

This episode was made possible, and seen a week earlier by my generous supporters on Patreon. Welcome to my new patrons this week,

Synopsis

So as Ash finally approaches the isle of plot after seven episode, and Tracey's all "there it is! Dragon Roost Island- NAVEL island!" Then Misty's all

And Tracey's all "That's a really weird question but I'll answer it anyway!"

And Ash is all "Well now that we've firmly established the name and shape of a blasted BADGE, let's hit the gym! Man, that was weird..."

Then we hit the titlecard and I'm sorry, I know it's a pun on Navy maneuvers and Navel being the name of the island and a type of orange, but spelt that way all I can think of is a REALLY niche fetish video. And that's about as blue as I'm comfortable going so let's move on to the landfall!

And once we get there we're greeted with... a surprisingly desolate landscape. Kind of creepy, actually, what happened here? Just as Ash is all "great, let me guess, I have to resolve a feud between two rival gym leaders before I get my badge. You got any ketchup on you, Misty?" "Surprisingly, yes" Their attention is caught by the local slide guitar.

What's awesome is that I'm not joking either, the music's diegetic. Apparently Danny here likes to sail to his theme song! So he disembarks and he's all

And Ash is all "Well yeah, but right now I'm kind wondering why the whole town is deserted, are you the only one living here? What happened?" "That's a topic undeserving of discussion, so we're going to drop it now, ok? Now let's focus on my teeth, shall we?"

"Now then, you're a pretty thing aren't you? I bet you look real good framed by the mountain snow..." "Oh Sweet Swirlix on a stick, why do I always attract the weird ones?" I'm not making this up either, it's seriously skeezy.

Thank heavens though we move on before Danny can ask if she hears the Mareep screaming and as they walk to the gym after Danny changes into his Milo Murphy cosplay, Misty's all

And Danny's like "That's a really weird question but I'll answer it anyway." "You know, I'm getting that a lot lately..."

Dang, now he's getting into character as Milo Murphy! Maybe that's what happened to the town, everyone got tired of being around his curse! It's a Disney cartoon, look it up, it's pretty good. Anyway Misty's all

And Ash is like "I literally have a tent and sleeping bags in this backpack, what are you on about? You've got so little in your satchel it got replaced with a sack of rocks and you didn't notice!" "Ah, the misspent energies of youth!" I'll mispend YOUR energies!" then Danny's all "Ah, you two must really like each other. Nothing like equating insults with affection to build a relationship of trust on!" then Tracey's all "hey, that's what I keep saying!"

Then we're finally mercifully released from the grip of pre-teen hormones and the grown men who like to exploit them for fun and arrive at the gym. Turns out in order to qualify for the gym you need to climb to the top of a mountain without the use of Pokemon.

Just think about that for a second. This POKEMON GYM, a place where kids are TESTED ON THEIR SKILLS AS A POKEMON TRAINER, have to pass a challenge without using Pokemon. This is like asking a pro Hearthstone player to beat Dark Souls before they enter a tournament! There is literally no purpose to this except to weed out the... weak and disabled... Danny, stop smiling like that! "The mountain tenderises them on the way down."

So Ash begins touching the void with a stirring battle cry...

And holy crap I guess he's really going for it! No cables, no handholds and oh look, now he's in free fall. I'm starting to see why there aren't many old people in this world... Luckily Ash survives by pulling a Nathan Drake!

"Yep, right out of the socket! Bulbasaur, think you could click it back in-" "NO, Ash! You'll be disqualified!" "But I'm about to freaking die!" "But what is life without Gym battles?" "You're right! You're ABSOLUTELY right! Screw dislocation! Screw muscles torn like wet cardboard and the possibility of sepsis! I WILL be the greatest Pokemon trainer and I will prove it by NOT TRAINING MY POKEMON!"

And if that's not enough we get a "Wow, that kid gets it. Life and limb should always be secondary to the sport you choose to pursue."

