



## "Skiboards Growing in Popularity"

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By Darren Marcy/Outdoor Editor

Alternative to skis and snowboards a fast-growing industry

BAYFIELD, Colo. If you haven't already seen them, you will soon.

Skiboards are growing in popularity the way snowboards did a couple of decades ago.

Best described as skis that are half as long and twice as wide, skiboards allow just about anybody with an interest in gravity-based snow sports to enjoy them, said Doc Roberts, owner of Skiboards Superstore in Bayfield.

Roberts said skiboards might be just what that winter sports junkie on your list wants to find under the tree.

About eight years ago, while living near Boulder, Colo., Roberts tried a pair of skiboards and was immediately hooked.

Roberts had long been an ice skater and skier, but he said he went home and told his wife, Christie, she had to try them.

"I was a long-term skater and long-term skier, but the two never went together for me," Roberts said. "But when I got on skiboards I immediately felt comfortable. It took me three runs to decide I would never go back again."

Roberts said the twin boards offer a little bit of the best of two worlds < skis and snowboards.

You can ski them tackling any terrain, or head into a terrain park for a variety of tricks.

Ease of learning is one of the highlights of skiboards, and they're easier on the body Roberts said.

"They're way easier," said Roberts, a former skier. "I really think they should be putting people on these in ski schools. I've taken people up who have never been on a lift before and by lunch they've already got it down and have already gone from a green run to a blue run."

Carol Komie, director of marketing and operations for Skiboards Superstore, said they are so easy anybody can learn in a short time.

"Skiboards are just so goshdarn easy anybody can do them and enjoy themselves," Komie said. "You don't need poles They're totally fun."

She said the company hears from a lot of moms who didn't want to invest the time on the mountain in lessons to join their families on the mountain.

"We get a lot of moms," Komie said. "All these moms that were so scared to try skiing are up there with their family. It's people who just want to go up to the mountain and have a good time."

Skiboard retail outlet

Skiboards aren't new, but for the most part skiboards have been flying under the radar.

Komie said the phenomenon started in the 1950s.

"It's kind of lingered on the outskirts of the ski industry for a long time," Komie said.

But only in the last 10 years or so, have major manufacturers gotten involved, putting out name-brand skiboards with names like K2, Fischer, Salomon, Head and others.

After Roberts had his epiphanous skiboard experience, he convinced his wife to help him launch an Internet business out of their garage.

Christie Roberts put together a small web page and the pair thought they might have a small side business on their hands.

One 3 a.m. phone call changed that.

That phone call, from Sweden, should have warned Doc and Christie of what was coming.

Soon, Doc Roberts had quit his job and was putting in 15 hour days in the garage trying to meet demand.

Eight years later, Skiboards.com is the world's largest skiboard retailer and the Web site offers a full range of outdoor winter gear.

"We sell about 2,000 to 2,500 pairs of skiboards a year," Komie said. "We're the biggest skiboard retailer in the world. These things fly out the door."

The Web site these days is taking 5 1/2 million hits per month.

Komie said the majority of sales go to the Midwest and east coast, but the

company ships orders all over the world.

The company is growing at a rate of about 15 percent to 20 percent per year, and this year the company will surpass one-half million dollars in sales.

The newest upgrade to what is still a family business is the opening of a retail store in Bayfield early last week.

Komie said the company had no intention of opening a retail store, but the small company had outgrown its old location and the old Napa building came available.

"We figured why not," Komie said.

Roberts said the change is working well so far.

"It's a perfect location for us," Roberts said. "Prior to that we were mostly Internet. Now we've got a full-on retail store. It's nice, it's serving the local community."

Locals can buy or rent skiboards out of the company's building, located at 42456 U.S. 160, but they can also buy or rent by mail.

The Web site, Skiboards.com, offers a chance to rent the boards, which will be mailed to any ski resort to be waiting when people arrive.

The boards can also be purchased or rented at Zia Sporting Goods in Farmington, or the Ski Barn in Durango, Colo.

"Our experience is about 8 out of 10 people who try them buy them," Roberts said.

Marketing is word of mouth, but the best advertising comes on the mountain when people want to know what those "short skis" are.

"No matter where you are, people will stop you," Komie said. "A lot of people see them on the mountains."

Exploding sport

Roberts said skiboarders may get funny looks from skiers, but a skiboarder can do pretty everything a skier can do, only easier. Besides, skiboards are really nothing like skis.

"When skiers look at skiboards, they figure they can't be fast, they can't be very stable or very good in the powder," Roberts said. "They're like skis only in that there's two of them."

He believes they offer more fun in an easier-to-learn package.

"You can ski on these but you can really carve the mountain like snowboarders," Roberts said. "Where they really excel is in the moguls and the glades. They're very quick to turn. It's no longer work, it's fun. You can play in the moguls."

Komie agreed with the moguls and trees assessment, but said skiboards really shine in the trees.

"They're great in the trees," Komie said. "They rip through the trees and they're great in moguls."

And Roberts said skiboards work great in deep, steep powder, saying it's like waterskiing, making them easier in the powder than skis.

"With skiboards it's more of a water ski feel," Roberts said. "They definitely float and you can take whatever steep grade you want and float down."

While skis and snowboards have die-hard supporters, skiboard fans tend to cut across all ages and abilities.

There have been people on skiboards ranging from a 3-year-old to former skiers in their 70s including a former Olympic medal winner, Roberts said.

"The majority of our market is families," Roberts said. "Moms and dads can go with their kids and pretty much go anywhere."

Roberts said some people switch to skiboards because of age or bad knees.

"It's just a lot easier on your body," Roberts said.

And cost is another reason.

Compared to skis, skiboards are inexpensive with skiboards starting at \$99 with bindings, and range up to about \$400 at the top end.

"Because they're so inexpensive compared to skis, most of our customers own more than one pair," Roberts said.

Like most products, the higher the price, the better the construction and performance. Also, the name brand skiboards will likely cost a little more.

Roberts said the company is still a family-run business with a relaxed atmosphere.

It's a place where the marketing director hands the phone off to the owner to take her dog out to do its business.

"We've come a long way from Boulder," Roberts said. "We're happy to be down here."

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