

THE

TRIALS

OF

SNOWSHOE

THOMPSON



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INTRODUCTION

ESSENCE

The Trials of Snowshoe Thompson is a third-person cross country skiing Western game. It is based on a real man called John "Snowshoe" Thompson who answered an ad from the USPS in the 1850s to deliver mail across the snow-packed Sierra Nevada mountain range. Using homemade skis, he traversed the mountains in 3 days, faster than anyone before him. The gameplay will consist of the micro mechanics of **ski movement** and the macro choices of **terrain navigation**.

The core idea behind the design of the game is that friction should be applied to systems that other games make as frictionless as possible. For example, moving forward will not be as simple as pushing a joy stick forward. Players will have to learn and master the mechanics of momentum and balance to traverse terrain on their skis. Movement should feel appropriately **amusing to try, rewarding to learn, and frustrating to fail**.

WHY IT MATTERS

Throughout my life, the sports I've been most attracted to have been about movement through space. Running, cycling, swimming, skiing, and hiking were all priorities over other field or court-based sports. When I look back at the games and prototypes I've made, many of them also share the quality of focusing on movement through space. There is something primitively compelling to me about using different methods to get from point A to point B.

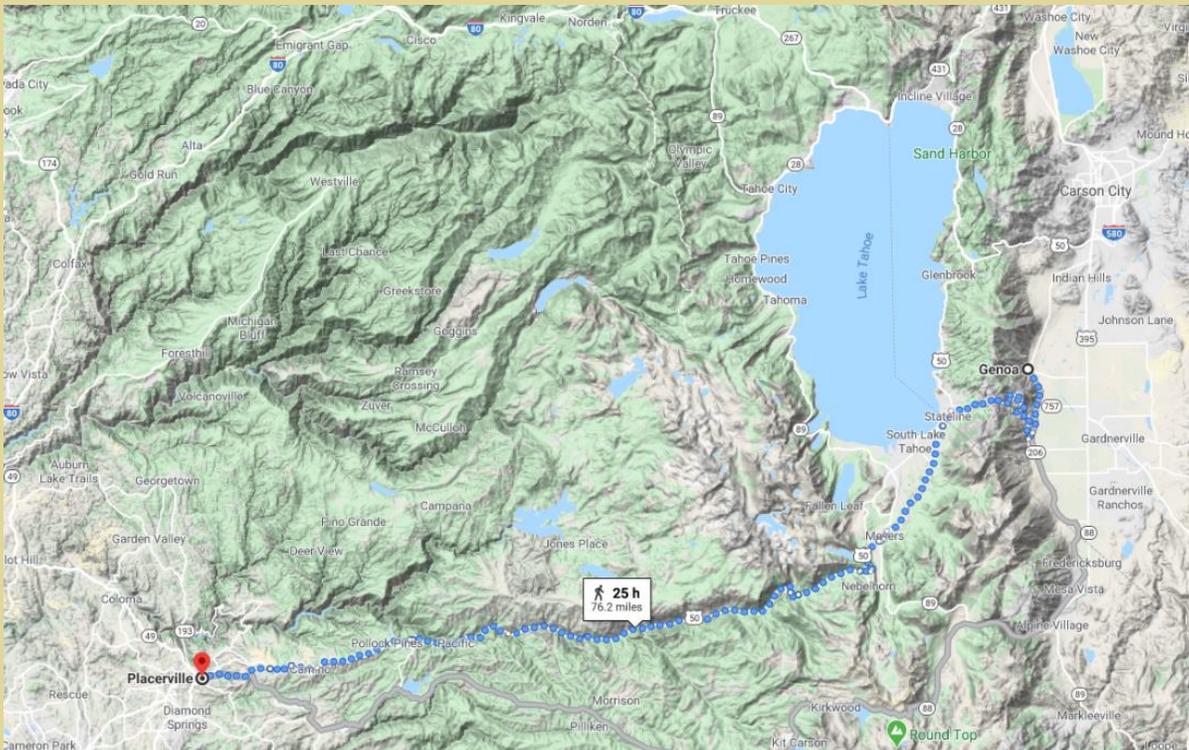
Most games do not make movement the *point* of their game. Movement is a means to an end. This is not true in platformers, which are expressly about movement. The *Super Mario* series is emblematic of platformer convention and best practices. However, many in the genre defy convention and add friction to their controls. Games like *Donkey Kong Country*, *N*, and *Gish* use

friction-heavy control schemes to provide a unique “brain feel”. In my opinion, there is a lack of experimentation in adding friction to movement in 3D third-person games. With *Snowshoe Thompson*, I would like to use friction in controlling movement to create my own unique “brain feel” in 3D.

