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Meeting the be(a)er of the Brenta Dolomites!

We arrived on Monday in San Lorenzo di Banale, Terme di Comano.

Having almost 1,5 thousand km covered by car, we loved to have rest and prepare for the next day's take off. We were quite anxious about the trip, worrying about our shape, our bikes, difficulty of the course. In the evening we made a walk to Rifugio Alpenrose to meet Alessandra Odorizzi, the manager of Terme di Comano Tourism Office, who told us a lot about Dolomiti Brenta Bike project. We "met" also delicious speck, stuffed peperoncini, polenta with deer, great local wine... We heard some **stories about brown bears visiting the chalets** – all in all, we spent a great time and were ready to start our trip the next day.

On Tuesday morning we met Davide – our guide and the author of the loop. He looked like **"vero biker"**, so we thought that it's going to be an interesting ride. And so it was. Since the first kilometers we suffered on the uphill, enjoyed the downhill and were absolutely amazed by stunning landscape. We loved the idea of riding on the old roads drilled in the rock, we enjoyed the forrest gravel paths as well (but to be honest we expected smaller, more loose gravel than quite rocky gravel instead). Having covered about 10 km we got to surrounded by mountains Lake of Molveno, with its beautiful perfect-blue water. Then we started never-ending sections of short but steep climbs and thrilling downhill. We enjoyed a lot forrest, **soft single tracks between Molveno and Andalo** and Andalo and Spormaggiore.

In the middle of the stage Grzegorz broke his chain for the first time and fell on his elbow but got no seriously injured, thankfully. In the second part of the route the uphill seemed to be steeper and steeper. Water from local fountains wasn't helpful enough, riding from one side of the road to another either. Sometimes Marek had to push his bike instead of cycling, but as soon as the road leveled he recovered quickly and could enjoy nice apple plants and the view over the valley. Having passed picturesque Tuenno we got to Cles where we met Franco with his shuttle bus. In the morning we had thought about trying to go to Monte Peller all by bike, but we were so tired that we enjoyed having a shuttle (great respect for all who made this mountain on two wheels!). We stopped few kilometers before the top and made a **short trip to Malga Clesera where we tasted fresh home-made cheese**. Excellent. Surrounded by horses, donkeys (one became new Kasia's friends called 'Fondling') and alpine cows, the road was idyllic. But, to make things more complicated, Grzegorz broke his chain again, this time he damaged the gear-change as well. **We reached Rifugio Peller** on foot, acting in solidarity with our friend.

We were welcome by Roberto, another always-smiling Italian during the trip. He helped us clean the bikes, repair damages and recover the difficulties of the day with some speck, pickled peppers and cucumbers and weiss beer. After having a well-deserved shower (hot shower over 2,000 meters – luxurious!) we could start the dinner. It was absolutely delicious with different types of gnocchi, meat, wines and grappas. **The atmosphere in the chalet was great – international talks about bikes, plans, treks, trips etc.** with a lot of smile and kindness. After 10 P.M. the light was off, so we went to sleep. Unfortunately, the sky was clouded, so we couldn't see the stars.

Getting up in mountain chalet is a really nice feeling, although some of us (=Marek) had difficulties with sleeping – probably **too much adrenaline in blood** ° It feels incredibly good to get up in mountain chalet and find great Italian espresso just in front of the door. Having the bikes prepared we went off to thrilling downhill of Monte Peller. The slogan of the descent was **"Be careful and enjoy it!"**. And so it was: different types of surface (smaller and bigger rocks, gravel, mud, grass, soft forrest paths), different gradient and technical difficulty gave us a lot of satisfaction. We were though affected by mechanical problems – Grzegorz

continued breaking his chain, Marek got a puncture. Only Kasia and her brand new bike stayed out of trouble. She kept repeating **‘this is the best day of my life’**. Everybody did enjoy the downhill a lot. We made some great movies recorded with helmet camera. Some of them will probably be published at DBB website. You have to watch it and, **if MTB is your religion, you have to experience it!**

Down in Malè, we visited bike shop to make some necessary repairs. After a pit-stop in gelateria for ice-cream, we started to climb on Passo Campo Carlo Magno. We were joined by Andrea, a super-friendly director of a local bank, who once competed in TransAlp. The ascent of Passo Campo Carlo Magno was over 1,000 meters of denivelation and is traditionally section of the TransAlp race. The climb was great – really (really!) tiring, but cyclable at all length. During the whole climb we shuffled ourselves with other bikers competing with the mountain. **For us it was the hardest climb to cover by bike in our cycling “carrer”**. The difference in altitude was like taken from Tour de France, or Giro d’Italia, to be more Italian. ° Having reached the top, we soon got to Madonna di Campiglio. We took a lift to Monte Spinale and then, after few quarters over 2,000 meters, we started another **thrilling downhill to Madonna di Campiglio**. An extra prize awaited us down in the town – weiss beer at our guide’s brother’s. The last part of the day was a gentle downhill to San Antonio di Mavignola (beautiful name, isn’t it?). Somewhere there Kasia, as she told us later, met the “beer” = fell and flew over handlebar. She was quite shocked but fortunately got only few scratches. After taking a hot shower or bath and resting a bit we could spend another festive Italian evening with nice, friendly talks, great food and some special local drinks – the mix of all Italian goods. ° As none of us, even Davide, avoided falling, before going to bed we had to use some gel for serious bruises. It helped.

On the last day of our trip it was unfortunately raining. And it was not just raining, it was raining cats and dogs. For few morning hours we hoped that weather could change but nothing like it happened. So we went by car to San Lorenzo in Banale, looking at some courageous and completely wet bikers with a mix of admiration, jealousy and pity for them. We spend our day resting, sleeping and watching pictures and films we made during the trip. In the evening we went to Terme in Comano to visit DBB information centre and mUwi bike shop ran by our incredible, unique, one and only ° guide – Davide.

We fell sorry that we didn’t finish the loop and we could sign on wall of finishers (great idea, by the way). So we have to come back and we gladly will – to finish the tour and maybe meet a real bear, not only beer. ° At the last dinner, eating great Italian pizza, we felt like we were all good friends knowing each other for many years, not only for few days.

All in all, a great experience and it’s not only about cycling. It’s about the lifestyle, the kindness, the landscapes. It’s worth coming back, definitely.

Grzegorz, Kasia & Marek from Poland

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