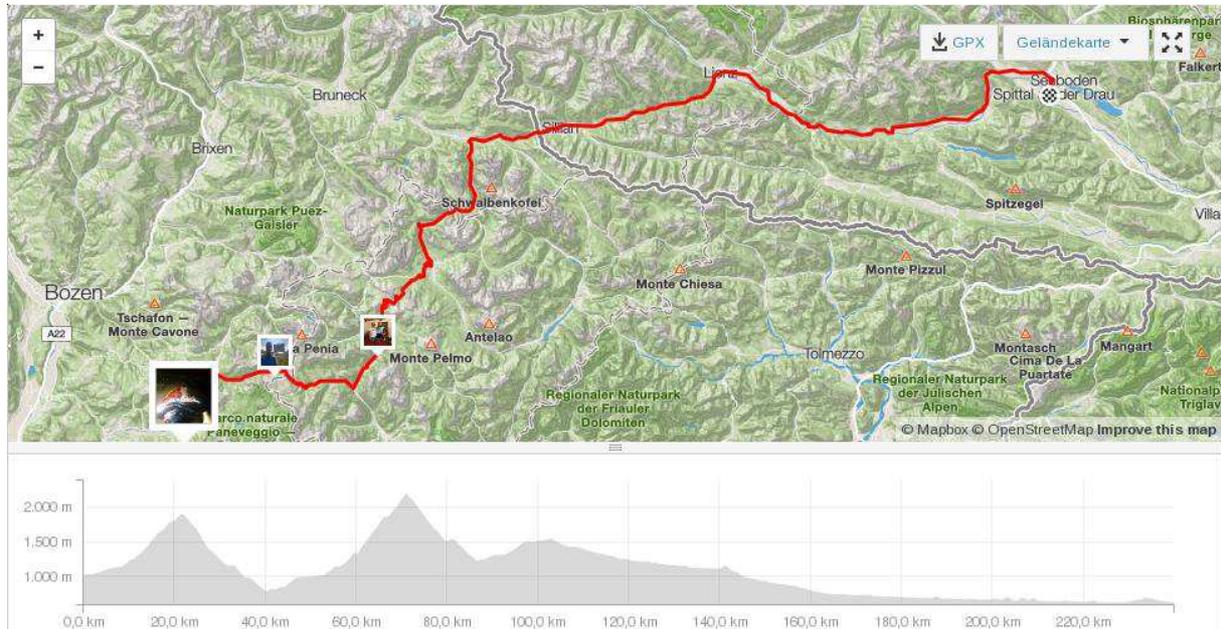


Day 6, Predazzo – Spittal a.d. Drau with CP3 (Italy – Austria, country #5)

Distance [km]	Metres of climb [m]	Moving time [hh:mm]	Time on road [hh:mm]	Break [hh:mm]	Avg. speed [km/h]	Normalized power [W]
240	3174	10:24	14:32	04:08	23,1	157



I had set my alarm for 5:45am. Although I had slept well in my 1st bivvy and felt really warm and comfortable inside my sleeping bag, I absolutely didn't feel as recovered as the days before in a hotel room. I hated the idea that I had to leave my warm sleeping bag now and pack up everything in the cold, and without access to a bathroom to freshen up.

After a minimal breakfast (one bar) I started at 6:20am with the immediate climb of the Passo Pelegrino (1918m). The 900m climb on 21km was not steep, but my stomach already demanded some food. I had not much food left, so I stopped for only 10 mins at the top to eat another bar and to take the obligatory photograph.



Passo Pelegrino (1918m)



Breakfast at CP3

I had done this part of my route already in May with my mate Howard, so I knew very well, that the last 30 kms to CP3, in Alleghe, were not very hard. After the descent there was only another easy 200m climb, so that I arrived around 9am at the Hotel Europa. The famous long distance cyclist

Juliana Buhring was one of the volunteers to welcome the TCR riders and stamp our brevet cards. Fortunately she did not refuse to take a photo with me, although I thought I wouldn't smell very nice! after one and a half days without a shower and clothing wash ...

