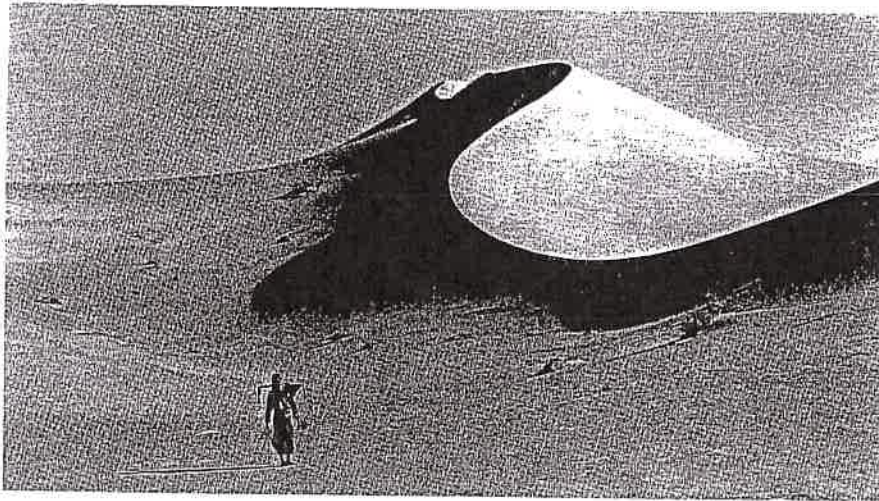


Quest for Adventure

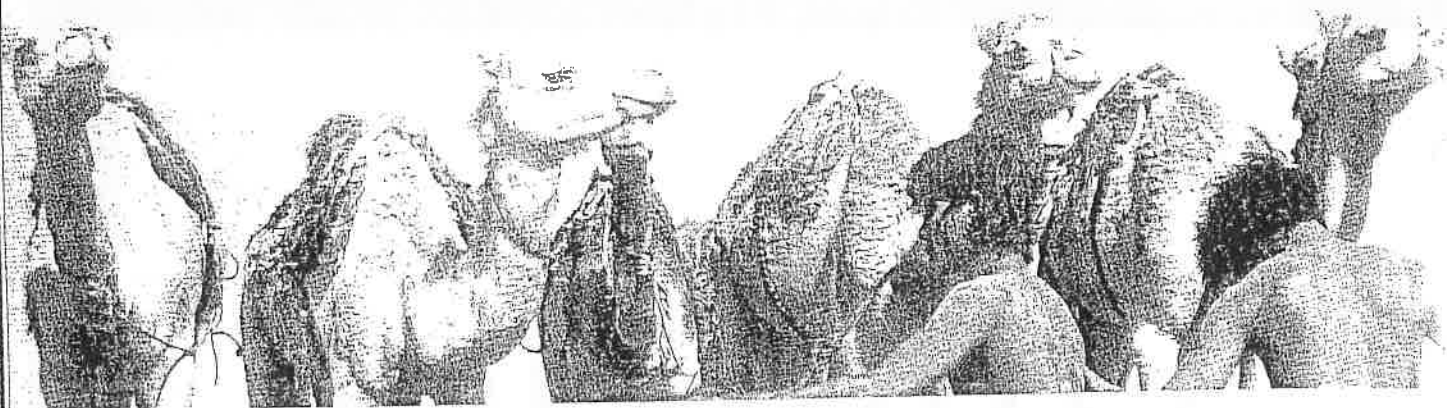


REMARKABLE FEATS OF EXPLORATION
AND ADVENTURE FROM 1950 TO 2000

Chris Bonington

*Introduction
and
Conclusion*

CASELL & CO
2000



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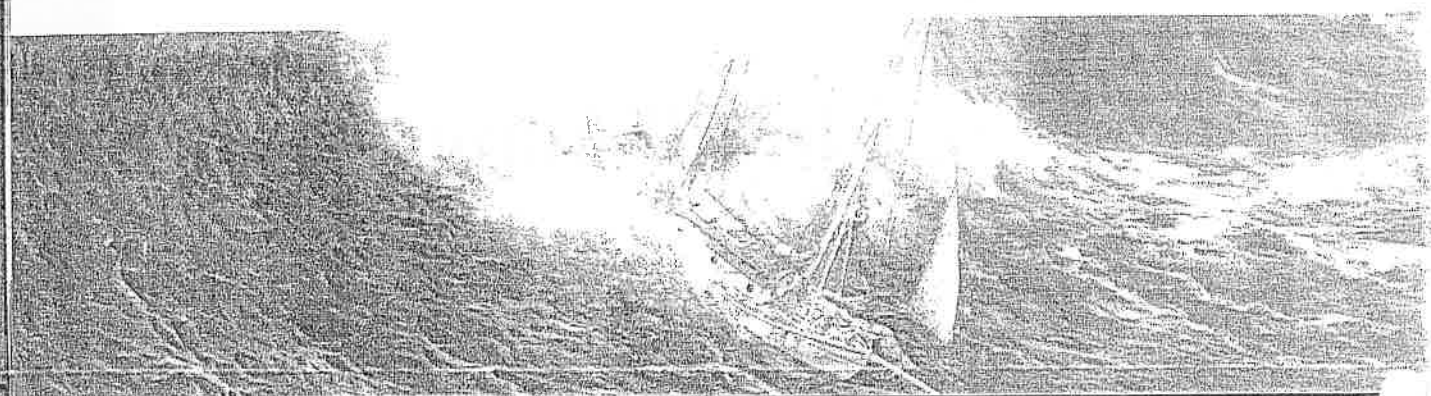
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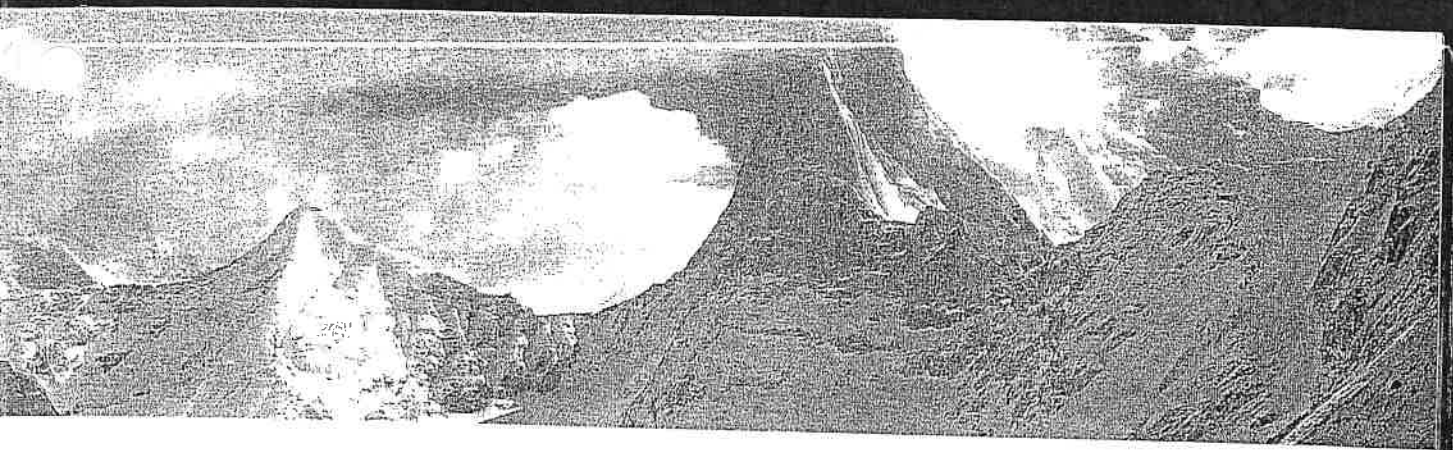
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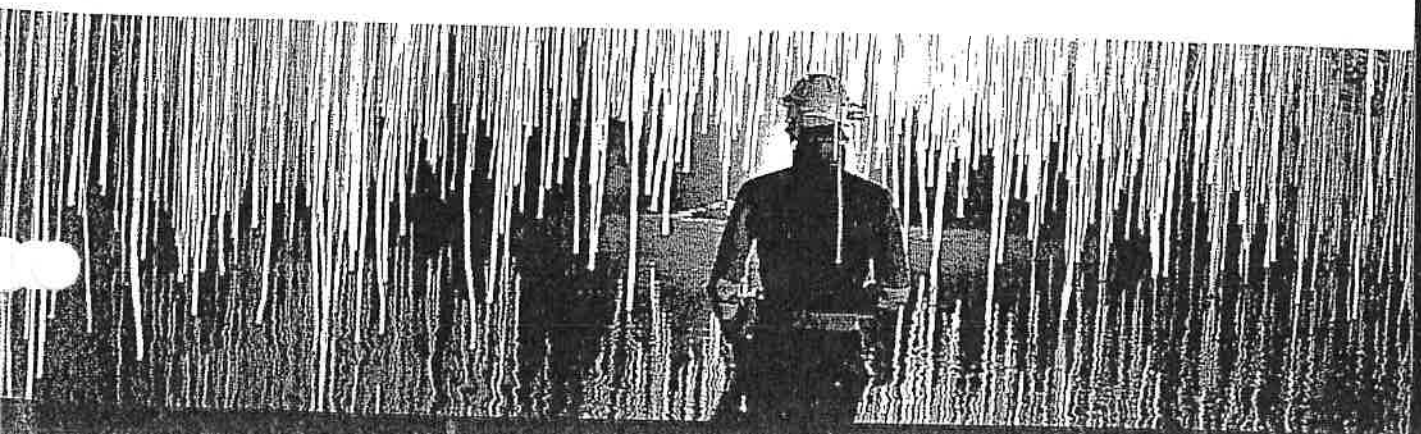
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Introduction

