

## #MegaAvaLaugh

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Some days, messing around on a truly inappropriate bike is all you need to remind yourself how great mountain biking is.

*Words* by Pete Bartlett aka ValleyDaddy/LongSocks, *pictures* by Wayne Carter, wayne-dc.com.

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Usually, the sound of 40 big, beefy Welsh lads charging down a hill towards you would give you something to worry about. This time, though, they're all dressed in their downhill gear, laughing their heads off... and riding children's bikes. The second annual '#MegaAvaLaugh' event was all about messing around in the woods – and for a good cause too. Local lad Pete 'LongSocks' Bartlett takes up the story...



Thereby explaining the national shortage of children's bikes in Wales at the moment.



Superman never shuttles.



## What's all this about?

So who are we, you ask? So many questions about a hashtag. We're a bunch of mountain bikers who meet up most weeks and ride together under the banner of Aberdare MTB; nothing different to many of you who ride with a bunch of like-minded folk I'm guessing.

We ride regular mountain bikes like everyone else – all shapes and sizes and all styles of riding from cross-country to enduro to full-blown downhill. We're one of the few groups based in South Wales, and we helped build BikePark Wales and continue to do so. We have a great friendly rivalry with our neighbouring clubs, HalfWay UP MTB, South Wales MTB, Granny's Ring, and Mynydd Du MTB, and throughout the year each group takes it in turn to host an inter-club ride where we prepare trails and host the other clubs. This regularly has 80-100 riders out and makes for great banter and social scene between the groups. A ride followed by a beer usually helps this and these events have been running successfully for past two years – the brainwave of local bike shop owner Dorian Thorne of DT Bicycles.

What makes Aberdare MTB different to the rest of the South Wales groups is that we bring the fun and the craziness to the party.

Once a year we have a little charity event called #MegaAvaLaugh. It's loosely based on the Megavalanche extravaganza, except our has one major difference: we ride kids' bikes.

Bikes must have a rim size of 18in or less; the smaller the wheels, the better start position you get and strictly no BMX bikes as they are too easy to whip!

We ran this last year in December, on the wettest day known to man. Fifteen riders turned up at a local country park and we discovered the best fun on two wheels was not three-grand, full-suss machines, but could be realised on little bikes begged, borrowed or stolen from your children or purchased off auction sites. We raised a bit of money for the Philippines disaster and had a whole heap of fun. The benchmark was set and the challenge was on to do it bigger and better.

## Let's get social.

2014 was a bit different. We really have got into social media a lot more and have raised our profile in the mountain bike world. So the four of us who administer Aberdare MTB had a committee meeting: it is Wales after all and you have to discuss these sort of things over



Style counts for everything here.

a pint of beer or four to get the most out of the genius marketers. So a plan was hatched for the #MegaAvaLaugh event 2014. This year we decided to raise funds for a fellow rider's daughter's charity as we thought it best to donate to someone we could make a significant difference to, rather than a faceless major one.

To add to the fundraising we decided to hold a raffle and used our contacts to secure some amazing prizes, all bike-related, so the tickets sold well. We were so lucky with shops and manufacturers all willing to give us products to raffle.

So, we had a good cause to donate to and raffle prizes to boot. It was now about finding the perfect track to have the most fun on. At the aforementioned meeting we decided we would run it on a recently discovered trail that we had hosted our inter-club ride on earlier in the year; we now had a full-on, one-and-a-half mile descent we could ride, with a mixture of rocky trails and steep mud tracks. It was an easy decision.

The frenzy was on, getting the hype up between the groups. For weeks the feeds on our Facebook pages had just been full of kid's bikes – from superhero bikes to princess bikes. One guy even sprayed his to match his regular ride: a Nukeproof Mega. The buzz about

this was electric, with debates going on about what upgrades were permissible; trying to get brakes to work that were designed to stop a four-stone kid, not a 15-stone man. The days leading up to Sunday's race day were horrendous – heavy rain, hail and thunderstorms threatened to bring trees down. What this meant was the beech wood descent was going to be epic. The mud was going to be nice and soft – perfect in fact for mini-downhill fun.

### Bring out yer pink princess bikes!

Sunday came after a final flurry of posts on Saturday night about the best tyre for the conditions and whether tubeless would be the winning choice, would we need lights for the forestry bit, and was it OK to wear tights? [Superhero ones, most definitely – Ed]. The sky was clear and mist lay thick at the bottom of the valley; it was going to be a perfect day. As almost all of our group rides start this way, we met in our local golden arches for a spot of breakfast and a coffee – the only reason being that everyone knows where it is and it's open early.

