



Cristo Redentor de Los Andes (3825m)

-32.825470° -70.071210°



Ascension of Cristo Redentor de Los Andes (3825m), Chile, Thursday 23-02-2017



Among the greatest hairpins in the world

Around noon, with a bright sun and temperature of about 27 Celsius, we began our climb from the village of Rio Blanco (1400m altitude). Our goal is to take Road 60 to the tourist station of Portillo (2800m) then on to the Tunnel Cristo Redentor at 3185m. Depending on the situation, I have this little idea in my mind: Just before the tunnel there must be a 8 km long dirt road that winds up to the Cristo Redentor de Los Andes Pass at 3825m altitude.

Of course it is possible to start the climb from a lower altitude, for example at the village of El Huape (900m alt.), which is just east of the city of Los Andes. From El Huape the road climbs gradually, apart from a short downhill, for about 30 km to 1400m altitude. Since Road 60 is a major artery between Argentina and Chile there is significant traffic, especially trucks in transit. During the first segment, one also has to contend with the city traffic of Los Andes.

Once past Rio Blanco, about 5kms before the tollgate, the road widens and traffic decreases. Today we are fortunate as road marking work is being performed and traffic is regularly interrupted for up to 30 minutes which is ideal for cyclists permitted to pass through without delay. Generally, we are unimpeded by traffic as the trucks drive uphill at slow speed giving wide berth to cyclists. Further up the climb there is a series of galleries where the road is narrower, especially some kilometres before Portillo and shortly before the Tunnel Redentor.



Cyclists can bypass this last one by taking a northern parallel road. The Tunnel Redentor itself, which leads into Argentina, is prohibited for cyclists. For the first 16 km after Rio Blanco the road is a nearly straight climb along the Rio Juncal River to 2200m altitude. The mountains surrounding us are impressive and the climate is dry. The western valley wind gives us a tail wind at times.

After this start, things become more interesting, the heart of the cyclo climber goes faster and this not only because of the physical effort. In front of us rises a 400m high wall of steep and barren mountain rock, a backdrop to some of the most spectacular hairpins in the world.

The road is wide and the grade mild. Most trucks do not exceed 30km/h. The higher we climb the more breath taking the view of the extraordinary hairpins below us.

It is on this section that we receive most encouragements from the motorists passing by. There are few cyclists riding this road. Today we'll meet only one other crazy cyclist: a Japanese who descends from Argentina on his fully loaded MTB.

Arriving at the top of the “wall” a photo stop is mandatory!! This is one of the most spectacular views of a roadway we will ever experience. This is where many stop, but all should continue – the remaining kilometres are an adventure of epic proportions!!!



After the hairpins, the road climbs further, some scenic views as well, to the intersection leading to Portillo Ski Station (2800m alt.). No stopping for us as we have some 3 km remaining until the customs office (in the Andes, the customs-check points often are situated miles before the real geographical country border). Some road repair is being done where the road is in bad condition (as a prelude of what is still to come). Again, we have this magnificent panoramic view of volcanic shaped mountains, the Portillo Lake and our valley starting point now far below.



We are fortunate on our way up the mountain to pass customs uneventfully (not so lucky on the way down when we were delayed in spite of never having put our wheels or feet in Argentina). This said, the frequency of control of tourists on the Andean passes seems variable and depends on the location and mood of the official on duty.

We've arrived at an altitude where one can feel the reduced oxygen level and it is important to pace ourselves so as to acclimate as much as possible on our long climb. The one advantage of the altitude is that it is cooler, some 15 Celsius. We also get the benefit of clouds forming overhead which offer welcome shade.

After passing customs we continue straight to the last gallery that we bypass. The roadway surface to this point is paved and in generally good condition except for the last kilometres. Vigilance is necessary, especially in the downhill because of irregular concrete slabs and holes.

After the last gallery a couple of hundreds of meters are left to reach the entrance of the Cristo Redentor Tunnel. We stop for a photo with the 3185m altitude road sign.

Since I have the time, energy and motivation left I decide to see if my road bike allows me to make my way up on the dirt road that leads to the Pass. Beware, the access to this dirt road is not marked or designated and not obvious (the start is situated about 200m before the tunnel on the south side of the main road).

After some hesitation I locate this amazing dirt road that winds up to the sky.



With about 600m of altitude gain in 8 km on dirt, I am anticipating quite a challenge, compounded by the inadequate rental bike I am riding and the effects of the high altitude. But the 25mm tires show their best side and the motivation is there! Regardless, ascending to 3,000+ meters here is a good test for my future plan to ascend in the Atacama the highest paved pass in the Americas at 4,800m.

Overall, the dirt road would be manageable with a road bike if equipped with wider tires. But there are some parts, often in the steep bends where there is loose gravel and stones, where the rear wheel may slip and its difficult to keep balance. A couple of times I am forced to dismount and briefly walk.

Surprisingly, I meet in the first kilometres a group of bikers (All terrain motor bikes, with Malaysian license plates!) of which some are unable to keep their bikes up in the narrow and steep curves. I passed the motorbikes (a first!) and later see them abandoning their effort to ascend this segment. However, a few cars, pick-up trucks and SUV did pass me on the way up.

Evidently, the higher the altitude, the faster the respiration. The climb is taxing and the hairpins seem to go on for an eternity, but the sense of accomplishment upon sumitting makes it all worthwhile.

