

Honk if you love real snow

By Leah Rogin-Roper

...and these three remnants of a once-massive massif behind.

The Navajos do not separate the Peaks into their fragments, but call them as one entity:

Dook'o'osliid, Light Always Glitters on Top. They consider the area to be a sacred place. It is one of their four cardinal peaks, marking the westernmost point of Dine land. The Hopi say that the Kachinas live there, the gods in charge of making snow. There are more than a dozen other tribes that have some kind of religious affiliation with what the Forest Service now calls in aggregate fashion the San Francisco Peaks. The Peaks are so huge, so visible, so unique, that it seems obvious why many tribes would depend on them in one sense or another: as a compass, as a dependable place for finding water or snow, as a gathering ground for sacred medicine, as a deity; in the land of the desert, the four aspects easily become interchangeable.

The Snowbowl, a resort whose creation was resisted 35 years ago, is currently the focus of a case that the general manager of the resort has threatened to take all the way to the Supreme Court. On one side, there is the love of the outdoors that becomes expressed through recreational activities like snowboarding and skiing, which is problematic because of lack of snow, and which has resulted in the proposal to supplement the fading glitter of natural snow using treated wastewater as a base for artificial snow. On the other side, there is a coalition of tribes and environmentalists (the sign-carrying protesters), serious questions about Environmental Impact Statements and a 9th Circuit Court of Appeals decision to disallow snowmaking using the tainted water.

I know the breathtaking San Francisco Peaks shouldn't be sprayed with treated wastewater. The resort is part of what is called the Inner Basin, on the inside of the once-giant volcano, tucked away from the wind. It also contains the major watershed for all of Flagstaff. Shit rolls downhill, I was always told, and sewage must seep downhill too. It is clearly not the best location to spray water of questionable quality.

I know the protesters are right, but damn, I just want to go snowboarding. The closest resort, Sunrise, is a couple of hours away. It is run by the White Mountain Apache, who, incidentally, also make snow from wastewater. Colorado is even more hours away; Utah, half-a-day. I don't have enough time. I don't have enough money. I don't have enough strength. I am weak. I have been praying for snow for months.

★ Last winter, I had sadly turned in my snowboarding pass after my obstetrician had informed me she didn't think snowboarding was a good idea with my pregnancy. I had always thought it would be perfect to get pregnant after snowboarding season, if I timed it just right, I figured, I would be able to have the baby, a couple months to recover and — BAM! — it would be snowboarding season again. I wouldn't even miss a day. It is funny the illusions of control we have.

I hunch low in my seat, wondering how conspicuous I am in our silver Subaru with the Yakima rack stuffed with gear.

"You think they know where we're going?" I ask my husband, Roper, who is driving.

"Hell, it's the first Saturday the mountain's open. I bet everyone making a left at this light is heading to Snowbowl." He grins, honking his horn and waving at the protesters.

"Roper, shit! I think some of those kids were in my class when I taught *The Snowbowl Effect*," I whisper, slouching down lower in my seat and adjusting my beanie to cover as much of my face as possible. As a Graduate Assistant at Northern Arizona University, I had been directed to use the controversy as a teaching tool. My students practiced their skills of rhetorical analysis using a film called "The Snowbowl Effect," which was a rather convincing documentary about the dangers of making snow from reclaimed wastewater. Then we analyzed the Snowbowl's website, which some of my students found equally convincing. In discussion, I had one passionately anti-snowmaking student leave the classroom in tears; I had another set of students create "Make Fake Snow" T-shirts, in response to the accusation that snowboarders were too lazy to stand for anything.

We

drive through Flagstaff's downtown setting: the kitschy: a turquoise-and-bright-pink, always-deserted fortune-telling parlor; the unavoidable: a hulking chain bookstore impossible to make a left turn into or out of; the touristy: a jewelry shop specializing in Navajo and Hopi crafts, run by a white cowboy with yellow teeth. Looking between the buildings, I catch a glimpse of Humphrey's Peak, one of nature's most-startling juxtapositions of mountain and desert. Big mountains are impressive anywhere, but there is something about this one, set against the dry, flat terrain that makes it impossible not to stare and respect, even gape a little, as it hovers over the landscape.

As we drive past the Courthouse lawn, protestors stood there with signs. Once a week, the Women in Black stand in a similar position, silent, heads bowed, in black dresses, protesting the war. But these people are not silent and they are not wearing black. Instead they carry signs and wave at the passing cars.

