

100 MUST DO CLIMBS

DIRK VISSERS

MY TIPS FOR UPHILL BIKE RIDING

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This book assembles a Top 100 of marvelous and unique climbs in 13 different countries in Europe. Since I bought my first racing bike in 2003, I cycled 400 different hills in my home country, and almost 300 different hills and mountains outside of Belgium.

With this book I hope to give you inspiration and enthusiasm for mountain cycling. In my opinion, it is one of the most intensive and lovely experiences you can have in life . It is sport, travelling and sightseeing combined.

To conquer the famous climbs from the Tour de France, Giro d'Italia of the Vuelta gives you an extraordinary satisfaction.

This top 100 is composed with only climbs I did myself. It is far from complete. My dream to reach all the famous climbs in Europe is still not complete. I didn't want to share my experience of climbs I didn't do so far. So there certainly will come a sequel in a few years with more climbs.

I still have to explore Switzerland, for example. So you won't find the Gotthard Pass or the Furka Pass... yet.

Other than that, the list in this book is the unique taste of climbing by bike I have the privilege to share with you.

Of course some legendary climbs are present, but I also tried to write about more unknown regions, which are worth to discover.

Enjoy this book and make your cycling dreams come true!

Dirk Vissers

June 2021

How to read the symbols:

Length:



Summit height:



Avarage gradient:



Maximum gradient:



Climbing is something I've always loved. It gives new perspectives that I don't normally know as a resident of the flat Campine (Kempen) region in Flanders, Belgium. A bird's eye perspective. It's lovely to, after minutes or even hours of effort, end up in a completely different place that can give you a beautiful (over)view of the valley below. To stay there for a moment to take a breath, reflect on your labor and the resulting satisfaction. The panorama you're given there becomes a memory that you can take with you in your mental backpack.

Countless are the climbs for which I have had that experience. The climb to Matraia, with the beautiful view of the historical city of Lucca at the top, which can be furthered in direction of the peak of 'Le Pizzorne', is undoubtedly an example of the mixture of sportsmanship - with several kilometres with steepness above 10% - but afterwards, time and again: that satisfaction. That is why it's my favorite climb.

Jan Bakelants - professional cyclist
June 2021

Winner of :

Tour de l'Avenir

Stage in the Tour de France and ex jellow jersey in the
Tour de France

Grand Prix de Wallonie

Stage Criterium du Dauphiné

Giro dell' Emilia

Giro del Piemonte

And many places of honor in Grand Tours and classics

1. STILFERSJOCH/PASSO DELLO STELVIO-SÜD TIROL/ALTO ADIGE-ITALIA

From Prato: → 25.200m ↪ 2.757m ↪ 7,3% ↪ 14%

This is it. The Holy Grail, the Summit, the one and only “Stairway to Heaven”.

The Stelvio has the most reasons to be number one. It has it all: The height; the surroundings, the road, the history and it's 48 hairpin turns.

Of the three sides, I climbed the harder Prato side three times, and once via the Umbrail Pass.

When you start at the junction with the Vingschau valley, you can really warm up your legs. The start is green and easy at a 2 to 5% steepness. After 6km you reach Gomagoi (at the left there is the road to Solda), and there the real work starts. A part with 9% takes you higher, via some nice bends, as the valley behind you turns smaller. You pass the river running through the village of Trafoi a few times, where you'll find the first of 48 marked hairpins. From now on you can count down the bends to the summit. Trafoi is one of the last signs of civilization before the top. Here you keep on climbing at 9% while the view of the brilliant mountain massive of the Ortler appears for the first time. You reach bend number 47. It was here in 2008 that I crashed my bike. Coming down, I hit my pedal to the ground. I fell against the stone wall at the side of the road. Besides some bruised ribs it was nothing serious, but this kept me awake for a couple of nights. (So be careful coming down!)

At kilometer 13, when you pass the restaurant Weissen Knott at your left side,

there is a hard passage of 13 a 14%.

As you can count off the bends, you reach the hotel Franzenshöhe approximately 9km before the top. From here you can see the summit, but there are still hard kilometers to come, with climbs between 8 and 10%. The road in front of you drops inside of the landscape and goes up like a stroke of a paintbrush.

You are lucky, because the next 22 bends succeed each other quickly, and in every bend you can relax for a moment as the hairpins provide some rest from ascending. At your left side you can see the Ortler massive in all its glory. The last bends are a real moment of glory. Although breathless, I always get somewhat emotional there. In part because of the unique and wonderful surroundings, but also because I'm already knackered. In the last few meters, you can already smell the hamburgers...

