



DAN DEAN/staff photographer

It's a long way from a sunny West Coast beach, but snowboarding on powder is as close as you can get to surfing — winter style.

Catch a 'wave'

Snowboarding craze brings West Coast surfing to ski hills

By Bill Parker
staff writer

The young skier watched in awe as Mike Greenway floated over the snow with surf-like motion.

"Check it out," the youngster called to his friend. "Awesome man, how cool."

Greenway was riding a snowboard down a slalom course at Mt. Brighton.

Snowboarding is the newest craze on the ski slopes and it's sweeping the country faster than a Michael Jackson hit.

"Snowboarding has tripled in growth in the past couple of years," said Greenway, a snowboarding instructor at Mt. Brighton. "Skateboarding picked up and a lot of skateboarders snowboard in the winter. We have between 30 and 50 snowboarders per day on the weekends."

Alpine Valley in Milford has been equally busy with snowboarders this season.

"Last year we had about 5-10 boards on the hill on a good day," said Lara Peereboom, Alpine's snowboard instructor. "This year we have between 40 and 50 boards on a good day. It's not taking over yet, but we're working on it."

ACCORDING TO Greenway, snowboarding originated in Vermont about 12 years ago. It began on the hills in "the backwoods," but as it grew in popularity, it evolved into a ski resort activity.

"They were pretty much designed for backwoods use in powder," explained Greenway. "People would hike back to a hill and ride down. They originally started with half-inch fins on the back, which made it easier to control in the snow. Now the boards have metal edges which work better on hardpacked conditions like we have here in Michigan."

The standard snowboard is between four and six feet long and 12 to 18 inches wide. Snowboarders wear regular winter boots and strap the snowboards to their feet with non-release bindings. No ski poles are used. Advanced snowboarders compare the ride to surfing.

"When you're in powder it's about as close as you can get to surfing without going to the beach. You're floating on top of the snow," said Peereboom. "You use the same balance and technique as surfing. It's almost a sensation as if you're flying."

PAUL SCHNEIDER, a Birmingham resident with five years of snowboarding experience, enjoys the



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"Hang 10" refers to riding the tip of a snowboard. You can't quite "hang 10" with boots on, but snowboarding is a popular winter sport that brings the sensation of surfing to the ski slopes.

backwoods conditions much more than the ski resort.

"I hate boarding on hardpack," said Schneider, a professional skateboarder in the summer. "It's a lot more fun in powder. It's easier to control the board and if you fall you don't bruise. I think the backwoods belong to the snowboarders and the resorts belong to the skiers."

Management at some ski resorts agree with

Schneider's feelings. Alpine Valley and Mt. Brighton are the only resorts in the area that allow snowboards on the slopes.

"We do not allow them," said Peg Westlund of Pine Knob in Clarkston. "In our past experiences, people on snowboards aren't as courteous with other skiers. We talk about (allowing snowboards on the hills) each year. Maybe next year our position will change."

Schneider, however, feels a minority of snowboarders are giving the sport a bad wrap.

"The big problem is, it seems, that a lot of kids haven't been conditioned that resorts are the skiers' hills. They make all the rules," said Schneider. "A lot of kids are in it only to jump. They don't know how to control the board. They get in the way of skiers and all snowboarders pay the price. But that's not what the sport is about."

DESPITE THE CONTROVERSY, most serious snowboarders feel the sport is here to stay.

"I don't think it's a fad," said Schneider. "A good snowboard costs about \$300-\$400 and if you spend that much money on something, I think you'll stick with it. There is already a national and world competition. It has already established itself as a sport."

"People are doing it in Europe, Greenland, everywhere there is snow. It could even take off as an Olympic sport. You never know."

Peereboom feels snowboarding will stick around because it offers a neat alternative to skiing.

"Personally, I feel snowboarding is more fun," said Peereboom. "It's more of a challenge. Skiing gets boring on a little hill. On a (snowboard) you have to work harder. You have no skis and no poles. It's all balance. That's what makes it attractive. I think it will stay around. People have skied for so long, now they want something different."