"Honk if you love Real Snow"

"Respect, Not Recreation."

"Make love, not snow!"

"KEEP SACRED PLACES SACRED"

I look out the window at the dozen or so protestors, admiring their sense of ethics and dedication as we make a left turn off Route 66 towards the Snowbowl, the resort that begins at 10,000 feet, several thousand feel below the slightly rounded, cone peak. The three fragments, Humphrey's Peak, Agassiz Peak and Mt. Elden, all once formed a giant volcano, 20,000 feet or so above sea level; many thousands of years ago this Denali-sized mountain exploded,


“Hey, the sign says ‘honk if you love real snow,’ and I definitely love real snow,” Roper tells me as we headed to Fort Valley Road. “That’s why I’m snowboarding now, because I sure as hell won’t be snowboarding next year when they start blowing shit snow.”

“You really think they’d be able to wrap a pipeline all the way up the mountain by next year?” I ask. There are so many reasons not to run a pipeline up the swerving curves to the Snowbowl. But not the least reason had to be economic feasibility. “I mean, it’s got to cost millions of dollars to build a pipe line all the way up the mountain. How’re they ever going to make that money back?”

The Snowbowl has the misfortune of being one of the few ski mountains in the West that does not have snowmaking capability. This complete inability to control Mother Nature leaves Arizona snow enthusiasts annually weighing the option of buying a pass. For years, snowgoers have accepted this quandary as part of

being a snow-lover in one of the driest states in the country. Yes, Humphrey’s Peak towers over the valley, but the major waterway, what is referred to as the Rio De Flag, is little more than a sewage ditch. What is called “Lake Mary” is a rapidly receding, mercury-filled, mud-surrounded puddle. I’ll never forget the first time I tried to take my dogs swimming there. Used to the pristine lakes of Colorado, we all happily skipped towards the banks of Lake Mary, only to sink belly deep into swamp mud. Water in any part of Arizona, even the relatively mountainous area of Flagstaff, is hard to come by. And, well, waste not, want not.

So, the Snowbowl hit on this great idea to use treated wastewater. Wastewater is a euphemism for sewer water. And sewage water is a euphemism for chemically treated piss and shit and whatever else gets flushed down the toilet. Just when everyone thought the poo-snow would be flying, the Appeals Court came out with its decision that the proposed fake snow would violate the Religious Freedom Restoration Act by contaminating



adventure gear for mountain women

NIKE
SUGOI
GOLITE
MONTRAIL
PEARL-IZUMI
LA SPORTIVA
BROOKS
TRIKS
CW-X

outdoor

outdoordivas.com

1133 pearl street • boulder, CO • 303.449.DIVA
2717 east third ave • denver, CO • 303.320.DIVA



Flagstaff Friends of Traditional Music presents

Pickin' in the Pines Bluegrass & Acoustic Music Festival September 14-16

with David Grisman Bluegrass Experience

Also playing:

Sweet Sunny South
Chatham County Line
Kruger Brothers
Burnett Family Bluegrass

Boulder Acoustic Society
Badly Bent
True Blue
and more

\$1000 band contest • free workshops • camping and jamming • children's activities
Saturday night contra dance • www.pickininthepines.org





TOP Presents

Flagstaff Blues & Boogie Festival

All Ages

w/ Robert Cray Band
Taj Mahal Trio
and more!

Saturday, September 22nd

Upcoming Shows:
8/22 Los Lonely Boys with B-Side Players
9/3 Flagstaff Symphony Orchestra (Free)



TYRRELL MARXEN



an area sacred to the many tribes who had filed the appeal.

"I'm glad we're moving back to Colorado soon. I don't want to make a decision between riding on shitwater and not riding at all," I announced as we made a right turn towards the resort.

"Yeah, it's nice to pretend like this battle has nothing to do with us," Roper replied. The questions the protestors posed still hang in the severely blue sky as we approached the curvy road that I suppose a pipeline could theoretically run along. It's true — I'm a Colorado girl, only in Flagstaff to earn my Master's Degree. This isn't my home. I'm only a two-year tourist. I think this, knowing my home mountain of Steamboat used to be sacred land to the Utes. The town council dedicated a statue to the displaced tribe and had a few tribal leaders come for the dedication ceremony. One leader was asked to make a speech. To paraphrase his words on the substantial bronze statue honoring his people:

"Big fucking deal. You want to impress us, give us back our land, assholes."

