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PHOTO BY ANDY LLOYD

ONE LAST FLING

Is it possible to have too much of a good thing? Well, following a succession of frosty beers in a town deep into Andorra during our trip to scope the riding in that country (check out the feature later in this issue), I was beginning to think so. In more of a long-term sense, recently I could have also come to the same conclusion, but for different reasons. But back to those beers, first of all:


It's hard to write about a night out without sounding desperate to disclose untrustworthy figures on quantities and conquests, but alas, I'll let you in on one of the most fun, random and bizarre evenings of my 2012. It all started with hard work and toil, the efforts of a photo shoot in a hot part of the Pyrenees in late August having taken their toll on the weary crew that comprised myself and photographer Andy Lloyd, combined with Martin Hills and Kevin Thine of Singletrack Safari. We had slaved away, riding every track and sampling every bit of Andorran culture along the way (the most bizarre, incidentally, being the fine dining in a member-less golfing clubhouse at a 2,000 metre high pristine course), and by the end of the week we were physical wrecks, good only for the consumption of ale.

It's rare to enter a foreign land and be greeted by friendly faces, that is, people you know, but Andorra is hardly a million miles from home and with some notable members of the mountain bike industry living the micro-state life, we were unlikely to be the only bike riders in town on any chosen night out. And so it was that we met with our hosts, our miss'leaders for the final evening, Damien Nosella and David George of Production Privee. The duo led us to an eatery in the mountainside town where they are based and introduced us not only to their group of friends but also to such fine dishes as frozen brie and currant jam, pizza, lager and chips. The company's main spokesman, its chief miscreant, is none other than Cedric Gracia, and sometime around midnight the somewhat broken man entered into proceedings and helped to lead the entire posse of already jelly-legged heroes to an ultimate destination of true Andorran legend...Pub Legends.

Pub Legends...I do not recommend visiting any day soon, it's a small hovel in the corner of a car park and home to much debauchery and wrong-doing, of which we were part for the latter stint of our drunken Andorran adventure. However unspeakable the goings-on may have been, the beer on tap was not to be sniffed at and it produced the desired effect – that is,

carnage. I'm not sure whether it is correct to report on one of the sport's masters at work doing what he seemingly does best (getting himself and everyone around him very drunk) but Gracia's affliction with spirits took hold of us and I couldn't help be amazed at the man's devotion. For someone fresh out of surgery and who had been within inches of death only weeks before (following his almighty hip-smashing crash in Val di Sole), he showed no signs of either slowing down or losing his commitment to the lifestyle he loves, one that is brought to him by bikes (a hazy memory of a conversation recounted his desire to be back riding and racing by November, a feat that he recently managed in style by winning his first enduro race in Spain). That night descended into chaos and we were left high but not dry, in the town's central fountain, an event that is slightly embarrassing but seemed logical at the time.

But that's clearly not my point. My point is, that I have recently taken a change in direction, I've bent my life goals slightly and I've only gone and got myself a desk job (of sorts)... However much I hate to admit that I was wrong, and to quote that ugly and over-used phrase, 'living the life' (which for me is a mountain bike lifestyle that keeps me fit, healthy and takes me on adventures) will never come without making compromises, and for myself that had to come at some point. I've had a pretty good run of it to be honest.

So perhaps Andorra was my final fling with freedom, my last ever journey or adventure. It could easily have been, just as Cedric's last race could have been in Italy this year. It would have been a fine note to finish on, but like Gracia I won't be giving up on my goals any day soon, and with the new job I'll be chasing the next big adventure even harder than ever. 



This Andorran old boy won't be giving up his tobacco-growing way of life any time soon, and nor will I be giving up the mountain bike lifestyle.