



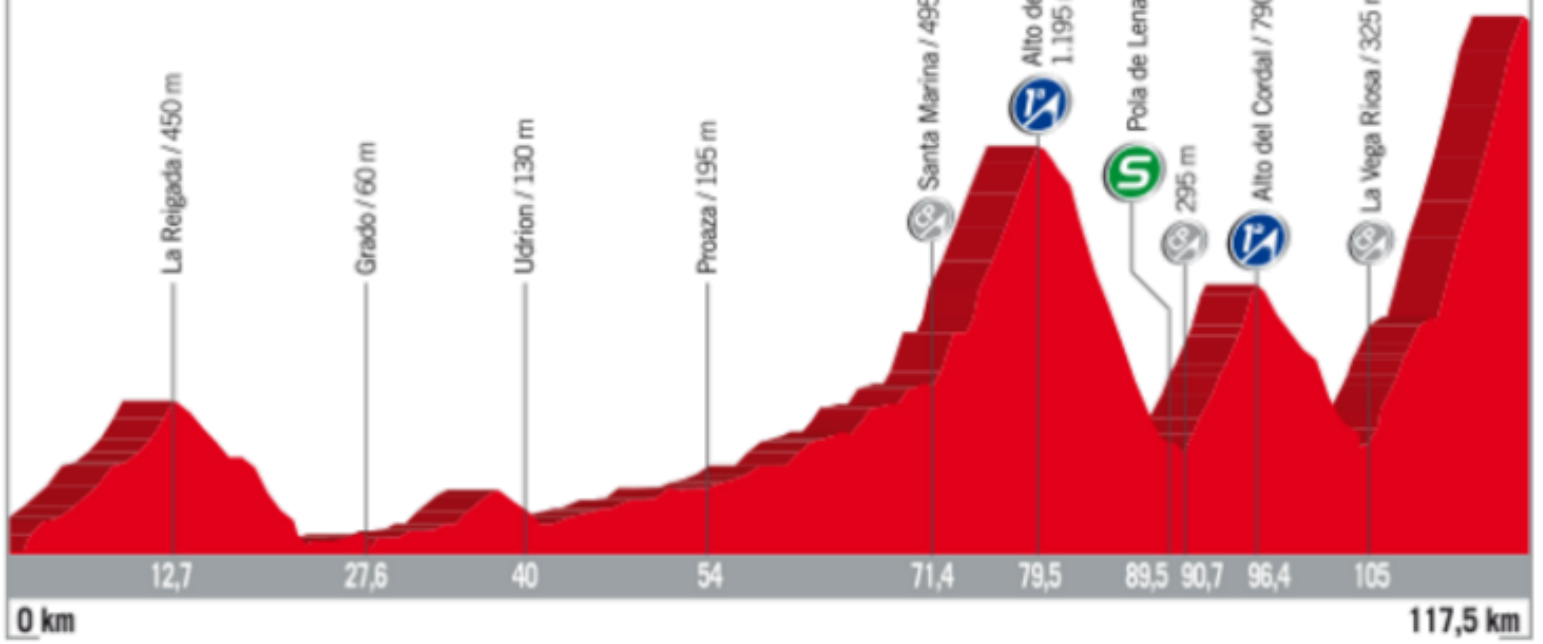
# CORVERA DE ASTURIAS

