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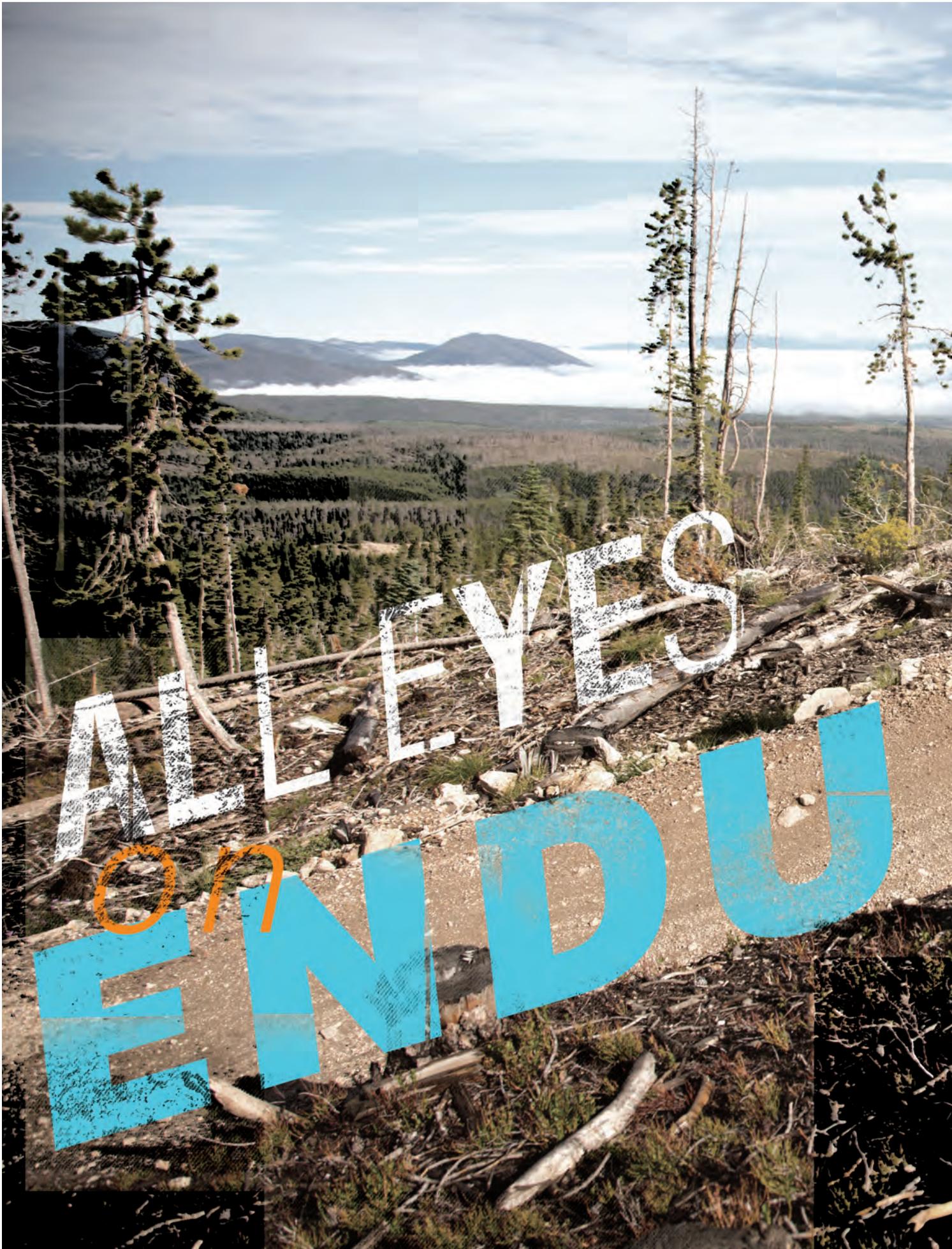
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*MOUNTAIN BIKING'S NEXT ERA IS HERE, AND YOU CAN FEEL IT.*

“Enduro” is the buzzword that has stormed the industry, infiltrating the vocabulary of the media, sparking the interest of sponsors, and packing athletes’ race schedules for the year. Most of us are familiar with what an enduro race looks like, but the big questions are, is there a common definition of enduro, where is it going, and what does it mean for mountain bikers in an ever-changing landscape of racing?

IT SEEMED LIKE A LOT OF PEOPLE WERE TALKING ABOUT THIS ALL-MOUNTAIN THING, BUT NOBODY WAS DOING ANYTHING ABOUT IT

PHOTO BY DEVON BALET





ENDURO IS WHERE MOUNTAIN BIKE RACING IS HEADED. IT ENCAPSULATES EVERYTHING THAT IS CORE TO THE SPORT

Although enduro has been alive and kicking in Europe for the past decade, it wasn't until the past two years that we saw much hype about it in the United States. Instead, we were racing long, point-to-point events such as the Downieville Classic and the Ashland Super D, as well as other shorter, one-stage Super Ds that were just add-ons to existing events. The popularity of these events has now slowly migrated toward enduro, a multi-day, multi-stage approach to fitness-based, gravity-oriented racing. Trek's Ross Schnell, well-known for two world championships and multiple national championships in disciplines across the board, initiated the movement for bike park enduros in the U.S. in 2011 when he created his vision of an enduro race format with a three-day, five-stage event in Colorado—the Trestle All-Mountain Enduro—which was intended to determine the best all-around trail rider in North America.

