

The story ski, skate and toboggan

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out to be South Koreans led by a young man looking like Sherpa Tensing, only younger. Shortly after our arrival two Japanese and a Japanese girl also arrived.

I have never had more wonderful weather or seen such an extensive panorama in the whole of my climbing career. Not a single cloud anywhere, the Monte Viso, 300 km. away, towards the South of France, stood out very clearly, while Mont Blanc could almost be touched by the hand. It is impossible to do justice to this view in writing.

My exhilaration was also mixed with some apprehension. Just as a credit transaction can only be regarded as successfully concluded when the cash is in the till, a climb is only over when you are back safely at the starting point. The descent from the Matterhorn is usually more dangerous and may take longer than the ascent and it is often during the descent that some of the terrible tragedies have taken place. As in the case of most other mountains, every step must be watched and a single slip could prove to be fatal.

It took thousands and thousands of years to shape the perfect forms of the Matterhorn, but there is no doubt that during the next thousands of years the ravages of time will have further effects. The Horn is totally exposed to the vagaries of the weather, storms, snow, ice,

heat and cold. The firm rock is slowly breaking up; I noticed that during the past 15 years already far more loose stones are lying on the rocks which are a danger both for the climbers themselves and those below who may be hit by falling stones.

As we started on our descent, we noticed a helicopter circling continuously overhead. My guide thought that it was looking for some climbers in trouble. On reaching the Solvay Hut, we found that two guides had called for the helicopter by walkie-talkie because a climber was ill in the hut. But he eventually recovered sufficiently to return unaided.

Our descent took place without incident, although it was long and tedious. With the tacit consent of my guide I took the liberty of merrily gliding down the fixed ropes although my backside collided in the process with a protruding rock and it took several weeks to shake off the effects.

On our return to the "Belvedere" – we were among the first parties to be back – I was warmly congratulated by all those present.

We were back in Macugnaga at midnight and my guide, as chief of the Rescue Organisation, was called out at once to recover the body of a young man who had just been killed on the Pizzo Bianco.

as late as the early Middle Ages. At the same time, however, more comfortable skates began to appear, made of wood and fitted with metal edges. Unlike ski-ing, skating as a sport was carried out in Europe, at least in some parts of the continent, already in the Middle Ages. In Holland, conditions were naturally favourable, and skating was very popular, as can be seen from many drawings and paintings by famous artists.

In the second half of the 18th century, skating became most fashionable, and poets vied with one another in singing its praises. Goethe was a great adherent and wrote in many of his works about the pleasure of the sport, so for instance in "Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre". At the beginning, it was men only who went skating, for it was deemed improper for women. The most they were allowed to do was to be pushed by men in special ice sleighs. Apart from this discrimination, however, there was no difference in state and class, dukes and labourers skated enthusiastically side by side. About the middle of the 19th century, after a resolute effort by some confident women, enthusiasm began to grow also amongst the weaker sex. In the course of time, skating began to develop into a fine art, especially under the influence of dancers. The ordinary "Sunday skater", though, still enjoys skating the same way he did then.

The third in the trio of old winter sports equipment is the toboggan. It, too, can look back on a fairly long history, for it is likely that one knew sleighs already before waggons. In the beginning, huntsmen dragged their prey simply on a skin or bark behind them, and from that developed the sleigh with first one runner and later two. Gradually one harnessed dogs, runs and later horses. One thing is certain, the sleigh became an important means of transport quite early on. Tobogganning became a popular and fashionable leisure activity in Zurich already in the 16th century. Later still, artificial tobogganning slopes were constructed in some places. In mountainous parts, tobogganning on icy slopes had been customary already before it became a sport. (One moved forward by using two small sticks on either side of the toboggan). Horse-drawn sleighs soon became part of social life in winter. Some of the magnificent sleighs have been preserved, a few also in the Historic Museum in St. Gall. Tobogganning was considered rather as peasant amusement, and it was not until the end of the 19th century that tobogganning clubs were founded. In 1883, the first tobogganning competition was held on the road between Davos and Klosters. The bobsleigh sport began to enjoy popularity in St. Moritz, and it was there that the first bobsleigh run was constructed. Later such runs were built in other winter sports resorts. The inventor of this sport, incidentally, was an American diplomat.

(Translated from the "Bodenseehefte")

The story of ski, skate and toboggan

Few people know anything about the history of ski-ing. Winter Sports is spelled with capital letters in our part of the world. Ski-ing and skating have become a matter of course. But who would imagine that behind all the fibreglass, foam-lined boots and quilted suits, there is a history of some of the oldest tools in the world. Of course, they were not invented for sports, but to our ancestors they were weapons with which to fight the rigorous elements of winter.

Many literary documents exist (some dated from before Christ), and they prove the great age of snow-shoes and skis. The oldest known picture of a skier was found on a runic stone in Sweden. It depicts a hunting skier.

In the Far East, in China, Korea and also in Siberia, skis were known very early. The old Germanic/Nordic literary documentation is proof of the importance of ski-ing to Northern people. Thanks to this means, some of the legendary heroes achieved masterly speeds which still today would be worthy of Olympic distinction. These old accounts also tell of the first competitions in this kind of sport. Especially the Laplanders organised regular competitions quite early. According to reports, skis reached Central Europe well over 200 years ago. But they were kept as curiosities, and it was not until well into the 19th century that the advantages of these new tools were

recognised, especially by huntsmen and foresters. It was Nansen who became one of the great propagandists of ski-ing, for the whole success of his expedition to Greenland was due to the use of skis. He reported on it extensively in his book "With Snow-Shoes across Greenland". No wonder that the first ski clubs were founded immediately on publication of the book.

Unfortunately, the ski-ing pioneers in our part of the world lacked something very important, a technique. Every man had to collect his own experiences, and that is probably the reason why enthusiasm waned soon with some of them. It was not until daring men began some remarkable ascents in the mountains and especially after the famous crossing of the Bernese Oberland, on skis, that the conquest started in earnest and the ski became triumphant, a triumph which has gone on into the present epoch.

By no means less popular is skating, especially since artificial ice-rinks allow execution of this sport well into the spring. The history of the skate is at least as old as that of the ski, and equally varied and interesting. In lake-dwellings already one found bones which had no doubt served as skates. The lake-dweller pierced the bones and tied them to his "shoes" with straps. Such prehistoric skates were found in Switzerland, too. Incidentally, such bone skates were used