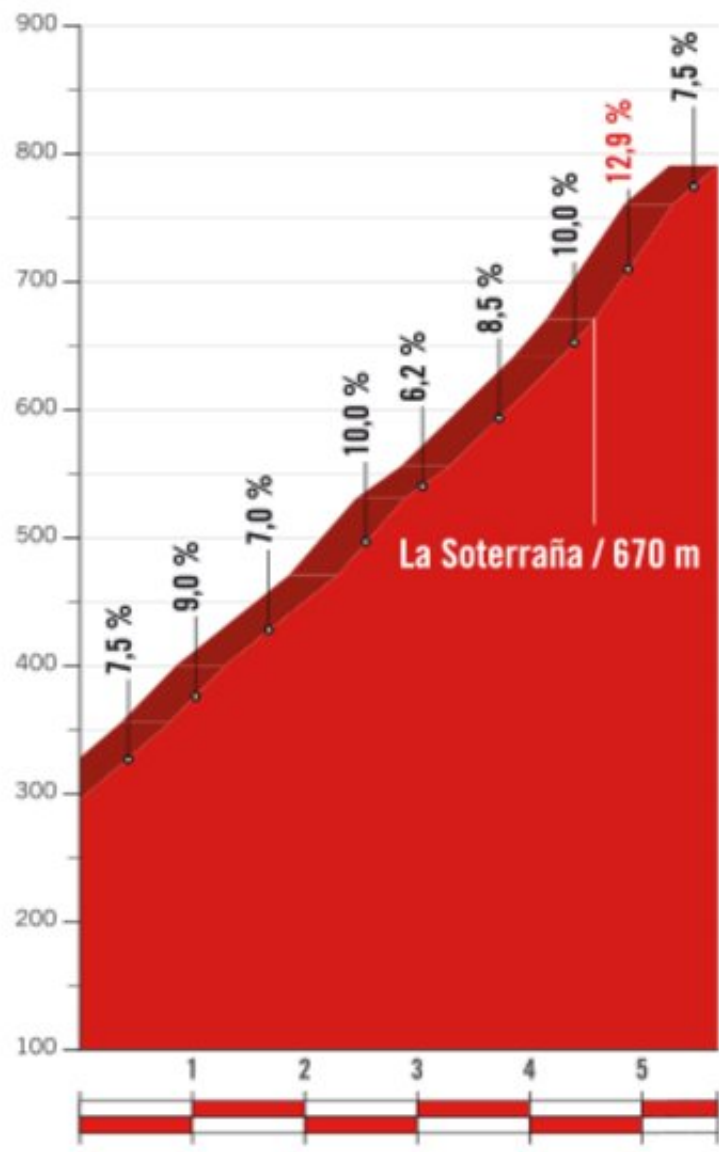
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