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CHILDREN'S SNOWSPORTS THE BEAR ESSENTIALS



Beginning Terrain Park Instruction for Young Skiers and Snowboarders

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Intermediate level skiers and snowboarders of the 7-11 age group, who are still developing their skills, often turn to the terrain park seeking even more fun. These youngsters typically try out the terrain park without taking any lessons or receiving any supervision, after watching how other kids use terrain features. Their results vary from elation after having successfully negotiated a feature (possibly by chance), to disappointment after they suffer numerous bumps and bruises. At such times, snowsports schools have an excellent opportunity to enhance a student's fun in a first terrain park experience. The following presents a student's beginning terrain park progression, and is directed toward children and young teens.

Feature Selection

Choosing the proper features for beginning terrain park skiers and snowboarders will determine the success of your lesson. The ingredients for a good beginning feature are typically: one of flat design, low height, ride on ramp and wide.

Figures 1A-1D show typical feature choices that will help ensure the success of your class. **Figures 1A** and **1B** show a typical “dance floor.” It is essentially a large reinforced board which is available in many terrain parks. The feature is approximately 4 feet wide and allows room for the skier or snowboarder to experience the sensation of traveling over a plastic surface without having a perfect line up. **Figure 1C** depicts a typical beginning straight box with a user-friendly ride-on ramp, and minimal height, found in many terrain parks. **Figure 1D** shows a portable terrain park feature that is placed on the snow during a class (Reference 1). A surface at low height is a good plan since it reduces the fear of falling off the feature, while allowing students to attain the skill of lining up and sliding. It is a good practice to check out the feature you plan to use in advance of your class to make sure it is positioned parallel to the fall line, level, and has a good ride-on ramp.

Beginning Terrain Park: Skiers

For the best results, your students should be intermediate to advanced skiers who are comfortable with maintaining a parallel position on skis. The straight fun box, or dance floor, would be the preferred feature to start the basics of terrain park moves. Introducing terrain park etiquette (Smart Style Program from NSAA) is recommended early on in the lesson and is typically displayed on an information sign (**Figure 2**) at the entrance to a terrain park. Encourage students to make a plan for using the park and then check out the features before using them. They should choose features that are consistent with their ability level and be respectful to other park users, when inspecting or utilizing the features. (Some Park rules include: Make a plan, look before you leap, easy style it, respect gets respect.) The Park and Pipe Instructors guide from PSIA-AASI covers the Smart Style Program in detail. (Reference 2)



figure 1A

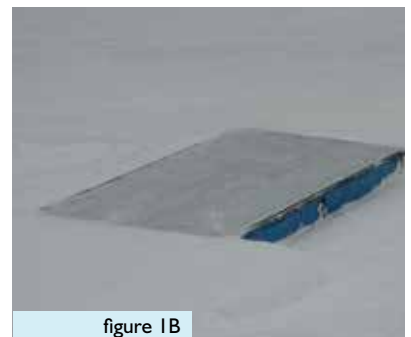


figure 1B



figure 2

The 50/50 (skiing straight over a box feature with skis parallel) is a good elementary move to start with and is the basis for many more advanced moves. The instructor should introduce the ATML (Approach, Take off, Maneuver, Landing) method that helps point out significant aspects of terrain park maneuvers. On a slight slope, students can practice a braking wedge which is used in the approach phase to adjust skier speed. Next, proceed from the braking wedge to a narrow flat ski parallel position (wedge change-up) which sets up the skier for the maneuver. A narrow parallel stance is necessary for boxes that may be only 12 inches wide. (A wide stance could result in the student straddling the feature.) When the students are comfortable with these maneuvers, the instructor may deploy the portable feature or select a suitable, uncrowded feature in the park in which to demonstrate the 50/50. Slowly stepping onto a box of low height from the side, and shuffling the skis, gives the class members a feeling of what to expect when sliding on plastic. Have the students try out a 50/50 maneuver on a beginner box (**Figure 1C**), emphasizing that they should line up by looking at the end of the feature. **Figures 3A-3D** are a sequence of photos showing a good 50/50 performed by a 10 year old skier.



