

Whilst travelling in 2001, I had my first but definitely not last go at snowboarding. Rhona and I went to the Cardona ski resort, a couple of hours from Queenstown in New Zealand. We had been staying in Queenstown for a couple of weeks and had tried a couple of the local ski resorts. They had been so popular, that there was almost no room to stay. The problem for me with this was that with so many people moving around me, my eyes were constantly re-focusing. This meant that I couldn't see a thing! As I had never snowboarded before, we decided that it was going to be a problem. A guy at one of the local ski rental shops recommended that we should try Cardona.

On arrival I went straight to the Ski Patrol and explained my situation. They suggested that I should wear a vest, that they supplied, with the words "BLIND SKIER" on the front and back on top of my jacket. They told me that this was more for the benefit of the other skiers around me. I must admit, I wasn't very keen to do this, but thought I would give it a try.

Once onto the slopes, I put my vest on and began to practise my limited skills. Because I have done some other board sports, i. e. skateboarding, surfing, etc., it wasn't too hard to learn the basics. Once I was comfortable with this, I headed off for the ski lift and the big slopes. As I stood in the queue I could hear people talking about that "poor blind guy". This niggled me a bit, but I decided to try to ignore it. At the top of the lift I stepped off and strapped my feet onto the board.

As we headed off I could hear more people talking about the vest. I was starting to get paranoid. Then as I gathered speed and Rhona would shout directions, I realized that the people who saw the vest were getting out of my way. Fantastic! This was better than a white stick in a crowd. We picked up speed turning left, then right, hitting a few bumps, but mainly going really well. I even managed to control the snowboard. Well, sort of control it. Before I knew it, we had zipped down a long straight slope and had come to the end of the run. The adrenaline was buzzing and I was "high as a kite". What a feeling. I got back on the ski lift and headed back up. This time I was going to do the run solo!

I had memorized the slope from my first run and felt very confident. As I came off the lift, I rushed to get started. Again, I could hear people talking about me, but now it didn't matter. The vest was a definite benefit for the novice snowboarder! I took the first stage at a steady pace, looking for my first left bend. No problems there. I found that easy enough. I was now looking for my fast approaching right bend. I missed this one completely and ended up in the safety netting at the edge of the run.

At this point, I decided I was not the world's best snowboarder and would have to take things a little slower. As the day progressed, so did my skills. I had a great time. Even taking "air" on quite a few occasions. However this was not deliberate! I was now very wary about that bend I had missed, so I started to take it a bit earlier. Unfortunately, this meant that I would leap about 2 metres into the air. And what was more surprising than being airborne, was the fact that on half a dozen occasions, (out of about 30), I landed on my feet and carried on downhill. The rest of the time I fell on my bottom. I heard some people comment on how brave 'that blind guy' was. Little did they know it was lack of skill rather than bravery.

We boarded at Cardona for two days and had a fantastic time. Because it is a bit of a drive away from most of the tourist places, it is not as busy as the other ski resorts. It is mostly visited by the locals and I think that says something. If you get the chance, I would definitely recommend Cardona. I would also like to thank the Ski Patrol for that great suggestion. Without the vest, I am sure there could have been some crashes, caused by me. But with the vest, everyone just got out of the way. However, I think that if I was to get a vest for myself, it would probably read 'BLIND&DAFT'.

The narrator did the second run solo and he...

1. ...tried to memorize all the bends.
2. ...failed to go round one of the bends.
3. ...tried not to listen to Rhona's directions.
4. ...fell down and was injured.