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Early Alpine mountain bike events

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- ¹ Mountain biking may be defined as “a physical activity using a wide-tyred bicycle off-road, over diverse terrain, for utilitarian purposes, leisure or competition” (Savre, 2010a). Invented, developed and diffused in the United States during the 1970s, the introduction and growth of this new sport in France and Europe took place in the early 1980s. From the very beginning, early followers made the Alps a favoured location for mountain biking. The organisation of several Alpine events, in particular, encouraged the discovery of the new activity which was not yet widespread in France. In the space of a mere few years, these events served to highlight the dually innovative character of mountain biking, i.e. social and technological. For pioneers and local officials alike, the new vehicle confirmed all the sporting and touristic promises of an emerging market. The aim here is to determine the conditions under which these events were able to speed up the encounter between a nascent demand and an almost nonexistent offer¹.

Event valorisation of a social and technological innovation

- ² French people share a real passion for road cycling, as can be seen, in particular, by the ongoing success of the Tour de France (Vigarelli, 1992). Between 1971 and 1982, the number of federation members for mountain sports (+87%), cycling (+129%) and cyclotourist activities (+633%) (Attali, 2007, 69) confirmed, however, the existence of conducive ground for the development and diffusion of a new form of cycling coming from the United States, mountain biking.
- ³ On American soil, bikes such as the Stumpjumper and Alpine Univega model enhanced the mountain-bike revelation in the early 1980s. Popular races and events featured in *Fat Tire Flyer*, the only specialist magazine to relay information on the development of this new outdoor cycling activity, already attracted hundreds of enthusiasts (Savre, Saint-Martin, Terret, 2007). In France, against a background of ecological awareness

and desire for freedom and physical adventure, the arrival of this activity revived the symbolics historically conveyed to the popular imaginary by the bicycle. The cultural purveyor responsible for introducing the activity was Stéphane Hauvette. Since 1979, this company boss has owned a firm specialising in the organisation of sports events. He has set up sports training programmes and sports holidays, as well as showing his clients and friends how to do new outdoor sporting activities, such as parachuting, potholing, hang-gliding and windsurfing. Totally captivated by both the sliding sport spirit of the moment (Loret, 1995) and the perspectives offered when reading the American magazine *Outside*, his aim was to develop a market that valorised sporting innovation².

- 4 In 1982, Stéphane Hauvette contacted Charles Tantet, a well-known figure of the cycling world in France and owner of the journal *Le Cycle*. The man was only “half convinced”³, but finally directed the young prospector to another partner, Alain Baumann, who specialised in distributing Peugeot road bicycles to the American market. Hauvette promised Baumann a few articles on mountain biking in *Le Cycle*, in exchange for help in organising the new vehicle’s very own event. Baumann accepted and promptly provided twenty or so Peugeot bicycles. Hauvette then quickly secured agreement to hold the event in La Plagne the following summer. Indeed, with the *white gold* crisis setting in (Bessy, 2008), the Alpine resort was on the lookout for new summer events to add to its tourist attractions and saw in it a low-cost advertising opportunity. A previous BMX event had, moreover, already shown the resort managers the strategic importance of such a meet.
- 5 The event was held over the weekend of 6 and 7 August 1983. Hauvette, whose avowed objective was to win over the journalists invited for the occasion, did not hesitate to also invite a number of sports personalities such as Cyril Neveu, professional motorcycle rider and winner of the Paris-Dakar, and Sandrine Martin, a dirt bike specialist. The Saturday was a day of discovery for the press (*Libération*, *Le Monde*, *L’Express*, *Le Nouvel Observateur*), with a trail ride in the mountains and picnic. A downhill slalom mountain bike race between Bellecôte and La Plagne the following day enthused participants. The latter used ski lifts to reach the starting point of the race designed by Hauvette, “It seemed to me to be the closest thing to what I called sliding sports at the time. [...] A hundred people took part, including journalists, resort people, tourists. [...] Now, we are in the world of sliding and in no way that of the bicycle. We, the mountains in summer, are sliding sport”⁴.
- 6 Both press and public were won over by the concept, and the resort of La Plagne decided to purchase the twenty Peugeot mountain bikes used during the event. In addition, the presence of one of the American pioneers, Gary Fisher, gave credit to this first experience, “And there was Gary Fisher, Gary was there! It is thanks to Peugeot that he came. They told me ‘There’s this guy in the United States, who looks like he’s the inventor. Do you want to ask him to come?’ I said ‘Of course!’ [...] Most of all, we were talking mountain bike. The Ritchey, Fisher ones. They were the names I had read in the article, along with Clunker and Repack Race. It looked good to have an American! He took part in the race. He had good fun, but Cyril Neveu, better known to the French, made more impact”⁵.
- 7 Gary Fisher and Stéphane Hauvette had neither the same background nor the same profile. Coming from the cycling milieu, the American was an early inventor⁶ who developed technological innovations, whereas the Frenchman, an outdoor activity