The pass is on the border of Chile and Argentina and from here we have exceptional views of the majestic Andes and the tip of Aconcagua, the highest mountain. The volcanic rocks vary in colour from yellow to red and from grey to black, accented by almost vertical glaciers on the highest slopes, here and there with some splashes of green in an overall dry and barren landscape.



The pass is on the border of the two countries and there are some military buildings, a restaurant and a gift shop at the summit. At this hour in the end of the afternoon there are few visitors and in the distance some dark clouds are developing. A kind Chilean couple that passed with their pick up during the dirt climb offered me a lift which I politely declined. But later at the summit, I did gratefully accept their offer of water and to photograph me thus memorializing this magnificent climbing adventure.

As it is getting late, I briefly enjoy the magnificent summit view and do note that the road on the Argentinian side of the pass seems in better shape. My route though will take me back down the steep dirt road and I send some prayers that I do not puncture my tire(s) at this late hour and with bad weather approaching.

The descent is not fast on my rental bike but is blessedly uneventful, other than more of the wonderful views that I experienced many hours before on my ascent. As I descent, the sky becomes black and lightning and thunder begin. The wind picks up and the temperature drops significantly and I begin for the first time (I think anyway) to experience some altitude sickness with the onset of headache and neck pain.



After what seems (or really was) an eternity, I reach the paved roadway and descend to the customs office where I have a (welcome) delay. It has begun to rain by now. As I finish my business at customs, I observe a beautiful rainbow highlighted against a black sky on the side of the mountain pass. It seems the rain stopped at the customs. Now only the last section of downhill is left in the direction of a nice sunset.

Ard Oostra

Technical data

Elevation gain : 2408m – Distance : 41km - % average : 5,87%

Km % according to Openrunner.com

3,6 7,5 7,4 1,0 2,8 / 3,0 4,7 5,9 5,3 5,5 = 467m

7,7 6,1 5,3 4,4 5,0 / 3,8 8,8 7,2 5,6 7,6 = 615m (1082m cum.)

5,8 4,1 6,8 6,4 5,2 / 5,0 5,5 5,7 4,3 3,0 = 518m (1600m cum.)

7,0 6,7 4,8 8,4 8,3 / 9,9 8,5 6,6 7,3 7,1 / 6,2 = 808m (2408m cum.)

Topography of Chile

<http://www.fremdenverkehrsruero-chile.com/03-ingles/informacion.html>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_Chile



Chile extends more than 4,200km from north to south, and it only averages less than 200km east to west. It is surrounded by two main mountain ranges :

The Andean Mts. tower above the whole eastern part of the country, from the Plateau in the north to Tierra del Fuego in the south. Its highest point is a still active volcano : Ojos del Salado (6893m).

The Coast range in the west. It's modester, as its highest points hardly exceed 2000m.

In the north, Atacama Desert, one of the most dry place on earth and well-known thanks to its astronomical observatories.



In the central part, the plateau opens to the Central Valley (965km long as far as Puerto Montt, and 40 to 80 in width). There we can find the capital, Santiago, and the main Andean passes.

In the south, Patagonia, its pampas and glaciers. And in the extreme south, Tierra del Fuego, Ushuaia and Cape Horn, separated from the continent by Magellan Strait.



Vuelta de Chile

Official website : <http://vueltachilecachantun.cl/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vuelta_Ciclista_de_Chile

The Vuelta exists since 1976, but with a few breaks : 32nd edition in 2017 (UCI America Tour 2.2). Since 2002, the winner list is very South American and rather unknown in Europa. But before it was much more international and with some striking names : Soukoroutchenkov, Tonkov, Moreau, Halgand as winners ; Van Calster, Grewal, Hervé, Halgand, Wüst on the podium.

In 2017, the Tour had 5 stages, among which the 4th, in the high mountains. The finish line was in Farellones, resort at 2400m.

DETALLE DE PREMIOS DE MONTAÑA.

Etap	Ubicación	km	Categoría	Altitud
1ª ETAPA	META MONTAÑA 2ª CATEGORIA 6,8 km ascensión	26,1	2°	160mts
1ª ETAPA	META MONTAÑA 2ª CATEGORIA 6,5 km ascensión	35,8	2°	280mts
2ª ETAPA	META MONTAÑA 3ª CATEGORIA 1,4 km ascensión	24,2	3°	250mts.
4ª ETAPA	META MONTAÑA CLASE 1 CIMA PIEDRA ROJA	75	1°	1.150mts.
4ª ETAPA	META MONTAÑA CLASE 1 YERBA LOCA.	115,4	1°	1.810mts.
4ª ETAPA	META FINAL FARELLONES, META MONTAÑA ESPECIAL.	124,3	1°	2.400mts



Profile - 4th stage



Hairpins to Farellones



The resort

El Portillo

The Cristo Redentor is too isolated to receive the Tour of Chile. But the resort in the climb, Portillo, occupies an important place in its history. And since 2016, the Gran Fondo Merrell Portillo, keeps its existence in the media alive :



Official website : <http://gfmerrell.cl/>

https://chile.as.com/chile/2016/04/04/masdeporte/1459778549_748160.html

Presentation of the race : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-sKSml6LEM>

On-board camera : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fyJNix2QwbU>

