

# Snowboarders surf the slopes

Thursday, November 29, 1990 O&E

★ 9D

By Pat Schutte  
staff writer

Pat Schutte, who coordinates the snowboard school at Mt. Brighton Ski Area, grew up as one of those street wizards who could take a small board with rollers on the bottom and skateboard like a champion. He moved naturally to snowboarding, so his life on the slopes parallels the history of this growing winter sport.

"It all started out as a picture in a magazine. There was this shot of a guy carving a turn through some deep snow on a surfboard-like plaything. It was just one picture, but it was to foreshadow something that has taken Michigan winters by storm."

The picture, published in the winter of 1978 in the now defunct Skateboarder magazine, inspired alternative-thrill enthusiasts from Detroit to the U.P.

I was one of those enthusiasts. Snowboarding in the 1980s is an accepted mega-million dollar sport. Virtually all of the ski areas now accommodate snowboarders by building special ditch-like runs called "halfpipes" and allowing snowboarders to ride the chairlifts with the skiers. Technology, adapted from the ski industry, permits snowboarders to travel as fast as skiers, and with proper instruction, with just as much control.

In Michigan, skateboarders have only six to seven months of good skateboarding weather, so they have taken to snowboarding with enthusiasm.

David Seelbinder, 27 of Orionville, has skateboarded since the late

1970s and is now a snowboarding instructor at Alpine Valley in Milford. Also a skier, Seelbinder compares the two sports.

"With snowboarding you're always hitting lumps, bumps, and jumps, flying around and having a blast. It's like surfing in the snow," he said. "Skiing is up and down and cold."

Ben Knaak, 18, of Brighton is also a skier-turned-snowboarder with a skateboard background. He finds the sport of snowboarding to be much more wide open than skiing.

"I found that with skiing I couldn't go the distance that I wanted to, probably because I wasn't that good," said Knaak, a top area snowboarder competitor. "I tried snowboarding and found that it was the sport for me. Skiing was limiting."

You had to go out West to get the full affect. With snowboarding you can have a blast in your own backyard.

Twelve years ago we didn't have the luxuries that riders have today. Wherever you wanted to ride, you had to hike to get there. Ski areas would have nothing to do with snowboards back then. And the boards we rode would crack up a Third World boarder today.

My first board was a Snurfer (a wooden, water-ski-like contraption that in its very rudimentary form was the grandfather of the snowboard) with a skateboard deck, minus the wheels, mounted on top.

The bindings consisted of rubber garbage can straps or bent metal hooks with athletic tape for padding.

If we were dropping down a steep, gravel-faced gorge in a sand pit during the summer, we wore tennis

shoes. If we climbed through deep snow to "catch a ride," we wore two pairs of socks with our tennis shoes.

The first board you could actually purchase back then was a snappy, pressed yellow plastic version of the skateboard we had so cheaply, and crudely modified. We had to dish out a whole 60 bucks at Don Thomas Sporthaus in Birmingham for this board. But once you had one, you could hang out with the area's top riders.

In Michigan, snowboarding took a dive when skateboarding suffered its first death in the early 1980s. Many of the original riders had gone off to college, left the state to find work, or headed to Colorado to ski. It was as if someone had pushed the pause button on Michigan snowboarding. And though it laid dormant for a couple of years, everyone who knew the thrill first hand also knew that snowboarding would become the popular sport that it is today.

Snowboarding has given the ski industry a shot of adrenaline. For the first time in the history of skiing in North America, ski areas allow a new recreational tool on their runs. Sleds, toboggans, inner tubes, rolled up sheets of plastic. You can name a bunch of snow gadgets, but none of them have been allowed at ski areas other than in special events.

"Snowboarding has created more excitement and enthusiasm due to the difference of the sport," said Joe Bruhn, general manager of Mt. Brighton ski area in Brighton. "We promote snowboarding as if it were just another aspect of skiing. We rent boards, provide instruction, and appreciate the people who come to Mt. Brighton to snowboard."

Snowboards have also taken a firm hold on the retail skiing business. "We see the people who came in here in the 1970s and '80s to purchase skateboard equipment and they now try to buy snowboarding," said Bob Thomas, manager of Don Thomas Sporthaus in Birmingham, the store which played the lead role in introducing skateboarding and snowboarding to Michigan.

"Snowboarding's very popular with the 10-24 year olds, but we're also starting to see quite a few adventurous upper 20s and 30 year olds giving it a wing."

Bill Parent of Sun and Snow sports in Ann Arbor has been in the snowboard market for several years and is confident that snowboarding has made a niche for itself in the ski industry.

"Over the last several years we've gradually increased the lines of snowboards we carry and are confident that this sport will maintain its popularity for many years to come," he said.

Some skiers view snowboarders as a nuisance, but most tolerate them. Some look to the snowboard with curiosity. For these skiers, the snowboard has opened up a whole new toy box in a state that produces some of the nation's greatest skiers on some of the nation's smallest hills.

One skier who is in the process of picking up the sport of snowboarding is Scott Hoag, 30, of Novi. Hoag, a part-time ski instructor at Mt. Brighton, says that snowboarding has brought some added excitement to Detroit area hills.

"In this particular part of Michigan the terrain is not typically challenging to an advanced skier," he said. "Snowboarding has introduced a different aspect so the local terrain can now be considered challenging."

