

Making Of... 1080 Snowboarding

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THE MAKING OF...

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1080° SNOWBO

DODGEMS ON ICE

Giles Goddard and fellow programmer Colin Reed created almost the entire game engine between them, leaving only the camera control and computer AI to a third coder. Unfortunately the AI, which gives the computer just three paths to choose from, never quite worked correctly, meaning the other boarder will often crash into the player rather than take evasive action.

While Goddard confesses that he probably would have handled it in much the same way, it's something that will definitely not be seen in the sequel.



"Let's make a game involving snow," said Shigeru Miyamoto. Chief coder Giles Goddard took this simple brief and created the *Wave Race of the pistes...*

While the N64 was never the machine of choice for fans of realistic racers, it was host to what remains probably the most authentic snowboard sim ever coded - *1080° Snowboarding*.

Way before the current 'adrenaline sports' trend kicked in, ex-Argonaut coder Giles Goddard met with Shigeru

Miyamoto to discuss a potential snow-based game using the inverse kinematics (IK) technique he had been working on in between his regular odd-jobs on titles such as *Super Mario 64* (see *NGC* 61). It's a brain-twisting method of calculating realistic, unpredictable animation in real-time, which would turn out to be just the

WHY 1080° WAS A CLASSIC

REAL SNOW Well, compared to anything else at the time, and, for that matter, most recent snowboarding games too, 1080°'s snow looks and 'feels' real. Deep powder, crunchy pistes and bone-shaking ice are all extremely convincing.

CONTROL Easing back on the analogue stick makes the edges of the board bite into the snow, forcing a harder turn. Among its contemporaries only Wave Race offered more subtle control, although this method is now a standard feature on most snowboarding games.

WEATHER The variable weather conditions, which change between the three difficulty settings, make little difference to the gameplay, other than by blinding the player with fog. But as pure cosmetic effects, they're certainly among the best seen on the N64.

DETAIL Everything from the curve of the near-vertical drop on Dragon Cave, to the height of the moguls on Crystal Peak, to the layout of the multiple routes on Deadly Fall, has been carefully tweaked, smoothed, and playtested thousands of times. It's what makes 1080° so enduring.

MAGIC MOMENT SECRET BOARDERS

Some funky reflection effects make the hidden Crystal and Gold boarders look great, but the Panda Head suit takes the award for most memorable secret character. Even stranger is the Penguin Board – literally a giant, squashed penguin that you ride down the mountain. Both were the work of artist Katsuhiko Kanno – “quite a quirky person,” according to Giles Goddard.



ARDING

thing for recreating authentic high-speed tumbles on a ski slope.

The game, which actually started out as a skiing sim, was built by one of the smallest teams ever assigned to a Nintendo EAD (Entertainment, Analysis and Development) in-house project – Goddard began coding on his own,

The team decided to swap skis for snowboards, mainly so that tricks could be included.

with just two artists to design the courses and graphics. Fellow Brit Colin Reed joined two months later, and the team was supplemented by a third coder halfway into its development cycle. Essentially, though, they were left

to their own devices – “Nintendo didn't know themselves what kind of game they wanted to make,” says Goddard, “So they gave us the reins.”

The real deal

The team decided to swap skis for snowboards, mainly so that tricks could

be included as well as straight racing, and the first few months were spent refining the handling of a riderless board. Goddard's experience of snowboarding in the Japanese Alps, a five-hour train journey from Nintendo's

Kyoto HQ, allowed him to apply first-hand experience to the game.

“We put a lot of effort into not just using the left and right of the stick, but also allowing you to brake by pulling back. In snowboarding, half the time you're not trying to go down the hill – you're trying to stop yourself going down the hill. If you look at the slalom snowboarders in the Olympics, you'll see they're trying to stop themselves going fast. That's what fun about snowboarding in general.”

That the early demos met with an enthusiastic reception from Miyamoto and Nintendo's directors was much to the team's relief. “We had put our foot down from the start about no cutesy, character-based stuff,” explains Goddard. “That was the biggest hurdle we faced from EAD. They'd never done a game like that, and they weren't up

for it. But we were such a small team, and Nintendo were such a big company, that if it didn't work it was gonna be peanuts to them. Nintendo take lots of risks internally, and many unusual, off-beat projects are cancelled without anyone on the outside ever hearing about them.”

That strange man

Miyamoto's own contribution to the project was the method for landing after making a jump – you have to press the Z-trigger to bend the rider's knees and absorb the impact. “We just thought it was one of those weird ideas at first,” chuckles Goddard. “We put it in anyway – not to make him happy, but because he knows what he's talking about, even if nobody else does.”

As inevitably happens with all games, certain elements fell by the

THE MAKING OF...

