

Raid Alpine (Geneva to Nice)

772km road cycling challenge from Lake Geneva to the Mediterranean,
over 31 cols with 17,900m ascent

Summary

WHERE: French Alps

DISTANCE: 770km

TIME : 6 days cycling

PRICE : see website

DATES: Jun to Sep



The Raid Alpine (Geneva to Nice)

The north to south Raid Alpine is a classic road cycling challenge from Lake Geneva to Nice on the Cote d'Azur, through the Southern Alps. We closely follow the historic route devised by Georges Rossini from the Thonon Cycle Club. Unfortunately some of the original roads have become busier and less enjoyable on a bike so we have adapted it to showcase the best roads and most legendary Alpine climbs, including the two highest, the Col d'Iseran and the Cime de la Bonette. The scenery shifts dramatically from quintessential Alpine meadow views in the north to rocky gorges and Mediterranean landscapes of the south.

The Raid starts in 'chocolate box' Alps with chalets, green pastures and Milka cows with their distinctive bells. As you head south, you take on the harsher heights of the bigger 'beasts', followed by traversing the Southern Alpine gorges with roads hewn from the rock, where the warm air rises up to greet you, carrying with it a scent of the sea and your final destination.

Along the way you will collect stamps for your carnet at control points along the route and successful Raiders receive a Marmot Tours medal at the finish.

The Raid Alpine is a cycling challenge, but it is also your holiday. Marmot Tours have been supporting clients on our Raid challenges for over 15 years and ensuring that you have a great time is what we are passionate about. You will love the ride, the country and the route, as well as enjoy 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....

Highlights

Traverse the French Alps from north to south

Infamous TdF passes including the Iseran, Galibier, Izoard and Cime de la Bonette

Carnet & medal for successful finishers



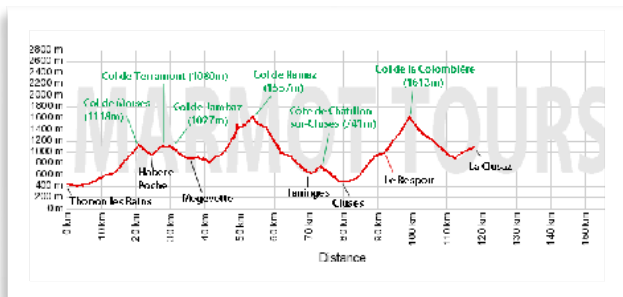
Your Raid Route

Day 0 - Travel Out

We offer included transfers from Geneva Airport which is 1hr from the start hotel in Thonon-les-Bains. Meet your guides, assemble and test out your bikes and come along to the welcome briefing followed by a good dinner.

Day 1 - Thonon-les-Bains to La Clusaz 118KM WITH 3200M ASCENT

Warm up day (of sorts!) in the foothills of the Alps. You leave the tranquil shores of Lake Geneva with a lovely 10km warm up before you start on your first col, the Col des Moises (1118m). With this one under your belt and one 'tampon' done, you are officially en route!



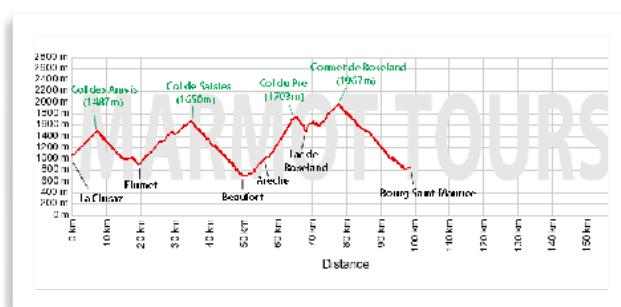
There is some navigation to do today but your guides will watch out for you as the route takes you through pine forests and over the stunning Col de Terramont (1080m), Jambaz (1027m), Col de la Ramaz (1557m) and on to the classic Gran Colombiere (1613m) towards the end of the day.

Day 2 - La Clusaz to Bourg-St-Maurice 99KM WITH 2900M ASCENT

A beautiful day riding today through some of the most well known areas of the Alps. A short but sweet 7.5km warm up from the hotel will see you arrive at the Col des Aravis (1487m) before crossing into the Savoie.

Descend to Flumet and then enjoy the gentle ascent to the Col de Saisies (1633m). Passing
Raid Alpine (Geneva to Nice)

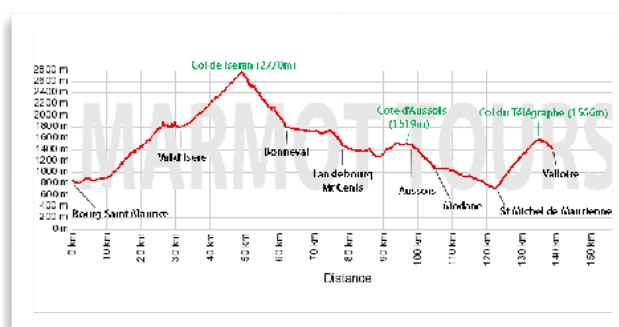
through Beaufort (famous for its cheese!), the next climb is the Col du Pré (1740m).