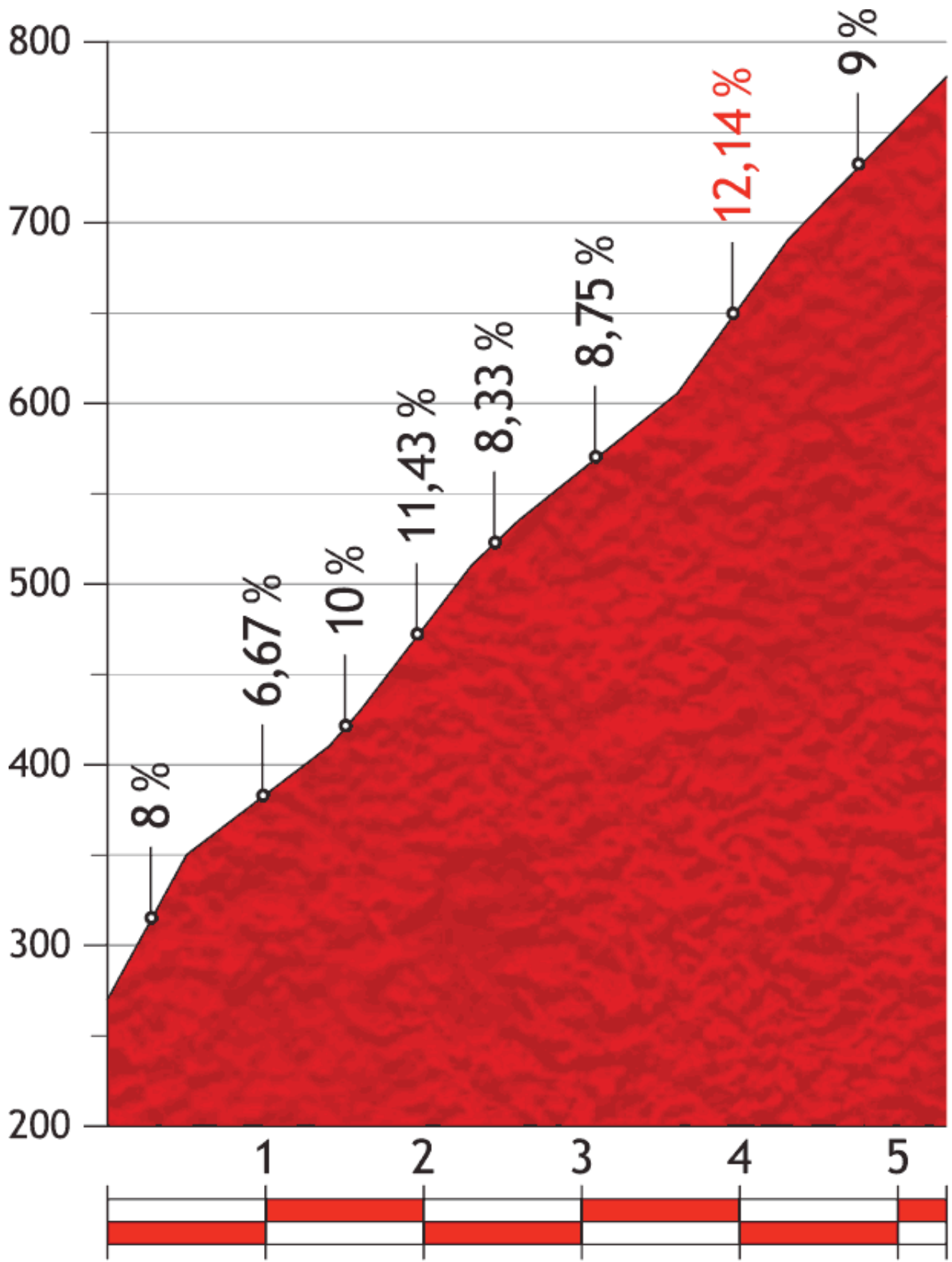