Then they stop a little ways up and it seems like it's plain sailing until

Yes, apparently team rocket disguised themselves in the fog by cooking up... Basculin? Oh, who am I kidding, it's fish, pokemon still haven't fully taken over the ecosystem yet. Anyway they get their world rocked by Danny who's all

"I already took care of the troublemakers in the village"
and the duo continues to the top, this time slowed down by the bitter cold. Pikachu starts to falter but then ash is all

"I've already shattered my spine and ripped my arm out, what are some chilblains between friends after that?" Then they FINALLY reach the top and misty reveals the shocking truth!

Wow! The ONLY other character we've met so far is the gym leader? And they call Wild Duck pokemon far fetched! Then Tracey's all

And Danny's like "Yes, those who fail to measure up to my physical level aren't worthy to participate in a tournament where you stand on a platform and shout at things! Disabled trainers can take a hike! No dreams for them!" "You know, I've never actually met a disabled trainer..." "Exactly."

Woof, that got darker than I wanted, let's move on to the WACKY COMPETITION, shall we? Just like the first gym, it's best two out of three on three unique events. Round One: Freeze a geyser faster than Nidoqueen! Hope you brought an ice pokemon, ash, or you might as well have let go earlier! Luckily Lapras is able to give a good try but falls short. Round two: sculpt the block of ice you just made into a workable bobsled! Hope your pokemon can replicate a blueprint verbatim! Ash brings out a bulbasaur, fair enough, pikachu, o...kay, and

"What are you yelling for, Tracey? You've never seen Charizard before!" "You kidding? You don't know you got number 3 on PSBN's top fails of the indigo league? EVERYONE knows your charizard!" "Well, brilliant."

Luckily the will of charizard falls in Ash's favor this time, as while bulbasaur carves and pikachu... zaps I guess, honestly squirtle could do a way better job with controlled water

jets but anyway, Ash is all “Come on Charizard, I can’t win without you! I’ve learned absolutely nothing since the league!” and Charizard reacts accordingly.

Of course, this also carves the ice perfectly... somehow, I guess if pokemon can shape fire into kanji they can build sleds with them. So Ash wins! Now it’s on to ROUND 3: a race in said sleds, all the way back down the mountain! So wait, if Ash won the first two rounds would just get the badge and go down the cable car? That certainly would have been anticlimactic! So then they’re off! Somehow! Who pushed them? Did YOU push them? I didn’t push them! Whatever, so they barrel down the hill at bone-shattering speeds and Tracey’s all

And Misty’s like “Good idea, we’ll definitely match their speed!”

But then Danny falls into a Rocket pit and Ash, who before could barely control his sled, pulls off a flawlessly executed Kaneda maneuver and stops to help. After Team Rocket does the usual and Danny forces Electrode to sacrifice itself for the cause we of course return to the top to try again OR we start from halfway down despite Danny clearly being farther ahead when it was disrupted. Oh well. So off they go again... somehow... Did you push them? I didn’t push them... And after being forcibly detoured into the brush it looks like all is lost until.. It isn’t.

“Bulbasaur! Try WINNIIIIIIING!”

Then they zoom past Danny after being whittled down to an ice tray (thought realistically the bottom really should have been the first to go) and Ash is victorious. So Danny, gracious winner that he is, is all

“But that’s not a ruby! It’s freaking green! Shouldn’t it be called the sea emerald badge or even the sea green sapphire badge if it’s made out of the same stuff?” “Honestly, The sea green sapphire actually sounds cooler.” “yeah, what’s up with that, Danny?”

“Do y’all want to take this badge, or do you want to find out where all the people in the village went?”

“Hooray! I got a sea ruby badge!”

Thoughts

Well this sucked. Not only was the animation pretty poor with some really stiff and janky sections with multiple off-model and ugly cels, but what the heck was up with this entire screwed up premise?

