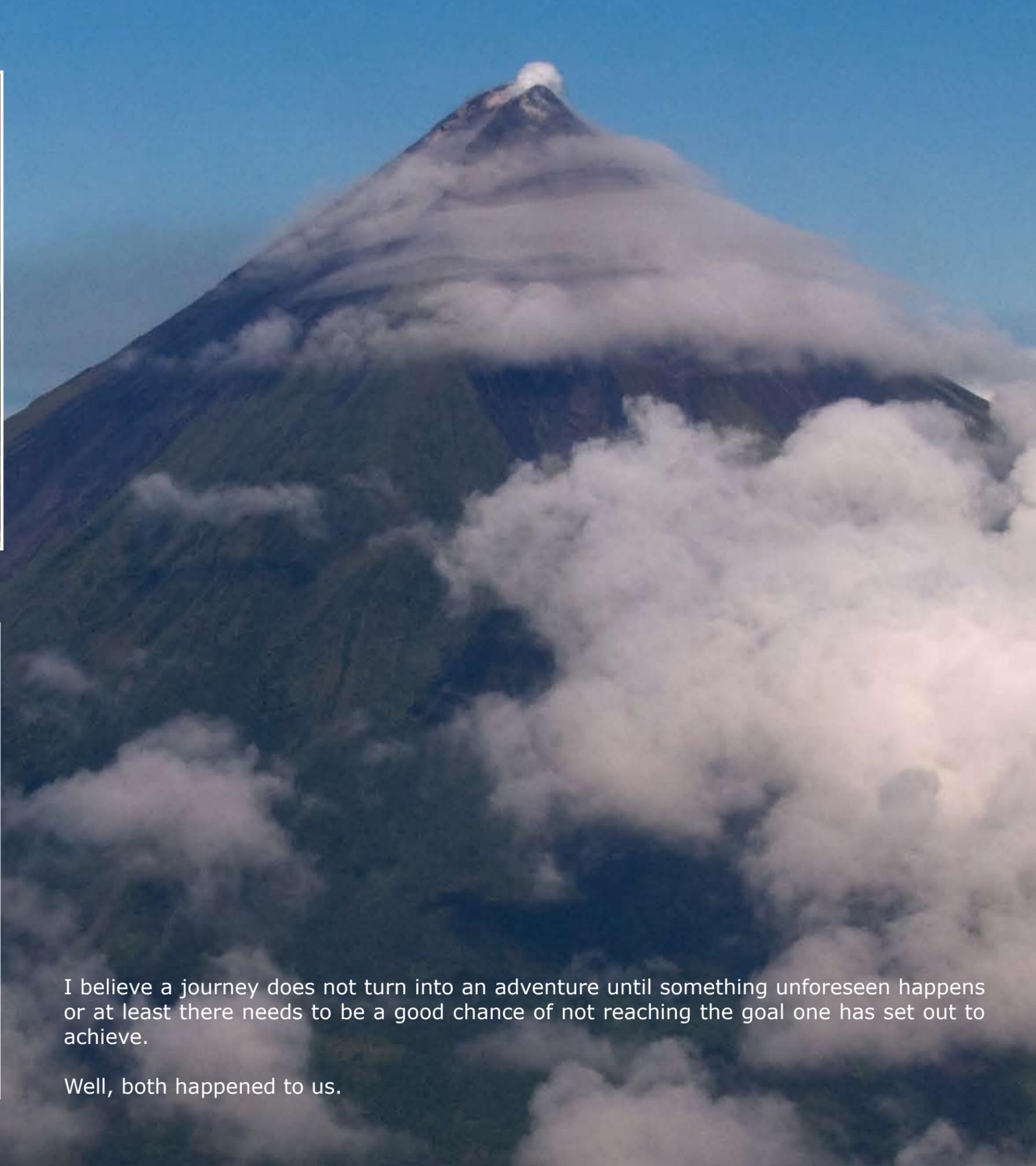


# CLASSIFIED: *unrideable!*

Mount Mayon Volcano Adventure  
with Brian Lopes

by Hans Rey  
Philippines, April '09





I believe a journey does not turn into an adventure until something unforeseen happens or at least there needs to be a good chance of not reaching the goal one has set out to achieve.

Well, both happened to us.

A photograph of two mountain bikers on a rocky trail in a lush forest. The biker in the foreground is wearing a white and grey long-sleeved shirt and grey shorts, leaning over their orange mountain bike. The biker in the background is wearing a green and white long-sleeved shirt, black shorts, and a red helmet, standing next to their blue mountain bike. The trail is composed of large, moss-covered rocks and is surrounded by dense tropical vegetation, including ferns and large trees. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day.

Brian Lopes, multiple World Cup and World Championship winner and myself were invited, along with photographer and friend, Bill Freeman, to the Philippines to attend the annual Terry Larrazabal Bicycle Festival, which was held this year in Subic Bay. It's one of the biggest biking events in Southern Asia and includes events of all possible disciplines from Road racing, Triathlon, XC, DH, 4X, etc....

