

A brief history of snowboarding at the Ski Club of Ireland

1994/1995 (Snow Season 1)

Spring:

Ski Club of Ireland purchases (for an unknown sum) a Dynastar Coupe du Monde board designed for deep powder rather than shallow Dendix.

1995/1996 (Snow Season 2)

Autumn:

Gerhard Mayhuber takes to the Dynastar like a fish to water in ski boots and on the way reminds Fintan Keatinge of a lift operator he had seen in Verbier, Switzerland four years earlier carving it up on a not dissimilar board. Michael Costelloe turns up on an asymmetrical Burton race board – nice, and the slopes of Kilternan are set to change forever.

Winter/Spring:

Gerhard mainly gets lost in skiing again. Fintan decides to teach himself how to board and later wishes he had worn decent pads. Michael hangs on in there. Rumors that the D’Arcys are snowboarding abound. Donald Minty (a smooth talking Scottish salesman and BSA [British Snowboard Association] grade 3 instructor) turns up in soft boots –novel!

Summer:

Emmet and Jacques D’Arcy soft boot it along with Donald and a variety of others, whose names are forgotten but will be remembered, on warm hazy summer evenings. Fintan is still on his hards and Nick Smith (BSA grade 2 instructor and all round nice guy) turns up from across the water. Air is taken off hay bales amidst other such silliness. Pauli Scharwzacher Joyce shows us how to ride the steep before he stacks big time on Dublin’s Dendix (he is

later to show the world his aerial antics in the 1999 World Skiing Championship Men's Downhill).

1996/1997 (Snow Season 3)

Autumn:

Fintan heads off to Tignes, France, to get a BASI (British Association of Snowsports Instructors) grade 3 snowboard licence, assisted by a SCI instructor bursary. 8 Oxygen 150 freeride boards and plate bindings (2 turned up) are purchased. Nick gets decent rental plate bindings from his mates in England. Donald starts getting snowboard gear into Great Outdoors. Gerhard still makes the occasional snazzy entrance in a flurry of impossibly quick turns. The Sunday Session is born and the general public are invited to give it a whirl.

Winter/Spring:

Once the extra bindings come in lessons start in earnest. Barry Smith turns up on the 'Purple Cow', another powder classic. Simon Kinley-Shortt does stupidly fast riding on the Dynastar with bindings of no fixed setting (ie loose). Daire O'Connell softs it with his Nitro stick and a few brave ski instructors get their fix. Deidre O'Neill and Catherine Roche give their all. As Jacques perfects the 180hop and Emmet satraps to master his own style tricks on the steep. A few memorable (and not so memorable) moments were had on the real thing - snow.

Summer:

Sessions are awash with technique for trainee instructors and hay bales rule again for the less timid. The public is beginning to cop on.

1997/1998 (Snow Season 4)

Autumn:

Classes begin again with demand ever upward. Mr. Michael Bates from the BSA and Scotland comes over to pass Barry, Daire, Emmet, Jacques and Simon for their BSA grade 3 Snowboard Instructor Licenses, as well as to drink a bit of lager.... Ten more boards (2*Nitro Gothic 157's, 6*Nitro Gothic 152's and 2*Nitro Gothic 147's) are eventually obtained, plus another ten sets of Burton rental plates (yes that's those friendly folk at Burton - just for Frank, sadly the situation and product dictate choice). Sunday is now heaving(ish).

Winter/Spring:

Emmet, Simon and Daire decide to head off to Sauze D'Oulx in Italy, which is nice for them even if it leaves the rest of us shafted – no, seriously...Fintan heads over to test the joys of snowflex in Kendal (not quite up to the quality of Sauze's powder through the trees, but..). Dylan, Moira, Alan, Richard, John, Dave and Dave appear on the scene to give the occasional helping hand. The Davy twins – John and Peter are also seen giving it loads. Dee Smith kindly donated a big cup for the first official Ski Club of Ireland Snowboard GS competition – Fintan half filled it with beer and sambuca. The people want more and a big hand must be given to all those who came up and took lessons, took knocks and took away our pads (perhaps inadvertently?)

Rossignol boards and bindings were purchased (though not delivered) and the instructor uniform debate raged on, we will not freeze...

On an international level snowboarding entered the Olympic arena in a cloud of marijuana (secondary inhalation) and TV's thrown from bedrooms (claims). The media had it hyped, but the competitors rode some fantastic turns (on swallow tails) – shame no air for those really warped people – that's FIS (Federation Internationale du Ski) for you, they must of forgotten all those aerial / freestyle shenanigans in the 70's.