I ORIGINALLY WROTE *Quest for Adventure* through 1979 and 1980, setting my start point at the end of the Second World War, a period that was not only within my own conscious memory and the beginning of my own personal quest, but also one which marked so many huge social, economic and political changes. Bringing my investigation up-to-date covers just over half a century, and reveals some changes in the style and nature of people's quest for adventure which are not necessarily for the best.

The what and the why of adventure is the reason for this book. I should like to go back to my own beginnings, since I suspect that it is only through one's own experience that one can analyse motives and feelings. For me it started with a picture book of the Scottish hills, picked up at the age of sixteen. The pictures were in monochrome, showing rolling hills, rocky crags and shimmering waters. I was captivated in a way that I had never been before, longed to be among them, to reach their tops, to see beyond the confines of the page.

And then came a trip to stay with my grandfather in Ireland. He lived to the south of Dublin and from his garden I could see the Wicklow Hills. I caught a bus and set out on my first mountaineering expedition to climb one of the outlying hills but fled, frightened, when a great cloud of cumulus threatened to engulf me. I had no compass and anyway did not know how to read one.

But this was adventure. Tentatively, I was stepping into the unknown, had an awareness of danger – admittedly more imagined than real – and a love of the wild emptiness of the hills around me. The following winter a school friend and I hitch-hiked from London up to Wales. It was the long hard winter of 1951, and the whole country was clad in snow. Viewed from Capel Curig the Snowdon massif had for us all the scale and majesty of a Himalayan peak. Clad in school mags and wearing Army boots, we tried our first ascent by the Crib Goch Ridge, but were avalanched off a long way from the top. My school friend had had enough and hitched home, but I stayed on and made a solitary attempt on Gwader Fach the next day. It was a brilliant blue, sparkling day with great galleons of cloud sweeping over the tops. Once again I fled, afraid of getting lost, but on the way down stopped to watch some climbers on the Milestone Buttress, just above the road. They were roped together, moving slowly up the sheer rock, one at a time, tiny coloured blobs against the grey of the rock and

the white of the snow that covered every ledge. I knew then that was what I wanted to do. I can't define why or how, had never read a book about rock climbing, didn't even know that the game existed.

I found a friend of the family who did a little climbing and he took me to Harrison Rocks, a small outcrop of sandstone just south of London. It wasn't ten metres high. You climbed with the protection of a rope hitched round one of the many trees at the top of the crag. At the end of the day, I knew that I had found something I was good at and loved doing. The basic satisfaction of climbing is both physical and mental — a matter of co-ordination similar to any other athletic attachment. But in climbing there is the extra ingredient of risk. It is a hot, heady spice, a piquancy that adds an addictive flavour to the game. It is accentuated by the fascination of pitting one's ability against a personal unknown and winning through. Being master of one's destiny, with one's life literally in one's hands, is what gives climbing its fascination.

It also gives a heightened awareness of everything around. The pattern of lichen on rock, a few blades of grass, the dark, still shape of a lake below, the form of the hills and cloud mountains above might be the same view seen by the passenger on a mountain railway, but transported to his viewpoint among a crowd, he cannot see what I, the climber, can. This is not an elitist ethic, but rather the deeper sensuous involvement that the climber has with the mountains around him, a feeling heightened by the stimulus of risk.

These are the elements of adventure that I have discovered in climbing — the physical satisfaction of having complete command over one's body, a sense of risk in the process, an awareness of beauty and the exploration of the unknown. At its most satisfying this would mean one of the rapidly dwindling unknown parts of the world, but almost equally satisfying is a personal unknown, even if others have trodden that path before. The romantic adventurer has always had strong links with science and intellectual curiosity; the very act of trying the unknown, whether it be a stretch of unclimbed rock, a sheet of polar pack ice or an attempt to be the first to sail alone around the world, holds a challenge of the mind as well as the body.

But there is one more ingredient that appears in almost every adventure, as it does in everyday life — the spirit of competition, gratification of ego, call it what you will. Though today competition climbing has developed its own line of athleticism with set rules, historically and in theory climbing is a non-competitive sport. In practice, however, there is a very high level of competition. At its simplest level, a group of climbers bouldering almost inevitably start to compete, trying to outdo each other, to solve a climbing problem that has beaten the others. On bigger crags or mountains, it is reflected in the sense of urgency to be the first to complete a new route, be it on Scafell, the North Wall of the Eiger or Everest itself. In any activity competition is a spur to progress. Although there are undoubtedly exceptions, I am sure that most of us respond to the stimulus of competition and, having won, enjoy the fruits of success, be it the approval of one's peers or acclaim from a much wider field.

History has offered plenty of opportunities for the adventurously inclined to sail the seas in search of merchandise or plunder, to trek overland to distant Cathay, but adventure as we know it today is a very recent phenomenon. The concept of climbing mountains or sailing small boats just for the fun of it could only come to those with sufficient wealth and time to indulge their whims. It came on the back of the Industrial Revolution, which brought a certain amount of leisure and money, at least to a privileged minority. At the same time, the growing safety and blandness of urban life sparked the desire to escape and seek the stimulus of the unknown, the thrill of defying danger and enjoying the physical beauty of nature entirely for its own sake. During the first half of the twentieth century, adventure games remained the prerogative of a small, middle-class minority. If you were working a six-day week, with only a week's holiday each year, even if you were able to afford to buy a small boat, you would not have had time to sail it. It was cheaper to go climbing, but, without a full weekend, there was not enough time to get started. In addition, two destructive world wars consumed the energies and, in many cases, the lives of two generations.

It has only been since the Second World War that the field has been laid open to almost anyone in the developed world who craves such a release. This is the reason why people in their thousands tramp the hills, sail their boats, fly their gliders. The ordinary person has been given both the time and the money to do it. It is also why comparatively few people from the Third World play the adventure game – they have not yet reached this level of affluence or leisure. The Sherpa in Nepal is happy to be a high-altitude porter, frequently enters into the spirit of an expedition, is keen to reach the summit, but he is still doing this entirely professionally. For the Nepalese to organise their own expeditions to their high mountains is still a rare occurrence. The more successful ones could undoubtedly afford it, for they are well off, even by Western standards, but I suspect they are too busy consolidating their new-found positions. They are members of a society in a state of fast transition and it is their children or grand-children who will, perhaps, feel the restless urge towards adventure for its own sake.

