

## Ski Cooper Spawns Snowboarding Competitions

Contests arise nationwide; World Snowboard Championships moved to Breckenridge

After Ski Cooper hosted snowboarding's first competition in 1981, the King of the Mountain contest was held at Berthoud Pass for the following two years. Additionally, the original competition fanned even more events throughout the country.

The 1983 Berthoud Pass snowboard event featured the Sims Challenge. Anyone who could beat Tom Sims through the slalom gates would win a free Sims board – but no one was able to beat Sims at the slalom. Events at the competition in 1983 included a slalom, freestyle and “expression” section.

In 1984, Berthoud Pass hosted the contest again, this time featuring freestyle, “expression” and halfpipe events, and an invitational slalom, along with video replays and an awards ceremony. Berthoud Pass began allowing snowboarders at the ski area after hosting these events. Said Richard Christiansen, who organized the original 1981 event at Ski Cooper, “Berthoud Pass was very satisfied with our activity and they also (in addition to Ski Cooper) kept their ski area open for snowboarders thereafter.”

Paul Graves, one of the original Snurfer champions, organized the first National Snowsurfing Championship in 1982 at Suicide Six in Vermont. *Sports Illustrated*, the *Today Show* and *Good Morning America* all provided coverage of the event, which attracted 125 riders. Sims took first place in the downhill, and Doug Bouton, who rode on the Burton team, captured the slalom and overall. For the following two years, Jake Burton hosted the event at Snow Valley ski resort in Vermont. In 1985, the contest was moved again to Stratton and renamed the U.S. Open Snowboarding Championship. Today, the competition attracts thousands to Stratton.

Sims decided to open the first World Snowboarding Championships in 1983 at the Soda Springs Ski Bowl in California. As the first-ever snowboard halfpipe contest, the event was quite controversial and the Burton team threatened to boycott the competition because “they felt that halfpipe riding had nothing to do with snowboarding.”

As Dave Alden remembers, Sims was running the championships, as well as competing and winning events, which put Sims in a tight position. He was “happy to let the battle go,” when the event was relocated from Soda Springs Ski Bowl to Breckenridge in 1986. Fran Richards and Alden, a professional snowboarder on the Burton team during the 1980s, along with help from Alden's father, Dave, went to Breckenridge with the idea. The ski resort accepted host responsibilities for the competition and began work on digging a halfpipe. However, the men had to “convince (Breckenridge) that the halfpipe was not a speed event,” said Richards. “They thought it was an Alpine event.”

The event at Breckenridge drew a large amount of media attention and the 1986 and 1987 contests were even sponsored by Swatch, which was a “big deal.”

Washington's Mount Baker Legendary Banked Slalom contest, a favorite among riders, was first held in 1985. The event is legendary due to the challenging racecourse, which features halfpipe-like gullies, with gates on the chute walls. Sims won the first contest, and winners in other years have been big names in snowboarding, including Craig Kelly, Shaun Palmer and Rob Morrow.

By 1987, Paul Alden and a group of riders and manufacturers form the North American Snowboarding Association (N.A.S.B.A.), with an aim to create a cohesive World Cup tour system with the Snowboard European Association (S.E.A.). That same year, the first World Cup tour began, with two events in the United States and two in Europe.

These first few contests throughout the 1980s established the importance of competitive snowboarding, and served as venues for riders to show new tricks, technology, board features and ideas. As Sims remembers, “The actual events themselves seemed to stimulate innovations.”

Sources included:

Snowboarding’s Holy Grail, video produced by First On Board

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<http://snowboarding.transworld.net/1000022540/featuresobf/a-complete-history-of-the-snowboard-halfpipe/>

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<http://snowboarding.transworld.net/1000020998/uncategorized/snowboard-history-timeline-part-21980s/>

“Colorado Snowboard Archive: Roots of a Movement,” Transworld Business:  
<http://business.transworld.net/79980/features/colorado-snowboarding-museum-roots-of-a-movement/?pid=18802#ngtop>

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