enthusiast, positioned himself as an event promoter and specialist. Nonetheless, Fisher made the effort to travel to France in order to stimulate the development of mountain biking in the Old World⁷. Although coming only third in the event, his very presence reinforced the ‘fun’ image of the activity, by associating it with other ‘Californian’ sports, such as windsurfing, skateboard and surfing.

- 8 Buoyed up by the positive press spin-off and impressions related to the success of this first gathering, Stéphane Hauvette attended the Paris Cycle Show in October 1983, where he exhibited Gary Fisher’s bicycle on Peugeot’s stand. The French car brand was undergoing an active observation phase at the time: it wished to assess the market potential of mountain resorts, yet feared a rapid dwindling of initial enthusiasm. It assigned its BMX production team the task of developing the mountain bike, albeit in “only a vaguely proactive way and while in waiting position”⁸. The Paris Show confirmed, however, the interest of other industrialists and sponsors, such as the St Etienne bicycle manufacturers Mécacycles and Gitane. Sufficient interest, in any event, to justify Hauvette’s creation, a few weeks later, of the *Association Française pour le développement du Mountain Bike ou Vélo Tout Terrain* (AFMB) (French association for the development of mountain biking),⁹ thus further galvanising the market, “At the same time, I began refining my thinking and, gradually, I realised that it was also possible to go cycling not too far from home. I had the feeling there was a really large market coming into being and that we weren’t keeping up”¹⁰.
- 9 Stéphane Hauvette immediately contacted members of the cycle industry. In presenting the mountain bike as user-friendly, ecological, economic and entertaining, as well as being adapted to public demand, multipurpose and comfortable, he was anticipating a threefold urban development, as in the United States at the time, i.e. family-oriented, more sportive and with an annual market growth of roughly 10%¹¹. Hauvette foresaw, moreover, three categories of mountain bike: a simplified mountain bike for use in town and through undergrowth, one of quality with sturdy components, “intended for extreme riding”, and a top-of-the-range competition bike, “custom-made or with a finish and decoration that were exceptional.” Selling prices, ranging from roughly 1,800 francs (275 euros) to 6,000 francs (914 euros), would be higher than those of standard bikes, but were justified by the innovative dimension of the mountain bike as a creator of great expectations, following in the footsteps of the windsurfing board¹². Yet in spite of such perspectives, the optimism of Stéphane Hauvette was met with reticence among the industrialists.

Early small-scale events for a cycle industry playing the waiting game

- 10 In 1984, the AFMB launched a strategic programme for structuring mountain bike activity, which included, inter alia, establishing contacts with the administration for right of way in national forests and parks, setting up an alpine mountain bike project for its development in mountain resorts and publishing a newsletter for members and the public, as well as taking part in expeditions and prospecting across the country with a view to encouraging the creation of local clubs, and organising competitions and days for the general public. The general idea was to have several options, whether in leisure or competition, by valorising events, particularly in medium and high-altitude mountain resorts. As member subscriptions were insufficient, however, to ensure the

implementation of such a programme, Hauvette offered cycle industrialists a financial agreement whereby the AFMB would issue certification for the cycles they produced in return for a fee. A few partners such as the *Ateliers de la rive* in Saint Chamond, which developed the Vitus tubes, showed an interest in early 1984 and were willing to pay five thousand francs¹³. Yet despite an active promotional campaign, the cycle industry adopted a somewhat wait-and-see attitude. In March 1984, Stéphane Hauvette tried a different approach by uniting the industrialists and manufacturers in a “France Mountain Bike Pool”, similar to that of the ski sector twenty years earlier, and by creating a label that was supposed to protect them from foreign competition: “It is not possible for our Association to refuse certification for equipment that conforms, but which is made in Italy or Japan, the public would not understand. The AFMB itself can, in no way, protect French industrialists against foreign imports. On the other hand [...] the AFMB can contribute to the development of a label that is 100% French by creating a pool of French industrialists”¹⁴.

