

Shredding in a whole new way

Snowskates bring a new sport to
Beaver Creek. **By Laura Lieff**

Beaver Creek and Vail have a new winter sport that's here to stay – snowskating. The sport's unofficial debut took place recently when a group of approximately 20 curious snow lovers – including snowboard instructors, members of the Beaver Creek park crew, former pro snowboarders and local shredders – spent a day trying out a new sport with new gear.

With less than average snowfall this year, riders have been looking for ways to keep the mountain interesting, which is why Beaver Creek Ski and Snowboard School Manager Mark "Spike" Eisenman invited Dan Russell of Hovland Snowskates to Beaver Creek.

"Now that snowskating is legal at Beaver Creek, a lot of instructors were interested in upgrading to a newer version," Eisenman says. "I looked into companies that would have availability to help out our staff. Dan was very accommodating, offered to help us and could deliver the goods."

Snowskates resemble a skateboard in size, and in that they have no bindings. They also have a ski underneath the top deck and a leash like a surfboard. The snowskates used on the demo day unofficially dubbed Snowskate Sunday featured a 9x36-inch top deck and a 42-inch sub deck. Without the element of bindings, snowskaters can wear snowboard boots or simply regular snow boots, sneakers or skateboarding shoes.

"What's so cool about snowskating is that it is in its infancy," Russell says. "Anyone who can snowboard can snowskate, and people are starting to shred strapless more and more. I'm really excited to see the progression."

While some of the people in the group had been on a snowskate over a decade ago, for others, Snowskate Sunday was their first time.

"It's always fun to ride in a big group, especially when you're trying something new and all learning together," Eisenman says. "It's a sport you can have fun with and try new things, and everyone has a blast. It makes us all remember what it's like to learn from scratch."

New and improved

According to former pro snowboarder and longtime local Brian "Wookie" Fleming, Beaver Creek allowed snowskating over 10 years ago for just a few weeks. Then the sport disappeared as quickly as it arrived.

"The older snowskates that came out were more similar to a traditional skateboard because they were smaller," he says. "But now they've been upgraded, and they are bigger, wider and much easier to control. Finding the proper size was the key."

Some might be concerned about a sport that uses equipment without bindings on the slopes, but Russell says he does not foresee any problems.

"Ski hills were concerned about snowskating at first because of foot traffic on the lifts,"



Brian "Wookie" Fleming, Chuck Hewitt and Dave Hryckowian cruise Beaver Creek on snowskates. The newest sanctioned sport at the resort combines elements of skateboards and snowboarding. Mikie Farias photo.

Russell says. "As resorts get acquainted to it, they realize it's a non-issue. Snowskating is as safe or more so than skiing or snowboarding. It's nice to not be strapped in."

According to Eisenman, many of his private lesson guests have asked to try snowskating. "I appreciate Vail Resorts thinking outside the box and allowing more varied snowsports," he says. "It's great to see locals getting out there, always trying something different and having fun no matter what the conditions. I recently found that it helps with a family day on the mountain, too, as my seven year old is entertained trying out snowskating while my two-year-old learns to ski."

Fleming points out the reappearance of snowskating at Beaver Creek and Vail is beneficial for both the resorts and the snowskaters.

"Vail and Beaver Creek need snowskating because both mountains need another reason for people to be on the mountains," he says. "People are still paying for Epic passes and lift tickets, and these venues should be used more and allow more options."

Fleming says the sport was a great alternative to riding or skiing on poor-condition day. The sport has potential, he says.

"It was exciting being part of a big group – it was like being a kid again," he says of Snowskate Sunday. "I could even see people doing snowskate birthday parties. It also provides a new way to experience terrain you've been riding for years."

Beaver Creek Adult Private Supervisor Dave Hryckowian, who also helped organize Snowskate Sunday, thinks that the sport is here to stay. A few years ago, Vail Resorts heads decided snowskating should be allowed at either all or none of its resorts.

"They have been legal at Breckenridge for a couple of years. So legalizing snowskating at Beaver Creek and Vail was a no-brainer," he says.

Hryckowian also says that Beaver Creek Ski and Snowboard School is working on putting together a program that would allow instructors to teach snowskating in the future – maybe as soon as next season.

The future of snowskating

While Eisenman doesn't think snowskating will be in the Olympics anytime soon, he does think that the sport will continue to gain popularity.

"I think we'll see more people trying it as people are always looking for a new adventure," he says.

By all accounts, Snowskate Sunday made enthusiasts out of everyone who participated, and you may see more people toting snowskates with them to the mountain, along with their snowboards, on a more regular basis.

"Snowskating is next and it's starting," Russell says. "People are skeptical but if they try it, they love it. Every time." **A**

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