

dispatches → Tour de France 2007



Stage Fright

Discover the pleasure and pain of pro-caliber climbs with these U.S. mountain monsters

Ever watched Tour de France cyclists suffering through the Alps and Pyrenees and wondered what it felt like? You don't have to go to Europe to find out. The U.S. has Tour-worthy climbs of its own—though they might not be where you'd expect. European mountain roads tend to be old, rough, and narrow, with steep and highly variable grades. That means the engineered highways in Colorado's Rocky Mountains don't make the cut. But with the help of Tour veterans, local bike shops, GPS data, Tour officials, topo maps, and a lot of riding, we've dug up eight stateside ascents that match the challenges of France's mythic climbs—and two that hurt more than anything that country has to offer. Enjoy the pain. —ANDREW VONTZ

TOUR CLIMBS IN THE U.S.

Appalachian Gap

WAITSFIELD, VERMONT

HIGHEST POINT: 2,392 feet **VERTICAL**

GAIN: 1,500 feet **LENGTH:** 6.3 miles

GRADE: 4.5% average **SIMILAR TO:**

Col de Tamié, Stage 8, July 15 (5.9 miles, 1,250-foot vertical, 4% average)

Don't plan on getting into a rhythm on this one. The Appalachian Gap includes brief sections of 7, 12, 10, and 14 percent before settling back down near the finish. "It's a bit short," says Chris Carmichael, who trained on this road as a young pro in the eighties. "But it compares to Tour climbs in its steepness and varying pitch."

Big Cottonwood Canyon

HOLLADAY, UTAH

HIGHEST POINT: 8,705 feet **VERTICAL**

GAIN: 3,852 feet **LENGTH:** 14.7 miles

GRADE: 5% average **SIMILAR TO:** **Cornet**

de Roselend, Stage 8, July 15 (12.4 miles, 3,959-foot vertical, 6% average)

A favorite training climb of Utah native and Team CSC pro Dave Zabriskie, Cottonwood snakes its way east from Salt Lake City. The steepest pitches come near Storm Mountain, after mile two, and between Solitude and Brighton ski resorts. "It's a big road, and it can get really windy," says Zabriskie. "The fun thing to do, when there's no snow, is keep going up over Guardsman Pass." From that 9,695-foot perch, you have

the option of bombing down into Park City, 2,671 feet below.

Latigo Canyon

MALIBU, CALIFORNIA

HIGHEST POINT: 2,122 feet **VERTICAL**

GAIN: 2,016 feet **LENGTH:** 9.2 miles

GRADE: 4.2% average **SIMILAR TO:**

Montée de Hauteville, Stage 8, July 15 (9.5 miles, 2,566-foot vertical, 4.7% average)

A winding, wide-open road that seems designed for bikes and convertibles, Latigo begins with a sharp hump, then settles into a steady but steep grade for about six miles as it rises into the Santa Monica Mountains. "It's reminiscent of climbs in the Pyrenees, because there's very little cover from trees and it can get really hot," says Carmichael. The ride ends on Kanan Dume Road with a 50-mile-per-hour descent to the beach.

Gibraltar Road

SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA

HIGHEST POINT: 3,588 feet **VERTICAL**

GAIN: 3,264 feet **LENGTH:** 9 miles

GRADE: 6.9% average **SIMILAR TO:** **Col**

du Galibier, Stage 9, July 17 (10.9 miles, 4,068-foot vertical, 6.9% average)

A narrow road with fractured pavement that heads up into the coastal mountains above

Santa Barbara, Gibraltar was a frequent training climb for Lance Armstrong. "The effort it takes to get up that definitely compares to some of the climbs in the Tour," says California resident Levi Leipheimer (see page 24). Yeah, but Tour climbs don't have ocean views.

Ebbetts Pass

MARKLEEVILLE, CALIFORNIA

HIGHEST POINT: 8,718 feet

VERTICAL GAIN: 3,016 feet

LENGTH: 13 miles **GRADE:**

4.4% average **SIMILAR TO:**

Port de Balès, Stage 15, July 23

(11.9 miles, 3,881-foot vertical,

6.2% average)

"The best place to simulate a Tour climb is right outside Carson City, Nevada," says three-time Tour champion Greg LeMond, who regularly trained on Ebbetts Pass during his career. After six miles of a steady 4 percent grade, the climb kicks up to 22 percent in a hairpin turn and ultimately hits a roughly mile-long stretch of 15 percent up to the summit.

Pine Flat Road

JIMTOWN, CALIFORNIA

HIGHEST POINT: 3,165 feet **VERTICAL**

GAIN: 2,936 feet **LENGTH:** 11.1 miles

GRADE: 5% average **SIMILAR TO:** Col de la

Pierre Saint-Martin, Stage 16, July 25 (8.9

miles, 2,414-foot vertical, 5.2% average)

The vineyards surrounding the first mile of Pine Flat Road resemble terrain riders will pass through at the Tour, and the comparison holds to the summit. "It's not steady," says Leipheimer, who rides up Pine Flat twice a week during preseason training. "The grade changes a lot, and it's nice and long."

Mount Wilson

PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

HIGHEST POINT: 5,699 feet **VERTICAL**

GAIN: 4,827 feet **LENGTH:** 22.4 miles

GRADE: 4.1% average **SIMILAR TO:** Col du

Galibier, via 2006 route (26.6 miles, 6,220-

foot vertical, 4.5% average)

"This would be a Category 1 climb in any grand tour," says Discovery Channel pro Tony Cruz. With 17 miles of relentless climbing, save for a brief downhill scream near mile 11, Wilson's only recent Tour equivalent is the Col du Galibier, via the 2006 route, which takes in much more of the alpine beast. Starting from the nearby Rose Bowl gets the mileage and vertical up to Galibier standards.