"There were a number of reasons we wanted to start promoting enduros in the U.S. It seemed like a lot of people were talking about this all-mountain thing, but nobody was doing anything about it short of throwing together a Super D," Schnell said. "Because of a lack of proper enduro racing in the U.S. riders like myself, Mark Weir from WTB-Cannondale, and a few others would travel to Europe in search of real enduro racing. What we found were well-thought-out and organized events that catered to the modern mountain biker."

Since then, an exponential acceleration of new events and series across the country and now across the world has emerged, including the North American Enduro Tour and the Enduro World Series. The stage has been set for 2013.

"Enduro is where mountain bike racing is headed. It encapsulates everything that is core to the sport—technical skills, fitness, and a big, all-day adventure where you're out riding with your friends," said Brandon Ontiveros, executive director of the Big Mountain Enduro Series and board member of the NAET.

The NAET was founded in 2011 to tie together the major enduro events in North America, set standards for the sport, and put a stamp on individual events that demonstrate an ability to meet NAET's in-progress standards for what enduro racing should be. Beginning in 2011 with five events in the Northwest, the tour has grown to include eight for 2013 (with the possibility of a ninth,) including the Santa Cruz Mountain Bike Festival, the Canadian Open Enduro as part of Crankworx Whistler, two events in the Oregon Enduro Series, the Bell Wasatch Enduro in Utah, the Colorado Freeride Festival, and two stops in the Big Mountain Enduro Series.

The Whole Enchilada Enduro, part of the Big Mountain Enduro Series, in its second year is slated for the 2013 NAET finals. "The Whole Enchilada is one of the raddest trails, with over 7,000 feet of descending through several different ecosystems," Ontiveros said. "You don't find that anywhere else in North America. There was no question that this would be the perfect place for the competition of NAET to culminate." The Big Mountain Enduro Series will include five events in 2013 and offer a mix of unparalleled

ENDURO RACING IS BASICALLY THE TYPE OF RIDING YOU'D BE DOING WITH YOUR FRIENDS ANYWAY, EXCEPT WITH A NUMBER PLATE STRAPPED TO YOUR BIKE.



PHOTO BY EDDIE CLARK



PHOTOS BY DEVON BALET



backcountry and bike park racing in Colorado, New Mexico and Utah.

The popularity of enduro is increasing so much that The Whole Enchilada sold out in seven minutes last year, and France's Trans-Provence sold out in less than a minute for 2013. Ontiveros says next year's Whole Enchilada will be in higher demand as the NAET finals, and should see a decent amount of international competitors as companies begin to see the value in supporting a type of racing that fits a broader audience and represents the bread and butter of their sales—trail bikes and related components and soft goods.

As enduro racing becomes more prevalent in the U.S., so has the push to unify events worldwide under one umbrella. In 2012 there were rumors of a series to be backed by the UCI, cycling's international governing body, but when that began to fall through, the people behind the international enduro movement—Chris Ball (formerly of the UCI), Fred Glo of the Enduro Series, Enrico Guala of the Superenduro Series, and Darren Kinnaird of Crankworx—decided to make the Enduro World Series happen without the involvement of the UCI. The series will include seven stops: five in Europe and two in North America.

"We certainly would love to expand to multiple continents in the years to come but want to make sure we are growing this for the long-term," said Ball, managing director of the Enduro World Series. "In the future we would like to see large series like [NAET] be a platform for riders to qualify, especially as the events become more popular and rider entries will be harder to come by."

The Enduro World Series will have a point structure working through the year to qualify riders for the events and the finale in Ligure, Italy, since there is no previous qualification structure to work off of. In addition, the board is creating its own rule book to define what enduro is. The rule book will be open sourced so that the sport of enduro can move forward in a more general direction yet still maintain a common framework. According to Ball, "We don't want it to be restrictive; we want to keep it open and creative."

So what does this all mean for you, the enthusiast, the racer, the professional, who is looking for the next exciting thing?

As Schnell simply put it, "This type of format is so attractive to the average person because it's what the average person does every day. Enduro racing is basically the type of riding you'd be doing with your friends anyway, except with a number plate strapped to your bike. It also appeals to the top riders in the sport because it's fresh and exciting."

With several strong regional series, the North American Enduro Tour and now the Enduro World Series, the future looks promising for mountain bikers who enjoy getting out to race, even if it's just once in a while. "The future of enduro racing means riders expecting to get what they paid for are finally getting it. It means...ex-racers are coming back to a sport they lost interest in years ago. It means putting thought and effort into creating an experience for the racer that will keep them coming back," sums up Schnell. 