In this book I want to look at a wide spectrum of adventurous activities, to see what they have in common, not so much in motive – the why of it – but rather the 'how'. In studying what took place in an adventure, be it an attempt to sail round the world, cross one of the Poles, or climb a mountain, the reasons for doing it emerge on their own. But the field of adventure is so wide I have given myself a few ground rules in deciding which ventures to study.

To me, adventure involves a journey, or a sustained endeavour, in which there are the elements of risk and of the unknown, which have to be overcome by the physical skills of the individual. Furthermore, an adventure is something that an individual chooses to do and where the risk involved is self-imposed and threatens no one but himself. It could be argued that the man who volunteers to join the Army, or becomes a mercenary or perhaps a member of the security services, is also an

adventurer answering the tempting call to play the danger game. I am aware that this is what attracted me to the Army when I became a professional soldier for a few years. It is something the recruiting posters play upon, but in the end one cannot escape from the fact that the soldier's adventures and thrills are at the expense of others, and that part of the thrill of adventure can become the thrill of the hunt. This goes outside my own ground rules.

There are different levels of adventure which one can separate in the same way as the athlete distinguishes between a hundred-metre sprint or a marathon. The hundred-metre dashes of adventure are activities that are very intense but of short duration. Take the solo rock climber making a new route in North Wales or the English Lake District. His is undoubtedly the ultimate in adventure, for his life is literally in his hands and, if he makes a mistake and is a couple of hundred metres above the ground he will almost certainly die. He is faced with the challenge of the unknown and the extreme limits of muscular control. It needs an intense level of

commitment, but the period involved is comparatively short. At the top of the crag the tension is over and the climber can return to a pint at the pub, home, family, friends. The same can be said of other extreme-risk sports — steep gully skiing, white water canoeing, hang gliding or dinghy sailing on a stormy day; in all there is an immense concentrated commitment.

The marathons of adventure are to Himalayan peaks, to the Poles and across the oceans. The biggest difference is the obvious one of scale, where the element of time is perhaps as important as size. The immediate risk and skill level might not be so concentrated, but the expedition requires

both physical and mental stamina, the capacity to live with others for a long period of time or, perhaps even harder, to be alone and self-sufficient.

From my own point of view I have worked my way through the various levels of the game; first as a necky young rock climber, tackling the most difficult rock climbs in Britain, next to the middle-distance of the Alps, with climbs like the Central Pillar of Frêne and North Wall of the Eiger, and then, in more recent years, to the great peaks of the Himalaya, with all the complexities of logistics, human relations and the sheer scale of everything involved.

In this book I want to look at my fellow marathon-runners, to see what we have in common, where we are different. I am not unduly concerned by the level of mechanical aid used in the adventures I have selected, since in almost every case some kind of tool or mechanical assistance is needed. My own personal ethic in planning an expedition has always been to use the minimum force that I have felt would give the enterprise concerned a chance of success. Thus, on the South-West Face of Everest, we had a team of very nearly a hundred, using oxygen, specially designed

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tents that were like miniature fortresses, and the best equipment available at the time. Since five expeditions that had been similarly equipped had failed, this seemed a reasonable scale of effort at that particular time. Having achieved success, I would never want to launch a similar expedition, since the challenge is forever to reduce the size and force of each enterprise to its most fundamental simplicity. Reinhold Messner succeeded in climbing Everest from the north side on his own, without the help of oxygen. In 1988 four Czech climbers succeeded in climbing the South-West Face alpine-style, without using oxygen, but perished on the way down, exhausted after spending too long above 8000 metres. Is there perhaps a finite barrier to what human beings can achieve either in high-altitude performance or in athletics? Who can tell? Perhaps someone some day will climb the South-West Face solo and survive to tell the tale.

In my selection of adventures I have only been able to deal with a limited number of subjects in the detail that is essential to convey the story of what happened. So I have chosen the ventures which have been important, innovative 'firsts' – the first ascent of Everest, the first crossings of both Poles, the first circumnavigation of the world by balloon, the first non-stop solo voyage in a sailing boat round the world. I am uncomfortably aware that I will inevitably have left out many ventures that readers will feel are either more representative or more outstanding than those I have included; my answer can only be that the ones I have chosen are ones that especially inspired me and are examples which, I hope, will illustrate a broad spectrum of post-war adventure.

In checking out adventures over the last twenty years for this new edition I became aware of the huge increase in the numbers of people undertaking all forms of adventure, linked to a decreasing number of obvious firsts to achieve. In the climbing field the 8000-metre peaks had all been climbed by 1962, Everest was soloed by Messner in 1980 and, although there are still a huge number of smaller unclimbed peaks and even more unclimbed faces and ridges on some of the highest peaks in the world, the easily identifiable superlatives have been achieved. The same can be said of sailing, while in polar travel there has been a refinement in style rather similar to that of climbing, with a reduction of numbers and level of support, the ultimate goal being to traverse the Poles alone and unsupported. It could be argued that the last unique first, the equivalent of the first ascent of the highest point on earth, was in the air with the first complete non-stop circumnavigation of the world by balloon in the spring of 1999. The year before, Brian Milton, became the first man to fly round the world in a microlight.

While there has been an explosion in the number of people going adventuring, the way adventure is pursued has changed. We seem to have entered an era of adventure-on-a-plate, neatly packaged and sold at an appropriate price. You can join a commercial expedition to attempt Everest for prices ranging from \$25,000 to \$65,000, race around the world in a 18-metre yacht for around £25,000 or be conducted to one

of the Poles. The terrain remains the same – Everest, the Southern Ocean or the wastes of the Polar Ice Cap are no different from when the original adventurers climbed or crossed them. The fact that they are more attainable does not render them less dangerous. However, that special quality of the unknown has vanished from this level of adventuring. The guided client need hardly think, indeed is encouraged not to take the initiative.

On Everest the tents are erected, the food is cooked, the fixed rope set up, the acclimatisation programme carefully planned until the client sets out for the summit from the South Col. It can, of course, all go terribly wrong, as it did in the spring of 1996 when nine died in an appalling storm. Guides, starved of oxygen, made faulty decisions; clients, without the experience to cope for themselves in a crisis, just sat and waited to be told what to do or, in trying to get down, lost their way. The very shallowness of the tailor-made adventure-on-a-plate proved their undoing. There has also been a change of emphasis amongst the elite. This is particularly noticeable in the field of mountaineering.

With the obvious firsts already climbed, the next step is to try to make ascents that are faster, in better style, without supplementary oxygen or the aid of Sherpas. There is the challenge of skiing or paragliding from the summits and the growing popularity of collecting summits – the seven highest peaks of each continent or, much more challenging, the fourteen peaks of more than 8000 metres, all of which are either in the Karakoram or the Himalaya. The first person to do so was Reinhold Messner, arguably the greatest innovative climber of all time, and yet in setting this trend he has changed the emphasis in climbing from exploration to peak-bagging, which ends up all too often in following the easiest possible known route to the summit.

It is very noticeable that fewer new routes are being tackled today. The ascent of new routes, which I believe is at the core of climbing adventure, has always been a minority activity. The vast majority of climbers are happy to follow in the footsteps of others, guide books clutched in their hands. But there is and always has been a small elite who have gone for new routes and unclimbed summits. There are still literally hundreds of unclimbed peaks of between 5000 and 6000 metres in Central Asia. There are unclimbed faces and ridges on many of the 7000-metre peaks. In describing the first ascent of the North Face of Changabang, climbed in 1997, I have tried to capture the magic and challenge of this style of climbing.