Summer:

Not much if any boarding done as people were too busy having babies, raves and bouts of pre-millennial tension. The Irish Snowboarding Association (affiliated to the ISF [International Snowboard Federation]) was set up in America (of all places - modern communication) and apparently the Irish Snowboard Open Championships are held in a most convenient location for us - America (shame the Internet can't beam us up yet).

1998/1999 (Snow Season 5)

Autumn:

The season seems to start earlier every year - August, I kid you not. Fintan heads over to the British Dry Slope Championships in High Wycombe and scares himself witless in the boarder cross (one of these days at Kilternan), comes in the top 16 in the parallel slalom, following in Nick's tracks from the previous year and watches the judges of the big air get stupidly stoned while the riders put stupidly large amounts of distance between themselves and the wirebacked toothbrush stuff- loopy. Everyone everywhere in Ireland is wearing snowboard clothing - the powder sure is deep on Grafton Street!

Winter:

Daire is lured over to Holland by the Guilder, challenging work and the experience of.... living in a very flat country. Simon heads off to sunbathe in Sauze, before coming back shortly after to work long hours on the plastic. Barry is seen now and again in between working 7 days a week (the furry Irish kitten has 9 out 10 Kitty Kat eaters tied in knots - along with the traffic, and we call it progress), while the stalwart team of Nick, Jacques, Donald, Emmet and Fintan have their ups and downs for way less than the minimum wage. Minimal enough so that Kitzbuhl is visited and the powder of Soll is pulverized. All the good, good people out there keep us busy and electric

screwdrivers are still not purchased. Meanwhile out there in the real cold world of snow a lot of people are killed by avalanches, luckily one thing not designed into Dendix.

Spring:

Finally the days start getting longer, the evenings lighter and slopes and courses of Scotland beckon. Emmet, Fintan and Simon visit the Scottish Championships in Aviemore in the Scottish Highlands and on reflection probably wished they hadn't. There was a giant slalom in which they were placed in the top 20's/30's, a boarder cross that caused a few thrills and a supposed 3rd place for Fintan in the Masters (old people!) category and a big air that was beyond the scope of people used to jumping off hay bales and tooooooo much Scotch..... Back in Dublin the classes continue to be increasingly popular and the number of people freeriding during the Sunday Session increases. The end of season slalom now incorporates a hay bale bump which throws Nick sideways and sets the spectators hair on the end. Fintan wins his second in row and Kyle (Simon's cousin) gets the novice prize for a daring run or two. Barry Smith heads off down under to surf with his girlfriend.

Summer:

Due to the hectic work load handled by the instructors in the previous season a number of people (John Holland, John Smith, Murton Mann, Alan Hamilton, Eugene Tobin, Richard Tolan, Dave Keegan and Laurie O'Sullivan) who have been boarding with style during the last season are asked if they would like to become Snowboard Instructors and embark on a training program (of sorts!) assisted by ye olde faythful instructors of yore. There is still no sign of all the lovely snowflex features promised a year ago. Meanwhile in Sheffield, England they build a snowflex halfpipe and hits for boarders and skiers.....

1999/2000 (Snow Season 6)

Autumn:

Classes again start in the middle of August (which is still summer in my book, to be a volunteer or full time?) and by mid September things are fairly busy. At last a number of soft boot set ups arrive and are extremely popular with the riders. The overall number of boards increase to about 35 which means that the public can be more easily accommodated. Salomon send Donald 4 test boards which he kindly donates for use at the club (nice graphics, superfast) and the instructor jackets turn up which is nice and red. An Austrian ex pro-racer by the name of Thomas Zmugg appears and rides softs on a ridiculously steep race set up – carving baby! And then pulling wicked fakie moves, enough to make us artificial people just a tad jealous (it is not until later in the season that we discover his confidence – all over mid section protection as sold by Donald and apparently modeled at Soltex by young ladies wearing little else - lovely!).

Michael Bates (our old buddy) comes over to assess the trainee instructors and must have had a bad month as only 3 people (well done Alan Hamilton, John Holland and Murton Mann) qualified. The paperwork didn't seem to match the result in other people's cases and especially as the cost was expensive (not 'alf) a different solution to assessment is needed, After the celebrations / commiseration's the new instructors set to work providing great service on the regular snowboarding nights – Sunday, Monday, Tuesday and Thursday.

