

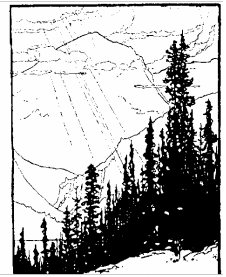


International Club of Andorra

NEWS MONTHLY

FOR MEMBERS ONLY

Editor: John Pinnell



The News Weekly is a selection from the main items in the local press, information of general interest and Club news. It would be appreciated if any factual errors could be brought to the attention of the editor. Please note that any opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the C.I.A. Board.

No. 525

News for September 2007

If you like this newsletter you may also be interested in the additional news and articles on the International Club Andorra website. It is easy to access - just click here to enter www.international-club-andorra.com

I would like to thank Servissim for having agreed to sponsor this newsletter. From next month the newsletter will carry a brief message from Servissim and its logo will appear on the front page. We will also be able to carry news information as prepared by Servissim for its many clients on subjects such as property and taxation – which should be of great interest to our readers.

John Pinnell

MAIN NEWS

Cleaning up the act and other matters:

The Spanish Environment Minister was here right at the end of the month. She was taken round the incinerator and also the water treatment plant at Sant Julia (which is the biggest in Andorra). She made very positive remarks about the efforts that have been made over the past several years by Andorra to comply with EU standards on water purity (after all the rivers do run down into Spain so if they run dirty they affect our neighbour) and on rubbish disposal (the rules which now have all excavation material dumped within Andorra and the results of having all rubbish produced here incinerated here). She also referred to the “fluid” relations between the two countries in these matters (while we may recall all the articles about the problems with Spain refusing to allow material from Andorra to be dumped there). Only one black mark for her – she indicated that the incinerator could treat Spanish rubbish as well; most of us would prefer not to have trucks coming into Andorra laden with rubbish – thank you.

The Finance Minister has come up with a new way of balancing the books – for 2008 the draft budget shows a surplus of €15 million on expenses of €400 million. This is just sleight of hand because the proposal includes financing major public works

(roadworks and tunnel works) through “pay as you go” financing. This method has already been used by the Generalitat in Catalunya to finance the widening of the C-25 for example. It consists of paying for the road (or tunnel) over a period of (say) 30 years by means of a deemed toll on the vehicles using it – with the proceeds being used to pay the consortium building the road (or tunnel). This looks like being what will finally happen to the financing of the cost of the Túnel de les Dos Valires and probably the viaduct to be built at the La Massana end and the Sant Julia bypass and so on.

It is a constructive way of recovering the cost – but as various newspaper articles have pointed out, this is just a way of avoiding recognizing a deficit and is in fact rather more expensive than a normal government loan.

While talking to a group of local businessmen, Xavier Jordana, another minister, talked about the heliport, about airports and about a possible railway line to Andorra. Staring with the least controversial, he feels that any possible railway line will be a long way off and very costly. On the airport issue he indicated that the government was still looking at the possibility of an international airport in Andorra itself (with capacity for smaller aircraft but able to run services to London or Paris) as well as cooperating fully with the re opening of the airport at La Seu d’Urgell. On the proposed heliport he stated that the study would identify a site before the end of the year and that he expected construction to start in early 2008 with a potential cost of €7-8 million (financed of course on the “pay as you go” method). What was perhaps oddest here is that he seemed to say that if the site could be on public land then there would be no issues and if on private land then there would be immediate expropriation – apparently ignoring that surely there must be some review of the proposal and that if the site were in the Comu of Andorra la Vella then the Comu has already expressed its opposition to any heliport.

Lastly in this section the strange way of evaluating Andorra and its credit worthiness shown by Standard & Poors. Their evaluation of the economy has it growing rapidly (nobody else seems to think that is the case). The report is also optimistic about growth through to 2010 (but hedges that by saying that this depends on a favourable evolution of tourism – which every other report has falling slightly at the moment). It does stress the vulnerability of the economy to any downturn in tourism and the relative importance of the banking sector and its dependence on deposits from outside the country (read black money). Given how right the rating agency was about certain sophisticated financial products recently, let us hope that their optimistic report does not really signify a pessimistic outlook.

