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A new Vision for the 21st Century
PROMOTE TURNING SKILLS

Several recent experiences made me painfully aware that many people on the slopes today don't have much control over the shape of their turn. First there were the skiers and boarders that crashed or almost crashed into me even though they saw me in plenty of time and had ample space to turn around me, but were simply unable to do so (see my personal experience #2).

Then I noticed that several of my friends (intermediate skiers), were really locked into a single kind of turn radius. They make rhythmic parallel turns down the fall-line, but always the same kind of turn, always the same radius, always used to constantly check their speed. But, when asked to elongate their turns, they just couldn't do it.

Finally, I was surprised to see that even some very advanced skiers, who usually ski powder all the time, even on cruddy days, were unable to synchronize their turns to those of another skier in front of them, on a groomed intermediate slope, even after several attempts. That really opened my eyes to the fact that the development of turning skills has been sorely neglected for years.

So, here's a proposal to make skiing **safer**, more **fun**, and provide **skill-building** opportunities. It would also make **lift-lines shorter**, be **financially profitable**, and **attract more people to the sport**.

It boils down to simply providing more opportunities for people to practice **TURNING**, which is the essence of our sport. It doesn't require any large monetary investment, but it does require a shift away from the **culture of JUMPING** to the **culture of TURNING**. (See *Turn 'em like Herman* below.)

THE PROBLEM: Remember when **jumping** was not permitted on the slopes (some 20 years ago)? Remember when people could practice running gates (i.e. **controlled turning**) for 50 cents per run? Ski areas have completely changed course in recent years. Jumping is now encouraged, and bigger, more dangerous jumps are being built. No 50 cents charge, and no liability release required, even though a wrong landing could result in a broken neck. Terrain parks encourage jumping, not turning!

Meanwhile, training gates have completely disappeared. The only time gates are set up is if there is a real race, or if a club pays for a training session, and those courses are then closed to the public. There is no opportunity for the public at large to practice controlled turning. Even in the rare cases when some gates are made available, people are asked for money, and must sign liability releases, ... as if running gates was somehow more dangerous than launching your body through the air in a terrain park!

In fact, any **turning** away from the fall line on groomed slopes has become dangerous! Because of wide open trails, clear-cut through the forest, many people ride/ski so fast that making wider turns (away from the fall-line) is now dangerous. The faster skier may not be able to stop or turn in time .

THE SOLUTION: It's simple. Provide more opportunities for people to **practice turning**, and place **fun obstacles to slow traffic down**. Encourage speed control through turning, varying speed, all kinds of turns, skidding, carving, and everything in between. Here are several possible ideas.

All these ideas are a lot less expensive than building a terrain park with huge jumps, or half-pipes. No special equipment is needed. And yet, it would make the slopes a whole lot of fun!

1. **Leave a few trees standing**

It's fun to turn around trees. Trails look more interesting. If trees were all cut years ago, plant a few back in!

2. **Make artificial trees**

We don't need real trees to turn. Often, a little **twig** or **pine-cone** will do, or a small **flag**. How about a whole bunch of those **orange traffic cones**? Just fill up the whole slope with cones all over. Not just in a single row down the fall-line, but literally all over, like a forest of cones. That way, not everyone would turn in exactly the same spot, and the formation of moguls would be delayed. You might think that a mogul field serves the same purpose, but it doesn't. A mogul field serves a similar purpose only for advanced skiers. But, here, we are trying to provide a fun activity for everyone! The included photo shows a maze of only 30 cones!



Start with just two trails: a beginner "forest" and an intermediate "forest". Make sure the cones are comfortably spaced. See what fun ensues when people discover these new forests! The cones, being small, would also make it easy for both skiers and snowboarders to turn around, without having to worry about hitting a bamboo gate.

Yes, the cones would have to be removed from time to time, maybe even daily (at the end of the day), so the slope could be groomed. But, this could be solved in several ways:

- a) Ask volunteer staff (ski hosts or patrollers) to plant some cones (and pick them up later).
- b) Ask the general public to help place & remove the cones. Many of us would gladly help!
- c) Add some sort of mechanical attachment in front of the snow-cat that would automatically pick up the snow cones, and then slide them down some kind of chute on the back side of the cat, back onto the snow.

3. **Build a "Twist & Turn Terrain Park" (instead of a JUMPING park)**

- a) Those "magic forest" paths through the woods that some ski areas have are a step in the right direction. Build a "magic forest" for adults. Make it interesting for adults to ski. Try to replicate the excitement of tree skiing or out-of-bounds powder skiing, but do it on groomed terrain within the confines of the ski area.
- b) **Make some interesting obstacles to go around.** Again, borrowing from the concept of kiddie-parks, but more challenging. Any obstacle will do. Trees, poles, bales of hay, maybe animal cutouts, or some armed terrorists, ... or imperial troopers and jedis, ... or snow-shapes representing volcanoes (Mt. Shasta, Mt. St. Helens, Mt. Hood, Pinatubo, Kilauea, Krakatau, Etna, etc.).