- 11 For Hauvette, the pool was more particularly intended to become one of the main sponsors of the AFMB and, as such, contribute to the development of mountain biking in France, as, for example, when it provided a promotional fleet of between fifty and a hundred vehicles for rides and competitions. With its help, the AFMB planned, from 1984 onwards, to organise a certain number of shows and regular training sessions in the Paris region, together with a Paris-Deauville ride, the *Tour des Alpes* and an ascent of Kilimanjaro, scheduled for November and whose television rights “Antenne 2” wished to purchase for its programme “*Les carnets de l’Aventure*” (tales of adventure). In addition, a summer challenge, including 15 competitions in tourist resorts (by the sea, in the mountains, in the country) or in cities, was contemplated between 1 June and 30 September. Among the mountain resorts contacted and interested in the creation of a permanent mountain bike event or the setting-up of mountain bike rental fleets for trail riding were La Plagne, les Arcs, La Clusaz, Courchevel, Tignes, Val Morel, St Gervais, Les Houches, Val Cenis, Megève, Les Menuires, Val d’Isère, Les Contamines Montjoie and Embrun.
- 12 The cost of the programme, however, exceeded forecasts. The budget announced late 1983 was thus five times higher and reached almost 2 million francs¹⁵. And yet, industrialists responded only with extreme caution to the different proposals. They were undoubtedly also sceptical about the transparency of the economic model Hauvette was setting up. Relations with the press and search for sponsors were, in fact, kept separate from the AFMB and carried out by an independent agency called FLASE whose President was none other than Hauvette himself¹⁶.
- 13 In the face of this reticence, Stéphane Hauvette contacted the French Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports in the spring of 1986, with the intention of creating a federation to gain greater recognition and increased means. However, ministerial policy was rather more in favour of integrating “new sports” into historically established federations (Lassus, Martin, Villaret, 2007)¹⁷. Hauvette was therefore directed towards the French Cycling and Cyclotourism Federations: “In about 86, 87, I had to sell the fact to my members that we were going to join the FFC. I was doing all the work, I was without means and the Ministry was starting to put obstacles in our path”¹⁸.
- 14 Dialogue was all the more difficult given that the AFMB had only three hundred and fifty remaining members and five affiliated clubs in 1986. While cycling was said to be the favourite choice of activity for men (20.36%) and fourth favourite for women

(14.59%) (Irlinger, Louveau, Métoudi, 1987), and appeared to represent an almost unlimited supply of riders, both the market and French manufacturers were merely waiting for demand rather than anticipating it. Equipment, which was often heavy and not very reliable, was difficult to find at traditional retailers who were, as yet, unfamiliar with the product. For some, the only solution was to import their vehicle, or even bring it back with them, from the United States. A small number of artisans, such as Raymond Crozet¹⁹, produced only a limited number of their early mountain bikes. Peugeot and MBK were just starting to take an interest in the sector, but investment remained hesitant. Sales at the time reached roughly 1000 units²⁰.

- 15 The first events organised by the AFMB, moreover, struggled to succeed. Following the relatively successful “demonstration” at La Plagne, the second event that Hauvette should be given credit for was the Paris-Deauville, a 210-kilometre event held over three days and launched in the spring of 1984. Yet, while the event format launched one of the major features of the future mountain bike mass phenomenon – trail riding –, it attracted only a mere handful of AFMB members and four Swiss people. In the same way, the French championship project of fifteen events in fifteen different resorts, planned for the summer, quickly fell through due to lack of material and financial means. Finally, a number of resorts, such as La Plagne, hesitantly set up rental fleets, albeit with no well-known gathering or organisation. As for the competition organised in Saint-Tropez in the autumn of 1984, with the intendedly attractive name of “Roc d’Azur”, it attracted a mere seven participants, who never imagined that the event would become the world’s biggest mountain bike gathering fifteen years later (Savre, 2010b).

