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There is a
Method!

PORTABLE TERRAIN PARK FEATURES: A 10-year EXPERIENCE

By Chuck Roberts



A portable terrain park feature is used as a training aid in beginning terrain park lessons, and for introducing more advanced terrain park maneuvers. Since terrain parks are often heavily trafficked, and because beginning features may not be available for the exclusive use of the ski school, I often utilize a portable feature which is used only by students during a class.

Previous articles (see References 1 through 3, below), introduced the concept of using portable terrain park features as teaching aids. This article reports on 10 years of experience in using a portable terrain park feature for teaching all levels of terrain park students.

Figure 1 shows a view of a portable feature that simulates a small box or dance floor. It is approximately 8 feet long and splits into two pieces for easy carrying. The top deck is composed of expanded polyethylene, which is light in weight, making it easier to carry. The top deck is mounted on a plastic conduit to raise the deck a few inches off the snow. This height will accommodate either cambered skis or snowboards while students are performing board slides. Snow anchors are provided to secure the feature to the snow. During a class, the portable feature faces parallel to the fall line on the snow and is used to teach various terrain park moves.

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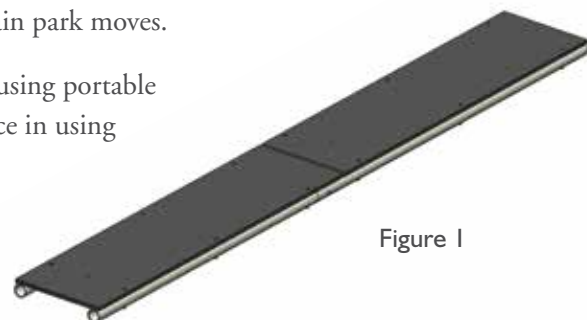


Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

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Figures 2 and 3 depict photographs of students performing an elementary move, the 50/50, or traveling straight down the long axis of the feature. (The term 50/50 comes from skateboarding where half the skateboard is on one side of a rail and half is on the other side). For the beginning free stylist, this move is certainly a less intimidating task on the portable feature, which builds confidence as the snowboard/skier graduates to more challenging features. Students practice ATML (Approach, Takeoff, Maneuver, Landing) - the essence of terrain park maneuvers. For beginners, the approach phase involves speed control and lining up properly. The takeoff is practiced by extension or “pop.”

Since the portable feature is close to the snow surface, there is no natural lift from the ramp; hence the “pop” is necessary. The maneuver phase is similar to most terrain park box features and the landing can be practiced by riding off or hopping off the end of the feature.

In Figure 4, the instructor utilizes the portable feature by helping the student achieve the proper stance and location on it. The student feels the difference between sliding on a feature and sliding on the snow. Depending on temperature and snow conditions, the resistance level (drag) of the feature may be more or less than that of the snow. Typical feature surfaces are constructed from high density polyethylene. Friction between skis and snowboards on this surface varies with temperature, snow coating, water coating and age. Practicing on the portable feature expands the student’s comfort zone so that they may more easily accommodate these variations.

In Figure 5, the instructor is shown statically explaining how the skier’s center of mass should be positioned on the feature, and illustrating a sliding exercise for those who have never ridden on one. The instructor is in complete control



Figure 5



Figure 6

of the feature and does not have to worry about others outside the class interfering with the students in the class.

Figure 6 is a typical freestyle seminar (class) made up of ski club members who frequent the ski area on weekends. Usually, skiers and snowboarders with a variety of abilities attend the seminar, ranging from terrain park “rats” (experts), to those who have never been on a feature. The novices are generally interested in learning how to make “hits” (perform maneuvers on boxes and rails), while the experts are often there to show off their expertise and try out new moves. The instructor can take advantage of this circumstance by having the experts help set up the portable terrain park feature. Having students set up a portable feature under the supervision of an instructor, teaches technical aspects of feature layout and design. This knowledge serves them well when they are choosing which features to hit in the terrain park. It is a customary safety measure utilized to instruct students to check out features to ensure that they can successfully perform a particular move. Knowledge of feature layout from setting up a portable feature helps the student choose a feature in the terrain park that is manageable at his or her skill level.

As before, the feature should be set up with the long axis parallel to the fall line (this reduces the chance of sliding off either side), and on a relatively moderate slope to avoid excessive speed on the feature. A small snow ramp is made at the entrance of the feature to facilitate those who prefer ride-on, rather than gap-on, which is more advanced.

Speed control on a feature is determined by the approach phase, where braking using a wedge, or side slipping a board occurs. Attempting to control speed on the feature may result in a fall. Many students attempt to change direction or reduce speed by edging on a feature. Unlike skiing on snow where edges readily engage the snow, the ski edges will not engage the top surface of the feature. Trying to do so would result in a loss of balance due to the edge moving out from under the center of mass. Practicing on the portable feature helps students learn to adjust for this condition.

Figure 7 is a view of a student performing an intermediate move, called a board slide. The portable feature also works well for students perfecting their advanced moves, such as lip slides and rotary maneuvers.



Figure 7



Figure 8 – Skier performing a 180

Like any terrain park feature, portable features wear out over time, and the top deck may need replacement. However, since the device is made of plastic, it does not dull the edges of skis or snowboards.

In conclusion, a portable feature has proven to be a very useful tool in teaching beginning through advanced terrain park lessons. Unfortunately, no such training aids are available commercially at this time. However, for those interested in constructing a portable terrain park feature, details are described in Reference 1.

Using such a portable feature is not only a great teaching tool, but for snowsports enthusiasts of all ages and abilities, it is a blast!

References

1. “Terrain Park Features Go Mobile,” Charles Roberts, Jr., Pro Rider, 2005.
2. “Unwrap the Mysteries in Flat Box Progression,” Charles Roberts, Jr., Professional Skier, Winter 2006.
3. “Welcome Beginners to the Boxing Club,” Charles Roberts, Jr., Pro Rider, 2007.

Chuck Roberts teaches at Wilmot Mountain, Wisconsin. He is a Level III ski instructor and has been teaching skiing since 1970. He is also a Level II snowboard instructor. He has taught snowboarding since 1987.

BONUS TIP:

It’s not too early to think about renewing your membership

By the time the first “Renew Now” emails are sent or the postman delivers renewal notices, the Central Division season will be over, and many of you will be moving on to summer athletic pursuits. But ignoring your membership renewal has a price – and that price is increasing. National late fees are doubling – from \$10 to \$20. Central Division late fees will stay the same at a total of \$10. That means you will pay a 25–35% penalty if you pay your renewal after June 30th. Mark your calendar now to allow plenty of time to pay by the deadline.