K2 ski and snowboard representative Greg Stebbins of Petoskey agrees. "It makes even the most gradual run exciting."

Snowboarders may not have started as skiers, transplanted surfers or windsurfers, but most have some kind of skateboarding background. In coastal states, where skateboarding began, skateboarders can surf when they're not skateboarding.



Leo Oles

## Party time

After a morning of risking their necks on the slopes, many skiers like to take a break. In fact, ski parties are so popular that many people who don't even ski love the lodges. And whatever you prefer, fancy dress or puffy parkas, there is something for all tastes. This group of happy downhillers found their thrills at the Winter Carnival at Boyne Mountain.

## Ski Patrol offers helping hands in time of trouble

Continued from Page 7

stings. As well as first aid and CPR, the ski patrol must pass courses in skiing proficiency, toboggan handling (for transporting injured skiers down hill) and aerial lift evacuation (mostly due to failures to get on and off chair lifts properly).

The injuries Heinz sees today are different from those he saw 21 years ago. "Back then it was leg and ankle injuries, but now, with improved boots and bindings, we don't have lower leg injuries as much as knee injuries — 80 percent of injuries today are knees."

If all this talk of injuries makes you squeamish, Heinz stresses that there are safety precautions you can take to reduce your risk:

- Take lessons. "Lessons get you started right, teach you how to turn, how to stop and how to control your speed. With improved equipment and grooming of the slopes, it's easy to ski fast and ski out of control. Reckless skiing causes accidents."

- Check equipment. "Make sure all your equipment is properly fitted and that your bindings release properly."

- Dress properly. "Layer clothing for the most warmth and the

least bulk." Heinz still likes wool best for keeping moisture from the body while providing warmth. "But Thinsulate, Goretex, all those newer fabrics are OK too."

- Be courteous. "Don't stop in the middle of the hill. When you enter from the side, check up the hill for other skiers. And if there's an accident, stay with the injured skier until help arrives."

If you follow this advice, you can be sure that Minnie Dole, wherever he is, will approve of your skiing. And if you still have an accident, do not despair. Your rust-colored rescuer will soon arrive.

## Pets Are Inn



Boarding without cages in a loving home environment

Call for free brochure  
642-6842

Join our escorted group on the all new

"CRYSTAL HARMONY"  
January 27, 1991  
San Juan to Alcapulco  
(Trans Canal)  
Special Group Reductions

travel  
max  
851-7760

Presents  
**LEARN TO SKI/  
RACE CLINICS**  
8 HOURS OF INSTRUCTION

\*December 14, 15 & 16, 1990  
\*January 4, 5 & 6, 1991  
\*February 1, 2 & 3, 1991  
ALL LEVELS OF SKIERS & CHILDREN WELCOMED  
Weekend Ski Packages Available from \$130 and includes:  
• 2 nights lodging • Lift tickets Friday night, Saturday, Sunday  
• Breakfast Saturday & Sunday • NASTAR Race • Dinner & party Saturday night • Warren Miller movie • Free day care  
For More Information on Instructional Clinics  
Let's go Skiing! Call Debbie 626-7454 or Joe 343-0622

**Cancun** from **\$299<sup>90</sup>** air only  
7 nights w/hotel from **\$539<sup>90</sup>**

**Ixtapa** from **\$379<sup>90</sup>** air only  
7 nights w/hotel from **\$599<sup>90</sup>**  
some restrictions apply

**TRAVELWORKS**  
29201 Telegraph • Southfield, MI 48034  
827-9920 • 1-800-729-9820 • FAX (313) 355-1701

## SENSATIONAL SLOPES



DELTA  
Winter Vacations

Ski the World Famous Colorado Rockies Experience Utah's "Greatest Snow on Earth"

### Your Dream Vacation Includes:

- \* Round trip air transportation via Delta Air Lines to Denver or Salt Lake City
- \* Hotel accommodations
- \* A "skierized" Alamo rental car with unlimited mileage for three 24-hour periods
- \* Bonus Features

| Departure City<br>4 Days/3 Nights | Steamboat<br>Springs<br>from: | Salt Lake<br>City<br>from: |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Grand Rapids                      | 419                           | 429                        |
| Detroit                           | 449                           | 429                        |

General Restrictions: Package price per person does not include taxes, tips, or other optional services. Delta Air Lines is not responsible for any changes in fares, taxes, or other optional services. Delta Air Lines is not responsible for any changes in fares, taxes, or other optional services. Delta Air Lines is not responsible for any changes in fares, taxes, or other optional services.



OPEN WEEKDAYS 8:30 - 5:30

LATHRUP VILLAGE  
26026 Southfield Road  
Call 443-8989

PLYMOUTH  
549 Ann Arbor Road  
(Riverbank Square)  
Call 455-1980

Before booking your next vacation, look for this symbol. It's your assurance that this tour/cruise vacation is insured against financial default.

## High Seas. Low Fares.



Only by Sea Inc., together with Royal Caribbean Cruise Line, offers the lowest fares for the price of 7. That's 7 days of luxury travel for the price of 1. And the Royal Nordic Prince. Save \$1190 per couple. Free upgrade to 11th deck. Call Only By Sea at 645-9900 and prepare to sail.