On the way towards mass tourism: The Alps, AFMB and mountain biking (1985-1987)

- 16 In spite of the setbacks of the first initiatives, mountain resorts quickly sensed that a market was emerging. The results at the end of the summer tourist season gave the AFMB cause for satisfaction, and the Association considered that all conditions were now fulfilled for events to attract a greater number of followers: “During the summer of 1985, over 30 resorts offered some form of mountain bike activity to the public. These resorts have bike fleets their visitors can use [...]. Such fleets should enable us to guarantee between 50 and 100 participants for each event. The large number of holidaymakers in the Alpine regions should, moreover, guarantee a very considerable crowd of spectators. It should be noted that the resorts visited have a sleeping capacity of 5 to 25,000 beds and that, at this time of year, they have an occupancy rate of almost 90%. These people will be easily reached. Last point, mountain resorts are hungry for this type of event and are able to provide us with an ideal infrastructure”²¹.
- 17 Consequently, the 1985 and 1986 seasons saw the development of initiatives that heralded a more large-scale diffusion of mountain biking throughout France: calendar and race participation increased progressively, new types of extended events appeared and the market diversified slightly with the arrival of manufacturers from the BMX milieu (Heimbürger, 2006). Albeit not the only ones to do so, the Alpine territories contributed greatly at this stage by hosting several noteworthy events.
- 18 The “Trophée des Alpes”, for example, organised by the AFMB in 1986, included ten events held in ten resorts in the French Alps over the summer²². The winners of each

event were awarded points, and the competitor with the most points from his/her best six results was declared overall winner. A ranking system for resort teams was likewise set up. One of the events also served as a support for one of the five heats of the “AFMB French National Championship”. The second important event of the season was the French Championship, which aimed “to reinforce mountain biking in chosen regions and to attract top-level sportsmen from road cycling, cyclo-cross or triathlon in order to quickly form a high-level team capable of competing against American teams, as well as to create media-usable events and to satisfy biker demand”²³. The events were held, from May to October, in Saint Etienne, in the Paris Region and, during one of the heats of the *Trophée des Alpes*, in Ramatuelle.

- 19 At the same time, the principle of roaming for several days, but competitively this time, saw the light of day when the reference model of the multi-stage Tour de France and Paris-Nice races was adapted to mountain biking. Long duration also appeared during events such as the “24 heures d’Auvergne” (24 hours of Auvergne) or “la Funny Bike” in La Bourboule. Before long, the more modest resorts of the Massif Central, Jura and Vercors were hesitantly starting to develop the activity with a view to mobilising tourists beyond the winter period. Certain mid-altitude mountain areas, recently equipped with hostels for cross-country skiing but often empty due to low snowfall, were looking for ways to make these places profitable during the summer period.
- 20 The first downhill competitions were also a new feature of the 1985 season. Albeit not organised in the Alps, but rather in the south of the country, they were, however, inspired by the principles of Alpine skiing, as Georges Edwards, pioneer organiser of downhill practices, admitted on the subject of the competition he was organising in la Croix des Gardes, near Cannes; “The essence of the activity is Alpine! Moreover, anything Alpine or to do with sliding is given more recognition and is more valorising. It makes the sporting gesture much more than mere effort”²⁴. At the same time, Michel Forestier, one of the early pioneers and renters endeavoured, in the Jura, to introduce the sport he had been practising for a year in a more ‘Nordic’ way: “No one wanted to rent bikes, so I did. I set it all up in the same way as for cross-country skiing [...]. I started off with five mountain bikes in 1985 for demonstration and entertainment purposes”²⁵.
- 21 Over and beyond the now standard Roc d’Azur, Paris-Deauville and *Trophée des Alpes*, the 1987 season confirmed these directions in that it was marked by considerable practice innovation, sanctioned, in turn, by various different events. On the one hand, the AFMB’s French Championship was now acknowledged by the FFC, with its members being able to participate in the nine events on the programme.²⁶ On the other, the first “Mountain Bike International Open” was held in August, with just over 300 participants and ten nations present. The event, which took place in Villard de Lans, was also described as an unofficial world championship, since it was not dependent on any federation or international association²⁷. This first international meet in France “gives credibility to the image of the sport”²⁸, through the presence of professional champions from the United States and their high-performance equipment. As for the Vercors resort, it was relying on the publicity to launch mountain biking alongside cross-country skiing, and began placing specific trail markers throughout its territory. As the first to become involved in large-scale rental activity and instruction, Serge Barnel already owned a rental fleet of over one hundred French brand mountain bikes (Libéria, Peugeot, MBK). The establishment in Grenoble of the first specialised store for