A hotel, restaurants, souvenirshops, ... the top of the Stelvio has it all. Don't pay it any mind... It belongs to this climb. On the top, take the road to the left, to the highest restaurant. Here you are out of the hectic world, almost alone, and the view on the crowdy top and the last bendy kilometers is AWESOME.

Travel tip: when you want to have the most wonderful view on the completely climb: take a holiday in the side valley at Solda. Put your walking shoes on, and go up to the Payer Hütte. You are on the top of the whole of Süd Tirol (which would seem like the world when you're there). •



2. COLLE FAUNIERA(COLLE DEI MORTI) - PIEMONTE-ITALIA

From Demonte:  24.600m  2.481m  7%  11%

The Fauniera, also called the Colle dei Morti, Mountain of the Dead, because of a bloody battle in the eighteenth century, is not even marked as a green road in the Michelin atlas. It is a mistake. But at the other point of view, also good, because this climb and its statue of Marco Pantani will remain untouched.

In the Fausto Coppi Gran Fondo, the Fauniera will live you with sore calves, a huge obstacle.

The southside from Demonte is located in the valley between France (via the col de Larche) and Cuneo. The same valley as the Italian side of the Lombarda. It is a silent and very green valley. The first half of the climb is very irregular, with parts between 3 and 9%. The road leads you across a nice forest region and some small villages. The last houses are 14km before the summit at San Giacomo. Here you have the occasion to fill your water bottle again, I didn't do it, regrettably.

After San Giacomo, the road gets smaller, and traffic lower. This makes the Fauniera so unique. 9km before the top, the surroundings are opening themselves up,

and a last small café is next to the road. I ran out of water at 22° degrees and full sun. So I needed a short stop with a coke and some water, and then I took off for the last part. The owner gave me a staggered look, as he said the last part is the hardest.

That wasn't a lie. With an average of 9%, the distance and the height, the Fauniera is a silent killer.

At this point the mountain views are wide, the road is narrow, and the rocks are unique. The Fauniera is unique. On no other climb nature is so wild, so untouched, so... unreal.

As you suffer yourself to the top, you reach the view on the Colle Valcavera, and the last part is there. Here you are cycling on a sort of ridge... on a small road in a bad state. At this last part, nature gets even more wild and desolate. Two eyes are not enough to look at it all.

Finally, in a short bend, you can see the large statue for Marco Pantani, and you know heaven is here, or certainly very close... •



3. COL DU GALIBIER - HAUTES ALPES/ISERE- FRANCE

From Saint Michel de Maurienne

via the Telegraphe: → 35.200m ↪ 2.646m ↪ 5,5% ↗ 11%

Of the possible sides up to the Galibier, I did two so far. I climbed it in 2004. With my first racing bike: From Briançon, via the valley of Serre Chevalier, and the Col du Lautaret. The part up until the Lautaret is not that hard, and very green. When you go up for the last 8km via the small road, at your left you can enjoy the wonderful Meije glacier. From here the Galibier is steep and small. But so much enjoyable with the wonderful high mountain surroundings. Just before you reach the tunnel, there is a large statue for Henri Desgrange, the founder of the Tour de France. For many years now, there is a small road which leads you to the top, as the tunnel is forbidden for cyclists. And the last kilometer is the hardest, at 10%.

The Northside, via de Col du Telegraphe, is one of the hardest in France... From Chatelard you need to conquer 1930 meters. Up to the Telegraphe and Valloire, there is already a part of 8km at 8 to 9%,

but then you can recover for a while. At the ski resort of Valloire, a wide valley leads you to your goal.

The real work only starts after 27km, when the road takes a U-turn at Plan Lachat. Here the road gets smaller again and the final push to the col starts. The higher you get, the thinner the air, but also the more wonderful the mountain views are. Both will take your breath away.

Stones, glaciers, and a small asphalt road, you only can make a deep bow and be humbled. But you need to reach your goal and keep on going. At the north side, the last kilometer is the steepest. Your adrenaline will bring you to the small top.

Once you are there, and the weather is fine, take your time to sit down for a while, and dream away with the unique and brilliant views.

Travel tip: The region of the Galibier is worth to visit. With the Izoard, Alpe d'Huez, Croix de Fer, and many other cols very close, you can enjoy yourself for more than one week. •

