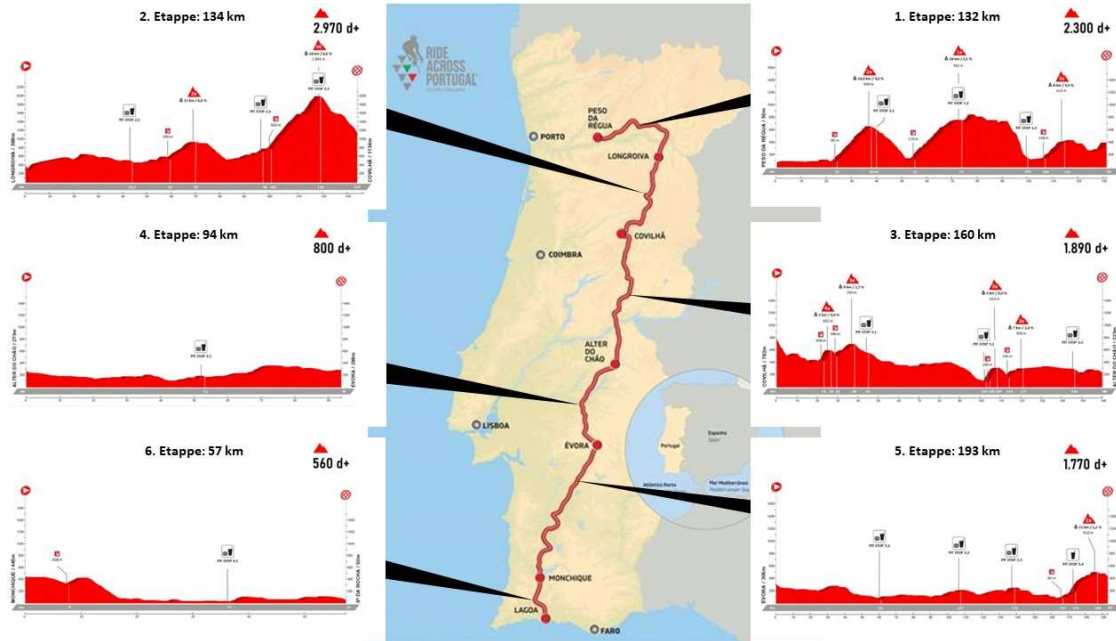


Through Portugal from north to south - on a road bike!!

Crossing a country completely on a road bike sounds like an exciting idea. We had our first experience of this on the Ride Across Britain: in 9 days over approx. 1600 km from the southernmost point of England - Land's End - to the northernmost point of Scotland - John O'Groats. We were looking for a similar project for 2023. It could also be a bit lighter, warmer and more comfortable.

We found all this at the Ride Across Portugal (<https://www.rideacrossportugal.com/en/>) and much more: Portugal from north to south in 6 days, almost 800 kilometres, accommodation in 4-star boutique hotels and all this in a country known for its warm and mild climate. Plus professional support on the stages from mechanics, support staff, a medical team, a broom wagon just in case, and well-stocked refreshment points.



We didn't have to think long to sign up and quickly planned and booked a small holiday trip around the tour with flights, hotels and transfers.

Day 0: At the starting point Peso da Régua

At the registration we got to know the very nice Portuguese crew, received among other things our start numbers and travel bags, which we have to use during the tour in the coming week.

Worldwide, the organisers of such cycling tours after Corona and in the general crisis have problems to animate many people to such adventures again. This explains the small but fine and international field with riders from Australia, Brazil, the USA, Canada, Great Britain, Germany and Portugal.

In the evening at the latest, the right mood and anticipation for the next week set in, as the official welcome, the briefing and the welcome dinner took place in the Museum do Duro. The procedures and rules were explained in detail in a pleasant atmosphere and the team was introduced. The meal that followed was excellent and provided the right foundation for the first stage.



Day 1: Peso da Régua - Longroiva / 132 kilometres, 2300 vertical metres

Everything was set for a beautiful bike tour along the Douro and over the mountains surrounding it. Finally, real summer weather with temperatures well above 20 degrees and sunshine all day. For the obligatory group photo, everyone had put on the official Ride Across Portugal shirt and lined up at the old wooden bridge.



After the start, we first leisurely crossed the old wooden bridge until the field slowly picked up speed along the banks of the Douro. The first 20 km were more or less flat and we could enjoy the wonderful view. Of course, the view got even better when we started the first long climb. The ambitious racers quickly separated from the relaxed cyclists. We hadn't really decided which group we belonged to yet, so we did a bit of everything: pedalling up the hill while enjoying the view and taking a few photos.



