

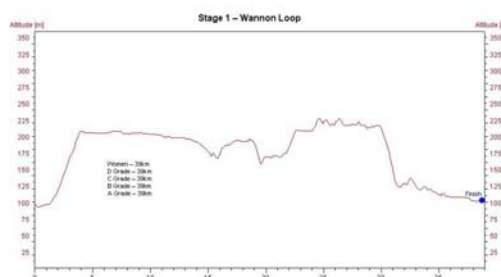
2006 Tour of the Southern Grampians

The 2006 edition of the Tour has some similarities of 2005 but with some subtle changes. The first stage has been shortened and no individual time trial, but with the addition of a criterium with generous seconds to be gained in intermediate sprints.

The first stage has been halved in distance and will make for a fast and furious opening to the Tour very similar to the opening stage of 2004. The afternoon stage will be a monster with 5 KOM primes to be contested over a distance of 116km. The Sunday morning stage has been left the same and the criterium in the centre of town will add some appeal for the locals as the tour will travel past one of the biggest sponsors, the Bendigo Bank. The organisers are expecting another high class field similar to last year.

Stage 1

With the opening stage being less than 40km it may look like a walk in the park but as many riders will now know some massive time can be lost with the crosswinds and the very narrow rolling roads around the back half of the Wannon circuit. Look for the big strong boys of the peloton to come out firing and really cause some damage early. The climbers will be looking to just survive this short stage as no KOM has been included this year in this opening stage.



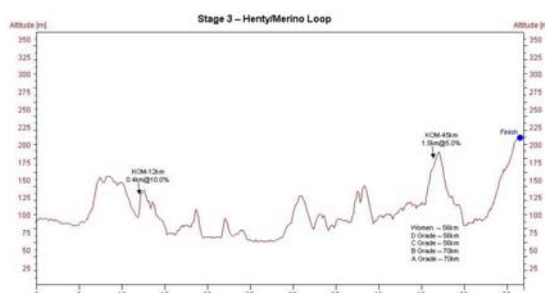
Stage 2

This will prove to be the hardest stage in the Tour's short history. At 116km in length and 5 KOM's the climbers will have to be in form or they will lose big time. The race follows the same start as 2004 with a 1km vicious climb only 12km from the start. From here the riders travel on flat narrow roads for the next 20km before some narrow rolling roads and the second short and sharp KOM. The race then turns back and heads back towards Coleraine, however instead of going straight into Coleraine the race will take a right turn and head into Zig Zag Road, nearly 5km of narrow climbing roads before the 3rd KOM. As in 2005 the race turns left again and takes the very fast and long descent back into Coleraine through the finish line only to head out again over the daunting and infamous Douglas Road that heads straight up for 1.5km for the 4th KOM. With this out of the way many riders will not cherish the thought of another lap and back up Douglas Road for the second time but that is what they will face. This stage will be the maker or breaker of many riders.



Stage 3

This is a classic stage with the continuous rolling hills of Sanford, Henty and Merino. Once again the finish will be at the top of the 5km drag heading coming into Coleraine from the south.



Stage 4

The sponsors demanded it, the crowds will love it and the riders will lap it up after 3 tough stages in the hills of the Southern Grampians Shire. This is a 1.9km circuit race around the centre of Coleraine running right past the doorsteps of many of the 1000 residents of this sleepy country town. With intermediate sprints every 5 laps this stage will make for some very handy gains for the breakaway artists or the big sprinters.