Winter/Spring:

Numerous trips are had by one and all with phone calls from mountain tops waist deep in powder, Hawaiian wood trashed on Austrian slopes, work in Thurles ("sure tis the finest"), further departures and drinks to Australia and global travel, ankles pulled on French slopes, 720's into mystical powder, elbows bust on fly high hay bale leaps, 'boardin bettys' on platforms, 'boardin dudes' with new duds, no snowflex (Newtown Mount Kennedy anybody?), Jacques gets engaged, Fintan gets engaged, Nick awaits twins, Donald supplies Dublin with snowboard gear, Irish Times columnists write about

their boarding experiences abroad, Himself writes about their boarding experiences here - before going belly up, RTE researchers want to know if they film a MacTwist, Elvis appears in the bushes eating burgers, the hay bale is replaced by the the Dendix Bambozzle roll-up, Clara and Keavey take flying lessons, John Smith starts pulling 360's and ribs, A1's are fully booked, boarders don't book more than 1 or 2 lessons, John Holland disappears to (to Tahoe), Alan goes Austrian cornice mad mate, Dave goes blond then blue, Richie gets it together, Murton goes skiing, Millenium Madness dies down (a bit), the seven snowboarders go to Tignes to see what a halfpipe can do to one's ego, what a snowpark is, what flat light can do for one's riding, what red wine is for, a lesson in bark texture, baling out of fog into bliss, boot fitting, edge testing (yeuch whose blood is that?), joint efforts, slush, lost valleys, snotty Val D'Iserians, dodgy bowels, wicked, wicked, wicked, booyacka Ali G, yellow lens, who's the fox, fat black dogs and sunshine. Roll on summer....!

Summer:

Babies, marriage and the rest of life take over. At this stage the author's memory gets crowded and time plays tricks – the following 6½ seasons are a bit of a blur but consist of some of the following.

2000/2001 (Snow Season 7) to 2006/2007 (Snow Season 13)

Autumn /Winter/Spring/Summer:

Classes become more popular and a host of people help out and get qualified including Rob Barnes, Quentin Smith, John Curtin, Ross Staunton, Jim Clifford, Laurie O'Sullivan, Paul Jones, Brian Logan and Vivienne McCourt. A recurring theme is people getting their instructor qualification and then going away for the season or years! How flighty....thinking of Simon (Sauze/New Zealand), John Holland (Caribbean), John Smith (Tignes/Soll), Murton (England/Chile) and Vivienne (France). Working longer weeks takes its

toll... Emmet, Barry, as do having babies...Dave, Fintan, Nick, Jacques, Donald, Alan, Brian (and their partners and wives).

High lights include a variety of rails and other hardware made by John Smith, which he duly trashed himself off, often with great style: the black steel tube, the double black steel tube, the sewer pipe, the rainbow rail and not forgetting the moment that pair of trousers disappeared into oblivion (ask Laurie for details).

Carrying on the penchant for hits and hurts have been Irish Snowboarders.com and the UCD snowboard club with some impressive looking boxes, table tops and jumps.

Irish Snowboarders.com also started the Saturday Evening Jam series combining boarding, food and music - a good combination, helped by the growth of university and college snowboard clubs.

Newer faces on the scene include a number of very hardworking trainee instructors whose commitment is much appreciated: Alan, Brian, Cain, Nick Batters and Shaun.

Talk of fun-parks and new snowflex features keep coming up and as of present are still events waiting to happen, although with the re-development of the hotel and club premises happening and planned they may not be so far off.

On an athletic note, Jen Grace, an American-Irish women tried to qualify for the slalom events in the 2006 Winter Olympics but sadly didn't get quite enough seed points. Good to see her up on the slope on a number of occasions.

Real snow was pulverised and slide on at numerous locations including Val Thorens (2001), Les Arcs (2002), St. Anton (2003), Tignes and Val D'Isere – the mythical powder week (2004), Courcheval (2004/2005), Habre-Poche/Argentiere (2005/2006), Canada, New Zealand, Switzerland, Spain, Andorra, The USA, Kiltarnan Co. Dublin and the Wicklow Mountains.

Thanks to all the people who ever strapped a board on their feet, the Ski Club office staff, presidents and back room boffins who keep the show on the road.

Here is to the next 10 years.

Fintan Keatinge