

Traying

It's winter at Flatlands State and there's two inches of fresh on a base of black, salted granular. There's not so much as a contoured landfill within 450 miles, and you don't have the bucks for skis or a snowboard anyway. But on your midnight munchie run to the 7-Eleven, that berm under the water tower caught your eye. You don't need to look any farther than your campus cafeteria or Wendy's for the proper shredding gear.

Time to rediscover the lost art of "traying." Once considered the greatest advance in urban snow sports since the Flexible Flyer, the cafeteria tray has been relegated to the mud room of history, right next to the Snurfer. But the Winter Olympic Games always seem to kindle a renewed interest in the sport. When I went traying just after the 1990 games, it seemed everyone I spoke to claimed they were training for the Jamaican Bobsled Team — at least, everyone who asked to borrow my lighter.

Traying can be performed in either the sitting or standing position. The secret is to lean uphill, and to keep your equipment in one piece. Leaning uphill is critical in preventing the front edge of the tray from digging into the snow. Even if you get turned around, back first, remember to lean forward to keep the leading edge off the ground. The sturdiest trays out there are the large, fiberglass composite models found in most cafeterias. These are far superior to the cheap, plastic versions available at Wendy's and other fast food franchises. One day after a big storm at my college, the hill over by Hope High was littered with hundreds of tray carcasses. Students at the cafeteria and nearby McDonald's were forced to carry their food on textbooks.

Despite its structural weaknesses, the tray is far superior to other low-cost options. Plastic trash can lids work well, but often have handles and other irregularities that increase friction. The cardboard pizza box and the 5-mil trash bag both provide a good sliding surface, but provide no tailbone protection when seated. Be particularly careful with pizza boxes. If you use the wrong half, you'll walk home with cheeseballs mixed in with the dingleberries hanging from your wool pants. Flexible Flyers, plastic toboggans, inner tubes, and flying saucers are far superior, providing good speed, protection, and in some cases, rudimentary steering capability. But they're not worth the cost: they don't come with food.

- B.E.



Riding Stairs



What does your campus have in common with a World Cup mountain bike course? Stairs, see. And lots of 'em. The most outrageous part of last year's World Cup course in Vail, Colorado featured a heinous section down a series of steep stairways. Pump up your Rock Shox. Sell the Thule. There's no reason to leave town anymore.

To work on your stair riding, first find a short section of steps with a clean runout. For starters, try some wide, low-angle steps. Make sure your feet are square on the pedals, your front wheel is straight, and your body weight is back before going over the top. In fact, your saddle should come up in front of your stomach. Hold that position as you gain warp speed. Let your bike suck up the bumps, like the knees of a downhill ski racer.

Once you've come down the steps, try going back up and doing it again. That could lead into a game of "follow-the-leader" around campus. Go real slow, with lots of technical maneuvering: between a sign post and the curb, the switchback on a ramp, up some short stairs, or between two deans or professors without knocking them down.

- Skip Hamilton