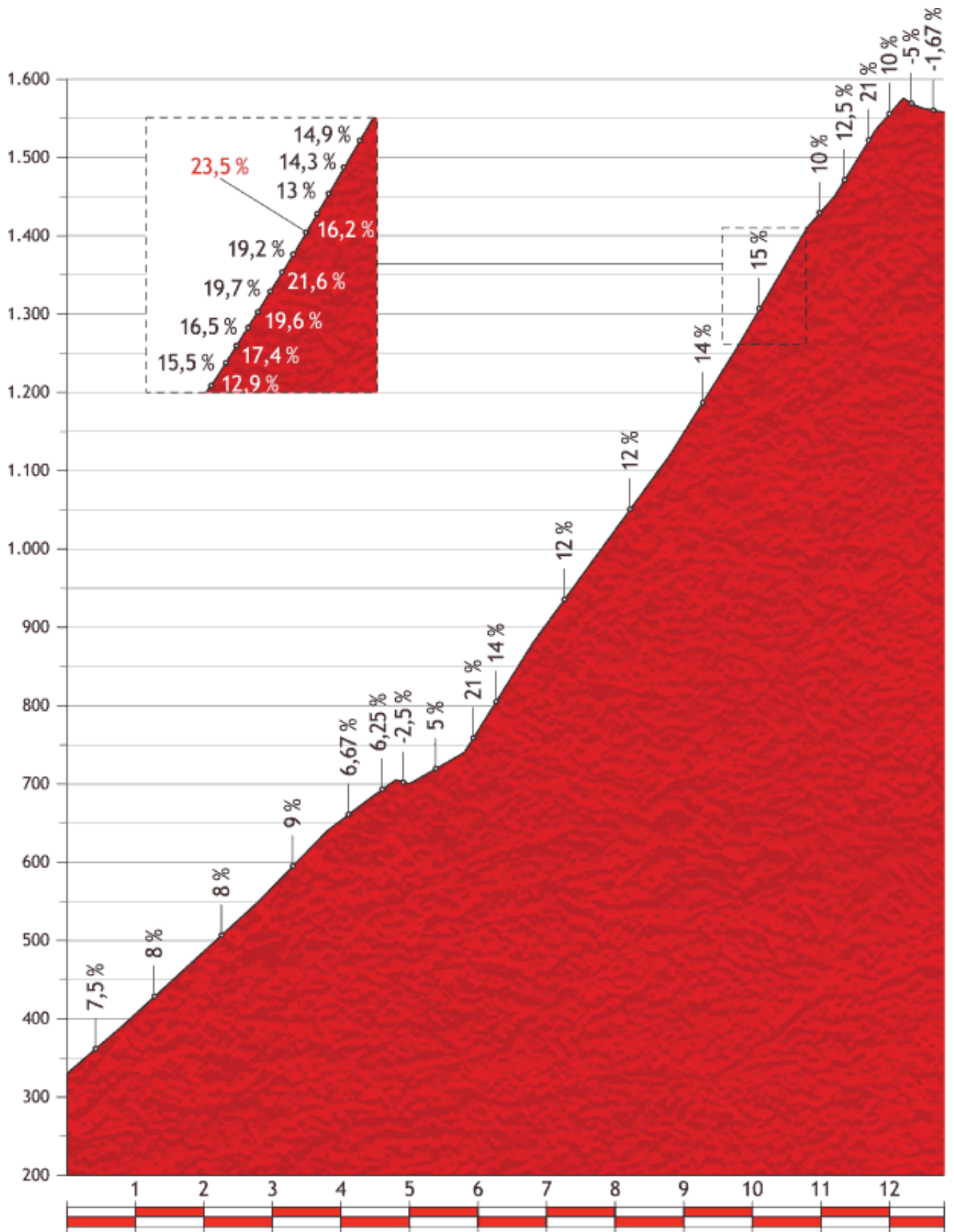
# ALTO DE L'ANGLIRU

1.560 m









"What Price Glory?" is a comedy and drama starring James Cagney, William Demarest, Harry Morgan, Robert Wagner, and a whole host of other actors you would recognize. Its subject is a company of soldiers who are hunkered down in a French Village, some are fierce rivals, all cannot wait to get to the action. They do.... and then "What Price Glory?" I have the DVD in a series called "Ford at Fox," and was just watching it this morning. As I was casting about for a theme for today's essay, I thought, what better theme than "What Price Glory?," as our brave cyclists head into the mountains today in the penultimate stage of the Vuelta a España.

It is said that the top athletes in the world are professional cyclists, who regularly in the course of a month, or two or three in Summer, will ride two to three thousand miles in a jaunt across Europe. To add insult to injury, or to add glory to challenge, many of these miles across Europe will climb up, and coast down, mountain passes.

That is really the meaning of the word Col in French, or Alto in Spanish, a mountain pass, not the summit, but the pass itself. The French, Spanish, and Italians like to outdo each other in planning torturous routes sometimes, and the ones which include these mountain passes are both circuitous and torturous. The roads used are not necessarily the highest paved roads in Europe, the list of those is impressive in length, and my impression of these is that they ultimately peter down to goat trails. This means, of course, that if some of those are ultimately better paved, the French, Spanish, or Italians may be adding more challenging climbs in the future, if that be possible.

