

AJ Hackett Bungy, n.d.

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1987

History

The First Generation

Bungy as we know it all started with a small group of individuals who have been throwing themselves from huge towers for centuries with nothing more than a few vines tied to their feet - the people of Vanuatu in the Pacific.

Vanuatu

'Land-diving' on Pentecost Island originated hundreds, perhaps thousands of years ago. Local legend has it that a woman who was repeatedly abused and mistreated by her husband Tamalie ran away from him, only to be caught time and time again, punished, then given more of the same treatment.

She finally climbed up one of the tallest banyan trees to escape from her husband's abuse, he following hard on her heels. When she reached the top she dared him to join her, mocking his cowardice. She then jumped out of the tree, having been smart enough to tie vines to her ankles beforehand. Tamalie, taunted by his wife's accusations of cowardice and not noticing the vines around her ankles, was astonished to see her land on her feet and threw himself after her - succeeding only in falling to his death.

The event was subsequently reconstructed annually, initially only including the village woman. Shortly after, the men took over in order to address their historical shaming and to prove their courage to the woman, and eventually the jump became the premier annual custom coinciding with the Yam harvest on Pentecost Island. Today the event is totally male-dominated. The tower is divided into twelve sections which represent the various parts of the human anatomy from the feet to the forehead - constructed over a period of 10 days - and this is where the final, supreme jump is performed.

To ward off evil spirits, including that of Tamalie, who is thought to reside in the tower until the jump is completed, jumpers sleep under the tower at night. While the construction of the tower is a communal effort, the process is supervised by a chosen "elite" individual who performs the penultimate dive from the highest part of the tower and in whose hands (or ankles!) the very success or failure of the yam harvest depends. The newly-circumcised younger boys jump from the lower levels in order to be attain the status of manhood while the more experienced divers work their way up higher every year.

Preparation of the vines is crucial as they are relied upon to save lives. If they are cut too long when fully stretched the diver will catapult into the ground, but if they are cut too short he will fall through the tower. So, they have to be precisely the right age, have the right amount of elasticity to enable the divers head to graze the softened earth 30 metres below without giving him a headache. They don't use calculators and officially there are no practice sessions; instead, years of custom calculations are used.

Before each dive, a ritual is performed during which the jumper can step down anytime without any shame and disgrace. After raising his hands to still a swaying, chanting crowd, the diver gives a short monologue on a personal or family matter that he is concerned about. After the speech, the singing, dancing and swaying crowd picks up the tempo. The jumper plucks a feather from his hair, releases some leaves from his belt and claps his hands above his head to announce he is ready.

Wearing nothing other than a penis sheath and the vines for protection he freefalls into space crossing his arms across his chest in a gesture of confidence as well as being the natural action of protection for the body. If his meticulous preparation is accurate the diving platform slowly collapses, the vines pull taut, his head clears the ground by inches and he lands safely on his feet to jubilant cheers from the crowd, having proven to everyone - especially the village woman - his heroism.

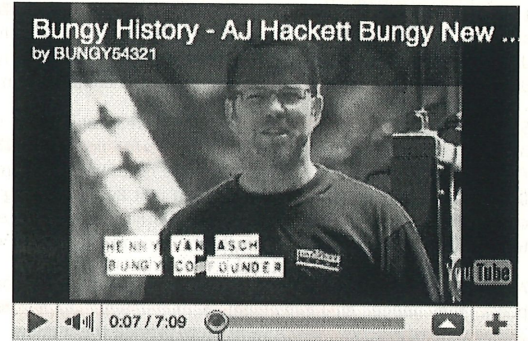
The Second Generation

The ancient ritual practiced on Pentecost Island eventually inspired the Oxford University Dangerous Sports Club to try a few experimental jumps back in the 1970's.

Oxford University

'Oxford University Dangerous Sports Club' is a group of people who were loosely based around Oxford University in the mid 1970's to late 80's. They pioneered many of what are now termed 'Extreme Sports'. Many books and films have been written about them, of which many may not be true and accurate representations of the club, depending on who you talk to.

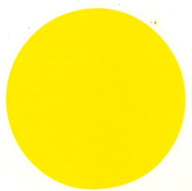
He saw a video of this group in action, and his imagination took over. He teamed up with a



Henry van Asch and AJ Hackett

How the beginnings of two men's exploits led to the creation of this iconic kiwi company and industry.

3rd



fellow speed-skier Henry van Asch, and they went on to develop Bungy into the modern adventure it is today.

The Third Generation

The 80's

AJ Hackett and Henry van Asch, who met while skiing in Wanaka, New Zealand, set about developing and testing Bungy cords with the help of Auckland University scientists. They were both convinced that others would pay to experience the adrenaline rush associated with Bungy.

After some extensive testing on latex rubber cords a series of extreme jumps were made, first in Tignes, France from a ski area gondola 91 metres above the snow.

Once tried and tested by AJ, Henry and quite a few of their mates. They agreed that they needed a very **public confirmation** of their complete faith in the newly-created Bungy ropes. To achieve this, a **PR coup was set up involving a Bungy Jump from the Paris Eiffel Tower in June 1987**. AJ snuck up the Eiffel tower and slept their overnight, then first thing in the morning he Bungy Jumped down off the tower. He was immediately arrested and released five minutes later. The Jump **made international headlines** and phenomenon had begun.

Shortly after, in **November of 1988** Despite the fears of sceptics who thought it was a tourism operation which would never catch on, the **world's first commercial Bungy operation opened up at the Kawarau Bridge**. At that stage they were given license to operate for just 30 days from the Department of Conservation. Many assumed that Bungy Jumping was a tourist fad with limited consumer appeal and commercial viability. During that year, twenty-eight people paid \$75 each to leap off the 43-metre bridge with a Bungy cord attached to their ankles.

AJ and Henry knew they had a safe product, but in order to convince the tourism industry and the public, they needed an **independent method of safety assurance**. So they worked to develop a **'Bungy Code of Practice'**, which went on to provide the framework for the New Zealand/Australian Bungy Jump Standard. AJ and Henry's company was the first in the world to be awarded the "S"Mark for exceptional safety and quality assurance in Bungy Jumping, with the Standards Association of New Zealand completing an independent audit of all jump sites every six months.

The launch of the Kawarau Bridge Bungy site has been hailed as the birth of adventure tourism in New Zealand, and was integral towards putting New Zealand on the world adventure tourism map.

CALL 0800 BUNGY JUMP

Bungy Centre Location Map

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ACTIVITIES

- Bungy
 - The Ledge Bungy
 - Kawarau Bridge Bungy
 - The Nevis Bungy
 - Auckland Bridge Bungy
- Swing
 - The Ledge Swing
 - The Nevis Arc
- Climb
 - Auckland Bridge Climb
- Hot Deals & Combos

SITES

- Queenstown
 - The Nevis
 - The Ledge
 - Kawarau
- Auckland
 - Auckland Harbour Bridge

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