The Raid Pyrenean is one of the 'must do' epic rides for any cycling enthusiast. The route across the French Pyrenees from the Atlantic to the Med was established in 1950, keeping as close to the Spanish border as possible. It has to be done within 100 hours and traverses many Pyrenean cols made famous by the Tour de France, including the Tourmalet, Aubisque, Col de Portet d'Aspet and the Aspin. Whilst riding these mighty climbs is truly fabulous, you should not underestimate the joy of cycling the quiet and beautiful back roads and passes that lie in-between the cols and the refreshing change that it makes to cycle on decent tarmac, amongst drivers who respect the bike and the rider.

The Raid Pyrenean is a cycling challenge but it is also your holiday. Marmot Tours has been supporting clients on our Raid challenges for over 15 years (from 14 Pyrenean Raiders in our first year to about 200 a year now) and ensuring that you have a great time is what we are passionate about. You will love the ride, the country and the route, enjoying some great banter along the way. We leave no stone unturned in preparing for your holiday and making it the best it can be - which is why you just have to eat, sleep and turn the pedals...

We also have Raid Challenges in the Alps, Dolomites, Massif Central and Corsica but this is a great trip to start your Raid experience with.

Highlights

Traverse the Pyrenees
from coast to coast

Official route in 100
hours with completion
medal & certificate

Includes infamous TdF
cols like the Tourmalet,
Aubisque, Portet d'Aspet
and Aspin



Your Raid Route

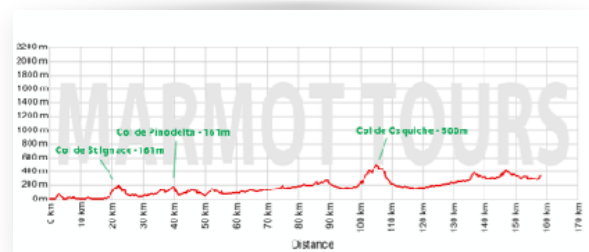
Travel Out (Day 0)

We offer included transfers from Biarritz airport to the start hotel in Hendaye (30min) or an optional supplementary Toulouse package (see travel section) for a transfer from Toulouse Airport to Hendaye (3hr 45min).

Meet your guides, assemble and test out your bike and come along to the welcome briefing followed by a good dinner with a Basque influence. Hendaye is an attractive seaside town with plenty of charm if you arrive early and wish to explore.

Day 1 - Hendaye to Oloron-St-Marie

163KM WITH 2300M ASCENT



Dip your toes in the Atlantic to make this a true coast to coast adventure, before the grand depart at 09.00. On quiet roads, pass through the Basque heartland with distinctive burgundy and white buildings, bullrings and pelot courts. You undulate your way over the **Col de St Ignace (169m)** and the **Col de Pinodieta (176m)** before lunch, probably in the walled town of St-Jean-Pied-de-Port.

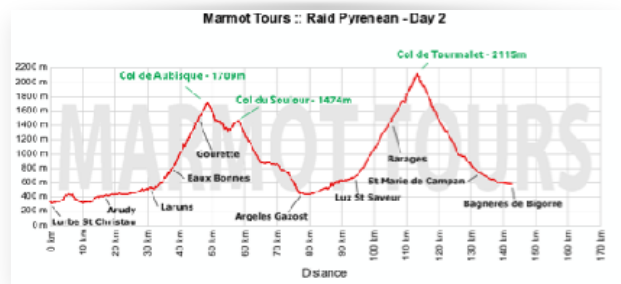
The first proper climb of the route is the **Col d' Osquich (500m)**, followed by small climbs and lovely villages to Oloron-St-Marie, where the hotel and its swimming pool and sauna will no doubt be very welcome.

With 2 carnet stamps today you are already well on your way!

Day 2 - Oloron-St-Marie to La Mongie

133KM WITH 3620M ASCENT

Today's route travels over the most feared cols in the Pyrenees and offers spectacular riding. Fortunately, there is a gentle warm up to the stunningly beautiful **Col d'Aubisque (1709m)**, where you can pause at the café on the top for a deserved rest before dropping down and back up the **Col de Soulor (1464m)**, which you will honestly hardly notice!