I am still attracted by what seems at first glance to be impossible. To me, the ultimate in adventure is to convert this impossible into the feasible, and this is what all the adventures I have chosen have in common. Together they represent a complex mosaic, the component pieces of which differ enormously in so many ways, but which contribute to a fascinating overall pattern.

CHRIS BONINGTON

Conclusion

IS THERE A COMMON FACTOR BETWEEN the adventures and adventurers described in this book? In basic motivation, spirit, call it what you will, I think there is, even though the adventurers themselves vary enormously in personality and style. In the fifty or so years covered by this book there have been huge social and technological changes which have also affected the way we venture. Yet I believe the fundamentals remain the same.

If we examine the complex mosaic of adventure, patterns emerge; there are differences of proportion but a uniting theme. Every one of the ventures I have described represents a plunge into the unknown to try to satisfy mankind's insatiable curiosity about ourselves, our reactions to stress or danger, to finding the boundaries of our physical capability or that of a craft. In each venture there is some level of risk. Thor Heyerdahl or Vivian Fuchs were not interested in risk for its own sake, considering themselves scientists rather than adventurers, but they were undoubtedly prepared to accept a very high level of risk to achieve their objectives. The climber or cave diver, on the other hand, who is much more directly stimulated by risk, is not trying to do something dangerous dangerously. Rather they each seek out a situation of high risk and gain an intense stimulus, which can reach levels of euphoria, by being in complete command.

Tom Robbins, in his zany novel titled *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* defines this: 'The principal difference between an adventurer and a suicide is that the adventurer leaves himself a margin of escape (the narrower the margin, the greater the adventure). A margin whose width and breadth may be determined by unknown factors, but whose successful navigation is determined by the measure of the adventurer's nerve and wits. It is always exhilarating to live by one's nerves or towards the summit of one's wits.'

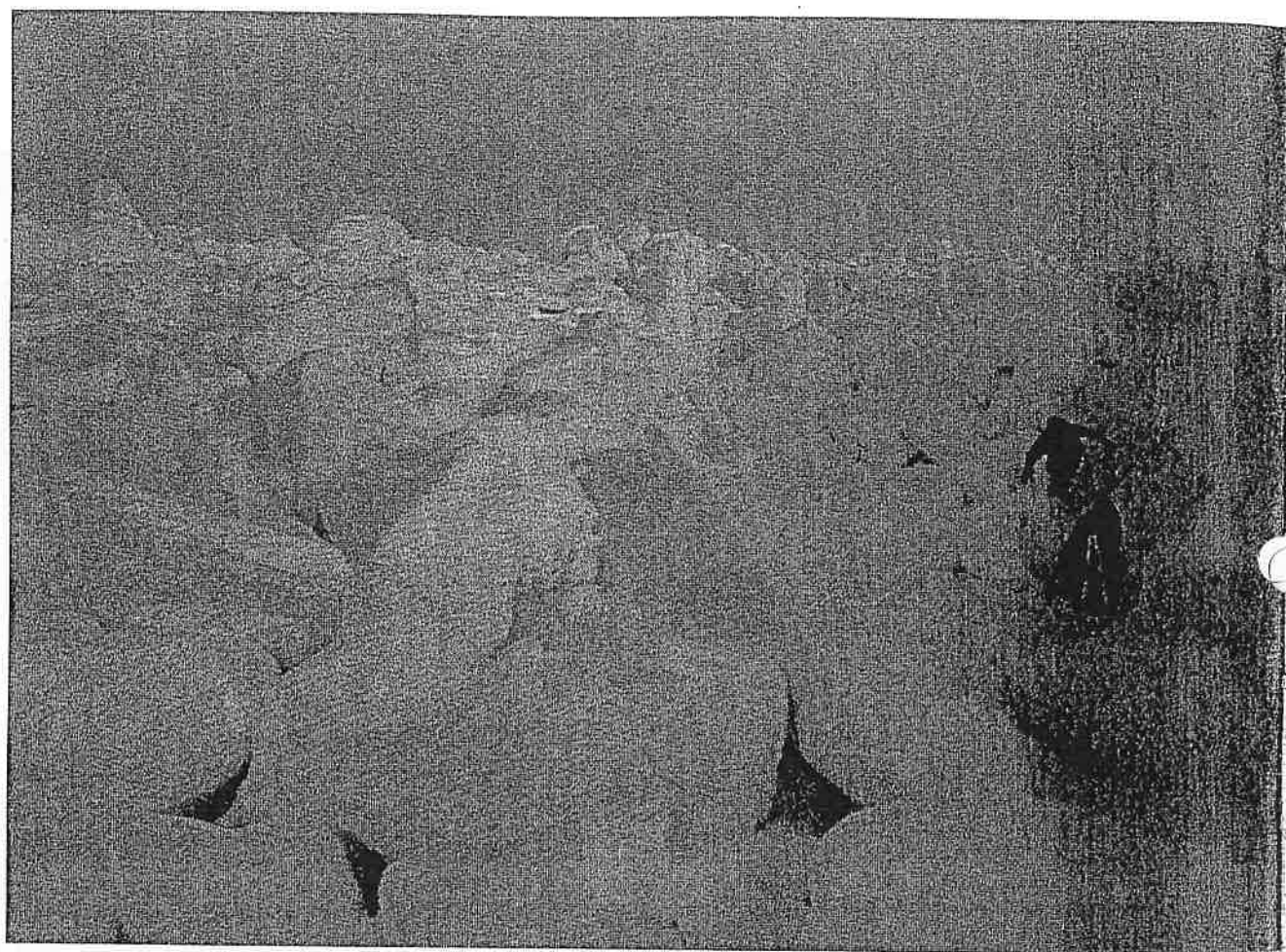
The margin of escape varies with the individual but arguably gets slimmer as successive generations stretch the limits and refine the techniques. In climbing, the ultimate is undoubtedly going solo, when your life is literally in your own hands and if you fall you are almost certainly going to die. Messner took this concept to the limit on the Diamir Face of Nanga Parbat and then on Everest. The same could be said of long solo ocean voyages or polar treks. Messner and David Lewis use very similar language in describing their need to push themselves to the limit to 'find' themselves,



ABOVE Paragliding high over the Zaskar region in the Indian Himalaya.

though the ingredients of this experience at sea and on a mountain are very different. Solitary sailors need greater reserves of self-sufficiency than mountaineers; the periods that they have to withstand loneliness being measured in hundreds of days. On Nanga Parbat or Everest Messner was alone for a few intense days. The moment-to-moment risk and physical stress were more continuous and unremitting than those of the solitary sailor, who matches them only in concentrated moments of crisis, such as the horror, known to practically every round-the-world yachtsman, of being knocked down in the Southern Ocean.

It is the media who batten on ghoulish statistics after each adventuring fatality. In purely statistical terms cave diving is probably the most dangerous of all adventure activities. But mountaineering, particularly at altitude, must run it close and certainly focuses press attention. One in three climbers who set out from the top camp for the summit of K2 die on the way up or down. Or to put it more personally, Voytek Kurtyka, who climbed the South Face of Changabang with MacIntyre and Porter and is one of the most successful mountaineers in the world, has commented in an



ABOVE Børge Ousland hauling his sledge, which weighed 178 kilograms, across Antarctica.

interview that eighty per cent of the best Polish Himalayan climbers are now dead. Even the survivors, people like myself, Doug Scott, or Kurtyka himself, cannot claim to be alive because we have more cunning, know when to turn back, or are more cautious, for we have all had our narrow escapes when only luck has saved us. Why do we do it if it is so dangerous? The stimulus of risk is undoubtedly a strong lure, combined perhaps with the demonstrably foolish belief that it is never going to happen to me. This stimulus of risk creates a sense of heightened awareness. Doug Scott felt this on the Salathé Wall of El Capitan. He and his climbing partner, Peter Habeler, had already spent one night on the wall; hands were chafed and sore; they were fully committed, for retreat would have been difficult, but Doug was also totally attuned to his surroundings:

'On Broad Ledge a frog leapt on the scene. My surprise changed to wonder as I contemplated that little frog and its place on the vast monolith of El Cap. How many more were there, I wondered. Perhaps enough to fill a ten foot square box. Then he hopped away into the rock, so perfectly camouflaged that I couldn't spot him again. I felt really good up there because of that frog; he seemed to show that we were all in it together — not just the El Cap scene, but the whole business of being alive.