The landscape is simply gorgeous. The roads are mostly of very good quality. However, almost all villages and towns have cobblestones. But of course, we put up with that for the unique experiences.

After a good 5 and a half hours, we were exhausted but satisfied at the finish, where a very nice hotel with all amenities awaited us.

Day 2: Longroiva - Covilhã / 132 kilometres, 3220 vertical metres

Today was the big mountain stage. First, we went a good 70 km south, not far from the Spanish border, through historic territory. There are still several castles or their ruins from the Middle Ages. The terrain was quite undulating, the roads again of the best quality and the wind was blowing from behind. So, everything was set for a fast start and concentration on the demanding climbs that followed in the last third.

From kilometre 70 onwards, the only interruption was a short descent and the downhill to the hotel. We had reached the Serra da Estrela National Park. This is the highest mountain range in continental Portugal. It is also home to Portugal's only ski resort. The highest mountain is the Torre at 1993 metres - and it was precisely its summit that was our goal. The climb was long and demanding. But here, too, there were the best roads with very little traffic, and above all, there were always magnificent views.



At some point, however, the suffering and simultaneous wonder at the fantastic landscape came to an end and we reached the top and thus the finish line. It was quite chilly there. So, after a short snack, we quickly put on a windbreaker and started the descent.

The rest in a first-class hotel with the best food was well deserved after a good 6 hours, 132 km and almost 3200 vertical metres.

Day 3: Covilhã - Alter do Chão / 160 kilometres, 1890 vertical metres

After the extensive climbing yesterday, we came to a completely different region of Portugal today. But even central Portugal is anything but flat. Again and again, smaller mountain ranges build up that put a hard strain on the cyclists' calves. After we had conquered the high Estrel range yesterday, the day began today with the not quite as high, but also quite demanding Serra da Gardunha.

The Gardunha range is followed by the vast Beira Baixa plain - wide, very dry areas that reminded us of South Africa. The roads go straight on for endless stretches and up and down gently but were very pleasant to ride due to the strong tailwind.

At Portas de Ródão we crossed the Tagus, Portugal's largest river. Immediately, the monotonous landscape was given another change in the form of another mountain that had to be conquered.



After 164 km, then again a good 2000 vertical metres and almost 6 hours of driving time, we reached the finish line.

The city of arrival is a special place. The Hotel Vila Gale is located in the middle of the Royal Alter grounds, the oldest mare farm in the world. A great facility with beautiful houses, stables, riding arenas and many horses.

Day 4: Alter do Chão - Évora / 94 kilometres, 800 vertical metres

Today we rode through the Alentejo region. While it is still a little greener in the northern part from the Tagus, the further south you go, the hotter and drier it gets. Some cornfields sway in the wind and the vastness of the undulating plain is only interrupted by cork oaks and olive trees. The historic towns of Avis, Pavia and Arraiolos are beautiful with their narrow streets and inevitable cobblestones.

The appearance of the villages has changed bit by bit on the way south. While grey fieldstone buildings still predominated in the north, it is now the typical white houses and churches that dominate the picture in the south. One of the advantages of such a tour is that you get to know a larger part of the country in a short time and gain new impressions every day.



The destination Évora is a tourist magnet with its many historic buildings, the city wall, churches and castles. The narrow streets also determine the picture here. Our hotel is located in the middle of the old town, directly on the city wall.



Day 5: Évora - Monchique / 193 kilometres, 1770 vertical metres

Today we rode for a very long time through the remote areas of the Alentejo region. Endlessly long, straight, undulating roads, in the course of time more and more agriculture - especially olive cultivation - characterised the picture. It then actually became a little greener and the one or other tree appeared at the side of the road. Finally, we reached the dreaded final climb, the Monchique Mountain. The view changed radically. Magnificent views of forested mountainsides opened up and the road wound its way up between deep valleys and mountains. This small mountain massif is basically the gateway to the Algarve.



The climb would certainly have been quite good if we hadn't already had 167 km in our legs at the foot of the mountain. But even so, the climbing eventually came to an end and the descent to the finish in the picturesque town of Monchique concluded this long day after 194 km, 2000 vertical metres and just under 6 3/4 hours.

