

History

The Whistler skatepark is a three part harmony, having been developed in as many phases.

Phase 1: Snake Run and Bowl



Jim Barnum - 1999
Phase 1

The original snake run and bowl (the Bowl) was designed and built in 1991 by Monty Little and Terry Snider in the fluid, serpentine tradition of their skateparks at West Vancouver High School, and Seyllynn and William Griffin parks in North Vancouver. In Whistler, they took it to the next level with massive waves and shapes, inspired by the mountain and creek context, knowing that speed-loving snowboarders would be the primary user group. Monty, an artist first with his BFA from the Vancouver School of Fine Art, saw the bowl as sculptural artwork with a skate function. It is most broadly categorized as a “transition” skatepark, meaning that it is made up mostly of radiused curves which “transition” the rider from the horizontal plane to planes 45 degrees and steeper (the bowl nearly reaches 90 degrees).

As planned, the bowl was perfectly suited to the needs of Whistler skaters at the time, delivering the big, fluid, rounded movements they experienced in their largely surf inspired

approach to snowboarding. The Whistler Bowl delivers that to this day and, depending on the specific judging criteria, is the best snake run in the world today (there are only two others that rival it). The skaters of the mid-nineties came along, and through their ollie and trick based lenses, developed an entirely new way of skating the park, finding a multitude of spots to launch and fly from. They appreciated and maintained the flowing skate tradition, adding to it and establishing “hits” and lines in the park that still bear the same names they gave them today, as the traditions and unique experience of the Whistler Snake Run are passed from generation to generation. In a community that has a significant transient population, the fact that these names, such as “Slayer”, “Bong”, “Speed Line”, “Gravatron” and “Aloha” endure is a testament to the galvanizing quality of the experience of being a skateboarder at the legendary Whistler Bowl.

The Whistler Bowl is our living room and oasis. Directly adjacent to the Valley Trail, yet tucked away, it’s a fairly private place, our own little world. The benches and picnic tables are heavily used, and space at them is always a hot commodity as the area is bathed in sun for much of the day. The beautiful natural environment, the ambience of Fitzsimmons Creek and the sweeping mountain views make the Whistler Bowl a destination where skaters will spend the entire day. The grass areas, while challenging to maintain over the years, are vital to the park-like atmosphere that inspires park users to stay all day, picnicking, skateboarding, socializing, icing sore ankles in the creek and sun-tanning. Not only are there very few quality snake runs in the world, there are almost no skateparks with such a great overall relaxing park setting. The small opening between

the bowl and the valley trail allows curious observers a non-threatening approach and vantage point to watch the amazing action.

The Bowl is a work of art, a historic piece of skateboarding terrain that stands test of time, allowing both “old school” and contemporary skateboarding to flourish as the bowl is reinterpreted by new generations. It’s quiet setting, sculptural beauty, historic value *and* its shape-shifting ability to host contemporary skateboarders give it value beyond words. It is still a stop on the long-standing “Bowl Series” contest tour each August. It is a gathering space, a home away from home, our oasis by the creek.

Phase 2: High-Flow Street / Transition



Jim Barnum - 2003
Phase 2

The “High-Flow Street / Transition” park was a direct result of a push for a new skatepark in the late nineties by the Young Adult Partnership Program (YAPP), which served as a conduit between Whistler’s young adults and RMOW Council. The bowl had serious safety issues with the top-coat surface delaminating and spalling, and Whistler’s new generation of skaters, while they loved the bowl, was hungry for some contemporary terrain. YAPP was heavily supported by Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) Mayor Hugh O’Reilly, who immediately got behind their drive for a new skatepark. Keith Bennett, Manager of RMOW Parks and Recreation was also a strong supporter. YAPP was led initially by Isabelle Ranger and Matty Janisse, who were soon joined by others including Adam Midgely, Tosh Osaka, Rick McCrank (who went on to a celebrated career in professional skateboarding), and Jim Barnum (pre-Spectrum). Jim fell into a leading role on the project, developing relationships with local donors, suppliers and contractors; leading the design effort and ultimately managing construction. The project was deeply grassroots with community

support flowing in from the RMOW and the business community, not to mention the skaters who worked alongside the Contractor volunteering to tie rebar, shovel fill, compact gravel and more. The sense of ownership of the park on completion was palpable, and the park was a resounding success, kick-starting Spectrum Skateparks, formed roughly halfway through the project.

This park’s design was inspired by that new generation of snowboarders whose approach to snowboarding was inspired by skateboarding, not surfing like the previous generation. These guys and girls were big-mountain, air blasting, halfpipe riding, trick launching, technical snowboarders. These all-mountain rippers still wanted a park that was largely “transition” based as the original bowl was. What distinguishes this new park is the linear, non-organic layout; the 100% geometrically precise radii, grindable steel coping edges atop the ramps, and features that reach pure vertical. Some street-style features, including the truncated pyramids and the “ledge line”, also distinguished the park as contemporary. Flood lighting was added in spring 2006. Also included were two asphalt connections to the bowl, one being the flowing pump track at the

eastern end of the central treed area. This park lacks seating, viewing areas, and a sense of park atmosphere. Currently the “ledge line” is often used as a seating area.

Like the bowl, this segment of the park remains highly functional with its timeless design. Due to the lack of sufficient true street or plaza style features, some minor conflict occurs with skaters moving home-made skate ledges into high traffic areas of the park.

Phase 3: Asphalt / Ramp Area

Street or plaza style features are not significantly present anywhere in the Whistler skatepark. In our original YAPP design for the park, the area that is currently asphalt with wood framed ramps was to be a Street Plaza, an area that replicated urban elements favoured by skateboarders including stairs, railings, benches and ledges. The RMOW indicated that funds for Street Plaza construction would not be available for a number of years given the large expenditure on the High-Flow Street area. As luck would have it, Sony brought its “Skate Space” competition series to Whistler in 2001 along with funding to build wooden ramps to add more High-Flow Street / Transition elements for the event. The RMOW had the area asphalted, and Sony engaged Spectrum to design the ramps, which were anticipated to be in use for roughly 5 years until funding was in place to build the Street Plaza. Instead of using the popular “Skatelite” ramp surfacing, Spectrum recommended Ramp Armour, which was reported to be the most durable product available. This resulted in the ramps lasting far longer than anticipated, with some still serving Whistler’s skaters today.

The asphalt area is the first thing a park user encounters at the skatepark, and it’s the only part of the skatepark that most passers-by see. While it’s a positive, active space, anchored by the roofed kiosk that currently hosts the park signage and information, it’s not visually pleasing. To the south, the dirt jump facility along the Fitzsimmons Creek flood channel has pushed right up to the edge of the asphalt area with the inclusion of the pump track. The current conjunction of these facilities is abrupt and unfinished. The Asphalt / Ramp area was a temporary facility that lasted longer than anyone imagined.