I was happy to get a very large breakfast at the hotel and hoped, I could continue my ride very quickly. But something was wrong with me – I felt dizzy and weak, my circulation was playing up. Was it yesterday's heat and dehydration, or was there something wrong with the breakfast – I still don't know, but I really struggled and thought I couldn't continue my ride, and I would have to scratch! But before doing that I decided to take a nap in the shade outside the hotel at the lake. I think I slept more than one hour as it was already 11:20am when I decided to continue. I did not have a clue how far I could ride – but at least I felt much better now.

I needed 2:10h to climb the 1200m to the top of the Passo Giau, the end of the CP3 circuit – which was very slow! It was a hot day again, and even at above 2200m the temperature reached 27°C! I only stopped for a few photos and descended the 1000m down to Cortina very quickly. Finally my appetite had come back so I intended to have a good big meal in the last Italian city of my route. I enjoyed very good spaghetti and a big scoop of ice cream, before I continued on my way to Austria. Most riders had gone south from here, to the Croatian coast, but I had intended to ride a more direct inland route through the Balkans to CP4 in Montenegro. My goal now was to reach Spittal in Austria today, another 150km from Cortina; and I had done only 87km so far in almost 9 hours!



Juliana Buhring and me at CP3



Passo Giau, 2236m

My energy had come back after my late lunch in Cortina, so that after an easy 300m climb out of the city I flew down to Lienz on the big SS51 despite lots of traffic: 80km with 800m descent in 2:35h. My destination was now another 75km away so I decided to stop for a last quick refuel in a McDonalds. Whilst eating 2 double cheeseburgers I googled and booked a hotel in Spittal, which I reached 2:30h later at 8:50pm. And you won't believe, but after showering and washing my clothes I was hungry again! Luckily, the hotel had a good restaurant downstairs and it was a very nice and warm summer evening so I could sit outside.



Passo Giaù

Passo Giaù to Cortina

Day 7, Spittal a.d. Drau – Karlovac (Austria – Slovenia – Croatia, country #7)

Distance [km]	Metres of climb [m]	Moving time [hh:mm]	Time on road [hh:mm]	Break [hh:mm]	Avg. speed [km/h]	Normalized power [W]
293	2584	11:55	15:23	03:28	24,6	150



Unfortunately the hotel didn't offer me a packed lunch for my early start, so this meant I had to leave at 5:15am without breakfast. I hoped I would find an open bakery or coffee shop very soon – Austria is very similar to Bavaria in this respect, where most bakeries open at 6am. The next city on my route was Villach, only ~30km away. A big Agip petrol station directly on my route with a coffee shop looked very inviting, and I was more than happy to find a typical Bavarian speciality there: Leberkässemmel (Meatloaf served in crusty white roll with either sweet or hot mustard !) I ordered 2 of them together with 2 big coffees and 1 liter of orange juice – this quantity was obviously not expected by the waitress so early in the morning, as she asked me twice to confirm the number of coffees and rolls. After 6 days with mainly croissants for breakfast, I felt very satisfied and happy and ready for the upcoming climb, the Wurzenpass, which leads into Slovenia.

This Pass is a climb of only 540m, but someone told me just 2 days before the start, that there are gradients up to 20%! Well I thought, with my 34/32 gears that shouldn't be a problem. The display on my Garmin showed gradients >10% very soon, reaching values of 16%. After a hairpin bend a traffic sign with the 18% gradient appeared, and in front of me a straight ramp. After only a few meters I decided I would be faster walking this steep section rather than trying not to fall off my bike. Only a few minutes later a young girl on a TT bike, dancing on her pedals, overtook me, which demoralized me for a few seconds, but then I said to myself: she is probably half of my age, weighs 20kg less than me and her bike is 12kg lighter than mine – everything is fine 😊 (At the finisher party Kristof, the winner, told me, even he had to walk this section! 😊). The last part of the pass was rideable, and I was a bit surprised to see the old tank, which was positioned on the top of the pass.