DESIGN

GOAL

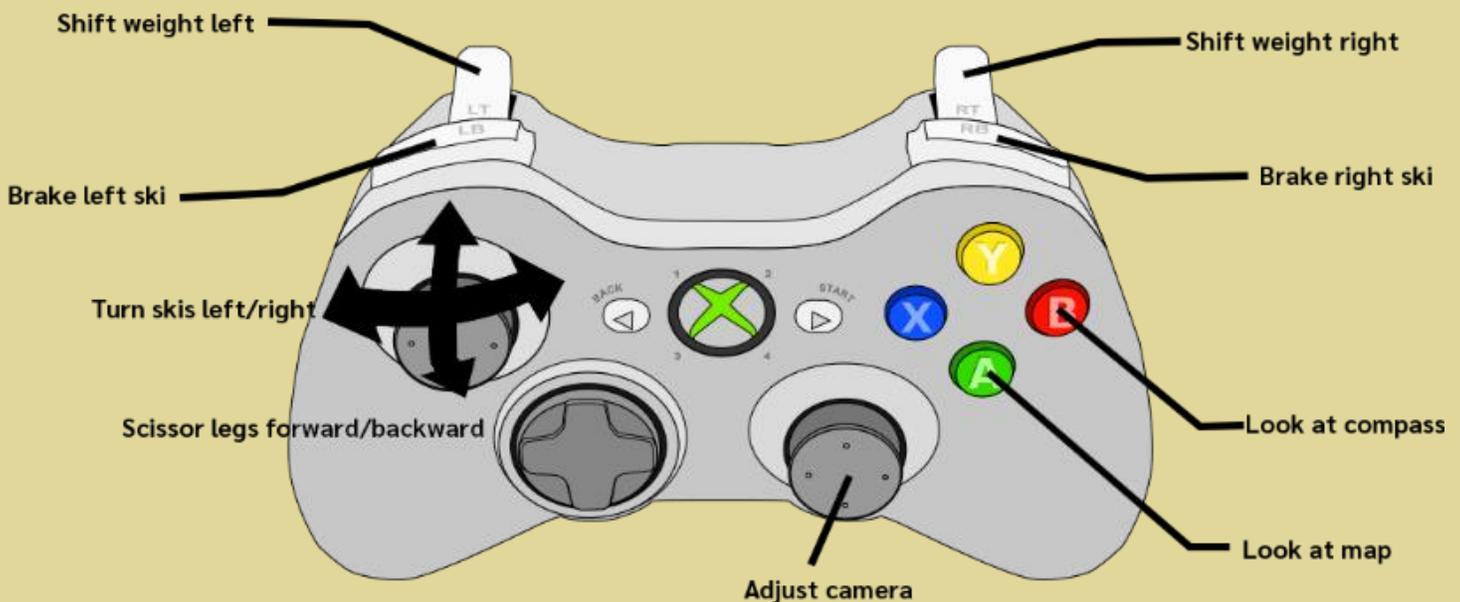
Deliver the mail from Genoa, NV to Placerville, CA as quickly as possible.



MECHANICS

Skiing consists of manipulating the controller to control Snowshoe Thompson’s legs. Actions include shifting weight, scissoring his legs, turning the skis, and braking. The combinations of these micro-actions will create the player movement as a whole. It will require a different combination of micro-actions to move Thompson on uphill slopes, downhill slopes, and flat ground. Below is a work-in-progress control scheme.

Navigating consists of using two items provided to the player: a compass and a topographic map. The compass will behave as expected, but the map will behave differently from how experienced videogame players may expect. It will not give the player's position. It will just be a display of the topographic information of the mountains they must traverse. Destinations and landmarks will be labeled, including where the player started and where the ultimate destination is. The player will have to use these tools along with observation of their surroundings to choose a path forward.

