

Opinion: Questioning if snowboarding can be saved

By Marc Peruzzi, Outside

I was a state college kid the first and only time I rode a snowboard. This was in the 1980s and snowboarding was still illegal at New Hampshire's ski resorts. A classmate from New York City named after Dylan Thomas (and who called everybody he didn't like a chucklehead) brought a board to campus after the winter break. It was a Burton Woody. Skegs on the base. No edges. You just strapped your Sorels in and went.

But it didn't hook me. It's not that I didn't think snowboarding was relevant, I did and I still do. But I was already a passionate skier and never once considered giving it up. Still, I supported my friends in the fight to open resorts to the fledgling sport, hired snowboarders to run nascent board departments in 50-year-old ski shops, helped Olympic snowboard racers figure out their stance angles and tuning, ran photos and profiles of snowboarders in a magazine about skiing, chased powder with snowboarders, climbed and descended Mount Rainier with snowboarders, and cracked many an après beer with snowboarders.

It sounds like borderline bigotry to say it, but I have "snowboarding friends." In fact, from adulthood on, most of my skiing memories are tied up with snowboarding. Frankly, skiing would be a lot less fun without it. From twin tips and fat skis to better clothing and a more laissez-faire attitude at ski resorts, the advent of snowboarding dramatically altered my once-stale sport. So please trust that I'm not just a hater when I say this: Snowboarding is screwed.

Many a destination resort will admit privately that snowboarding now accounts for less than 15 percent of total

revenue. Others have seen snowboard visits cut in half. Sales of snowboarding gear are down dramatically, too, a whopping 29 percent over the past six years. Where did all the snowboarders go? Many are skiing. Others simply quit.

It didn't really have to be like this. The problem isn't so much snowboarding, but the snowboarding industry. The sport was invented by humble folk in the Midwest (by a friend's grandfather) and Vermont (by some older classmates of my wife), but it was adopted by Southern California. Actually it was more of an alien rendition than an adoption. Most snowboarders in places like Maine, Montana, and Colorado have little affiliation with the carefully cultivated image of "action sports." Then there's the ageism. Over 30 years old but still get out and shred? The industry lives in absolute dread of you.

Read the whole story