'I looked around with a new intensity and watched a drop of water trickle down the dusty granite, a clear crystal that flashed a brilliant light and was gone, to be burnt up by the sun that had momentarily given it life. I traced his wet path upwards to a crevice and considered its route down through the rock from the melting snow hundreds of feet above.

'I felt completely relaxed.'

It is this sense of heightened awareness and perception of beauty, of being alive, of physical accomplishment, that raises adventure, despite its inevitable periods of grinding effort and agonising discomfort, from being an exercise in masochism to a much broader, richer experience.

The self-imposed hair shirt is present to a greater or lesser degree in every adventure. What would be memorable about the achievement without it? The struggle seems particularly unrelenting in polar travel. Wally Herbert's Arctic crossing is still the longest-ever polar journey, but subsequent travellers have refined the challenge. Naomi Uemura from Tokyo was the first to travel alone to the North Pole, but he used dogs and had a supply drop. The first man to reach the Pole unaided, hauling his own sledge, was the Norwegian, Borge Ousland in 1994. Two years later he went on to be the first to cross Antarctica alone and unaided, pulling a sledge weighing 178 kilos and, using a para sail when the wind was in his favour, he covered a distance of 2845 kilometres in sixty-four days. Polar travel has come a long way since Fuchs' epic crossing in 1957-58.

New materials and improved communication have enabled the modern adventurer to stretch the limits even farther and increase the safety factor. GPS (Global Positioning System) technology gives the sailor or polar traveller an instant fix on their position; satellite 'phones and lightweight radios can aid rescue, as when Ranulph Fiennes was in severe pain from kidney stones on his solo bid to cross Antarctica, or when Messner and his brother nearly drowned in their effort to make a North Pole crossing.

New technology has also created new forms of adventure. The development of the paraglider enabled Jean Marc Boivin to fly from the summit of Everest, while others have undertaken increasingly long flights and journeys. British flyer Bob Drury is exploring the Himalaya by walking to high launch points, then paragliding over peaks and passes as far as he can, attuned to the vagaries of up-draught and wind, until forced to land, then walking on to the next spot from where he can take off once again. He describes its magic:

'I can't believe where I am. The stark clarity of this incredible landscape contrasting against the cold deep blue of the unpolluted high altitude sky leaves me feeling like I should be seeing it all from the safety of a Boeing 747. I've always known that one day I'd get to Zanskar, but never dreamt I might see it while sitting comfortably in a little chair at 6500 metres, suspended under a nylon bag, supported by millimetre thick strings.

'I love the feeling of freedom you get from free flying, you are totally exposed to your environment and the elements on a paraglider. You feel the temperature fall and your heartbeat increase as you rise ever higher and the violent buffeting of the

thermals tells you that you're no passenger up here — you, and only you, can keep yourself alive.

A less attractive, but equally undeniable, element involved in adventuring is the ego factor or, to put a slightly more acceptable face on it, the competitive element. In looking primarily at the innovators in adventure I have found myself concentrating on the record setters in whom this urge to be first plays a strong motivational part. It is a rare adventurer who does not have any of this element in his or her make up. Moitessier belatedly discovered he didn't have it when he was in the position to win the Golden Globe Race and collect the prize and the plaudits, but

*Below Bill Tilman put
an ad in The Times
'Hands wanted for long
voyage in small boat;
no pay, no prospects,
not much pleasure.'*



instead he chose to sail on half way round the world again and drop out in Tahiti. Donald Crowhurst had such a desperate urge to succeed he became the victim of his own ego and the publicity machine he had created. Eric Shipton lacked the single-minded ambition to reach the top of Everest but found profound satisfaction in exploring the Patagonian Ice Cap. Exploration was the end in itself. It did not have to prove something or provide an entry for the record books.

Shipton's climbing companion of pre-war years, Bill Tilman, shared the same non-competitive philosophy. Tilman had established himself as one of the world's outstanding high-altitude mountaineers in 1936 when he climbed Nanda Devi (7816 metres), at that time the highest and by far the most technically difficult peak yet climbed in the Himalaya. But he, like Shipton, believed there were more interesting things to do than attaining summits. After the war he turned to adventurous sailing voyages in the Southern and Arctic Oceans. His attitude was summed up by the advertisement he placed in the personal column of *The Times*:

'Hands wanted for long voyage in small boat; no pay, no prospects, not much pleasure.'

Setting aside this extreme viewpoint, the lure of adventure is easy to understand, since I suspect that most of us are attracted by it. With some it gets no further than day-dreaming fantasies or the vicarious excitement of following others in print or on television. For many it is the modest thrill of climbing a local hill on a misty day, not sure of where you are, perhaps a little apprehensive, and then finding the summit, or sailing in coastal waters, or taking a hot air balloon up on a summer's afternoon. Today we can indulge in the more instant thrills of white water rafting, bungee jumping, free fall parachuting or gorge scrambling. Whereas twenty years ago the average walker, sailor or weekend climber was content with what was on their own doorstep, the world has shrunk to such a degree that with better communications, cheap flights and more disposable income, what was once unattainable wilderness now can be reached by package tours, be they to the Poles, the Himalaya or the wilds of Patagonia.

You no longer need to serve an apprenticeship before thinking of walking to the South Pole, sailing round the world or reaching the summit of Everest. A specialist outfit will take you there. While purists decry this development, I see it as an inevitable step in the evolution of adventure and I cannot begrudge the individual who has a dream which is allowed to come true. For the one thing I am certain of is that people in ever-increasing numbers will continue to seek adventure as a foil to a life that is becoming more pressured and dominated by technology, taking us farther and farther from the natural environment.

At the same time there is a danger that the increase in numbers and the commercialisation of adventure could damage the very places in which we seek our release. In this respect we need to find a balance and show some restraint for the sake of future generations. The great superlative challenges, the first ascent of Everest, the first circumnavigation of the world by balloon, the first solo crossing of the Poles may all have been achieved, but there are still unclimbed mountains, unsailed seas and breezes to carry us on our own personal quests for adventure.

Philosophy, Risk and Adventure Sports

Edited by Mike McNamee

2007

includes chapter
by
Loland
(phenomenology
of
snowboarding)

9 Outline of a phenomenology of snowboarding

Sigmund Loland

Introduction

In the 1960s, an American surfer, Sherman Poppen, developed what he called the 'snurfer', a kind of a single water ski for use on snow with a traction pad on the middle and a rope fastened at the front. The device was primitive and gave little control, and the rides were risky. The snurfer was developed further by skiing and surfing enthusiasts such as Tom Sims, Dimitrije Milovich and Jake Burton Carpenter. By the end of the 1970s, the snowboard had found its form more or less. In the mid- and late 1980s, stimulated by further technical innovations and by a televised world-wide professional tour starting in 1986-7, snowboarding developed into one of the main sport subcultures among young people. In the mid-1990s, an estimated 2 million people snowboarded all over the world. Perhaps surprisingly, more snowboards were sold than alpine skis.