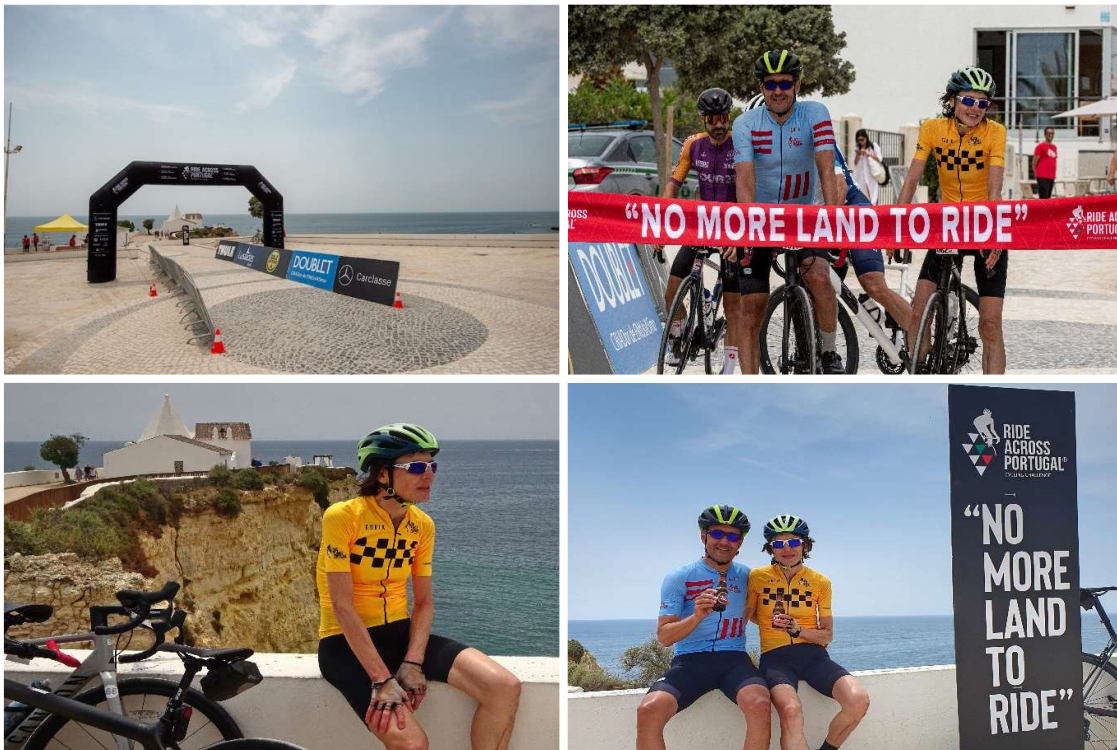
Day 6: Monchique - Porches / 57 kilometres, 560 vertical metres

In the morning we first cycled 250 vertical metres up from the hotel to the start line. After a small ceremony the start took place in the beautiful mountain village of Monchique.



Actually, the last day of such a tour is always quite relaxed. For us, at least, it wasn't always like that, and we really picked up the pace at times just because we were able to. But it was fun and a large group came together again and again.

The landscape again had a lot to offer. At some point we left the mountains behind us and you could already feel the fresh breeze from the sea. The buildings became denser, the houses higher and behind the umpteenth bend we could finally see the sea. Now it was only a few hundred metres to the finish, stylishly set up right on the steep bank in front of the church of Nossa Senhora da Rocha. Everyone was greeted with cheers; the obligatory finish line photos were taken and the first alcoholic drinks were served. We were happy and proud to have arrived well and enjoyed the beautiful coastal landscape.



Finally, a few statistics. There were 31 riders at the start: 10 Portuguese, 2 Australians, 3 Brazilians, 3 Germans, 6 British, 2 Canadians and 5 US-Americans. We rode 776 official kilometres (not counting the arrival and departure to the finish or start) and climbed 11028 metres. My riding time for this was 29 hours 22 minutes and 42 seconds.

The concept of taking time on some previously known and well-marked Strava segments per stage and deriving the placings per stage and the overall ranking from that, allowed the race character for the participants who

were up for it, but outside the segments also the relaxed riding in a group with otherwise much faster participants.

What we saw was phenomenal! The idea of cycling through Portugal from north to south is so brilliant because you touch almost all the regions and get to know the landscapes created by the different climatic and geographical conditions in a crash course, so to speak. By staying overnight and eating in top hotels along the route, you also get a good overview of the culinary spectrum that this country offers.

The organisation of the event was perfect. There is simply nothing to complain about. The people in charge thought of every little thing - from the riders' point of view. This probably also led to the fact that we were almost exclusively on very good road surfaces with incredibly little traffic. The offer at the refreshment stations was unique, very varied and prepared with a lot of love and enthusiasm. All points that make road cycling much more pleasant.

We met a lot of nice people, especially from the organisation team and of course also among the riders. The Portuguese are very warm and open. They are aware that their beautiful country is quite on the edge of Europe - both geographically and in terms of the attention they receive. They are very proud of their country and love to show it to their visitors. It happened more than once that we were approached during the ride by one of the Portuguese riders who explained to us which area we were passing through.

But be careful, this tour has addiction potential! We have already been infected and will be back at the start in 2024!

Steffen and Uta Joachim, Germany