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Paper 1

Insert

For use with Section A

The two items that follow are:

- **Item 1:** an article called *Skating towards peace*
- **Item 2:** an article called *EXHIBITION PARK*.

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to view both items**

Observations

AFGHANISTAN

Skating towards peace

Oliver Englehart

In America, one in ten teenagers owns a skateboard. In Afghanistan, the people have three boards between them. None of the barefoot street kids and policemen with Kalashnikovs gathered around an empty fountain in Kabul has ever seen people rolling around like this on a plank of wood and four wheels. But they seem to like it. Everybody is grinning.

It's not long before the boys in the crowd are jumping into the concrete bowl to have a go, whooping as their friends lose their balance and tumble over. One angry young shoeshine boy in traditional Afghan robes who, arriving a few minutes ago, viciously belted another urchin for working on his turf, is giggling as he is led along by the hand on a skateboard by Amir, one of the Skateistan boys.

Amir tells me: "No one knows even the name. They say, 'What is skateboard?' People are interested. I think it will be very popular. When you go down the street everyone is like, 'What is it?'"

Skateboarding, the sport and subculture of disenfranchised youth, has landed in Afghanistan, bringing its philosophy of physical expression of freedom.

Skateistan means "land of the skates". It's not a conventional NGO.* The



Bringing fun to Kabul: Skateistan members at Ghazi Stadium

three Australians who have set it up, Travis Beard, Oliver Percovich and Sharna Nolan, are simply doing something they love and at the same time empowering a generation of urbanised youngsters in Afghanistan. This year they will build the country's first co-educational skateboarding school.

Travis, a bearded photojournalist, explains: "It's about taking kids off the street when they would normally be selling phone cards or lighters on a Thursday afternoon. The kids who are in school are there only a few hours each day anyway – boys go to school in the morning here and girls in the afternoon.

"We want to create a positive image of Afghan youth, to bridge east and west, and of course the guys will learn all sorts of life skills from Skateistan. But above all, it's about sport and having fun."

It is also extremely touching to see young people having fun in a country that has suffered such a long and violent attack of the blues. For many years, all sports, including kite-flying and

even chess, were banned.

Travis remembers that when he was growing up, he used to see stickers declaring "Skateboarding Is Not a Crime". Skateboarding has not been rebellious in the west for the past 20 years but, as he says: "Afghanistan is like going back in time."

"A father came down the other day to see what his son was up to," he says, "but once he realised it was just sport – like a toy – he was fine."

At the moment the problem is finding places to skate. There are too many potholes in the streets and the "Kabul dust factor" ruins wheels. The schools are too preoccupied with security to let children skate there and the police have chased them away from Ghazi Stadium. But, as Travis remarks: "The police saying 'You can't skate here' happens all over the world."

Despite this, the idea of veiled women skateboarding in Afghanistan is still pretty radical. I had hoped to see a burqa on a board, but this won't be possible until Skateistan secures the land on which to build an indoor school, which

should happen later this year. Once a safe and enclosed environment is assured, women will be able to attend single-sex skateboarding classes, under a female instructor and out of the public eye.

But now, a little girl of perhaps eight approaches shyly. She is still too young to wear the veil. She hops on to a board and rolls along with arms outstretched and a look of furrowed concentration. The Skateistan boys are thrilled as she dismounts, leaping out of the fountain to hide her blushes. Travis punches the air with his fist; we have just witnessed Afghanistan's second-ever female skater.

Given the upsurge in suicide bombings in Kabul, the first rule in the NGO handbook is "Don't attract a crowd". Skateistan breaks the rules, but the reception, from what I can see as I fly on to my backside to the raucous laughter of the crowd, is overwhelmingly positive. Afghanistan is a difficult place to exist, and its people's lives are devoid of fun and frivolity. Perhaps skateboarding is the way to win hearts and minds. ●

*NGO stands for 'Non-governmental organisation'.

Item 2

Here Liam Russell's Hurworth training regime comes up with the goods. Exhibition Park tuck knee frontside air in the dark. photo: Leo.



EXHIBITION PARK Exhibition Park was built and completed in winter 2003. Although there are many parks in the Tyne and Wear area, Exhibition Park is the only park bang in the city centre. If the weather is good this is where you will find the more transition-based crew. It is a somewhat strange design for a city predominantly known for its street skating scene although Newcastle does have a huge BMX scene too and everyone cohabits this place pretty peacefully. It houses a decidedly average street section as well as the big bowl and is a blessing in that end of the city as every spot near it is on security lock down due to its close proximity to Newcastle University. Eyes were opened to what was possible there last summer when Div, Raemers and crew passed through town on the UK Indy tour. I'm sure the next generation of Toon skaters will be ATV*s.

*ATV: All Terrain Vehicle. ATV is used as a nickname for a skateboarder who is comfortable on all types of terrain.

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Item 1: OLIVER ENGLEHART, *Skating towards peace* from *New Statesman*, July 2008

Item 2: BINGO, *EXHIBITION PARK* from *Sidewalk*, July 2008