Gradually, the phenomenon of snowboarding caught academic, commercial and professional interest. Its immense growth led to the establishment of snowboarding schools and to the development of various instructional materials. Snowboarding technique was analysed from the perspectives of pedagogy and didactics, and to a certain extent within biomechanical frameworks (Reichenfeld and Bruechert, 1995; Fabbro, 1996; Svensk Utförsäkning, 1998). The instructional and scientific material provides good descriptions of the elements of snowboarding technique and how to learn it. However, the descriptions may seem narrow in the sense that they offer little or no understanding of the *esprit* of snowboarding in terms of its values and the reasons for its success. These latter topics have been pursued by sports sociologists, anthropologists, and ethnographers alike. Scholars such as Humphreys (1997), Anderson (1999), Heino (2000) and Christensen (2001), to name a few, understand snowboarding as part of a late modern or post-modern youth subculture, and as (healthy) opposition to highly organized, institutionalized and standardized competitive sport. Moreover, with popular films and images of radical descents in deep snow by snowboarding icons such as Craig Kelly and Terje Haakonsen, the sport has been linked closely to values such as freedom and individualism, risk and adventure.

Accounts of the biomechanical and pedagogical aspects of snowboarding are crucial in the education of instructors and important in the learning of the sport. Studies of its socio-cultural importance help the interpretation and under-

standing of the phenomenon and provide much needed critical perspectives on a rapidly growing sport. To a certain extent, the two perspectives seem to complement each other. Still, they can be criticized for not taking seriously some of the key features of the phenomenon of snowboarding *per se*. Within biomechanics, there is no room for expressions often used by snowboarders referring to experiential qualities such as 'joy', 'flow' and 'rhythm'. Similarly, social scientists have to a certain extent overlooked unique characteristics of the very practising of snowboarding and interpreted the sport as a typical expression of more general processes of modern society. In a discussion of so-called board sports (surfing, skateboarding and snowboarding), Heino (2000: 175) states that 'the stronger connection is not in technique but in the resistance of their predominantly youth cultures to the dominant culture'.

The aim of this chapter is to sketch an approach to snowboarding that seems less theoretically and methodologically fixed and more open to interpretations of the activity in itself. More specifically, I will offer a phenomenological account of the sport. First, to indicate the perspective adopted, I list some rather loose theoretical and methodological premises. Second, I outline some key points in a phenomenology of snowboarding free-riding technique, the most open and adventurous form of the sport. In the third and concluding section, I reflect upon how phenomenological analyses may provide a starting point for other scholarly analyses of snowboarding in particular and sporting activities in general.

Phenomenology of movement

The phenomenological approach has roots in a reaction against what was considered a distanced and scientific approach towards human conduct and experience, especially as found in the psychology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The aim of the founding father of philosophical phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, was to analyse human intention 'in itself' (Bell, 1991). Husserlian phenomenology is occupied with exploring the basic structures of consciousness, or, more specifically, the basic structures of human intentionality. A key phenomenological thesis is that human consciousness is always deliberately and purposely directed in a very fundamental way – it is always 'consciousness of something'. From this premise, phenomenologists proceed and study the *noema*, or 'that which presents itself to consciousness'. Husserl's methodological advice was to go *zu den Sachen*, to the things in themselves. Through a phenomenological reduction (*Epoche*), an intentional act in which prejudices and previous knowledge are 'bracketed', the essence of an experiential structure can be intuitively grasped and isolated. Through systematic reflection and 'free, imaginative variation' (another methodological slogan among phenomenologists), the researcher can bring to light its hidden meanings and qualities.

These premises need not be understood in essentialistic terms. The aim of this chapter is not to establish some kind of pure phenomenology, or to try to grasp 'the essence' or 'true nature' of snowboarding. Obviously, human practices cannot

be isolated and analysed independent of their social and cultural contexts. Nevertheless, my thesis is that in studies of snowboarding (as of many other sports), embodied practice, that is, the sport as 'lived' from the practitioner's point of view, is easily overlooked. In a phenomenological account, lived, embodied experience is given epistemological primacy as a mode of access to the real. French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes:

I am my body, at least wholly to the extent that I possess experience, and yet at the same time my body is as it were a 'natural' subject, a provisional sketch of my whole being. This experience of one's own body runs counter to the reflective procedure which detaches subject and object from each other, and which gives us only the thought about the body, or the body as an idea, or not the experience of the body or the body in reality.

(Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 198–9)

In what follows, a snowboarder is understood as embodied, intentional consciousness that interacts with the world in dialectic, meaning-producing ways. The interaction can take many forms. In successful runs, riders seem to transcend traditional distinctions between body, equipment and environment, and experience the very doing of snowboarding as one unified, meaningful whole. Snowboarders move as body-subjects. As will be argued below, such 'peak experiences' (to use a classic Maslowian term) can only be understood on phenomenological premises. In other situations, snowboarders can experience their riding in more objective, distanced and almost mechanical ways. In technical training, for instance, riders may examine critically the efficiency of alternative weight distribution on the board, or the angle of their ankles and knees while turning. And sometimes the body-object experience is due to the gaze of others and coloured by the socio-cultural norms of appearance and movement in the sport.

It is to this 'life world' (*Lebenswelt*) of snowboarding I now turn. After having narrowed the analysis to snowboard free-riding, I will outline its basic technical movement patterns, also called technical elements, as articulated by the experienced rider or instructor and as expressed in instructional material such as that of Reichenfeld and Bruechert (1997), Fahlro (1996) and Svensk Vintersäsong (1999). The analysis will be informed by didactic and mechanical knowledge in the field but in selective and 'superficial' ways, as my focus will really be on 'lived practice'. The raw material for the 'free, imaginative variation' is the way snowboarders experience and talk of their sport. Following this, I will examine how skilled snowboarding can be understood as a holistic experience in which technical elements come together in unified wholes.

Snowboarding styles

Snowboarding includes a variety of styles and riding patterns. Somewhat simplistically, we can talk of three styles: the alpine, the freestyle and the free ride.

Inspired by alpine skiing, alpine snowboarding values the carved turn on well-prepared surfaces in which the front and the back of the board follow the same track without skidding. In its extreme versions, this is a slalom-race technique. Alpine snowboarding holds an ambiguous place in the snowboarding culture as it is placed between skiing (which to many snowboarders is 'the enemy'), and the freestyle and free-ride styles described below.

Freestyle is quite different and includes the half pipe, and aerial and trick manoeuvres. From the mass media and popular culture point of view, freestyle is the iconographic snowboarding style. The free-ride is less strictly defined. Free-riding borrows elements from both alpine and freestyle techniques and is the all-round style for various terrains and slopes. It includes skills in turning and jumping on firm surfaces, in *off-piste* deep snow, and in steeps and jumps. Extreme free-riding involves risky, steep descents with high-speed turns and acrobatic jumps in virgin terrain. To restrict the analysis somewhat, the phenomenological sketch will be linked to the basic technical elements involved since they are the necessary building blocks upon which to master all other challenges of the sport.

Good equilibrium conditions: gliding in a balanced position

Together with surfing, skating and skiing, snowboarding includes the particular experiential quality of *gliding* on the surface. Gliding sports remove the harshness of gravity and represent contrasts to universal and common movement patterns such as walking, running and jumping. Gliding poses particular challenges to states of equilibrium. Mechanically speaking, a body is in equilibrium when the result of all force vectors acting on it equals zero. In stable equilibrium conditions the force vector acting from a body's point of gravity and towards the centre of the earth falls within its supporting base. Gliding on an uneven surface implies constant challenges in this respect. To the unskilled snowboarder, instability is experienced as threats of falling. To stabilize, arms, upper body and hips move dramatically and are often, to a certain degree at least, uncontrolled. The skilled snowboarder moves in and out of stable equilibrium conditions in a controlled, playful manner and with a minimum of energy expenditure.

The key to good equilibrium conditions is the position on the board. Due to the limited snowboard width, adopting a sideways position is a matter of necessity. To enable easier and more flexible weight distribution, the distance between the forward and backward foot is about the width of the hips. Knees and hips are flexed to lower the point of gravity and reduce the distance to the supporting base. Arms are relaxed but slightly stretched and work as balance adjustments just like the balance pole of the line dancer. The front shoulder and arm are pointing towards the line of travel.