4. **Provide Practice race-courses (free)** (See personal experiences #4, #5 and #6)

Part of the reason fewer and fewer people used those coin-operated race courses is that they cost additional money, on top of an already very expensive lift-ticket. Fifty cents was acceptable, but

when the price went up to \$2 or \$5, it made us think twice. The terrain parks and half-pipes would not be so popular either if people had to pay additional money every time they went in. So, make the practice course free. Charge only for real races on weekends.

5. **Let people set up their own gates** (See personal experience #3)

We would gladly set up our own practice gates and clean up afterwards. It doesn't even have to be real gates. Bamboo poles would be fine, or orange cones, ... or even just a bunch of old ski poles! Those new "whisker" gates might be a possibility too!

These are just some ideas. The possibilities are endless. The main point is: give beginner, intermediate and advanced skiers and boarders **something to turn around**, something to practice the art of turning.

Bring back a culture of **turning** (not jumping or speeding), and you'll make the slopes **safer**, more of a **learning** experience, more **challenging**, and more **fun**! It will bring **more people** to the slopes. Also, the more time people spend negotiating a maze of fun obstacles on the slopes, the **shorter** the **lift lines** will get.

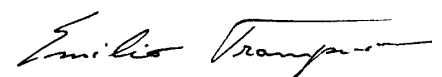
To promote the whole idea, let's come up with suitable **slogans**, such as "**Turn 'em like Herman**" (referring to Hermann Maier, the Herminator) – also a play on the movie title "Bend it like Beckham".

I hope ski areas can set aside at least one intermediate slope this season for some "experimenting" with slowing traffic down by providing us with fun obstacles to turn around.

As for **ski schools**, they could make learning more fun by teaching **synchronized** skiing, where the students spread out across the slope behind the instructor and try to mimic his/her movements. The instructor could begin by doing rhythmic turns at first, but then progress to varying the speed and radius of his turns, and see if the students can still follow. Not only does this teach an important skill, but – when executed correctly – can look beautiful, and would hopefully act as a magnet for people seeing it from the chairlift and deciding they would like to learn to do this too.

Another important ingredient in **turn control** that has been neglected is **skidding**. For years, there has been too much emphasis on **carving**, while completely neglecting skidding skills. A complete skier should have a complete set of turning tools at his disposal, and skidding is definitely part of it. Just witness how many people seem unable to let their skis skid down the fall line, from a standing position, with skis positioned perpendicularly to the slope. Snowboarders do this naturally, but many skiers have difficulties with even just plain skidding, let alone the playful control of letting their skis slide forward or back by varying the pressure on their tips or tails, while skidding sideways. This skill is hardly ever taught these days, though it is a great exercise for edge control. Consequently, people find it hard to vary the radius and shape of their turns, because they are not used to the subtle interplay between carving and skidding that can be used to vary the speed and shape of a turn.

These are just some ideas and visions for improvement. I am sure that others can add to this, and bring on a whole new shift in the way we teach and promote our favorite sport, to make it both safer and more fun for everyone, and thus attract a whole new generation of snow-riders to the slopes.



(P.S. See the attached personal stories. These could be published in separate "boxes" alongside the main article.)

Some Personal Experiences for illustration

Jumping means losing control

It's a bad idea to promote jumping. When a person jumps, all control is surrendered as soon as contact with the ground is lost. The person becomes a projectile. There is no way to alter the course.

***Personal experience #1:** One such projectile (skier/snowboarder - doesn't matter) launched himself right in front of my path from a spot where neither of us could see each other. I was skiing relatively slowly on an easy, green slope, the lower end of the Magic Mile at Timberline, and the perpetrator was in the gully (a canyon of sort and a natural half-pipe) off to my left. He decided to pick up a lot speed and launch himself out of the gully and right into my path. By the time I saw him, he was in the air, a foot from my chest, and I had nowhere to go but slam into him. He apologized profusely. But, why did this happen in the first place? Because of the whole culture of **jumping**, and ski areas actively promoting it. Where were the bamboo poles to prevent that fateful launch? If I had been only a fraction of a second faster, instead of my chest slamming into him, he would have slammed into my ribs from the side!*

People on slopes unable to turn

Amazingly, lots of people on the slopes don't really know how to turn, much less control the shape of the turn!