Anyone interested in exploring the sport of snowboarding can rent a board at Mt. Brighton. Spectators and participants are invited to the First Annual Great Lakes Snowboard Competition, 8 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 27, at Alpine Valley. For details call 682-2601.

Dying breed? Backyard rinks are few and far between

By Tim Smith
staff writer

Neighborhood ice rinks, ever-present in the '60s and early '70s, are dwindling to a precious few. Today, most people pack up the sticks and skates and head to an indoor arena whenever the urge strikes to play hockey.

Not Southfield's Rob Parent, a holdout for the old days.

All the 26-year-old hockey buff has to do is lace up the skates and walk into his back yard, where a glossy sheet of homemade ice is located.

"You don't have to know too much. You just need level ground and mounds (on the sides) so the water doesn't get out," said Parent, a veteran rink-builder of two years — not to mention the winters spent helping his dad build one behind his backyard home, near Telegraph and 12 Mile.

"Once the yard is leveled off, the rink's not going to change too much," he explained.

The ice is a bit chipper — more brittle — than that found in arenas, and Zambonis are nowhere to be

some fun," explained Parent, a resident of the Evergreen-Eight Mile area. "They drop their gloves and start imitating 'Hockey Night in Canada.'"

ACCORDING TO Parent, an adequate home ice rink requires long hours of attention and toil. One can take a full weekend to complete, and later much after-work time for maintenance.

But once the first foundation is laid, Parent said it isn't difficult to get that ice down in subsequent years.

"You don't have to know too much. You just need level ground and mounds (on the sides) so the water doesn't get out," said Parent, a veteran rink-builder of two years — not to mention the winters spent helping his dad build one behind his backyard home, near Telegraph and 12 Mile.

"Once the yard is leveled off, the rink's not going to change too much," he explained.

"Playing in a snowstorm is great, but it's hard to see the puck."

— Rob Parent, Southfield

found. However, Parent said the game is still a blast, even though played on a much smaller scale.

FOR A HOME ice rink guaranteed to provide plenty of winter excitement, here is Parent's recipe.

● The first, and most important thing novice rink-builders should do when starting out is to find a good, level piece of land. If the earth is tilted or uneven, Parent suggests bringing in loads of dirt.

flooding the rink. Parent said two-by-fours can be used as an alternative.

● Next on his checklist is rolling out plenty of heavy duty visqueen, a single sheet of thick plastic to be laid out on the ground where the ice is planned. For best results, there shouldn't be any snow under the plastic, Parent said.

He said the visqueen can be looped over the sides and secured with logs or pieces of wood. The setup works to hold water much like a swimming pool does.

AND THE PLASTIC ensures that a rink won't lose all its water during a warm spell, such as the one which hit the area recently.

● For rinks where hockey is expected to be played, end boards and/or wire fencing and floodlights are essential.

Otherwise, neighborhood hockey games become futile exercises in finding pucks in the snow or climbing fences with skates on.

It gets old real quick chasing the puck down," said Parent, who assembled eight feet of combined wire fence/volleyball net behind the end where a hockey goal is located.

After the components are in place, it's time to break out the hoses and crank the faucets.

"You flood it with about four inches of water initially," Parent said. "Usually, you get the same amount of ice."

FOR RESURFACING after a full-fledged hockey game, Parent said, "all you have to do is go out there with a hose and wet the whole thing down, walking back and forth."

He said home rink builders should expect to pay more for supplies such as visqueen, lumber and dirt the first time out. But the costs are reduced to an inflated water bill in following years, Parent added.

"It'll cost me at least \$80 on the bill by the end of winter, but you pay about the same for an hour of ice at some places."

And for that extra money, hockey enthusiasts can enjoy playing at a whim, even getting out in blizzard conditions.

And in today's fast-paced world, it's much easier to toss the skates into the car and drive to the arena.

That's too bad, said Parent. "They don't know what they are missing," he said, tugging on a skate lace and getting ready for another dose of do-it-yourself winter fun.