We were the guests of honor along with frame builder Jeff Jones and Justin Steiner from Dirt Rag Magazine. The cyclists in the Philippines are extremely passionate about the sport and we were very welcome. We had to sign endless autographs and pose for photos with our fans. Its amazing how TV, internet and print media has made us to icons in far away places. I started to feel for the big stars like Tony Hawk or Lance Armstrong who must deal with this kind of attention on a daily basis; I'm quite content with my occasional 15 minutes of fame.

The second part of our trip was an attempt to climb one of the most active, deadliest and beautiful volcanoes with our bikes. Mount Mayon, it rises 2462 m (8,077 ft) above the gulf.

We flew into the town of Legazpi and met our local guide J.P., a very experienced mountaineer and our local cameraman "Dong". By the way, I found it quite interesting that his brothers name was "Ding"!

Although the volcano looked relatively tame on photos, it was a different story up close. She was very majestic, blowing smoke out the top and looked picture perfect. One could almost see the fire in her eyes, especially when we felt an earthquake shake the ground on the first day, we kind of got a reality check. This would not be a walk in the park, plus there were several factors which where completely in control by mother nature.



the "trail"...



The guide explained to us that it would be at least a 10 hour hike to the top if we moved fast and didn't lose too much time filming. Another problem was the only place to stay on the mountain where there was fresh water and a flat area for sleeping was Base Camp 1. At only at 2500ft. elevation, it was relatively easy to reach this point. But Day 2 was going to be extremely long and hard as we had to reach the summit, then make our way back down which would take just as much time and effort. Below Camp 1, the trail was rideable as a descent. The upper camps were destroyed in recent years by eruptions. In 1993 there was a devastating eruption that killed 77 people, mainly farmers. It wasn't actually lava but a heat/steam wave (pyroclastic flow) that rolled down the side of the mountain, burning everything in its way, including the skin of humans and animals alike. Thousands of people had to be evacuated not only to avoid the lava flow, but also to avoid the common mudslides that often follow the eruptions.



I brought my GT carbon Force bike, which seemed the perfect choice for this kind of challenge, not too heavy to ride and carry on the way up, and enough of an All mountain bike to tackle the downhill. Lopes, too, brought a similar style bike with his Ibis Mojo.



We had reached Camp 1 already by noon time on Day 1. It was super hot and humid, I must have sweated buckets of water. The trail was promising, but slightly overgrown and rocky. Since we had to spend the night there and didn't want to sit around for the rest of the day, we decided to climb higher to take a look. If necessary, we'd leave the bikes there so we wouldn't have to carry them up again the next day, speeding up the ascent on Day 2.

Fact was, from Camp 1 on there was no more trail. We followed the river gorge, littered with gigantic boulders and cliffs, which continued to get steeper with every step often forcing us to exit the gorge and find an alternate route through the overgrown jungle. The terrain was difficult with nothing to carry, but with our bikes the challenge was nearly twice as difficult. After one hour we stopped and came to the conclusion that the past hour of trail would be 99% unrideable on the way down, so we decided to leave the bikes behind and continue without them to find out if the conditions would improve higher up.

The slopes of Mayon average 35–45 degrees gradient. I started to believe this mountain was not meant to be ridden. After another hot and hard hour of hiking, we came to what seemed as the end of the gorge. From there on up we looked at this mile-long lava bed that was not only rough and steep, but turned out to be even unwalkable when wet, which was a constant factor on this tropical mountain. It started to rain and the rocks got as slippery as ice, forcing us to use a rope for some sections on our way down. With the rain came another danger, the possibility of flash floods. Happening all too often when all the sudden it rains way too hard for some time, hiking & camping in the gorge can be a death wish.





At the point where we turned around, we were about half way up the mountain. From there we would have had another 5 hours to hike, likely more with the bikes, and the guide told us that the already unrideable mountain would only get steeper.

We worked our way back to camp where we came to the conclusion that it didn't make much sense to carry the bikes all the way to the top, just to carry them back down over 90% of the terrain.

I have done many trips and first descents over the years. Often I find trekking trails, which turn out to be rideable with my skills and trials background, but would never become popular mountain bike trails. It's fun and challenging to explore new areas and ride where no bicycles have ridden before. One needs to push the limits in order to find them. On this trip we have found the limits. I guess some places are just not meant to be ridden.

Did I just say that?

At least we gave it a good try. We really aren't too worried that someone will ride this trail any farther than we did, not to mention the fact that they would first have to make it up to the top.





We spent the night at Camp 1 and had a blast riding back to civilization the next morning. The trail on that lower part was pretty much all rideable except for a few short sections.

Nonetheless, it was a great adventure, an amazing mountain, and a legit effort.

On the way home we got to fly right over the crater, it was not only a fantastic experience, but the bird's-eye view confirmed that we made the right decision.

- Hans Rey

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