The exception to our usual rides this time was that, instead of worrying about leaving precious steeds on roof racks outside, there wasn't that concern as the highest price paid for a bike was 15 quid



At least it's closer to the ground when you fall off.

via Gumtree. There was one rider who paid two pumpkins and a bag of Revels; we are talking serious investment here. I honestly don't think there was a sub-18in wheeled children's bike for sale in the South Wales valleys that wasn't destined to have its final swansong heading flat-out over a log drop this weekend.

We arrived at the meet point and then the cars and the vans just kept coming. Our PR push had done its job. We had in excess of 40 riders and a dozen more supporters, including ghoulish ones who just wanted to take photos and videos of the carnage. They were not to be disappointed...

The safety briefing (ahem) was delivered to the masses that had turned up: some in fancy dress as superheroes, women in ball gowns, full three-piece suits, animal onesies – the lot. Everyone was really entering into the spirit of #MegaAvaLaugh. Then the trudge started up the track. Like any good downhill event, barring those posh ones with an uplift service, we made our way to the top of the mountain under our own power. Yes, to the top. Momentum is key when riding mini-downhill; the little wheels do not like rocks.

At a suitable point we stopped the crowd and made them line up, then force-fed them shots of Red Bull and vodka (G&Ts for the posh boys) to get everyone ready for the pain that was about to

happen. While this was going on, the 40-plus bikes were assembled into size. The smaller the wheels, the closer to the start line you would be. Some bikes were lobbed into the bushes for an extra starting handicap because they were too close to regular bikes in size.

### The chaos has started already. Let the race begin!

So in true Megavalanche style we had a countdown to the off. There was a mass sprint start and a true Welsh rugby maul to get to the bikes, and then the real carnage began.

In true RatBoy 'flat-out, get your rat-out' style heading down the rocky track, the first crashes happened into the second corner: these little bikes do not like turning with an oversized lump on them. So after roughly ten minutes of descent, we hit the first fire road and paused. A quick check that everyone was OK revealed that one lad had been dragged superman-style down the trail by his minibike and, being he has legs like a chicken, his knee pads slid down and he suffered a nasty gash above his knee from a stray crank. First aid [Vodka? - Ed] was administered and he was good to go. After all, there were pictures and videos to capture and he is our resident ET rider. After a brief chin wag to let the giggles subside it was off to the beech wood descent for the ultimate slide fest.



More a scrumple than a scrum.



Eject! Eject!

A quick pedal along the fire road took us to the middle section: steep, rooty and impossible to stand on, let alone ride down. In dry conditions this is a superb natural descent on regular bikes. Fine in the dry, but in the wet it's nuts – perfect.

Within seconds the woodland was filled with owl hoots and shrieks as grown men and the odd lady whooped and hooted with laughter. Bodies, bikes and spectators were flying all over the place, slipping and sliding down this great, fun section. A few kicker ramps were installed for the day to add to the photographers' delight and it was great to see everyone's commitment to have a go over these.

### Now for the Big One.

Again we assembled the group on the subsequent fire road for the final descent – the one with the *big* jump. The vodka-Red Bulls, gin and tonics and the odd can of Strongbow had done their jobs – the adrenaline was pumping and there was Dutch courage aplenty. A quick blast of singletrack followed, a stream crossing and there it was: the four-foot log ramp.

There was a baying crowd with cowbells ringing, begging for willing victims. If anyone heard us in the forest who was not part of this event, God knows what they thought was going on. There

was no end of riders going flat out off this ramp, some on bikes with sub-10in wheels. Many rode it having never done it before on their regular bikes, such was the peer pressure. A few tree hugs and wipeouts ensued, but this major obstacle provided much merriment and great picture and video opportunities. A final slide down the last muddy bank and we made haste to the pub to tell tales of heroism, bravery; all this, remember, riding princess bikes.

As all good rides must end at the pub, no sooner had the Taffy Apples been ordered but the cameras were out and the morning fun was played out with groups of riders huddled around tiny screens, laughing at countless wipeouts and death-defying jumps. Tales of spectacular crashes and bruise and cut comparisons continued late into the afternoon. A great day out on my 12in wheeled bike. So, what are you waiting for? Grab a go on a kid's bike down your regular trail and I assure you, you will have a blast. 🍷

### Aim High 4 Aiyla

This ridiculous stunt was done in aid of Aiyla Fear. You can read more about her, and donation options, here: [@AberdareMTB](https://gofundme.com/au3jcg).