



“The lift shuts at 7:30 and we won’t be able to catch it. This final run has to count”

In fact, it’s enough of both to give Melissa her second pinch flat of the day. As we rally round in a Formula One-style attempt to keep the team running, I take a mental tally of the damage sustained so far – two pinch flats and a few aching muscles. Miraculously, James’ wrist is holding out, and Ash and Matt look as fresh as ever, chasing each other down the trails in a dustcloud of endo turns and waterbar-clearing hops. It’s late, but we genuinely think that we can still pull it off.

The last funicular ride of the day is a tense one. We’re just shy of 8500 metres into our target, so one more descent should tip us over. But it’s seven in the evening now. The lift shuts at 7:30 and we won’t be down in time to catch it. This final run has to count.

True to his pro mountain bike guide credentials, Ash has saved one of the best trails for last. Secret Garden cuts an inches-wide swathe through almost untouched forest on a long-forgotten hiking trail. Vine-covered fallen trees and moss-covered rocks keep us on our toes, but there’s a palpable sense of achievement. As we thread our way through a series of back gardens on



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Picking the right bike for a ride like this one is very important



Photo: Ying Zhang

By the numbers

Despite the haphazard nature of the actual descent, we actually found out that we did better than we originally thought...

→ Our original plan to track our route by GPS, download it to a PC and use mapping software to calculate distances and elevations was scuppered by one thing – tree cover. Thick forest covering the lower slopes of the mountainside makes for great technical riding, but makes billions of dollars’ worth of fancy orbiting technology completely redundant. So instead, Ash meticulously plotted our route manually with French mapping software after we’d completed it, only to find that we’d ridden 469 vertical metres too far...

- Total vertical drop: 9317 metres
- Total distance ridden (not including lifts; mostly singletrack): 97.7 km

Job, as the saying goes, well and truly done.

the Granny’s Garden trail to the valley floor, it’s hard to resist the temptation of breaking into an enormous grin.

A little over 11 hours after setting out and we’ve done it. We’ve descended the entire height of Mount Everest. Or, if you prefer, a little less than nine Mount Snowdons. It was a hell of a day and one we’re unlikely to ever forget. ●