

# Students break boundaries, earn bucks by snowboarding where they aren't wanted

By Karen Knelsen

The word "poach" usually refers to either a method of cooking eggs, or the act of illegal hunting – but not when it comes to Oliver's Sid Ruhland and three of his college friends from Kelowna.

"I bought a snowboarding magazine and the first advertisement in the magazine was the Poach for Freedom (ad)," said Ruhland.

To poach, in the world of snowboarding magazines at least, is to ride down a ski run on a ski mountain on a snowboard, where snowboarding isn't allowed.

"What the competition was aiming to achieve was to pressure the ski hills into allowing snowboarders," Ruhland said.

At the start of the contest, which was put on by Burton Snowboards, there were four ski hills in the United States that did not allow snowboarding. Burton offered to pay \$6,250 to the competitors who filmed the best video of their experience poaching a run on any of the four mountains.

"Originally snowboarding was regarded by skiers as not a serious sport," said Ruhland, on why some hills don't allow the sport. "One of the issues was liability, because skiers saw snowboarding as more dangerous."

He said there may have been some concern about snowboards wrecking snow on runs, but Ruhland believes it's all a matter of opinion.

Something else he believes is that snowboarding should be allowed everywhere, and that was why he and his friend Allard van der Veen entered the contest.

"It was hard to figure out who was going and how we were going to get there," Ruhland said.

The group chose to film videos of their poaching experiences at two mountains in Utah – Deer Valley Resort, and Alta Ski Area. They won for their video at Alta, in Salt Lake City.

The first attempt at poached runs nearly failed when Steph Burgeois, who suffers from asthma, had to stop her hike up the mountain (they couldn't use the lifts, because they were sneaking in without permission) and ride back to the bottom to wait for the group. Eventually ski patrol spotted her snowboard, told her they knew about the contest and what she was up to. She was told to call her friends and tell them to come down the mountain. She complied and the group left peacefully (a rule of the contest).

The second attempt – at Alta Ski Resort – was more successful.

"After Deer Valley we drove into Salt Lake City and did a bit of sightseeing – it's a really beautiful city," Ruhland said. At one of the monuments in the

city, however, one of the group suffered a back injury while peering at a work of art on a ceiling. Monty McKinnon would have to sit out the next attempted poach.

"We drove up to the second ski hill – Alta. This time we had the benefit of having lots of time to walk around and scope it out," said Ruhland.

The group parked their car in a residential neighbourhood and slept for a few hours – setting their alarm for 3 a.m.

Burgois once again started the hike up the mountain with Ruhland and van der Veen, but due to asthma, had to turn back. This time she waited for them in the car so as to avoid being spotted by the mountain's staff.

"It was just me and Allard left," Ruhland said.

The two had several hours to wait in the cold dark before the sun came up enough to see and the mountain opened – they were looking forward to an audience.

When the time was right Ruhland and his friend got what they had been waiting for.

"There were a lot of people staring," he said. The two were met at the bottom by Alta staff and told to leave, but again the encounter was peaceful.

Ruhland and his friends did win the prize, but he said the money was never the point of their adventure.

"I think it should be allowed everywhere because it's a legitimate sport. It's just as much of a sport as skiing. It's a full range of people who snowboard: it's not just the punk demographic."

Making a statement about who snowboards isn't even the most important thing to Ruhland.

"Really, it's just that we want to be able to share the ski hill. We have nothing against skiers, so they should have nothing against us either."

Onno Wieringa, general manager of the Alta ski hill said the decision to not allow boarding on the mountain doesn't have anything to do with safety or quality of snow – or discrimination against any demographic that snowboards.

"I love snowboarding: I think it's a great sport." He said the reasons Alta doesn't allow snowboarding have more to do with tradition than anything else.

"Just because something is there doesn't mean you have to allow every activity that goes on. We've got a good product and our skiers like and it enough of them show up to support it. It just works good for us."

He said the poaching contest may be having an opposite effect to Ruhland's goals.

"This marketing ploy that Burton is doing is making the void bigger."



Oliver's Sid Ruhland, centre, stands with Steph Burgeois, left, and Allard van der Veen, two of the friends who joined him in entering a contest put on by Burton Snowboards.