

SQUAW VALLEY, CA



Every sport has its proving ground. In surfing, it's the North Shore of Oahu. In tennis, it's Wimbledon. In snowboarding, it's Squaw Valley. The names, the talent, the heavies in the average XT-22 chair lift line can read like a snowboard flick's opening credits: Steve Graham, Tom Burt, Shawn Farmer, Nick Perata, Dave Seabone, Dave Hatchett, and Noah Salasnek all made names for themselves conquering the terrifying terrain at Squaw.

If you don't like air, if steeps make you queasy, if previously unthinkable lines send you in search of the cateters, you don't belong at Squaw. Pick any one: XT-22, Squaw Peak, Emigrant Peak, or Granite Chief, and you can lose yourself for a week in the terrain. Squaw is big, but better yet, 75 percent of the rideable terrain here is intermediate or expert. The local snowboard vibe here is heavily charged with energy. Fresh snow is tracked out quickly and lines are dropped with abandon, so come with a mission and keep your head down. (916)581-6985.



STRATTON, VT



Much like Mt. Baker, Stratton has a long snowboarding history, with roots in competition: The U.S. Open, the longest-running national snowboard contest in the free world, is hosted by Stratton. With Burton Snowboards, the world's largest snowboard company, right in its backyard, Stratton has been home to good snowboard riding as long as there has been good snowboard riding.

Because weather conditions on the East Coast are often tricky, much of the area's status is focused around its halfpipe, one of the best-shaped and most well-maintained in the country. This pipe has turned out one freestyle legend after another, including Jeff Brubaker, Jason Ford, and Todd Richards. (802)297-2200.

Now hit the road, Jack.



Doug Palladini lives in San Diego, but can ride wherever he wants because he edits for *Snowboarder* magazine.

You might find the Vail stereotype not in line with that of a snowboarder, but if you can get past the typecasting, a world of snowboarding pleasure could be yours. In fact, the Vail stereotype of wealthy jet-setters clogging up the mountain works in a snowboarder's favor, as most visitors load up the easy-to-get-to runs and leave the fun stuff to those in the know. Another major bonus of Vail is Beaver Creek, just a short shuttle ride away, even more stereotypically snobbish with even more untapped terrain for hungry riders.

Vail is seven miles wide, big enough for all of Colorado to find powder stashes, long tree runs, and huge hits off the beaten path. Beaver Creek, on the other hand, is smaller, very quiet, and there for the taking. This writer has taken full runs there, from getting off the lift to riding back into the lift line, without passing another soul. (303)476-5601.