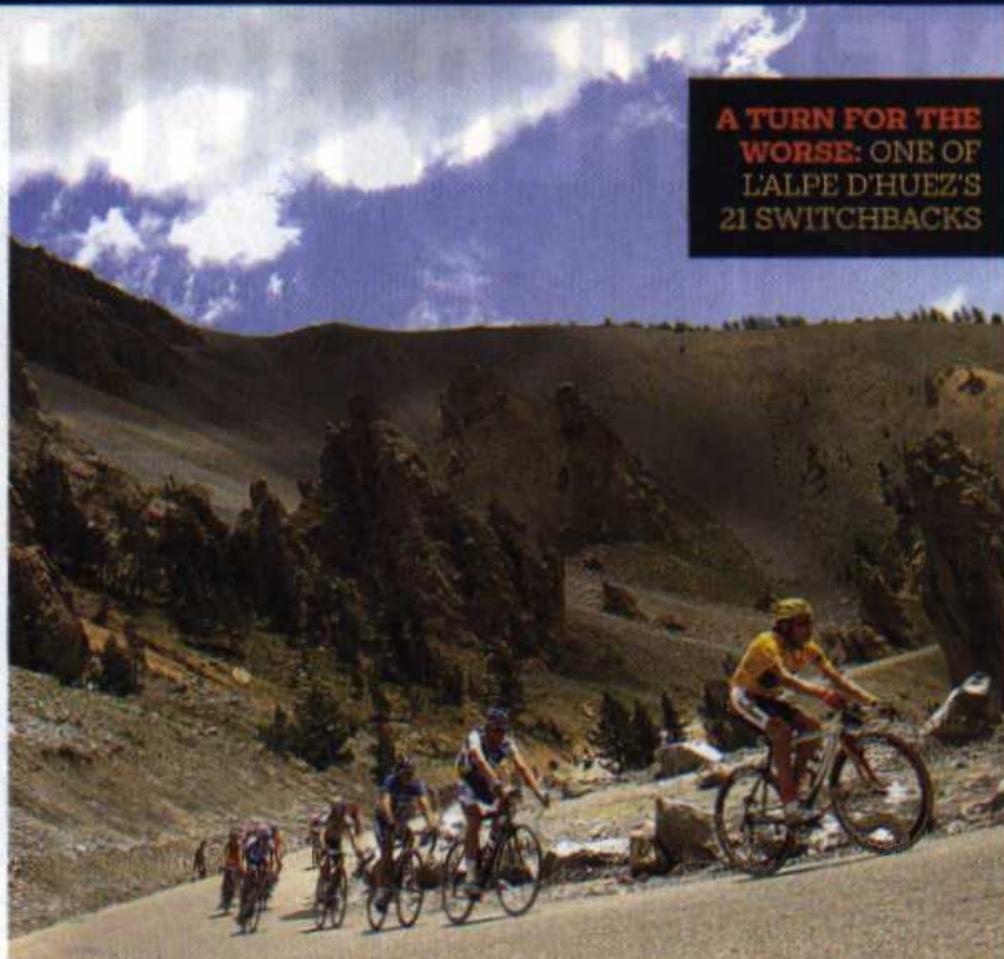
Mount Baldy

CLAREMONT, CALIFORNIA

HIGHEST POINT: 6,314 feet **VERTICAL**

GAIN: 4,669 feet **LENGTH:** 12.6 miles

GRADE: 7% average **SIMILAR TO:** L'Alpe



d'Huez, last used in the 2006 Tour (8.6 miles, 3,608-foot vertical, 7.9% average)

Baldy doesn't have the 21 brutal switchbacks that make L'Alpe d'Huez the Tour's most iconic climb, but it can nearly match it in grade and surpass it in length as it rises from the SoCal sprawl into Angeles National Forest. "I use it to prepare for big stage races," says Cruz. "It has the look and feel of a European high-alpine climb."

BONUS CLIMBS

Brasstown Bald

TOWNS COUNTY, GEORGIA

HIGHEST POINT: 4,741 feet **VERTICAL**

GAIN: 2,065 feet **LENGTH:** 3.1 miles

GRADE: 12.6% average, 21% maximum

SIMILAR TO: Nothing in France compares.

The Tour de Georgia introduced Brasstown Bald to pro cycling in 2004, and the peloton has been wincing ever since. "It feels like your arms and head are going to explode," says Discovery Channel climbing ace Tom Danielson. "Seriously, your arms feel worse than your legs, because you're working them so hard just to keep moving forward."

Mount Washington

GORHAM, NEW HAMPSHIRE

HIGHEST POINT: 6,288 feet **VERTICAL**

GAIN: 4,725 feet **LENGTH:** 7.6 miles

GRADE: 12% average, 22% maximum

SIMILAR TO: Nothing in France compares.

"When you combine the grade, the weather, and the gravel road, there's nothing in the Tour de France like Mount Washington," says Carmichael. Just two-thirds of the road is paved, hurricane-force winds can blow riders off their bikes, and the grade gets progressively worse the higher you go, finishing at a nearly impossible 22 percent.

OUTSIDE ONLINE

For complete route maps, go to outside-online.com/yourowntour