the sale of mountain bikes in France, “Mountain Bike Diffusion”, which imported “Marin” and “Trek” brand mountain bikes at the time, soon encouraged the trend throughout the region.

Manufacturing, distribution and technological innovation

- 22 In the case of mountain biking, the virtuous triptych event-innovation-market (Andreff, 1985; Chantelat, 1992) underwent a boom precisely between 1985 and 1987. During the period, sales increased from 4000 à 60 000 vehicles. The first two retailers to dedicate themselves entirely to mountain bikes set up business in Avignon and Grenoble²⁹. Spurred on by Philippe Tomasini, *Trekking Bike* became the main importer of American equipment; already well-established foreign brands, such as Fat Chance, Fisher, Muddy Fox, Salsa, Ritchey and WTB, could be found there, together with major traditional cycle market brands, such as Peugeot, MBK, Gitane, Mercier, Raleigh France and Lapierre. Increased demand meant that artisans such as Mécacycles in St Étienne and Ferraroli, the creator of very sophisticated equipment in Switzerland, were able to establish themselves on a market that continued to represent a niche in the cycle industry. In 1987, for example, Ferraroli produced, on a small scale, a model called *California*, which weighed less than eleven kilogrammes, an almost record weight at the time. As for Peugeot, it developed its mountain bike into a five-model range, including a 20 inch bike for children, a 24 inch bike for adolescents and a top-of-the-range “Mountain Bike 4”, elected mountain bike of the year by the AFMB’s magazine. This model proved extremely successful among racers, despite the different origins of the parts used to make it: a Reynolds 501 frame with a Unicrown fork and fitted with a Stronglight chain-drive system, a Sachs-Sedis chain, Maillard freewheel, Rigida wheel rims, Michelin tyres, Diabolo hubs, Dia Compé braking at the front and Suntour XC Roller Came at the back, with Shimano derailleurs and levers.
- 23 Other manufacturers, this time from the world of BMX, likewise decided to try their hand at the artisanal production of mountain bikes, in spite of prevailing scepticism. Max Commençal, for instance, endeavoured to transfer the recreational and acrobatic concepts he had developed for BMX to mountain biking, “Since 1980, I have been making BMX bikes for the Laffite brand, then in 1982, I created “Sunn BMX”. [...] I know that the first mountain bike ever to be made was a large BMX bike. The ratio was blown up from 20 to 26 inches. It was something that was all ready to jump and slide. I wanted to make BMX bikes to go along trails. [...] Already going towards downhill riding. I can remember taking kids down ski slopes to see how it felt. In France, everyone told me it would never work. [...] It’s something that makes everyone in the cycle industry run the other way. Without exception! Excessively vigourless, conservative, lagging behind. [...] Personally, I couldn’t care less. I’m doing business. I work with imagination and fantasy, and I try to take as many people as possible with me in my wild ideas. In those years, at the beginning, there weren’t many of us. It was more makeshift than artisanal. The market and the need, we could feel them”³⁰.
- 24 Over and beyond these technological enrichments, coming from proximate products on a line genealogy already studied (Hillairet, 2005), the new mountain bikes very quickly integrated the technological innovations that had proved their worth on the American market or during French meets. Sign of the times, the first full-scale mountain bike

comparison test was even carried out in 1985 for the magazine *Moto Verte* (green motorcycle), with six vehicles being tested by Didier Coste, future creator of the magazine *Vélo Vert* (green bicycle)³¹.