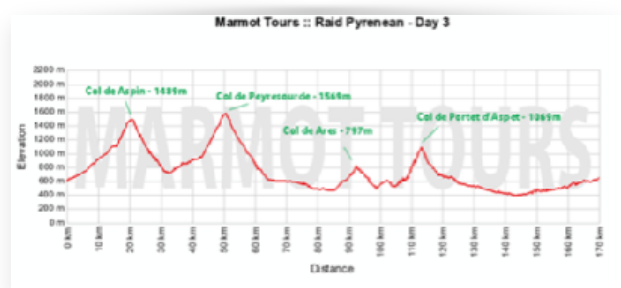


A fabulous swooping descent leads you to Argelès Gazost, well situated as a lunch stop. Here you meet your first busy road taking you up the gorge to Luz-St-Sauveur. Needing little introduction, next up is the **Col de Tourmalet (2115m)** and another great café with some interesting Tour de France artefacts. A short descent to La Mongie takes you to our resting place for the night.

Day 3 - La Mongie to St-Lizier

155KM WITH 3000M ASCENT

With possibly the 'toughest' day behind you, climb the picturesque **Col d'Aspin (1489m)** and the **Col de Peyresourde (1569m)** before lunch; your efforts will be rewarded by a cafe selling the best (and best value!) crêpes in the Pyrenees.



The following descent, right down to Luchon, is voted the best of the Raid Pyrenean. Undulating over the Col des Ares (797m) and the Col de Buret (602m) is delightful, before the slightly terrifying 14% inclines of the Col de Portet d'Aspet (1069m).

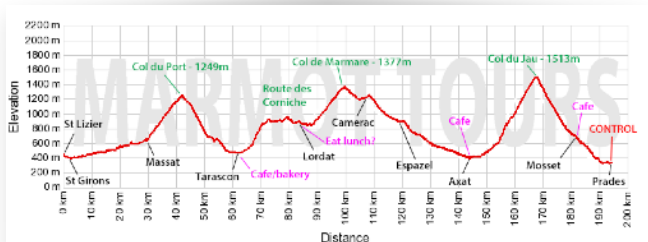
However, once you have that in the bag, the next 35km undulate gently downwards to St-Lizier.

Day 4- St-Lizier to Prades 195KM WITH 3400M ASCENT

After a gentle warm up to Massat the Col de Port (1249m) is a beautiful climb followed by an equally beautiful descent to Tarascon.

From here you climb up to the Route des Corniches and traverse high above the valley before taking on the Col de Marmare, which carries you over into the plateaus and limestone gorges of the Aude.

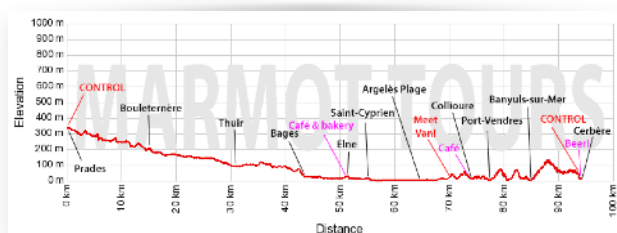
Next up is the Col de Jau (1506m), before the final descent which takes us nearly all the way to our hotel. Prades has a reassuringly Mediterranean feel about it, with lots of courtyard cafes and clay tiled roofs.



Day 5 - Prades to Cerbere 95KM WITH 620M ASCENT

Don't be fooled into thinking the ride today will be flat, just because you are near the coast! You hit the Mediterranean at Argelès-sur-Mer, taking on some fairly large undulations along the coast road through the fortified town of Collioure and on to our final destination of Cerbere.

Your 100hrs is up at 13:00 so no dawdling today!



Cerbere is a pretty fishing village with a pebble beach and seafront bars - the perfect place to relax and reflect on the emotional highs and lows of the Raid!

People short of time can leave this afternoon after 15:00 to travel independently to their departure airport or for onward travel.

Day 6 - Travel Back

Our included transfers drop you at Perpignan PGF airport for flights to Stansted, or at Toulouse, for an extra cost of £45.



Start & End Hotels

Start: **Hotel Campanile**, 102 Route de Behobie, 64700 Hendaye (Tel +33 559 480 648)

End: **Hotel La Vigie**, 3 route d'Espagne, 66290 Cerbère (Tel +33 468 884 184)

Travel

Finding flights

Travel to and away from this Raid is notoriously complicated, particularly if you live in the north of the UK.

We recommend using a comparison tool such as www.skyscanner.net when searching for direct or indirect flights from various airports/regions/countries. It can be helpful if you search for one-way flights, giving results of all direct routes available, eg. 'UK to BIQ'. Search results may change as airlines release their schedules for the following year at varying times.

If you are flying long haul, we recommend arriving a day early in order to get over any jet lag before you start cycling and join us either at our start hotel or back at the airport for a transfer. We can generally only offer an airport transfer on the start/finish days of the itinerary but can certainly arrange a taxi transfer for you (payable direct to your driver) on other days.