If a snowboarder is able to meet the mechanical requirements of good equilibrium conditions, he or she is in good balance. Good balance is the experiential, phenomenological equivalent to good equilibrium conditions. As with bicycling, the supporting base of the turning snowboarder is sometimes marginal. On hard

surfaces, when the board is tipped on its edge the rider balances on a steel edge a few millimetres wide and approximately 1.5 metres long. The challenge to the rider is to utilize centripetal forces (forces acting from the centre of gravity and towards the centre of the circle of which the turn is a part) while at the same time working on stable equilibrium conditions. Expert riders do this in creative and playful ways. Balancing on the edge of the board while not moving is impossible. Just as in bicycling, a fundamental quality of snowboarding is constant, dynamic and well-balanced movements. Snowboarding is a sport in which one is constantly 'on the move'.

Snowboarders' solutions to balance challenges are diverse. Most riders use their left foot forward (*regular style*), although a few prefer to ride with the right foot forward (*goofy style*). One method for establishing one's style is by determining which foot one prefers when kicking a ball; or which foot one puts forward when one is pushed from behind in order to re-establish balance; or which foot one prefers putting first when sliding on a slippery surface. The angle of the feet towards the line of travel is, at least to a certain extent, a matter of individual preference, too. Snowboard bindings are adjustable at the level of 1 degree. (The rule of thumb is to find a front foot angle that feels comfortable – in free riding, 20–40 degrees – and then adjust the rear foot accordingly – usually 15–35 degrees.)

The position on the board is not strictly defined but is found in a rather open trial-and-error process. Snowboarding seems to build on intuitive and basic movement patterns. Moreover, the sideways position is a quite radical alternative to conventional, symmetrical sport techniques in which the body fronts the direction of travel. This holds true even for related gliding sports such as alpine skiing, water skiing and speed skating.

Good equilibrium conditions and the experience of being in good balance are the *conditio sine qua non* of snowboarding. In the basic position, a snowboarder is at the centre of all possible movement patterns on the board: backwards and forwards, sideways, and upwards and downwards. Yet good positioning is a necessary but by no means a sufficient condition for successful snowboarding. Further key skills are the controlling of speed and direction.

Manipulating friction: controlling speed and direction

As in all gliding sports, snowboarding includes techniques for the efficient regulation of speed and direction. According to Newton's law of inertia, a body continues in a state of rest, or in uniform motion in a straight line, except and in so far as it may be compelled by external forces to change that state. To be able to change speed and direction, snowboarders have to manipulate friction. In mechanical terms, this means mainly manipulating resistance forces acting between the board and the snow and in the opposite direction of the line of travel. Technically good riders use frictional forces in balanced and efficient ways. Controlling speed and direction is achieved primarily by the 'edging' of the board in relation to the surface.

Edging means rolling the board from edge to edge or balancing it on one of its edges. Putting a board on its edge makes it skid and brake, and/or turn. Snowboards are designed originally for turns in soft snow. Their cut is narrow on the middle and with wide fronts and tails. When the board is fully balanced on its edge, it carves a turn with a radius that equals the circle of which the cut of the board constitutes a part. When edging, the area of contact between the board and the snow is reduced. Frictional forces between the board and the surface increase, and the rider can change direction. The more the angle of the edge towards the snow is increased, and/or the more pressure is put on the board, the stronger are the frictional forces created resulting in sharper turns.

There are many ways of achieving edging. The initiating movement is called 'pivoting'. Pivoting refers to the steering of the board by putting weight on the front foot, and by kicking the rear foot forward or backward. The movement implies rotating the lower body including the hips while keeping the torso rather stable. Due to the sideways position, and in contradistinction to gliding sports with symmetrical movement patterns such as alpine skiing, the snowboarder utilizes two edging and turning techniques.

The heelside turn implies putting the board on its backside edge by 'lifting the toes' and pushing the hips backwards. Balance is adjusted by leaning the upper body outwards and down the hill. At high speeds, the whole body can be leant inwards with the arms stretched forwards to adjust balance. Often, this is the first turn to be mastered as it overlaps with creating friction to reduce speed (heelside sideslipping). It feels relatively safe: riders can fall backwards and still be in control.

In the toeside turn, the rider 'climbs up' on their toes to put the board on its inner edge. Knees and ankles are bent and ready for flexible adjustments. In short turns, the bending of knees and ankles is sufficient to roll from heelside to toeside edge and back. The torso is kept relatively stable. In long turns at high speeds, the rider leans inwards in the turn with the whole body. Although instructional materials describe the toeside turn as the easier one, the turn takes certain courage as the rider has the back towards downhill and no good overview of potential falling zones. When in balance, however, the toeside turn is an extraordinarily stable and powerful turn.

When executed well, and with good balance, heelside and toeside edging leads to carving turns – the classic sign of a skilled rider. In a carving turn, the front and the back of the board follow the same even and clean line on the surface with a minimum of sideways drift and skidding. On soft snow turning takes a minimum of edging, on hard surfaces edging has to be radical, in both instances skilled riding requires a delicate balancing of forces. This implies a close and finely adjusted balance and use of force.

Long turns at high speeds have a particular floating quality to them. Characteristically, this kind of snowboarding is called *cruising* (see Figure 9.1). The carving turn on firm surface and the well-balanced turn in deep snow are the fastest and most efficient turns in snowboarding. But cruising with smooth yet at the same time decisive and carving turns poses radical technical challenges. A key skill in this respect is the linking together of turns.

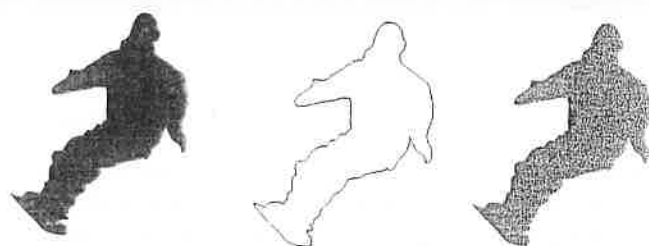


Figure 9.1 Cruising. Observe how the rider is balanced in the sideways position, how the board is edged from heelside to toeside turns, and how turns are linked together with smooth weighting and unweighting technique.

Linking turns together: weighting and unweighting techniques

A gradual increase of edging indicates the initiation of a turn which again (according to the Newtonian third law of reaction) results in increased friction and an equally strong counterforce from the surface. As the snowboarder crosses the fall line, the centripetal force that keeps the rider in the curve and hence the frictional forces towards the surface, have to be increased. To achieve this, good riders utilize a technique that is most often explained with references to the Newtonian law of inertia: pressure control, or weighting and un-weighting technique.

The first part of a turn does not require much friction. The rider stands in an upright position, the lead shoulder points in the desired direction, and the weight is put forwards allowing pivoting with the rear foot to let the front of the board drift into the fall line of the hill. The rider works with gravitational forces. As the rider approaches the crossing of the fall line, there is need for a gradual work against the components of the gravitational force that acts downwards in the hill. To stay in the turn, sideways frictional forces have to be increased. The good rider does this by creating centripetal forces acting from his or her centre of gravity and towards the centre of the circle of which the curve is a part.

In the first half of the turn, the centre of gravity is gradually lowered by flexing ankles, knees and hips, and the body is gradually compressed. The movement looks almost as a slow-motion preparation for a jump. When crossing the fall line, good riders heighten the centre of gravity and rise. Due to the law of inertia, the result is the same as in a jump or a rapid upwards movement. There will be a much needed increase in frictional forces between the board and the snow. The board is weighted. If it is balanced on its edge, the result is a powerful, carving completion of the turn.

At the completion of the turn, the rider is in an upright position, and (again due to the law of inertia) frictional forces decrease. Now the rider is in an un-weighted phase. The rider can pivot into a new direction almost without effort, and a new weighting phase is initiated followed by a new compression and gradual rise of the body.