MAGIC MOMENT DEADLY FALL

Deadly indeed. The most enormous jump in the game sees you plummeting off the edge of a massive cliff, promptly leaving your stomach behind back at the top of the ridge. The rest of 1080° Snowboarding isn't always so extravagant, though. "Less experienced coders often think an exhilarating game is all about vertical drops, but it's more about straddling the line between keeping it real and making it exciting," thinks Giles Goddard. "If you manage to get close to that line, then that's when you've made a good course."



WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE?



At the same time Giles Goddard's team was working on 1080°, a complete lack of communication meant Nintendo was also funding a third-party snowboarding project by Boss, with a view to publishing it. As soon as the mix-up was revealed, Nintendo's support was cut back in order to clear the way for 1080°, and the remains of Boss's game eventually appeared as Twisted Edge – described in *NGC/24* as "A poor man's 1080°," appropriately enough.

SMOKE AND MIRRORS



The reason the game features snowboards instead of skis is specifically to allow for tricks. But 1080°'s stunt system is quite staggeringly hard, proving frustrating for many players.



A gentle half-pipe training area introduces you to all of the available moves – a total of 29 if you include the flips and tweaks that only the Panda Head suit can attempt.



The Air Make course, a short ramp that launches the boarder into a single, huge leap, is the place to go if you think you've got the hang of linking those moves together. But check this out...



...the game's signature stunt, the 1080°: press R, rotate the stick, R again, rotate again, press B, press R, rotate, hold B, tap Z... oh, and don't forget the landing. Yeah, right!



LITTLE DEVIL

1080° Snowboarding might have only six courses (according to Giles, Shigeru Miyamoto would have preferred just one, set around a single giant mountain), but they're friendlily well designed, and packed with detail. Artist Katsuhiko Kanno began with a flat polygon 'mesh', pushing and pulling it to create rocks, walls, and other objects, before dropping textures over the top. Following that, months of playtesting and fine-tuning, even during the final debugging stage, ensured that some of 1080° Snowboarding's individual courses were lavished with more care and attention than lesser games receive in their entirety.

wayside during development. Most disappointingly for Goddard, the processing power required to implement full inverse kinematics proved to be beyond the N64's capability, and in the final version only the riders' legs have a touch of IK applied to them.

Two additional CPU opponents were also removed, leaving just one rival to compete against. The team wasn't too bothered about that, since including the additional riders would have meant having to reduce some of the graphical detail. Plus, they had

noticed that during the more competitive four-man races, the playtesters were ignoring the game's painstakingly crafted physics, in favour of simply hustling down the slopes ahead of the computer riders.

A critical disaster

With 1080° close to completion, the team had a worrying moment when Mario Club, the group that tests and rates all Nintendo games prior to release, awarding the game a shockingly low score of around 60 per cent. Goddard blames this on the fact

that most of Mario Club are long-time Nintendo fans, who weren't sure what to make of his PlayStation-style realistic sports sim. Besides, Nintendo was always more interested in releasing 1080° in America, where it would find a more welcoming Western audience. "It would have probably done a lot better in Japan if it was more cutesy," laments Goddard.

Of course, it proved more than successful enough to warrant a sequel. If you're wondering what to expect from the GC version, Goddard cites *Dark Summit* as one of the best of the

new wave of snowboard titles. "That's what I wanted to do with 1080° to start off with. One of the great things about snowboarding is the ability to go wherever you like. It'd be nice to create a game where you can make your own course by picking your way down the mountain, and nowadays you can do that. Probably the main reason that hasn't happened yet is if you give too much freedom, people end up doing the same thing every time, and think the game's boring. Somehow you have to force the different levels and courses on the player..." **NGC**

LEVEL TOUR MOUNTAIN VILLAGE



MAGIC MOMENT: CONTEST MODE

An all-round challenge for anyone whose speed and trick skills are up to scratch. Three slalom courses, with stunt bonuses along the way, the Air Make ramp, and a half-pipe for freestyle displays of joystick jockery. Man/boy separation begins here.



1 Mountain Village is one of the longer courses in 1080°, and it's riddled with alternate routes. Here at the start, you can choose to follow the ravine straight ahead, or slide up onto the ridge to the left for a more difficult challenge.



3 The ice tunnel branches at several points, giving six possible routes and a total of three exits onto the lower slopes. The safest option is to stick to the left-hand fork every time, which gives the easiest exit.



5 An assortment of alternative routes can be found over the top of the buildings and along bits of pipework, but because of the high risk of falling, weaving through them is a more reliable way to get a fast time.



2 Travelling through the hut gives you the chance to make a huge leap, cutting out some of the hazardous bumps on the steep slope below. If you're going for trick points, this is the option to take.



4 Failure to hit the Z-button at the moment of impact usually results in a time-wasting tumble. We must have played this course hundreds of times, but we still fell over when we were taking these screenshots. Grr.



6 Finished, with only a couple of scrapes along the way. Almost 30 seconds outside our old record, though – you'll find 1080° very tough if you're dusting down the cart to play for the first time in years...



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