Snowboarder finds bigger challenge out west



easier transi-tion.
Not true for

It's often said things look bet-ter on paper — think it through logically and it will make for an

Not true for snowboarding. You tightly You tightly You tightly you tightly to a waxed (for optimal speed) of bergles board. While attached to this device you speed down a snow-covered mountain looking for jumps so you can attempt difficult combinations of flips and spins, all in sub-zero temperatures.

OK, so it deen't look so good in paper. But it sure is a thrill. Getting the hang of it is exceedingly difficult. The day after my first attempt at the sport doesn't rate with my fondest memories.

sport doesn't rate with my fondest memories.

But a few years later, I can't
get enough of snowboarding. In
our area we have a lot of choices
on where to snowboard: Alpine
Valley, Mount Brighton, Mount
Holly and Boyne Highland,
For the last few years I navigated those hills, all the while
yearning for a more difficult
challenge. A few weeks age, I
found it.

On a recent trip to visit with
my close friends, Kelly and Jack
Skinner, who live in Colorado
Springs, I took my board with
plans to do some snowboarding.
This excited me since chances to
ski out west aren't common

ski out west aren't common.

But what I encountered was like nothing I had ever seen like nothing I had ever seen before, or remotely experienced. Knowing only the hills of Michigan (which might top a few thousand feet), what Colorado offered was astonishing. "After spending some time in the Springs, Kelly, his brother furt, Tyler Mance and I made the hour drive to the base of Breckenridge.

We arrived at dark, so all I could make out initially was a looming, dark black shadow that extended up further than I could be to the seen of the seen

The town — that was some-thing else. Breckonridge was alive with shops, chalets, equi-hient vendors, everything you think of when you think of a ski fown. People wandered about bundled in thick winter coats, some still wearing their boots from a long day of navigating touch terrain.

from a long day of navigating tough termin.

The night was spent in front of a fire talking about what lay ahead the next day. Tyler, a student at Central Michigan, and yeres the most excited. We were accustomed to Michigan skilling. This Colorado experience seemed to us like a chance to conquer the world.

As we turned in for the night, I book one more peek out the window at that looming, dark shadow. I was filled with zuitieration.

Morning came quickly. The

tion.

'Morning came quickly. The chair lifts of Breckenridge opened at 8:30 a.m., so a quick bowl of cereal sufficed as breakfast. The process of putting all the gear on, with multiple layers of clothing, seemed to take forever-

er. The short drive from the condo to the mountain was a visual spectacle like no other, with trees as far as you could see and a mountain range that went on forever.

14,000 feet high, the peaks engulfed within thick cumulus clouds. All I could do was stare.

Until we got to the lifts, the next few minutes were a blur. I hardly remember purchasing a ticket or walking to the mountain's base, but the initial chair-lift to the top remains, and will always remain, vivid.

A cold wind blew through my body, though it did not stop me from shedding my gloves and snapping some photos as we ascended to what would turn out to be the time of my life. I fumbled quickly to put my camera away and hustled to pull my gloves on as the end of the lift and settled at the edge of the hill, the point of no return and your last chance to avoid the uncontrollable tug of gravity.

Kelly, Ty and Kurt, who were sking, pulled up along side as I strapped my foot into my snow-board.

"Ready Gisf" asked Kelly.

samp, point on y snow-beard.

Rendy Gis' naked Kelly.

And then he was off, swoosh-ing down the hill. After one more deep breath I followed.

In the first run I just got the hang of navigating the 20-25 inches of fresh powder, while trying to keep an eye on Kelly's red jacket so I wouldn't get lost.

I made it down safely, and was proud of myself for that, but ing like Michigan sking. I told the rest of the group that it was great, but tough.

"Tough?" said kurt, an expert skier. That was only the inter-mediate hill. I'll take you to-

And off we went. I slowly pro-gressed during the day to what now is the pinnacle moment of my snowboarding life. Before breaking for lunch, the rest of the group agreed that I

was ready for Chair Six, which would lead to Peak Eight. The 15-minute chair ride emptied into the Horseshoe Bowl, a 12,141-foot double-black diamond run with lots of powder—and run with lots of powder—and run with lots of forward run and a quick preyer I ahoved off. I made di, but the near vertical drop was the biggest runh of my life.

After a lunch break, it was back for Round Two. A light snow had begun to fall, which served to enhance the experiences of the day.

Never in our eight hours on the mountain did we snow-board/ski the same run. There was always a different avenue to explore.

The snow accumulated quickly and as it got heavier, there were countless times I became stuck in powder drifts that came up to hips.

As the sun began to set, it was time for us to exit. One last run, slower than the rest for me.

hips.

As the sun began to set, it was time for us to exit. One last run, alower than the rest for me. I was trying desperately to not lei tend, to take my time and just enjoy snowbearding in Colorado.

After one more look at the mountain, I plepped into the car, and by the time we backed out, I was out. Fatigue had finally caught up to me; the adrenalin in the tank had expired.

Michigan skiers/snowbearders don't get the opportunity to experience something like Breckenridge very often. It's a memory I plan to recapture every year.

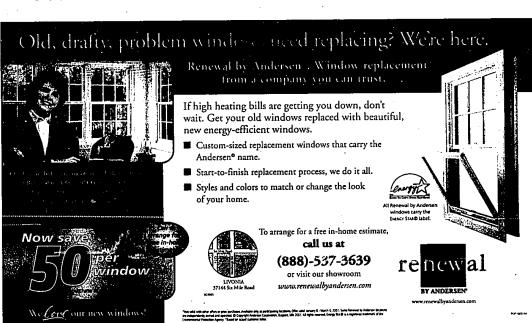
As my trip came to an end, leaving Colorado was terribly difficult. One thing is certain: Next year can't come fast enough!

Canton resident Nick Gismon-di is a free-lance writer and a first-year student at Eastern Michigan University.





Snowboarders: Canton resident Nick Gismondi resident Nick Gismondi (above) participates in the winter sporting event at Breckenridge, Colo. In the photograph at left are snowboarders (left to right) Kurt Skinner, Gismondi, Kelly Skinner and Tyler Mance.



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