The Alto de l'Angliru is a steep mountain road in Asturias, near La Vega-Riosa, in northern Spain. It is the road through the pass closest to the mountain peaks of el Gamonal, el Moncuvu y el Barriscal, and so some confuzzled commentators sometimes confuse the name of the pass with the names of the nearest mountains. It is one of the most demanding climbs in professional cycling, to date, at least. The top of the climb is 1.573 metres (5,161 ft) above sea level. The highest two paved mountain roads in Europe are in Spain, at double that elevation, over 3.000 meters, but hopefully those will not be paved to the meager Vuelta width for some years! The climb is 12,5 kilometres (7.8 mi) long, with an change in altitude from base to summit of 1.266 m (4,154 ft). The grade is an average of 10.13%, but is almost 24% at its steepest. The steepest part of the climb, the Cueva les Cabres at 23.6%, is 3 km (1.9 mi) from the summit. There are two later ascents of 18% to 21%.

It is said that, in the mid 1990s, the organizers of the Vuelta a España wanted a mountain to rival the Alpe d'Huez and Mont Ventoux in the Tour de France. The director of information for the O.N.C.E team, Miguel Prieto, visited Riosa and was shown the climb, then contacted the Vuelta officials about the possibility. The road was repaved by the local village, and approval was given. The Angliru was then first included in 1999, on stage eight from León, and was an annual event for a few years. Fans of sport were touched that first year by an almost mythical and mystical inauguration, as José María "Chava" Jiménez burst out of the fog which had blocked the view of the race until the last km, leading Russian Pável Tonkov, and took the stage. This climb and prosaic finish attracted the attention of fans worldwide, as an estimated 6 million people watched that first year.

The climb initially was described as barbaric. The BBC at the time published an article to that effect: "It's an inhumane climb," said Kelme's Oscar Sevilla in the BBC article. Sevilla, who many fans will remember, lost his lead in the 2002 Vuelta to Roberto Heras of US Postal, who tamed the mountain pass that day. Other winners at the Angliru include Gilberto Simoni (2000), Roberto Heras (2002), Alberto Contador (2008), Juanjo Cobo (2011) y Kenny Elissonde (2013). Let's see if Berto can repeat that win today. Of the 10 fastest ascenders, Roberto Heras (US Postal) tops the list, with Chris Horner coming in second. 7 of the 10 fastest ascenders are Spaniards, the fastest ascent took 41 minutes, 55 seconds, and that belongs to Heras.

An interesting fact I uncovered in my research was that there is another road up the Angliru which could be used, although it has never been, with a less steep gradient. Perhaps the Angliru, someday, will serve as an mid stage climb. The craziness of the Angliru has given rise to all manner of what in other contexts would be called "urban legends" or elsewhere might be called "mystery spots," where cars coast going uphill, etc. In the case of the Angliru, these legends or "mitos" are much more arcane regarding gradient, speed, etc.

The cyclist's answer to What Price Glory? was answered for cycling, perhaps, in 2002, by tempestuous Scottish cyclist David Millar (born in Malta). It is a shame if you don't remember him. His sister Fran is currently head of business operations for Team SKY. In any case, 2002 was a particularly challenging year on the Alto de l'Angliru, as it was raining. Many of the team cars stalled on the way up, and then could not get traction to continue, as their tires skidded on the dissolving paint which fans had left on the road with encouraging messages for the cyclists. Some cyclists were blocked, along the climb, by stalled cars and other hazards. Because no mechanics were available, some cyclists were riding with flat tires or other hazards. David Millar had crashed several times on the ascent, and his fiery temper got the best of him. A few feet from the finish line he dismounted, and lay his bicycle on its side, walking across the finish line and tearing off his number in disgust. The judges ruled he had not finished, as he didn't cross the finish line with his bike, that he had "handed in his number," and he was disqualified. I guess glory has its limits.

As always, should be a great day for cycling.

Enjoy the Vuelta. Enjoy the day.

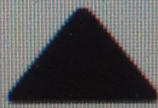
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**Daniel Friebe** @friebos

1h

Asked Contador this morning whether he'd let head or emotions dictate to him today.

Him: 'My legs.'

Then he winked (again).