If you are travelling in a group of 6 or more and are unable to join the group airport transfers, we may be able to organise a private transfer for you. Please contact us to discuss.

Under your own steam...

If you are going to meet us at the start hotel or are leaving independently at the end of your trip to go on elsewhere, please let us know so we can plan accordingly; we may also be able to help you with your travel plans, so do get in touch if you need assistance.

Foreign Travel Advice

For the latest travel advice from the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office including security and local laws, plus passport and visa information, check www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice.

Airport Transfers

Marmot Tours offer airport transfers at designated times from the most convenient airport for the start of your trip. Transfers are timed to fit in with as many flights from as many regional airports as possible.

Transfers at set times from **Biarritz airport (BIQ)** (30min) and back to **Perpignan airport (PGF)** (1hr) are included in the holiday price.

We are offering an early transfer on arrival into BIQ to meet the easyJet flight from London Gatwick. This will most likely be through a taxi company booked by us. Your rooms won't be ready when arriving at the hotel, but it is feasible to assemble your bike (the hotel has a track pump but you would need your own tools) and go for an exploratory spin until your rooms are ready and the guides arrive at about 3pm.

Extra Toulouse Transfers

Due to a limited choice of flights to Biarritz and to open up your travel options we also offer a supplementary **Toulouse Transfer Package** at an extra cost. Toulouse is a good choice if you are flying in from long haul destinations.

Toulouse TLS to start hotel (3hrs 45min): £60
End hotel to Toulouse TLS (3hrs): £45

We pick you up from the Arrivals Hall at **Toulouse TLS** airport at **11:00**. Your bike can be boxed or already assembled.

- We transfer you 4hrs to Hendaye, arriving approx 15:00 (including stops)
- At the end of your holiday we drop you at Toulouse (please get in touch to confirm times for your chosen dates). The transfer from Cerbère to TLS is 3.5 hrs.
- A limited number of places are available on these transfers so please get in touch with us before booking flights.

If you arrive earlier than the transfer time then you will need to wait at the airport for your pick up. If flights are delayed then transfers may also be delayed. If flights are significantly delayed or cancelled then you may need to take a taxi to the start hotel and make a claim on your insurance or to your airline.

You will find our most up to date transfer times on the **Holiday Details** page on the Link (once you've made your booking). If you need to know the timings before booking, please get in touch via email: cycle@marmot-tours.co.uk.

Navigation

We provide you with colour maps and annotated altitude profiles as well as tailored GPS files. These will be available on The Link a few weeks before departure in .gpx, and .tcx formats.

Please note that for this particular itinerary it is essential that you have your own GPS unit.

Navigation by instructions on paper is quite difficult, so you will be relying on your GPS. We also suggest you have a back-up navigation by uploading the routes onto the Ride with GPS phone App (instructions will be on the Link once the GPS files have been posted).

The files can be downloaded onto most units, including Garmin and Wahoo and in their most basic form provide a purple line to follow. With the more recent units you will also receive a set of visual instructions as you approach a turning. Our GPS tracks take you from hotel to hotel.

Am I fit Enough?

It is possible (or even probable) that the seed of doing a Raid was planted in your mind when you had a drink in hand, chatting with mates. In the cold light of day it is only right to consider whether or not you are fit enough to take it on! All our Raid routes are challenging and you need to be a regular road cyclist in order to enjoy and get the most out of this trip, so please make sure this trip is right for you before you book.

Many of our riders are club cyclists, have done cyclosportives or some longer distance rides. However by no means all of them have, and we have had many clients who have been fairly new to road cycling (but who have a good level of fitness perhaps from a different sport) who have effectively trained for the trip and successfully completed the Raid Pyrenean route in the 100 hours.

Pacing

The key to success on the Raid Pyrenean is to pace yourself. We are very keen to emphasise that you don't need to be cycling super fast in order to manage the daily routes. The joy of a Marmot Raid Pyrenean is that from the group of around 20 riders you are likely to find someone to cycle at a similar speed to you, so you don't need to try and keep up with your partner, friend or room mate.

The quickest way to injure yourself or burn out is to cycle faster than you feel comfortable going. Two guides in support vehicles will support your every need, be it mechanical, nutritional or motivational, so you are going to be supported on the road for as long as it takes to ride each day's route. If you think you might need an extra couple of hours to cover the distance, then choose a June departure date when the longer daylight hours will give you more flexibility than in September.