Other items:

In terms of visibility in newspapers outside Andorra, the least newsworthy item was perhaps the report that Albert Pintat addressed the General Assembly of the United Nations (this merely seems bizarre with all the world leaders attending). The most visible was the visit by the architect Frank Gehry to Sispony where he saw for the first time the site on which the new national archives building is to stand – which he has been commissioned to design. He had some first thoughts with him which show a building sprouting from the rocks – but now he has seen the site the real thinking has to begin.

During this visit Julie Minoves (as Culture Minister) took the opportunity of stating that the aim is to invest in buildings with a special quality to leave a legacy to the future with modern architecture just like the builders of the Romanesque churches did so many centuries ago. Apart from the national archives building this means seeking a “star” architect to build the new national museum on its proposed site in Santa Coloma.

By now everybody should have discovered that Andorra has become only the second country in Europe (after the Netherlands) to shut off analogue television signals in favour of digital ones. We also now have more free channels – with the addition of CNN International as an English language channel.

NEWS IN BRIEF

The traffic news has included two very nasty accidents.

The first was a frontal collision between an Andorran registered car and a Rumanian registered van in Lleida province on the C-25. The van was simply on

the wrong side of the road. The Andorran woman and her young son in the car were killed outright along with three of the five Rumanians in the van. Significantly 4 out of 5 killed were not wearing seatbelts at the time of the accident.

Then at El Serrat there was a tragedy when a Novatel minibus returning from taking Dutch tourists on an excursion to the lakes above Arcalis suffered a break failure after rounding the first hairpin bend. The driver lost control and (according to reports from the guide who survived the crash) tried in vain to engage a lower gear and to use the hand brake. The bus ran into a Jeep coming up the hill, veered off the road and turned turtle down a steep bank. Two people (the driver and a passenger) were killed and thirteen injured, six seriously and taken into the intensive care unit. It took two hours to free the passengers and eight ambulance and a helicopter were used to ferry the injured to hospital.

In Escaldes a young Portuguese driver in a Seat Leon (those cars always seem to be in a hurry) lost control after braking sharply, veered across the road, then the pavement, through a barrier and down from a bridge to land 7.5 metres below – injuring himself and his two passengers badly.

Outside Canillo a young lady driver lost control of her car and veered across the road into the safety barrier, severely damaging the car and injuring both herself and her passenger.

Another lady driver in Andorra la Vella lost control of her car and veered off the street, across the pavement, through the safety barrier and down a three metre drop. Either she was going far too fast or she just lost concentration.

The police have confirmed that they are only taking action against drivers caught doing more than 80 km/h in the radar traps (which are in 60 km/h zones). Given that the entire process from reading the registrations in the photographs to checking the registered owner to preparing the letter and notification of fine (through to addressing the envelope) is manual this may not be a great surprise. In Spain by the way they have opened a special automated centre to receive on line the data from all the radar traps, match the registrations against a master file of vehicle and owner data and prepare the notifications – with the aim of getting the notification out within 48 hours of the infraction. Another world – but one that still appears not to have Andorran registration plates on file so far.

The express bus to Sant Julia has completed one year of operations and is now carrying 35,000 users a

month (according to one report – another says 25,000).

Three young Portuguese were arrested and charged with possessing 700g of explosives stolen from the worksite of the Túnel de les Dos Valires. This all happened by accident as the police were searching the room of one of the arrested men for drugs when they found the explosives. Questioning led to the detention of the other two (who appear to have been responsible for stealing the explosive). Nobody of course had noticed that it had gone missing.

The INAF produced its report on the Valora case and sought maximum penalties (including the loss of licence to operate and fines totalling €300,000 on the entity and its main managers). The Government confirmed the sanctions and also called for the immediate winding up and liquidation of the entity.

The young Italian who was caught leaving a house that he had broken into in Sant Julia last year and who was charged with a total of 13 burglaries was tried (in one and a half days total hearing) and sentenced to six years in prison. His accomplice (who ran off at the time) has never been traced.

The young woman employee who stole €400 from the main government offices last year and who pleaded guilty to the offence was sentenced to one month in prison.

The French couple who left their young child most of the night in the car in Pas de la Casa with their big dog while they went out drinking are being charged in their absence. The prosecution is seeking a three year suspended prison sentence for each of them.