- 25 As far as equipment was concerned, the introduction of “indexing” revolutionised gear changing, making the latter more precise and rapid and, as a result, enhancing its effectiveness in competitive riding and its ease of use for new riders during trail riding. The increase in number of speeds to 18 gave the rider better speed progressiveness and thus facilitated effectiveness on uphill slopes in particular. At the same time, the invention of watertight bearings enhanced the durability of parts and reduced their maintenance equivalently. As for the Mavic Group, it developed ceramic wheel rims that enhanced braking capacity. This type of technological evolution, aimed at simplification and comfort, accelerated novice riders’ adoption of the mountain bike, since they appreciated the effectiveness and ergonomics of the new equipment.
- 26 Innovation also concerned the colours used, in comparison with the duller ones of road cycling. The first mountain bikes in circulation on French soil were covered in pinks, greens, fluorescent yellows and purples, all reminiscent of the psychedelic movement of the 1970s, of fun and the Californian symbolic (Loret, 1996). The trend likewise affected clothing, with more specific fabrics coming from motorcycling, such as the *JT Racing* range with its multicoloured and fluorescents patterns, or the more discreet Fox clothes. Such changes in clothing served to heighten the distinguishing phenomenon under way between traditional cyclist and mountain biker. The transformation that protective gear underwent followed the same logic. The worldwide leading company Bell, for example, mass produced the first hard shell helmet, specific to both mountain biking and cycling. John Tomac, a rising American star, was quickly sponsored by this world leader, as it launched production aimed at a market that was hungry for the mountain bike. Riders wishing previously to protect themselves had had to resort to wearing leather helmets, used in traditional cycling, or headgear from other sports that was not adapted, dangerous and now considered out of date.

Conclusion

- 27 In the mid-1980s, mountain biking in France was undergoing its gestation phase with practices that were becoming more widespread and diversified, an association that was active albeit still in search of legitimacy and a vehicle that was increasingly reliable, but as yet relatively undiffused. Its future seemed guaranteed, however, since the activity already boasted technological viability, was adopted and promoted by a community and, finally, was organised spatio-temporally, as shown by the increase in number of propaganda events.
- 28 The second part of 1987, moreover, marked a decisive stage in the establishment of mountain biking in France. And in July, as if to celebrate the new stage, the monthly magazine *Jogging International*, which ordinarily targeted active joggers, published a special issue on mountain biking, printing 20,000 copies of it. In September, the first show entirely dedicated to the activity opened in the Vincennes Floral Park, and the first specialised magazine, *VTT Magazine*, made its entrance the following month. In only four years, conditions were thus fulfilled for an even wider diffusion of mountain biking throughout France. Such exceptional speed in the field of the history of sport, albeit undoubtedly less surprising in the marketing of the innovation, was undeniably

due to the convergence of three factors. On the one hand, analysis showed that it relied on demand “revealed” by cultural purveyors, such as Stéphane Hauvette whose success stemmed as much from his passion for the outdoors as his organisational qualities. On the other, it took root in the conviction, for tourist areas facing occasional crisis, as Alpine resorts at the time, that mountain biking may enhance their range of leisure activities. Last but not least, although equipment supply was one step behind the demand, it was nevertheless undergoing an intense phase of technological innovation which, through innovation, filiation, hybridisation and knowledge transfer, made it possible to catch up with the demand by launching onto the market vehicles that were comfortable, safe, efficient and in line with the expectations of the first wave of mountain bikers. While the innovations themselves were far from having all been produced in the rather favourable context of the Rhône-Alpes sport and leisure industry (Richard, 2007), it is nevertheless true that they greatly benefited from the visibility of the large events, both recreational and competitive, hosted by the ski resorts, thus reinforcing the importance of Alpine territories as the mountain bike location *par excellence* in the imagineries.