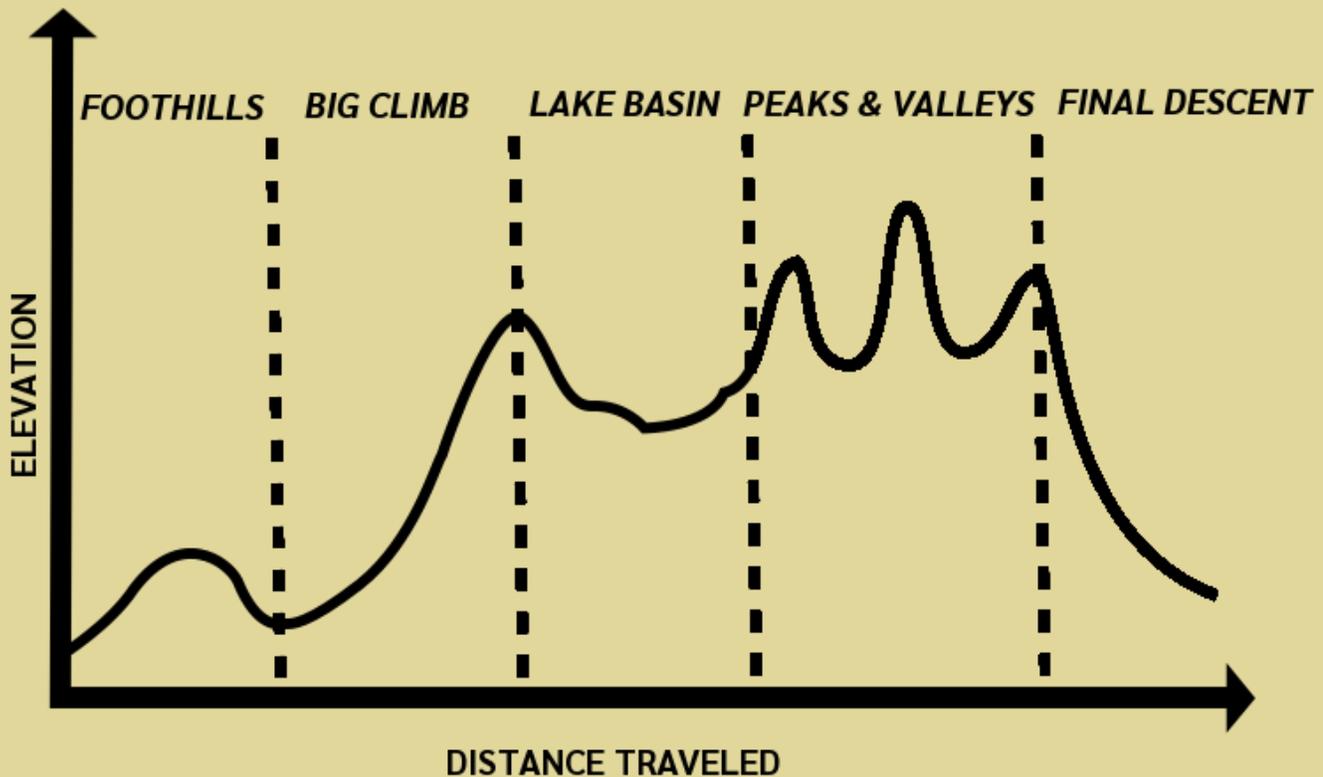


PROGRESSION

Player skill progression is completely intrinsic. No mechanical attributes of Thompson or his skis will change over the course of the game, nor will new actions be "unlocked".

The terrain will provide the greatest change in experience throughout the game. The map will be heavily based on the real terrain of the region, but with adaptations and restrictions added as needed in regard to the design and the

production process. There are three fundamental types of terrain: uphill, downhill, and flat. The objective in designing different areas will be to provide different combinations and variations of those three types. Combinations are straightforward. Possible variations include steepness, snow quality, obstacle avoidance, and weather effects. Below I've included a 2D slice of what the change in terrain might look like throughout the length of the game.



PRODUCTION

TECHNOLOGY

The game is being developed for PC, Mac, and Linux with controllers.

I plan on using Unity to develop the game along with a Terrain Tool I have been developing for several months. It currently uses noise to create and texture many meshes as chunks of terrain. The chunks are handled at runtime with

multiple threads and are highly optimized. The completed version will allow designers to directly edit the procedurally edited meshes and enable greater design authorship. Asset creation tools will be chosen in conjunction with the leads' comfort.

SCOPE AND TIMELINE

The goal is to create a 30-60 minute alpha quality gameplay chunk. It should represent 35-50% of a fully finished version.

Depending on the circumstances of the team and the quality of the project, I may try to seek funding to complete the game. The monetization model is traditional (a \$15-30 digital release).

Spring 2020

- Create 3D movement prototype
- Continue development of Terrain Tool
- Recruit leads
- Discuss vision and production

Summer 2020

- Establish team culture and management structure
- Iterate on movement prototype
- Finalize feature set of Terrain Tool
- Sketch out world map
- Request concept art
- Create detailed production timeline

Fall 2020

- Finish recruiting
- Establish team rapport
- Integrate movement prototype with Terrain Tool
- Use Terrain Tool to design a section of the environment based on the world map
- Model and animate character, environment and UI
- Implement initial soundscape
- Iterate based on feedback from weekly playable build

Spring 2021

- Determine final goals for deliverable
- Revise production timeline
- Polish all aspects of build (design, art, sound)
- Develop and integrate graphical FX
- Iterate based on feedback from weekly playable build
- Finish presentable build
- Create trailer and marketing materials

RECRUITING PLAN

1 creative director

1 lead programmer

1 gameplay programmer

1 systems programmer

1 graphics programmer

1 lead artist

1 3D character artist

1 3D environment artist

1 3D animator

1 FX artist

1 2D UI/Concept artist

1 lead designer

1 3D level designer

1 usability/accessibility designer

1 producer

1 lead sound designer

1 composer

17 total

ABOUT ME

I am a CS Games Masters student expecting to graduate in 2021. I graduated from NYU in 2019 with a BFA in Game Design and a BA in Computer Science. I have developed games solo and in teams and have released products on the App Store, Google Play Store, and Itch. During my time at NYU, I ran for the Cross Country and Track and Field teams and was Captain my senior year. Coming from the Bay Area, I grew up spending winter weekends trekking up to Tahoe to ski with my family.