From the summit you descend (briefly) before the epic Cornet de Roselend (1968m). Your reward (if the views aren't enough) is a 26km descent down to your hotel on the outskirts of the thriving town of Bourg-Saint-Maurice.

Day 3 - Bourg-St-Maurice to Valloire 140KM WITH 3200M ASCENT

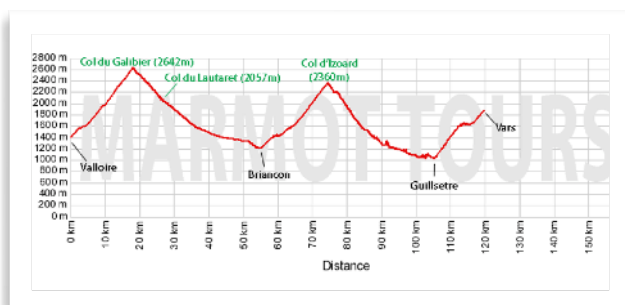
The only way is UP for the start of today (1965m to be exact)! The majestic Col de l'Iseran (2770m) is the highest true mountain pass in the Alps and in France 2nd only to the Cime de la Bonette (which you will cycle later!). At almost 47km in length, it is one to be ticked off the list. Stamp your carnet on the summit before the fast (and technical, in places) descent to Bonneval for lunch. From here enjoy some valley riding before the balcony road over the Côte d'Aussois (1519m). The Col du Télégraphe (1566m) is your final 'obstacle' before arriving in the pretty ski resort of Valloire.



Day 4 - Valloire to Vars

121KM WITH 3200M ASCENT

Today sees you tackle two of the most iconic climbs the Alps have to offer: namely the Col du Galibier (2642m) and the Col d'Izoard (2361m). Start the Galibier climb straight from the hotel (though it does let you warm up a little with gentle gradients before it ramps up). The final km averages 10% but with beautiful views.

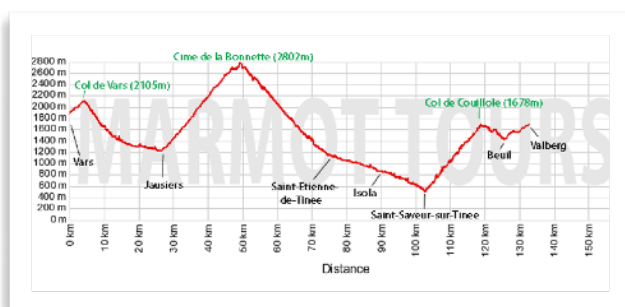


Enjoy your descent and a fast run into Briançon to the foot of the Col d'Izoard where you amble along the valley till the road starts to ramp up as you near the summit. Your reward for the climb is another twisty and fast descent to the adjoining valley where you find the base of the climb to Vars, where you stay the night!

Day 5 - Vars to Valberg

134KM WITH 3400M ASCENT

The final 5km of the Col de Vars (2105m) offer you a nice warm up before descending into a deep Ubaye canyon. From Jausiers you start the ascent of our highest col, in fact the highest col in Europe, the Cime de la Bonette (2802m). Though it will be a tough one in terms of the length of the climb (23km), it is a fairly steady gradient and you will be rewarded with an incredible 53km descent from the top, down into St-Sauveur-sur-Tinée! Just one more little cliff-hugging climb to go - the Col de la Couillole (1678m) - before stamping your carnet in Beuil and heading up to the ski resort of Valberg for a well-deserved rest!



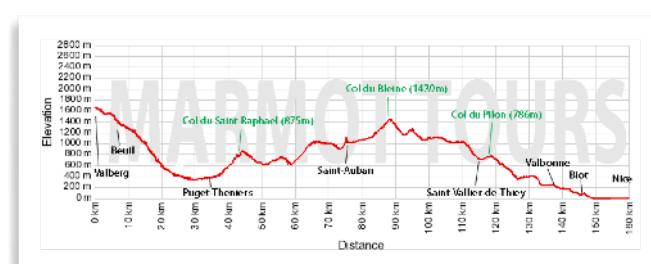
Day 6 - Valberg to Nice

160KM WITH 2000M ASCENT

Don't worry if your legs don't work first thing today – the route starts with an epic 22km descent through the Gorges du Cian, which are impressive, to say the least. From here you climb up the small Col de St-Raphaël (876m), followed by some fabulous cross country riding on an undulating gradient.