Training

This is a holiday that requires training. We want you to achieve your goals and to enjoy the whole experience. The fitter you are, the more you can relax and take note of the stunning route and throw yourself into the group banter. It can be difficult finding extended climbs for training in the UK, but generally, if you can build up your stamina and comfort in doing long daily distances you will really benefit when it comes to the Raid itself. Feel free to use the Link Forum if you would like to share your training plans with your group or meet other riders local to you pre-trip.

If, after reading this, you really can't banish the doubt then it may be worth you looking at one of our Classic Cols style holidays as a starter. You get to climb many of the same climbs but there is ultimate flexibility on the holiday as you have options and can choose each day between a 'Classic' route, with perhaps one col a day, or the 'Challenge' route with optional extras and gruelling stage endings. We offer Classic Cols itineraries in the Pyrenees, Provence, Cevennes & Ardeche, Alps, Slovenia, Dolomites, Picos, Catalonia, Andalusia, Corsica and Sardinia.



Group Dynamics

Your group will be any number up to around 21 riders. This number works really well - it's big enough for you to find others to cycle with at your pace, but not so huge as to feel impersonal! We get lots of clients booking alone and lots of small groups of friends. If you think you can get a group of 18 - 20 people together then we can offer you a custom departure date.

We love that we get a really big variety in terms of cycling experience... from club cyclists, people training for other events, those raising money for charity, ex-pro cyclists and people who are relatively new to cycling who like to try something new on holiday.

Accommodation

The 3-4* hotels we use are comfy and have been selected for their location along the Raid Pyrenean route (you don't want to be adding extra km by heading off route!). You will be sharing a twin room with another client (of the same gender) unless you book a single room for a supplement (contact cycle@marmot-tours.co.uk for availability). Each hotel has a garage/locked room to ensure that your trusty steed has a comfortable night too.

Food

Breakfast

No surprise that this is the crucial meal of the day. We're in France of course, so expect continental style breakfasts. We supplement hotel breakfasts with cereals and fruit. Some hotels offer cheese, eggs & meats for your protein kick start.

Lunches

You know what you like to eat when you are riding and it is not likely to be the same as what the others in your group will want to eat. We don't include lunches so there are no enforced group stops. We strongly advise that you stop for proper food at lunchtime. Each day we recommend a suitable place serving cyclist friendly food which is great for you, and the locals appreciate your custom. We will be sure to have a van there for your midday faff!

Snacks

Your support van aka snack-shack will be well stocked with a variety of tasty delectables: Salty crisps, bars, cakes, fresh fruit (bananas obviously!), nuts & sweets are the staples. We suggest you bring your own favourite energy powders/gels/bars with you as these will not be easily available en route.

Dinner

We eat as a group in the evening - either in the hotel or at a nearby restaurant and you can expect three courses geared towards the needs of cyclists. Dinner will be served at around 19:30. Wine at dinner is included, however, coffees/soft drinks and beers are not.

Special diets

Please note your special dietary requirements on the booking form or contact us. Our hotels can cater for most dietary needs and allergies if we know well in advance. Please note that we request that you stick to your dietary preference for the entire trip, as it is very complicated for the hotels (and guides) if an individual is (for example) vegetarian for some meals and not for others.

What's Included

- 5 days supported riding
- Airport transfers on arrival and departure days at specified times
- Route notes, maps and GPS files
- Raid Pyrenean registration, certificate & medal for successful Raiders
- 6 nights half board accommodation including wine at dinner
- 2 customised and well stocked vehicles with experienced guides, offering moral support, and nutritional, mechanical and first aid assistance, plus snacks & water



Strava

Many cyclists nowadays are using apps like Strava and Garmin Connect to track their progress, training and to compare themselves to their peers.

These apps make for great training tools and interesting post-ride analysis but there are obvious risks associated with competitive cycling styles, pushing yourself beyond your usual tolerance and focusing on live feed information whilst on the bike.

We therefore ask our clients to avoid such 'Live Segment' features when cycling on a Marmot Tours holiday, especially descending, and to **focus on the road at all times.**

Gearing/Bikes

Mainly, climbs are not particularly steep (compared to a lot of hills in the UK) but they do go on for a very long time. It is best to make sure that your bike will be suitable for your level of strength/fitness.

For most people a compact (smallest ring on front having 34 teeth), fitted with a 30 or 32 cassette on the rear, is a good choice. It is possible to fit your bike with larger cassettes, using a rear hanger extender, like the WolfTooth RoadLink.

If this all sounds too complicated then we do have some excellent titanium-framed bikes for hire, which are fitted with SRAM 50-34 at the front with 11 speed 11-36 toothed cassettes.

