

Surf the earth NZ's new extreme sport

A new phenomenon, mountain-boarding, aims to join skateboarding and snowboarding as an extreme sport in New Zealand, with the first dedicated park opening in Taupo in February and an estimated 1500 New Zealanders already enjoying the sport.

The first type of mountainboard was conceived in the United States during the early 1990s, by boarders who wished to use the mountain slopes to sustain their board skills during the summer months. They began "dirt boarding" or "earth surfing", by putting larger, wider wheels on their skateboards. The sport has moved from the ski fields to farm paddocks, forestry tracks and asphalt and has grown dramatically in popularity.

Today's mountainboard is a hybrid between a snowboard and a mountain bike, and in the US in 2001 there were more than 900 outlets selling 5th generation boards. Mountainboards come in a variety of shapes and sizes, all boasting to be faster and more stable on

the mountain slopes than each other, with the added bonus of enhanced suspension and braking systems. Essentially, the boards are designed to enable the rider to manoeuvre over stumps, rocks, roots, mud, sand, dirt and grass at speeds of up to 40 km per hour.

One US mountainboarding website provides a cautious reminder of the inherent dangers of the sport in a release of liability form which states: "I understand and accept that riding an all terrain board is a dangerous sport with inherent risks which can result in serious catastrophic injury or death". It must be signed by the rider before they can start classes.

To help prevent injuries a variety of specifically designed helmets, kneepads, elbow pads, wrist guards, gloves, padded shorts and a gravity leash have been produced, and in many



Mountainboard injuries - the next code needed for hospitalisation data collection?

cases are included in the cost of the board. Little data is available on injury statistics for mountainboarding but with New Zealanders' passion for recreational outdoor sports, this new form of extreme sport may in time need its own hospitalisation coding.

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