The last main col of the trip is the Col de Bleine (1430m), which is followed by a well earned 27km descent into St-Vallier-de-Thiery. The coast is in sight here. Head on over the Col du Pilon (786m), which you will honestly hardly notice at this stage of the game. A true downhill bias takes you into suburban Côte d'Azur.

It's a bit of a shock to enter such a populated area after the tranquillity of the route, but you will love the 'holiday' feel about the place. We take you on the quietest but least complicated (we hope!), route into Nice and along the coast to meet the guides at the finish line at your hotel for a celebratory glass of bubbles, a swim (if you fancy it) and some well deserved R&R while you wait for other riders to arrive.



Day 7 - Travel back

Transfers from the hotel to Nice Airport (10 min) are included. Please read on in the Travel & Transfer section for more details.



Start & End

Start: Hotel Côte Sud Léman, 6 Rue du Pamphiot, 74200 Thonon-les-Bains (+33 4 50 70 36 70)

End: Novotel Nice Airport Cap 3000, 40 Avenue de Verdun, 06700 St Laurent du Var, Nice (+33 4 93 19 55 55)

Travel

Finding flights

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 GVA'. 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 into Geneva a day early in order to get over any jet lag before you start cycling. 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 then do let us know and we may be able to help you with your travel plans.

Geneva has a left luggage service if you want an early drop off in order to explore the city. Please arrange to arrive at the start hotel for 18:30 at the

latest on the Travel Day so you can be there for the welcome briefing.

Train from Geneva to Thonon

There are regular trains from Geneva airport to Cornavin (Geneva mainline station) taking about 6min. Change here to a bus for Geneva Eaux Vives station (www.rail.ch for details). Trains from Geneva Eaux Vives to Thonon are direct and take about 45min. You need to get a taxi from Thonon train station to the start hotel (5min).

Driving

If it ties in with your plans you can drive to Geneva, leaving your car at the hotel car park or using a long stay parking facility near the airport. At the end of the Raid you can fly from Nice to Geneva to reunite with your car.

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 from Geneva airport (GVA) at set times at the start of the trip to the hotel in Thonon-les-Bains (around 1 hr) and from the end hotel back to Nice airport (NCE) (10 min) are included in the holiday price. As we are using the end hotel's airport shuttle service, your return transfer can be at any time from 6am, for flights leaving Nice after 8:15am.

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 for this itinerary, 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 cyclosporives 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 our Raid routes. As a first Raid however, most people tend to start with the Raid Pyrenean as it is just 4.5 days in the saddle.

Pacing

The key to success is pacing yourself. We are very keen to emphasise that you don't need to be cycling super fast in order to manage the daily route. The joy of a Marmot Raid 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

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comfortable going. Two guides in support vehicles will support your every need, be it mechanical, nutritional or motivational!

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.

How does it compare?

If you've done the Raid Pyrenean and are thinking, 'what's next?', or if you are a first timer, this is a fabulous choice. Whilst the ascent stats seem intimidating, the distances are less on average than on the Raid Pyrenean and the days in the saddle therefore tend to be a little shorter.

The Raid Alpine in either direction (we have a S-N version too), is 6 days in the saddle, which is not to be underestimated. To have some experience of consecutive days of riding would be sensible.

In terms of choosing between the N-S and S-N version of this challenge, the client feedback is that the latter is a little harder. South to north is the original direction that the Raid Alpine was first undertaken in, as Georges Rossini, the route creator, intended it. The north to south route however seems to be a popular choice of direction.

Overall the average daily distance you'll cover is 128km and the daily average ascent comes in at 2983m, which is a couple of hundred more m/day than the Raid Pyrenean.

Group Dynamics

Your group will be any number up to around 20 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

We stay in a selection of 2 and 3* hotels with en-suite facilities. The hotels have been selected for their customer service towards cyclists and their location. 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. Expect continental style breakfasts. We supplement hotel breakfasts with cereals and fruit. Most Alpine hotels offer eggs, cheese & meats for your protein kick start too.

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. Expect three courses (and generous portions) which are tailored to 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 vegetarian for some meals and not for others.

What's Included

- 6 days supported riding
- Airport transfers on arrival and departure days at specified times
- Route notes, maps and GPS files
- Medal for successful Raiders
- 7 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



Guiding

“I had an exhilarating, tiring, lung and leg bursting time. I thought the Pyrenees was wonderful and the Alps was just as superb.” J Wilson

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.

“This was my fourth Raid and, yet again, Marmot have provided an outstanding service” John C

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.



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).