Guiding

"Tim and Sam did a brilliant job of looking after us all last week on the Raid Pyrenean. It is a tough event and very challenging for the guys to deal with people spread out over various parts of the day's ride and they did it all brilliantly and always in a positive and good humoured manner." N Watson

Supporting you on your holiday will be two of our experienced, approachable, knowledgeable and fun guides. Despite being passionate about cycling, both guides will be in support vans as this holiday is all about you and your needs. Between them they will have knowledge of the area and the language and be skilled at bike mechanics.

Having two vehicles per group (regardless of the number of bookings up to a group size of around 20) is what allows us to offer you freedom to cycle at your own pace and with a level of independence on this holiday. It also means that wherever you are in the group (front, back or in-between), you will have access to your personal kit, snacks, water and any mechanical or first aid support. In the event of you needing help for a mechanical (for example) one of the vans will be able to quickly get to you with full tool kits, spare back wheels and even a spare bike. We hope you won't need us for anything serious but being prepared for all eventualities is what we do exceptionally well.

You can expect to see a support van with water, snacks and your personal day bag 3 - 6 times a day, so you don't need to carry much on your bike, unless the weather is exceptional!

A note to speedy cyclists who don't like stopping: Let us know so we can plan with you how to balance your needs against those of others in the group, in order for you to have utmost flexibility regarding pacing etc. If you think you are going to be very fast, please contact us to talk about this and what we can offer you as someone way ahead of others in the group.



Bike Hire

Marmot Tours has an excellently maintained fleet of custom built, titanium framed bikes available to rent for your holiday. Advantages of rental include:

- avoiding hefty fees levied by airlines for transport
- worry free travel (knowing your trusty steed is safely stored away at home!)
- the chance to try a titanium bike built specifically with climbing cols in mind (gearing!)
- relinquishing responsibility for cleaning and maintenance to our experienced team

Please see our [Bike Hire webpage](#) for details like prices as well as full specs and dimensions.

Please note that despite the size of our fleet steadily growing, we cannot guarantee that we will have a bike in your size available. If you would like to hire a bike, please check availability before booking your holiday.

How to Book

1. Email cycle@marmot-tours.co.uk to check availability for your preferred departure date. Remember to also check availability for single room and bike hire if they are your preference.
2. Bag your spot with a provisional booking for a week or so while you get planning.
3. Log on to or register with our online booking system, The Link (link.marmot-tours.co.uk), to make your holiday booking.
4. Pay the £400 deposit by BACS or by card online. Receive a confirmation email.
5. Confirmed single room supplements and bike hire are being added manually to your balance invoices, so may take a day or two to appear.
6. We'll post regular holiday information and updates on the Link (you'll receive an email notification).
7. You can meet your fellow holiday makers via The Link Forum and share training / travel plans etc.

Insurance

Holiday insurance is **essential** for all Marmot Tours holidays and anyone without insurance is not able to take part in the trip. Please arrange your insurance cover at the time of booking, as this will ensure that you are covered if you incur an injury during training and are unable to go on your holiday. We have a very high cancellation rate so are unable to deviate from our [cancellation policy](#).

Your insurance needs to cover you for non-competitive road cycling (cycle touring) at altitude with the following fairly standard inclusions:

- Medical Expenses
- Repatriation

Some clients also like to ensure they have the following optional items:

- Cancellation cover
- Loss or damage to their bike

NB if you are hiring a bike from us there is an insurance element in the fee so you will not need additional cover.

Once you have arranged your insurance, please add the relevant details to the **Before you go...** section of your holiday on [The Link](#). Unlike your passport and emergency contact details, you will need to add insurance details for every trip you are taking.

This ensures we have the most up to date information and are able to assist you in case you have an accident on your holiday.

Financial Protection

Marmot Tours are members of ABTA, the Association of British Travel Agents.

ABTA and ABTA members help holidaymakers to get the most from their travel and assist them when things do not go according to plan.

As part of our membership contract we are obliged to maintain a high standard of service to you by ABTA's Code of Conduct.

- In line with our ABTA membership (no Y6184), we hold an insurance policy that gives you full financial protection for all funds you pay us for your holiday
- We have full Tour Operators Professional and Public Liability Insurance with specialist brokers Campbell Irvine
- We carry out risk assessments on all of our holidays to ensure we have thought through every detail
- We employ staff with the correct experience and skills to ensure you have a safe and fun trip, and have a thorough training programme each season.

For further information about ABTA, the Code of Conduct and the arbitration scheme available to you if you have a complaint, please contact ABTA, 30 Park St, London, SE1 9EQ (Tel 0203 117 0500).