Bavarian/Austrian breakfast: Leberkässemmel Tank on top of the Wurzenpass (1070m)

The route profile on my Garmin told me, that I would have about 100km with ~700m descent ahead of me. The wind was also on my side, which meant that I could ride this part with an avg of 28km/h. The saddle sore, that had started on Day 5 in Italy, had not decreased a lot. The worst part was, when I started riding after a break. I don't know, whether the pain became less, or I just adapted to the pain, the longer I sat on my saddle. Anyway, the rougher the road surface was, the less comfortable I felt on my saddle. And I had the impression, that the road surfaces became worse and worse, the farther I rode in an easterly direction.

On the dot of 12 !, after 142km, I came past a big petrol station again. In Slovenia they very often include a mini restaurant or coffee shop, which was the case here – so that was the optimal lunch stop for me. 20km later I reached an easy small climb of 230m with 2,3% avg gradient, before I had only flat or descending roads ahead of me again for the next 60km. The road and traffic was ok and I never felt unsafe in Slovenia. The temperatures had risen again up to 30°C, but the sun didn't burn as much as in Italy, as there were some clouds in the sky. Anyway, I didn't want to risk another dehydration and stopped again after 206km in a beer garden, to refuel my bottles and myself and have some cake and coffee. A short check of my route indicated, that I had to ride another ~100km to Karlovac, in Croatia, which could be a good overnight stop in a hotel. The sky in front of me already showed some dark clouds and my weather app forecasted storms for Karlovac this evening. Therefore I didn't spend too much time in the shaded beer garden and forced myself to hurry up a bit. There was another gentle climb of 400m with ~4% gradient, but the last 40km were almost flat, so that I reached Karlovac at 8:20pm – still in the dry but with dark clouds all around. I hadn't booked a hotel during the day, so I just googled some options.

The 1st, a B&B was closed, so I just checked the next hotel, which looked like a small castle and was situated at and named after the river Korana. Although it is a 4-star hotel, it was no problem to take

my bike into the spacious room. After my quick washing procedure I went downstairs to the hotel restaurant, where I enjoyed a delicious 3-course menu together with 2 bottles of the local beer (Karlovacko) on the roof terrace, watching spectacular lightning all around, before the storm started. I was very happy to be sitting in the dry and knowing I would sleep in a warm and dry bed tonight.