***Personal experience #2:** While skiing mid-week at a very un-crowded Apex ski area, in British Columbia, on two occasions in the same day, I stopped to rest on the side of an empty trail, only to watch a snowboarder come barreling toward me, apparently unable to turn at all. It was a weekday, and there was nobody else on that slope. It was a very wide trail. There was plenty of room to **turn**. There was also plenty of **time** to turn. But, instead of turning, both riders (on both occasions), simply threw their boards sideways and tried to scrape off some speed while still heading straight at me!*

*This is **not** about snowboarders. I experienced the same thing a few years earlier when a **skier** crashed into me. He was locked into and ineffective attempt to slow down by using a wedge technique, but not knowing how to apply real pressure to those edges, ... and again, obviously not knowing how to **steer** away from me. I was standing at the bottom of this hill, talking to some people, and looked up just in time to see this guy barreling straight into our little group! The main problem, again: not knowing how to **turn**!*

What are ski areas doing to promote the ability to turn?

Sadly, most people these days ignore ski schools. As soon as they figure out how they can scrape off some speed, they stop taking lessons. Ski schools could still be part of the answer if they can find a way to become truly attractive to skiers. Here's a hint for ski-schools: Try teaching **synchronized skiing**! It's loads of fun, and we recently discovered it is not as easy as it seems; even some advanced skiers find it a real challenge! It definitely promotes controlled turning, as well as speed control.

However, ski area managers could do what ski schools cannot: by placing obstacles on the slopes, encourage people to control their speed and be precise in their turns. Currently, the opposite is true. Ski areas promote **speeding** (not turning) by providing very wide, straight and well-groomed trails. Currently existing terrain parks and half-pipes encourage **jumps**, not **turns**.

Training gates desirable but unavailable

Personal experience #3: *During a recent trip to Big Mountain, MT, I tried to help a young lady in our club learn how to run gates. She wanted to race with us. She is a good skier and can do linked parallel turns quite well. Her main problem was psychological. All her turns were quick, fall-line, linked turns, designed to control speed. She was afraid to make her turns longer or ski some sections of the race-course straight, because she would pick up too much speed when the gates were too far apart for her comfort. What she needed was a graduated method of easing into it. Ideally, we would have set up some bamboo poles in places where her natural-rhythm turns happen. Then, after a run or two, gradually increase the distance between the gates, by a foot or two at a time. At that point, she was not yet ready for some traditional race-training. She just needed to get used to running gates, and hopefully get used to it gradually. So, I tried to **rent a few gates**, or at least some bamboo poles to set up a little training area. No such luck. Ski areas simply don't rent this stuff. If you pay the big bucks, they'll set up a real race course for you. But nothing just for a bit of informal practice.*

Personal experience #4: *How many times have you seen some training gates set up and you really wanted to try running them? Unfortunately, these are always private affairs, closed to the general public. Sorry, this is just for the particular ski club, or race team! No general admittance!*

It all boils down to the simple fact that, at most ski areas today, there is no place, no natural mountain feature, that would encourage skiers and snowboarders to turn, and practice turning. Skiing in the trees is the only such natural feature, but this is too advanced for most intermediate skiers, because it usually also means having to ski ungroomed slopes.

Personal experience #5: *Big White ski area in British Columbia recently came close to fulfilling the dream of having a **practice race course**, or at least I was hoping it would. I had high hopes of being able to run some gates as part of the new Telus terrain park there. To my great disappointment, it turned out that the race gates were not exactly part of the terrain park, but set up on a separate trail, hidden behind the terrain park and very hard to find. On top of that, during the 3 days that I was there, the race course was never once opened. This race course still operates with the old mind-set that it needs employees to supervise it, that it needs the signing of a liability release, ... and maybe even requiring an additional payment. Meanwhile, in the nearby terrain park, people were hurling themselves down a dangerous boarder-cross trail, with multiple skiers/boarders attacking the same curvy path simultaneously, and nobody asked them for any money, or for a liability release.*

Personal experience #6: *At the Far West Ski Association Convention in Long Beach, CA, in June 2005, **Glen Plake** (the famous extreme skier and star of several Warren Miller movies) expressed **some very similar ideas and feelings**. He spoke very eloquently, and with some sadness, about the fact that there are practically no practice gates available at any ski areas these days. Ski areas have largely neglected the main ingredient needed for skiing (and snowboarding) - the ability to make controlled turns. Glen Plake suggested the use of "whiskers" as training gates, since they are small, unobtrusive, and won't hurt anybody.*

Can you do something about any of this at your ski area? If not, please pass this on to someone who can. Thank you!

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