

Broxbourne Woods celebrates 30 years of Paintball



The sport of paintball was developed in America. The process of firing a ball of paint was originally developed in 1960s by the Nelson Paint Company. The plan was to create an effective way to mark trees at a distance for felling for the US Forestry Service. Owing to the success, the markers (guns) were further developed to mark stray cattle from a distance. Paint was injected into a gelatine capsule producing a ball which could be fired.

In 1977 two friends were discussing this process over drinks and thought it would be fun to use the guns in a hunting game through the woods as a challenge to see if a writer, a manufacturer and a stockbroker would survive against a hunter, soldier or hunter. This first game of 12 mixed occupation people was played in June 1981 in a forest and was won by a New Hampshire Forester.

The sport grew in popularity and in 1985 came to England. The International Paintball Players Association was established in 1988.

30 years ago the Zap Combat site in Broxbourne was farmland and the area used for stock car racing. The owner saw the potential in this popular new sport and converted this 40 acre area of private woodland and two other sites in the country (Birmingham and Hampshire) to high impact paintball.



The site was known as Zap Sports and operated through The Go-Ballistic National Paintball Parks group. The current owner Michelle, as a student, would participate in games along with her hairdresser friend Natalie. They were such regular visitors that they were asked if they would like to help out. Natalie helped in the office and Michelle became a Marshall and at the owners request she eventually became the manager of the site.



When the owners decided that they wanted to sell the business, Michelle grasped the opportunity to further develop the business. It was re-named Zap Combat and the quite painful high impact games were replaced with low impact. Lazer games, suitable for children were also added. The site now opens Thursday and Friday afternoons and every weekend. The zero impact lazer games are portable and parties can be held in any suitable location.

The paintballs used now are made with gelatine coloured with vegetable oil. They are biodegradable and edible and the colouring washes out.



The site is divided into separate gaming areas and recently the original high impact games have been re-introduced. Using semi-automatic guns the balls are fired at 220 mph (ouch). The low impact guns work with a spring giving a single shot and the ball must hit a hard surface to burst. On the site there is a children's event area and a log cabin providing hot and cold party food. Hosting children's parties, corporate events as well as day visitors, paintballing is proving very popular in Broxbourne.



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