Now when I say that the premise is poor I don't mean its broadest strokes, as an idea of a gym battle on a mountain with a bob sled race is actually pretty sweet. But if you look at it ANY closer than that, it's just a trainwreck of a plot. Most of my gripes are pretty well laid out in the synopsis, but since I tend to go overly nitpicky for the sake of a joke there let me lay it all out properly here: nearly every example of conflict and stakes in this episode was more contrived than a bad Harry Potter Self-insert fanfiction. There was a shock opening with the ghost town that adds nothing to anything and dropped immediately. They give Danny exactly two character traits, bland positivity and skeezy creeper, and even then I'm pretty sure that last one was unintentional. There is NO reason for ash not to be able to use his pokemon to climb the mountain other than as a twisted form of eugenics and a crappy form of manufacturing tension, not to mention ash should have been disqualified anyway seeing as pikachu assisted him by lending him his body heat.

Then we get a joke of a competition that not only seems tailored specifically to ash's team, but also drains any form of tension when you realise that Ash HAS to get to the final round. At least in the first gym there was the possibility of ash winning the first two rounds but here, nope! I could go on but I'd just be repeating the synopsis more than I need to. It's dumb, it's boring, it's frustrating and none of the characters grow, even the new ones that aren't hampered by long running syndrome. Heck, Ash especially seems to have regressed in the way he treats charizard, and he isn't even punished for it! It's just so sloppy and the fact that it's a gym episode just makes it all the more tragic. I gave Fit to be Tide a pokeball rating because aside from it's blandnes it was perfectly serviceable, but this one doesn't have that luxury. All this has is a pokeshipping hint, a half decent race and some nice backgrounds. Not enough for me to stop it settling at the bottom with a Rock rating.

Trivia

Let's talk a little about the sea ruby badge. While looking up whether it's possible for rubies to be green, I found out that they're actually just red sapphires! Well to be fair, they're all corundum, but if it's any color other than red, it's a sapphire, and if it's anything other than blue, it's a colored sapphire. So yes, if the badge has a green sapphire in it, at an unbelievably basic level it is in fact also a sea ruby badge. How's THAT for inane trivia!

But wait, I have more badge trivia! The original name in japanese was the Shiranami Badge, which can be translated as the White-Crested Waves Badge or the Whitecaps Badge. See that work a bit better as it can apply to be the ocean and the mountains! This is the content you sub for, people!

Now I need to mention this as it's one of the only things that makes this episode stand out, but I'm a little skeptical about it. Apparently an old animation cel from this episode was found marked with a 1996 date, seen here, meaning this episode was in development since before or shortly after the first episode even premiered. The reason I look sideways at that though is that for one thing, pokemon was originally meant to be a single season, so having a second season episode in development this early seems to contradict that. For another thing, there's actually a magazine article about the development process of the orange island season that states that the turnaround for a single episode is about 6 months, not three years. Now it may have been a concept for an early episode that wasn't used until now, but the fact that it's painted and inked suggests it was pretty much ready for airing. The biggest cause for suspicion for me though, is simply that we don't know where it came from. The picture is just there on Bulbapedia with no source. So until one shows up, I'll remain skeptical.

There is one other unique aspect to this episode, though: as of it's airing, All 150 original gen 1 pokemon have appeared in the show! Yep, we were all just waiting on Nidoqueen, who'd have thought... What's really crazy is that you know how long we would have to wait until that number reached 151? 18 YEARS. Yes, Mew didn't properly appear in the show outside boss fantasies until Sun and freaking Moon, in the kanto visit episode over 800 episodes later. Geez, that little pink embryo really does know how to hide...

Bulbapedia

Script help: Verdant range, edmg7, bigdocfan, shadao

Patrons

And So, Suede bids the bulky beauty bye-bye as he heads towards the islands of non-filler. What awaits him there? Will the episodes get better? Or is it all downhill from here?

And So, Suede slides dejectedly away from the gym depressed by the show's abysmal gym track record. He seems lost in despair, but maybe a fresh new island can wake him up to better possibilities...