The British police released information about Alain Montané that rapidly became public knowledge and severely prejudiced opinion against him. The information was that some five years ago he used a web page devoted to child pornography and left a trail as it was a pay to view page and he used his credit card to gain access. The charity Infants del Mon immediately ceased seeking to defend him against recent accusations about his activities in Cambodia and he resigned from his position with the orphanage in Cambodia.

The Government has announced a new baccalaureate examination for Andorra. This apparently will automatically be recognised in France – but needs specific acceptance to be recognised in Spain. Parents of children who will be taking the examination next June are very concerned that studies are under way and yet nobody is sure that Spain will accept the examination – possibly

meaning that children would have to sit the Spanish selectivity examination to be able to enter Spanish universities.

The Generalitat of Catalunya has suspended the legal title of over 2,600 apartments built at Miami Platja on the Costa Dorada. This affects a number of Andorrans who had bought there. It also potentially affects many other properties on the Costa Dorada. The cause is almost lost in the mists of time. There used to be a major drove road that ran all the way along the coast from Valencia and under the old royal ordinances a swathe of land 75 metres wide was sacrosanct – and so never allowed to be built over. In Miami Platja a stretch of this old right of way four kilometres long was shown as being protected in the 1972 building plan but got lost from the 1986 plan – and built on. All of the properties are believed to have proper public deeds signed off by local notaries. This particular issue could reverberate for years to come. What is clear is that it will cast some sort of shadow over property dealings along this part of the coast.

Andorra is apparently about to sign a pre agreement with Luxembourg that would later allow a double tax treaty to be prepared and signed.

The King and Queen of Spain are scheduled to visit Andorra in the second half of 2008

AROUND THE PARISHES

Encamp – after two trials there will be one more trial before the decision is taken as to whether the Carrer Major at Pas de la Casa becomes pedestrian only.

La Massana – the church now has a new organ (it never had one before) as a result of generous donations by two local families.

Ordino – some 700 metres of track near Sorteny has been mysteriously “improved” so that instead of being a walking track it is almost two metres wide and so potentially accessible to vehicles. It is an issue because this is a protected area and because it is thought that influential local men who are keen hunters are responsible. Fingers are being pointed.

Sant Julia – the Consol Major opened up the possibility of a local referendum on the alternative route proposed by the Grupo Rocafort for the bypass. However, there are two immediate obstacles – showing that the alternative route is indeed viable

and stopping the Government from its avowed intention of just going ahead anyway.

La Massana – the new after school hours centre built below where the old children’s playground was behind the church has been opened. It offers 500 metres of space and is aimed at having capacity for 100 children aged between 3 and 12. There is a significant requirement in the parish for this facility with 42 children inscribed and a waiting list of 33 before the centre opened.

Ordino – the facility at Casa Ferino which houses the parish archives in the basement and a “ludo centre” for children to use primarily after school hours was formally opened. The new space has games rooms, a cinema, a computer room, and will have seven monitors and have capacity for 70 children aged between 3 and 14 years. The building dates from 1822 and was totally restored at a cost reported by some sources as €3 million (and others as €2 million) of which the Government contributed €500,000.

Ordino – a town meeting was held to explain the situation of Arcalis. Total losses since 2002 are about €6 million and the ski station has debts of about €8 million. The master plan for new investment (which does not include any of the most fanciful ideas such as a new ski lift from El Serrat but does include some huge new parking areas) calls for €32 million to be spent. In order to do anything the Comu needs to get special legislation passed (at country level) so that it could go into debt to fund all this expenditure.

CLUB NEWS

Two events at or after the end of October to note please:

The Halloween lunch at the Hotel Bringué at El Serrat on Wednesday October 31 at 1.30 pm for 2.00 pm. The menu will feature “pica pica” – a series of plates of meat, seafood and mushrooms (with more meat this year than last - including wild boar stew). Cost (members) €30 – please contact Chris Hansen or John Pinnell (355275).

The annual wine tasting at 19.00 on Wednesday November 21 at the Xalet Ritz Hotel. This year we shall be tasting wines from Southern France, Portugal and Spain. Cost (members) €15 – please contact Ron Spiers or John Pinnell (355275).