

The Myth of Powder

Chouinard è un personaggio unico. Scalatore tra i primi delle pareti di Yosemite. Con la sua intraprendenza ha fondato Black Diamond prima e Patagonia poi. E' un amante degli sport liberi e tra questi anche del Telemark.

Chouinard has been one of the first climber of the Yosemite group. He is founder of Black Diamond, Patagonia and a free heeler.

di Yvon Chouinard

I've had my share of the white stuff this past winter, but I can count on the fingers of one hand the times I've skied powder. Now, I don't mean "packed powder" or that 4 inches of fresh snow that smoothes out all bad habits. I mean the real stuff, that deep light feathery snow that's had the moisture sucked out of it travelling over the Bonneville Salt Flats or that's been solar radiated by a cold clear night in the Tetons. That thigh deep soft stuff is about as rare as the proverbial "6 to 8 foot hot and glassy surf".

Even if you're lucky enough to wake up to a major powder dump at a ski area there's little chance of getting to it before the ski patrol, friends of the patrol and the Pisten Bullies pack it down by 9.30 a.m. The local powder nazis and even the chili server from the warming hut will have violated all those little secret shots and slots the Bullies leave. What's left by ten o'clock is packed powder, junk and the still untouched too tight trees. The yahoos will still be out there making believe and inventing stories to brag about back in Van Nuys.

I gave up fat boards 5 years ago for the skinny. Like a lot of pinheads I was bored with doing the same turn on packed slopes and I was too much of a realist to only live for those powder days. Turning to the backcountry I lived out some memorable days of corn and untracked Sierra cement: Being a survivor of a couple serious avalanches I really don't care to go into the backcountry in midwinter any more. So my days of powder have to come in the spring, right after a dump or occasionally on some north facing bowl. A few times I've been lucky enough to scam a seat on the occasional chopper or snow cat. Still I'd have to say my big regrets in life, along with not having gotten enough sex as a teenager, is not getting enough of that perfect up and theree dimensional skiing.

Some of my more radical friends changed the rules even more and became crud freaks-only going out when conditions were shitty and actually searching out the most difficult snow they could find. I've always known that they were on to "something" but I've never been that good of a skier so I'm always careful to be back down before the corn turns to slush or the

powder starts setting up. That changed this past spring. I had to go out and test these new prototype Chouinard skis at Mammoth Mountain (somebody had to do it). Conditions were perfect for trying out the short fat Excaliburs - over 2 feet of new cement so heavy that even the lift operators and locals were in their rain coats and kayak paddling jackets. Somehow I managed to be first in line as the different lifts opened on the upper mountain and I was able to get some nice runs on the untouched slopes. Heavy snow or not it was dead easy skiing those 180 cm floaters. As the day progressed I switched over to the trees and got several good clean runs and a new discovery, tight trees and short skis go together! Back up at the cornice I wanted one more shot at the steep slope below. It looked "skied out," but by now I was pretty cocky and I attacked as if the 2 foot deep ruts and soft dearth cookies weren't even there. Lo and behold I found myself at the bottom without crashing and with a grin from ear to ear. My God, I thought, these skis are magic. I've never been able to ski crud like this before. Off I went in search of the worst. By now I had left behind all the rest of my friends except for Abe San, a Samurai telemarker from Hokkaido who I finally lost in the breakable wind crust out on the flats. I put the Magnums on their edges and came down busting through the crust but immediately snapping back up before the skis had a chance to run under and catch a tip. I couldn't believe I was skiing this crud! Right then and there it all came to me, on the best ski day of the year. I finally understood why Dorworth, Lito and Bridwell only live for those shitty days. I was born again.



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