Hotel Korana in Karlovac

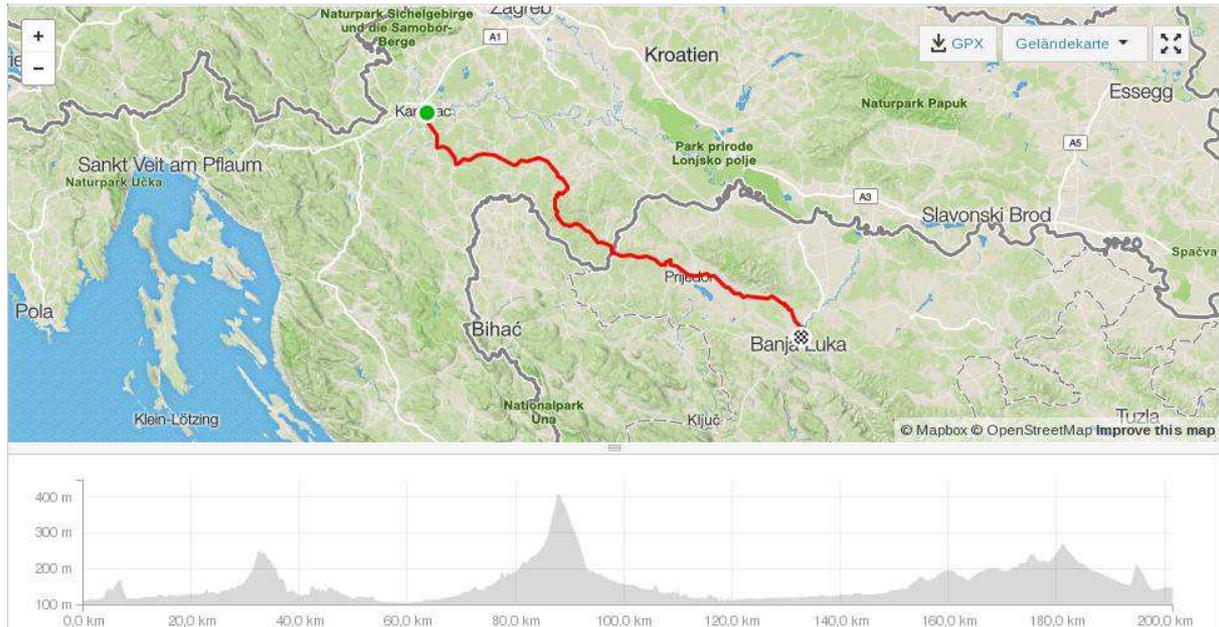


Hotel Korana in Karlovac – one of the best hotels of my journey

Desert: Chocolate Palatschinken

Day 8, Karlovac – Banja Luka (Croatia - Bosnia, country #8)

Distance [km]	Metres of climb [m]	Moving time [hh:mm]	Time on road [hh:mm]	Break [hh:mm]	Avg. speed [km/h]	Normalized power [W]
201	1152	07:25	09:09	01:44	27,2	153



I was now 7 days into the race and had done ~2400km – more than half of the distance and still within a possible 12 days finish. I set my alarm for an early start around 4am. But when I got up, it was raining cats and dogs! No way I would leave my room and start into a wet dark day! Instead I thought it would be better to rest another 3 hours and take breakfast at 7am. I was the only person at the buffet so early and enjoyed another delicious and big meal in this hotel, which would sate me at least for 5 hours.

When I had packed my bike and left the hotel, it was already 8:45am and it was now only drizzling, though the roads were still wet. My route through Croatia led through some very lonesome areas on small roads with little traffic. The houses were in a very bad state and I hardly met younger people. It looked like this part of Croatia was evacuated and the elderly people had been forgotten ... My route was also not very hilly – there were rather false flats (~1% gradient), than real climbs. Anyway, my saddle sore was quite painful today, and the bad road surface with cracked tarmac didn't help, as each of those bumps caused immediate pain. Riding in aero position helped against the pain, but on bad surface it was not possible to ride in this position. I tried to change my position as often as possible, and even stopped 2 or 3 times to grease the sore areas with chamois cream, which prevented it becoming worse.

The roads dried very quickly and I rode the 120km to the Bosnian border at Novi Grad without a food stop. I exchanged some money – Bosnia is one of the few countries on my route without the Euro. It was Saturday, the streets were very busy and there was a small market. My breakfast was already burned so that I stopped at the next small restaurant to have a late lunch. To my surprise the owners spoke German and it turned out, that they were refugees in Germany in the 90s, when there was the civil war in this region. They were quite thankful for the help, which they got during this time, and they wished me good luck for the rest of my journey.

The temperature was not high today – around 17°C with grey skies, but at least it didn't rain. During my stop I had a deeper look at my route data and noticed, that after Banja Luka, which was ~80km ahead, there were 2 climbs and no civilization for many kilometers! So I decided to ride to Banja Luka and stop there in a hotel, and continue the next morning very early rather than ending somewhere in no man's land in the middle of the night without options for food and bed! The remaining 80km were done quite quickly with an avg of > 28km/h, as the roads were better now than in Croatia. I googled the hotels in the city and rode to one, which was situated directly on my route in the city center. It was only 5:55pm and there were plenty of rooms available. After my washing procedure I walked to the supermarket across the street to get water, juice and some food for the next morning. Later I had an early dinner in the hotel restaurant and found out, that the Italian pair #218 Gualtiero Rossano & Alberto Vaghi had stopped in the same city, only a few hundred meters from my hotel! The next day I read on their FB page, that Alberto had to scratch from the race and Gualtiero had to continue solo.