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NOTES

1. The article is based, in particular, on a series of semi-directive interviews conducted with the main actors of the 1980s, completed by the analysis of federation archives and specialist magazines, such as *Les Pages Vertes*, published by the FFC (French Cycling Federation), *VTT Magazine* and *Vélo Vert*.
2. Interview with Stéphane Hauvette, Paris, 28 June 2006.
3. Hauvette (above-mentioned interview) reported the words of Tantet as follows: "What funny things. What on earth are these wheelbarrows, they weigh far too much, aren't they hideous!"
4. Idem.
5. Idem.
6. Fisher was the first to add a Suntour Spirit front derailleur to a Clunker, with an adjustable seatpost and shifter.
7. Interview with Gary Fisher, San Anselmo, 8 March 2005.
8. Above-mentioned interview with Stéphane Hauvette.
9. *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, n° 274, 26 November 1983. Stéphane Hauvette was elected President. The Vice-President, Éric Saint Frison, 26 years old, was Executive Assistant; the Treasurer, Étienne Boisrond, 32 years old, was an advertising executive, and the Secretary General, Pierre Étienne Gautier, 35 years old, also worked in advertising. Both were Parisian, from the city's inner suburbs.
10. Above-mentioned interview with Stéphane Hauvette. On these aspects, cf. Savre, 2011.
11. Presentation documents, December 1983, private archives of Stéphane Hauvette.
12. Idem.
13. Correspondence between the *Ateliers de la rive* and the AFMB, 10 January 1984, AFMB Archives.
14. Internal document, 8 March 1984, AFMB Archives.
15. Idem.

16. AFMB Archives, internal document of 8 March 1984. Remuneration of the agency was fixed at 10% of the amounts paid by the France Mountain Bike Pool and 15% of those paid by the remaining advertisers.
17. Windsurfing, for example, became part of the *Fédération Française de Voile* (FFV) (French Sailing Federation), while rock climbing joined the *Fédération Française des sports de Montagne et d'Escalade* (FFME) (French Federation for Mountain and Climbing Sports).
18. Above-mentioned interview with Stéphane Hauvette.
19. "Œuvre d'un constructeur Stéphanois: Le vélo qui grimpe aux montagnes", *Loire Matin*, 15 January 1984.
20. "Le VTT sort ses dents et bouffe le marché", *Libération*, 27 August 1990, p. 35.
21. AFMB Archives: "1986 Activity Programme", p. 2.
22. Courchevel, La Clusaz, La Plagne, Les Arcs, Les Houches, Megève, St Gervais Tignes, Val Cenis, Val Morel.
23. AFMB Archives: "1986 Activity Report".
24. Interview with Georges Edwards, Fréjus, 6 October 2006.
25. Interview with Michel Forestier Les Rousses, 20 October 2007. Michel Forestier is a cross-country ski instructor.
26. The Vercors hosted the last summer heat between Villard-de-Lans and Lans en Vercors.
27. In the same year, the National Off-Road Bicycle Association (NORBA) organised, at Mammoth Mountain in California, a further "World Championship" which was official in America, but still just as unofficial at the world level (Savre, Saint-Martin, Terret T, 2010).
28. Interview with Jacques Devi, 24 September 2006. Devi was France's first mountain bike champion in 1987.
29. Respectively *Trekking Bike* and *Mountain Bike Diffusion*.
30. Interview with Max Commençal, mountain bike manufacturer and Sunn team manager, Fréjus, 13 October 2007.
31. Interview with Didier Coste, Fréjus, 14 October 2007.

ABSTRACTS

During the 1980s, the diffusion of mountain biking in France underwent its first phase in mountain territories that discovered its socio-economic value. Over and beyond the structural and organisational aspects, the mountain bike also became a favoured medium for technological and social innovation.

The aim here is to reflect upon the various underlying stakes of introducing, into Alpine territory, a new physical activity that required a two-wheeled vehicle and had its roots in the spirit and values of the already existing Californian practices. More than just an activity, mountain biking would become a market over the course of the decade. Its economic stakes would contribute to its imminent institutionalisation. Featuring among the vectors of its development, the first competitions and/or events played an essential role in establishing a special relationship between sport and tourism economy. As a new lease of life for a number of ski resorts undergoing crisis at the time, mountain biking offered the various actors (riders, cycle dealers, political and institutional leaders) an opportunity to valorise a technical and social innovation in mountain areas.

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