figure 1C



figure 1D

In **Figure 3A**: at the approach, the student has adjusted his speed and is lined up with the feature with his feet together to accommodate the 1 foot wide feature. **Figure 3B** shows the student at the take-off, mounting the feature. **Figure 3C** shows the student performing the 50/50, sliding along the long axis of the feature with skis flat and parallel. At the landing (**Figure 3D**), the student skis away and is ready for the next “hit.” At this age level, lengthy explanations are not productive. Performing a good visual demonstration works well since most students in this age are primarily watcher-learners. A brief explanation on why this move works can be helpful. A basic tenant of this lesson is to take small steps toward the goal, while evaluating the skill development. Children at this age level tend to overestimate their skill level and may try to make significant leaps without taking the important smaller steps. Such actions can lead to disappointment.

Figure 4A-4D serve to aid in movement analysis toward correcting problems that are typically encountered in the beginning terrain park lesson. In **Figure 4A**, the skier has not properly lined up with the long axis of the feature which will result in the skier skiing off one side or the other of the feature before reaching the exit. Repetitive attempts at lining up properly, with some coaching from the instructor, usually eliminate this difficulty. Also, it helps to teach students to look at the end of the feature to aid in lining up. **Figure 4B** shows a student who suffered a loss of balance due to edging his skis while performing the maneuver. Since ski edges do not engage the plastic surface of a terrain park feature, they do not provide a means for correcting the position of the skis on a feature. The instructor can caution students to keep their skis flat, and if the skis are drifting off the feature, they should

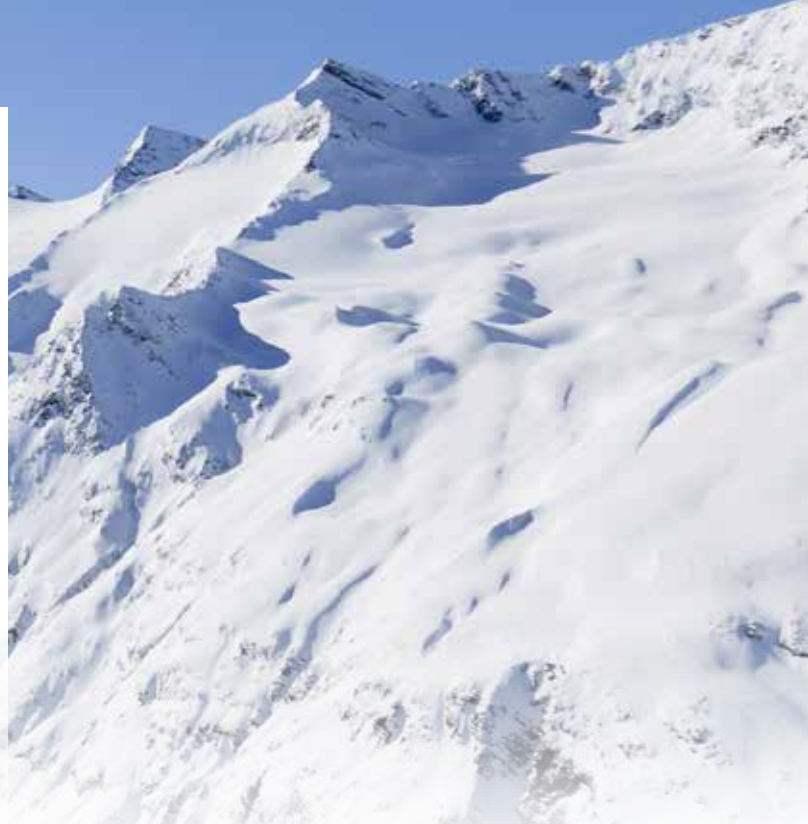


figure 3A



figure 3B



figure 3C



figure 3D

jump off and begin again. Emphasize that if a good line up with the feature is not achieved, the student should jump off rather than try to correct the trajectory over the feature.

