

TV series delves into the world of terrain parks

By Kathryn Reed

It's easy to name athletes who make doing tricks on skis and snowboards seem either like child's play or death defying feats depending on one's perspective. But how did the terrain park or half pipe come to be?

There's a good chance Chris Gunnarson had something to do with it. Better known as Gunny, he's been leaving his mark on the industry for more than 17 years.

It was 17 years ago that Snow Summit in Big Bear in Southern California hosted the first Winter X Games. Gunnarson designed that park and has done so for each X Games since then. His company also does work on the summer games.

"I guess I had all the right skill sets and the right kind of passion and enthusiasm. They put me in charge of the terrain park at Snow Summit. I was right there on the forefront of this whole niche industry as it was being developed," Gunnarson told *Lake Tahoe News*.



Chris "Gunny" Gunnarson is the man behind the X Games terrain parks as well as many of Lake Tahoe's parks.

Photo/Provided

His story and that of his company Snow Park Technologies will be the subject of an eight-part series to air on the National Geographic channel starting May 9.

He says the episodes are designed to appeal to people who've never been in a terrain park or might not even know what one is. Five are in the can, with three still needing final edits.

The show was Gunnarson's idea. Not one to watch much reality TV, he had the television on to something he wouldn't name and said how bogus it was.

"I thought what we do is more interesting, more different, it's in remote locations, and with elite athletes," Gunnarson said. He started talking to people, the shows got taped and the network secured to air them.

Filming started in mid-October and ended in mid-March.

Tahoe connection

Gunnarson is well known around Lake Tahoe. He has close partnerships with Squaw Valley, Alpine Meadows, Northstar, Heavenly Mountain Resort, and Sierra-at-Tahoe.

For the TV series, Squaw, Alpine and Sierra will be featured. One episode involves Jaime Anderson who is from South Lake Tahoe and rides at Sierra.

Gunnarson says Anderson is "unequivocally the best female freestyle snowboarder on the planet."

Like Shaun White, who rides at Northstar and has a half pipe built for him each season, Gunnarson grew up skateboarding and then took up snowboarding.

"I would love to see the X Games come to Tahoe. So many resorts are doing a great job embracing the action sports

culture,” he said.

While Gunnarson has not worked for the Olympics, he looks forward to 2014 being the first time slopestyle will be a medal event – and not just because it was his sport.

“Slopestyle is a condensed terrain park being judged,” Gunnarson said. “Kids relate more to slopestyle than pipe.”

The average athlete

But parks that Gunnarson designs are not all for the elite athlete.

“I get to create very unique fields of play out of nature,” Gunnarson said.

Gunnarson has noticed it’s not just twentysomething males in the parks. It’s skiers and boarders, guys and gals, and parents of those twentysomethings.

“First and foremost it starts with creating something that is appropriate for that particular resort,” he said.

Terrain, snow conditions and natural features all play a role. But who the customer is is even more important. Resorts attracting families wouldn’t want the gnarly terrain park, while the resort attracting adrenaline junkies would want some extreme features.

“Most conventional sports are very fixed. With terrain parks, it is very much open to interpretation,” Gunnarson said. “We can try to dictate a line, but everyone interprets it differently. Only they can experience it personally.”

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Notes:

- Here is a little video teaser for the show.

- “Mountain Movers” begins May 9, 8pm on National Geographic channel.