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## The Humble Beginnings of the Central Mass Skate Festival

by Daniel Fedkenheuer



**FACT:** *Extra slide-y Cloud Ride wheels directly influence style points.*

While the East Coast has become synonymous for much of the skate world with tough winters, crusty pavement and gritty street skateboarding, there exists a different face of the East Coast for the other disciplines in this space. One that exists not in crack-ridden alleys during the dead of winter but in steep wooded hills during humid summers. To paint this scene more vividly, a look at the past eight years of the Central Mass Skateboarding Festival shows a blossoming side of the East Coast's downhill, free ride and ramp scenes for a yearly celebration of all things skate.



*The boss man himself, Mike Girard, calling names and taking numbers.*

For CenMass organizer, Mike Girard, the story of one of skateboarding's most anticipated events begins with a natural middle school interest in skateboarding that would go on to be shaped by the surrounding landscape of Harvard, Massachusetts. As Girard's friends moved from street decks to longboards to better explore the local terrain, he followed suit and fell in love. Inherently, Girard's interest in the media creation aspect of the game was fueled by the popular Loaded Challenge Series of the time. As his content began to circulate around the internet, a standout question began to emerge: where were these picture perfect hills that Girard was documenting?



*Is dabbing more effective than tucking? You be the judge.*

With longboarders from across the country banging down the door to get a taste of the Northeastern slopes, Girard decided that he couldn't possibly be everyone's individual tour guide. Thus, out of respect for the township, he decided it would be best to sanction the influx of visitors with an all encompassing closed-road festival that would give seasoned riders a chance to get their licks in and give beginners a place to be ushered into the culture. As such, the first Central Mass came to inception in the summer of 2009 after just a month's work of planning, yielding a few dozen heads and giving the community a taste of what was to come. In the years following the first event, attendance grew larger as Central Mass became a facet in the minds of East Coast skaters and beyond that was not to be missed.



*Who knew the Loaded Tesseract was an ATV fit for a ramp jam?!*

As the event scaled, it became known as a two day and later three-day, festival that served as the ultimate mix between a training ground, summer camp and reunion for one sacred weekend of the year. Given it's emphasis on accessibility, many skaters over the years can claim Central Mass as their first skate event they attended. To this, Girard remarked,

***"Everyone regardless of their skill level can come out and have a safe, fun place to skate where they're welcome and where there's riders of similar abilities as well as riders that are top level - who are their inspiration, can co-mingle and hang out,"***

By providing the resources to experiment with disciplines like downhill and free ride, the event is aimed at allowing riders the chance to hone in their skills in an effort to enable them to race in events like the Killington World Cup or Gravity Fest, two major events in the top flight of International Downhill Federation (IDF) that Girard also organizes. However, even with the intimidation factor at CenMass kept at a minimum for nearly a decade now it does not exempt the craziness from taking over the celebration.



*Make no mistake: CenMass is definitely for the #LadiesofShred too.*

In Girard's opinion, some of the event's wildest moments have come in different forms. On one hand, there's the high risk, high reward crashes from the big air section that routinely produces some brutal slams in the end. On the other hand though, there's the logistical wildness of having an upwards of 400 skaters come out for an event and figuring out how to safely organize them all. Then of course, there are the late night shenanigans that have at times included things like an all-out techno takeover at the sleepy town's local billiards cafe. As Girard looked back, he recalled,

***"Watching their exterior windows flexing from this ridiculous massive sound system and having 17 year olds head banging to dubstep was pretty crazy too."***



*Sticker exchange? Random cash? Not sure what's going on here but it's rad.*

With that being said, the stage has been set for the next iteration of the madness, Central Mass 9 to descend on Harvard this coming weekend. Those who are making their way out can be on the lookout for some Dragon Bearings giveaways over the course of the weekend. Otherwise, those unable to make it out can stay tuned to @centralmassskatefestival for live updates and check back in with the Stoked Ride Shop blog for a recap of CM9 and the future of the Central Mass legacy next week.

*All photos from CM8 shot by Khaleeq Alfred & owned by Mike Girard*