Figure 4C shows a skier attempting to perform a wedge on a box. This can result in the skier straddling the box during the maneuver. (The risk of straddling the feature is also why the 50/50 is not performed on rails by skiers.) Attempting to make on-snow maneuvers on a terrain park feature is a common problem with beginning terrain park skiers requiring emphasis on keeping their skis flat and jumping off the feature, if the trajectory is not satisfactory. **Figures 4D** shows a student exiting a feature at mid-point after a bad line up. He merely steps off and tries again, demonstrating the value of features that are close to the ground.

Beginning Terrain Park Park: Snowboarders

The beginning terrain park lesson for snowboarders is similar to that for skiers. Your students should be intermediate to advanced level riders who are comfortable with linked toe and heel side turns with quick transitions. The straight fun box or dance floor, as shown in **Figures 1A & 1B**, would be the preferred feature to start the basics of terrain park moves. After reviewing terrain park etiquette (Smart Style)

and ATML, select a feature and demonstrate the 50/50. Emphasize the classic A-frame stance with shoulders and hips parallel to the snowboard with the head facing in the direction of travel. Many youngsters at this age level have developed an upper body twist such that the upper torso is facing in the direction of travel.

If this is the case when performing the take-off, the board tends to realign with the shoulders, and the student may inadvertently performs a board slide, attesting to the need for proper alignment (an A-frame stance). It should be noted that performing the 50/50 can reveal basic deficiencies in your student's riding behavior which when corrected, enhances the overall riding experience. The snowboard instructor should emphasize the value of lining up with the long axis of the feature, and looking at the end of the feature to assure a proper line up. Shuffling the board on the feature will develop a feel for riding on the plastic surface. It is important to explain to the class why the A-frame stance is necessary for this move, introduce exercises that reinforce the proper stance, and keep the group moving.

Figure 5A-5D show a reasonably good 50/50 performed by a 10 year old snowboarder. In **Figure 5A**, the student has



figure 4A



figure 4B



figure 4C



figure 4D



figure 5A



figure 5B



figure 5C



figure 5D

adjusted his speed by performing short pivots, or side slides, and is looking at the end of the feature. **Figure 5B** is the take-off with the board riding up the ramp, and well aligned with the feature. **Figure 5C** is the 50/50 hit where the student slides along the top surface of the feature with a relatively good A-frame stance. The student exits off the end of the feature, ready for the next hit (**Figure 5D**).

Figure 6A-6D depict some examples of snowboarders attempting a 50/50, which serves to illustrate movements that should be corrected. **Figure 6A** shows a student's typical difficulty in lining up with a feature. Some students turn reasonably well, but lining up with a feature presents a challenge. The instructor may need to continue to emphasize the A-frame stance and encourage repeated attempts at the feature. A typical problem with young riders is attempting to turn the board on the feature using the edges of the snowboard (**Figure 6B**). Emphasize a flat board on the feature with the knees positioned over the toes. In **Figure 6C**, the student has an upper body twist which will result in a board slide rather than a 50/50. Review of the A-frame stance would be appropriate, along with some all-mountain riding drills emphasizing a proper stance.



figure 6A



figure 6B



figure 6C

Conclusion

Beginning terrain park instruction can be fun for your students and help correct any riding deficiencies, thereby improving their all-mountain skiing or riding techniques. Choosing a feature, reviewing terrain park etiquette, demonstrating the 50/50, and utilizing movement analysis and correction are ingredients for a successful beginning terrain park lesson for youngsters. Further, skills developed in the beginning terrain park lesson will serve the students well when pursuing more advanced moves, and enhance their all-mountain skiing or riding.

References

1. 10 Years' Experience with Portable Terrain Park Features, Central Line, 2015.
2. Park and Pipe Instructors Guide, ASEAEF, Lakewood, Colorado 2005.

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