Good snowboarders master the technical elements of snowboarding and link together turns into harmonious chains. In skilful *cruising*, the rolling from toe to heel and backwards is done with a sweeping movement of the hips that provides strong sensual and kinaesthetic pleasures. In wild and steep *off-piste* terrain, snowboard free-riding is an epitome of an adventure sport. Good riders play with gravity – they have what is often referred to as 'board feeling' or good snowboarding rhythm.

Snowboarding rhythm

Rhythm comes from Greek *rhythmos* with the general meaning of a dynamic, floating, modifiable form. Most definitions of rhythm refer to the perception of the meaningful ordering of elements in time and space.¹ In sport and other motor activities, rhythm seems to refer to an intelligible and meaningful order of movement elements. How can rhythm be further operationalized in the snowboarding context?

In a phenomenologically inspired part of their movement analysis, Meinel and Schnabel (1987: 92–111) talk of phase structures, that is, of movement sequences that appear to be 'natural' wholes and in which all significant technical elements of a sport are represented. Most sports have rhythmic phase structures that occur in a repetitive pattern. Meinel and Schnabel refer to such phases being distinguished by, for example, regular repetitions of effort-relaxation, stretch-bow, right-left, and so on. In running, the basic phase structure is a step, in swimming a stroke, and in snowboarding a heelside and toeside turn. The intelligible and meaningful tying together of single turns into chains of turns make up what can be referred to as a particular snowboarding rhythm.

I have written of the technical elements of snowboarding in both mechanical (equilibrium conditions, friction, weighting and unweighting) and phenomenological (experiences of being in balance, of edging and pivoting, and of carving turns) terms. From the mechanical point of view, technical elements are seen as meristic wholes;² wholes that can be fully analysed and causally explained by looking at their parts. The thesis here is that this is not the case with the unifying principle of technical elements that binds them together into skilled snowboard riding: rhythm. Rhythm is understood as qualitative characteristics of movement patterns that are more than the mere sum of their parts; they are holistic entities that can only be rendered meaningful as experiential wholes. In successful rides, snowboarders do not 'have' a body, rather they 'are' their bodies, to paraphrase the philosopher Marcel (1979). Analysing snowboarding turns as meristic wholes can be done biomechanically and with a view of the moving body as an objective system of forces in interaction with the forces of the environment. In rhythmic movement, snowboarders appear as 'intentional I's' in the phenomenological sense of the word: as pure body subjects.

Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) have developed a five-stage model in which the development of skills is described from novice to the expert. At the first four stages, skills can be explained more or less mechanistically with references to rule

following and automatization. The fifth expert level, however, is described as qualitatively different.

An expert generally knows what to do based on mature and practiced understanding. When deeply involved in coping with his environment, he does not see problems in some detached way and work at solving them, nor does he worry about the future and device plans . . . An expert's skill has become so much a part of him that he need be no more aware of it than he is of his own body.

(Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1986: 30)

Good snowboarders, it is often said, move 'on intuition' and 'without thinking'. Expert snowboarding is kinetic knowledge unfolding as a dynamic, qualitative flow. The movement rhythm of the expert can only be fully understood as experienced and 'lived'.

Indeed, these ideas are found in more or less well-articulated forms among snowboarders. In most of the instructional material of the sport, there is an emphasis on its joys and excitement, and on its intuitive and 'natural' character. In more esoteric writings, such as Lenz's *Snowboarding to Nirvana* (1997), there is an emphasis on the experience of oneness: the rider, the board, the slope and the mountain are all parts of one force. In the movies and tales of snowboarders such as Terje Haakonsen and Shaun White, the objective and exact aspects of the performance draw little attention. What constitute meaning are the transcending and adventurous characteristics. Rhythm is a sign of an expert's mastery of a skill.

Snowboarding technique: a phenomenological model

Based on what is said above, technical elements of snowboarding can be ordered in an overview or a phenomenological model (see Figure 9.2). From novice to expert levels, snowboarders are challenged on equilibrium conditions, or good balance, linked to a good positioning on the board. Moreover, snowboarding implies a constant need to manipulate friction in terms of pivoting and toeside and heelside edging. The third element is carving, meaning the creation of sufficient centripetal force while balancing on the edge of the board to make turns without skidding. The unifying principle, rhythm, is seen to be a key characteristic of expert skills and refers to how all these technical elements interact. Different from the other technical elements, movement rhythm is understood as a holistic unity and described in pure experiential or phenomenological terms only.



Figure 9.2 A phenomenological model for freeride snowboarding technique

Concluding comments

The initial thesis of this chapter was that a phenomenology of snowboarding represents a different and more open point of departure for understanding its movement patterns than what is often found in the mechanical, pedagogical and socio-cultural interpretations of the sport. In a phenomenological analysis, snowboarding is considered as a unique human practice with its own meanings and contents that can be grasped only by departing from the insider's perspective and from 'lived' experience. Phenomenology takes seriously the doing of snowboarding *per se*.

The analysis does not build on an ideal of a 'pure' phenomenology and of a belief in articulating once and for all some kind of genuine 'snowboarding essence'. The idea is simply to depart from the experience of doing snowboarding; from practice. And here, there are many phenomenological paths to insights. To a certain extent, my emphasis has been on mechanical (or quasi-mechanical) knowledge as this is a standard discourse among good riders, but within the more extensive framework of experiential qualities. The further idea is that from such an initial sketch, snowboarding can be contextualized in many ways.

First, I believe there are significant pedagogical and didactic possibilities in the phenomenological approach. The perspective can inform studies of motor action both from qualitative and biomechanical perspectives. Terms and expressions from lived practice are starting points, and they can be given analytic descriptions and explanations in more full-fledged biomechanical approaches. Movement analyses departing from lived practice can escape the critique on reductionism often posed on standard biomechanics and demonstrate a more clear link to practice (Loland, 1992; Loland and Haugen, 2000).

As for socio-cultural analyses, phenomenological insights can inform in significant ways their interpretations and conclusions. As has been pointed out by many researchers in the field, snowboarding can be seen as a typical expression of Western youth culture. The intuitive approach to the sideways position signals a 'natural' attitude that stands in opposition to the rigid and disciplined skill development programmes of many established sports. The binding together of the toeside and heelside turn with pivoting and sweeping movements of the hip has a certain rebellious sensuality to it. The speed, aerials and the risks involved in

extreme off-piste free-riding offer excitement and challenges and exert strong attraction on the teenage disposition.

Still, phenomenological understandings represent an alternative interpretation even here. One limitation with standard socio-cultural interpretations of snowboarding is the emphasis on the sport as a youthful subculture. There is an ageist prejudice involved. The phenomenologist on the other hand considers the joys of gliding sideways on the surface, of being able to master speed and direction in harmonious ways, and of linking together carving turns to rhythmic wholes, as potential universal joys open to individuals independent of age, sex and socio-cultural background. This leads toward a further and more basic framing of the sport. We might call this the existential dimension. Originally, the snowboard is constructed for efficient riding in deep snow, where the rider is drawing his or her own lines and tracks. Christensen (2001) points to experiences of deep meaning in this respect. The making of tracks, he says, can be understood as the writing of an embodied calligraphy; as an individual's unique autograph in the snow and, more generally, as a free and radical possibility of constructing identity.

My more general argument, then, is that phenomenologically anchored analyses of human movement offer a more substantial and deeper understanding and a more open and critical attitude than that found in traditional analyses from a more fixed biomechanical and socio-cultural perspective. It remains to be seen whether phenomenological approaches can become of more value in sport studies in time.

Notes

- 1 *The New Barnam English Dictionary*, New York: Bantam Books, 1979, p. 780.
- 2 A meristic whole is a whole that is no more than the sum of its parts (i.e. $2+2=4$). A holistic whole, by contrast, is one that is more than the sum of its parts.

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