No one in Steamboat is spraying shit water on the mountains, but that doesn't mean snowboarding there is good for the environment or an act free of repercussions. I like to pretend the mountains are a ground of innocence, a pastoral escape from politics and power games. The mountains are one of the few areas where I am able to give up control, to know that I am inferior and at the whim of an entity larger than myself. But, in truth, they are still a front line for showdowns over Who Gets To Do What To Whom.

I think about the Appalachians, where I spent much of my childhood. There the problem is mountaintop removal. Spraying a sacred mountain with possibly not the best water may be bad, but in West Virginia, if they find a nice vein of coal under a mountain, they just blow the whole top off. No more mountain. Lots of coal. Easy mining. I don't want to belittle the problems facing the West by pointing out that there are mountainous tragedies everywhere. I think of mighty Everest, its tragic appeal, its

base littered with oxygen tanks, plastic bags, badly buried human feces.

I'm a snowboarder, not a colonialist. I'm a snowboarder, but I like to think I am an environmentalist too.

I turn up Missy Elliott loud enough to feel the vibrations of bass through our bad car stereo. We drive up the curves and I try to let the music give my thoughts some space. By the time we get to the parking lot, I manage to block out the beginning of the disturbing avalanches of ethical questions being set off in the back of my mind. Who owns the mountain? Who has the right to make decisions about its health and well-being? Who should get to control its future and possibly the future of the ecology of the entire valley? Should we just count ourselves lucky that there is too much respect for mountains in the West to just blow them to bits? Is that even true anymore? I don't have any answers — I just want to feel the solid weight of the board under me as my mind lets go of all thoughts.

I find myself in the short line at Snowbowl Resort buying a lift ticket. In my old life, the life as a carefree season-pass-owning ski bum, a brisk 10-minute walk to the base of the mountain was the only obstacle to going snowboarding. I could do three runs and call it a day or ride until my legs collapsed under me from exhaustion. I could come home and take a nap before work or stop at the bar with friends for happy hour. Now, to even leave the house with my husband takes a solid week of planning and preparation. One day, I will take my daughter to the mountain with me and that will represent a whole new era. The era I have just entered, however, is one of extensive calculations, responsible decisions and having to put someone else's needs before my own.

As I clip the ticket onto my pants and smile at Roper, we strap one foot into our snowboards and head for the Sunset lift. We ride up the lift and I peer over the back of the chair down valley to Wing Mountain and other smaller mountains outlined in the distance. I think back to other views, and other chairlifts, but always the mountains, floating behind me, giving me something to look up to.

Although I don't want to encourage the stereotype of the out-of-control snowboarder, in fact the physics of snowboarding necessitate a certain lack of control and a certain trust in forces outside of one's own body. Leaning into the metal edges of your board is what keeps you attached to the mountain. It requires, however, a certain leap of faith because there is a moment between when you lean into the edges and when the edges engage that feels like certain falling, like peering over a very steep precipice and leaning into it, leaning the body willingly out over it while the feet stay attached to the ground. On a snowboard, I am simultaneously more in control than of any other aspect of my life, able to assert my will to travel across and down the mountain with a mere flick of my thigh muscles, yet more out of control than at any other time, reaching speeds I never reach outside of a metal enclosure with a seatbelt.

This is the motion when the edges are engaged, a constant leaning out and shifting of weight back and forth between control and lack of control. As the turns become more sweeping, my body remembers how to let go, how to commit to a turn. The moments when the edges are unengaged become longer and longer. Snowboarding means knowing how to depend on the edges but also how to disengage them, to relinquish control, to build up speed and allow the board to go straight down. I pause for a moment at the top of the mountain to admire the view, the various shapes and sizes of mountains speckled with snow, the children meandering their way across the mountain. I breathe in the sharp clean scent of snow and pine needles mixing with the slight smell of diesel fumes from the lift. As I strap in, my calves and thighs remember the proper bent-knee crouch; my neck and head remember the slightly unnatural slide-glancing position. The turns start to flow, and there are long moments with no edges holding me to the mountain, when my board points straight down. The snow glows pinkly through my rose-tinted goggles.

Here my body is not a milk machine or a teaching role model or an itinerant environmentalist, but is a purely organic organism with no outside commitments or flaws. A certain lightness occurs that is not present in the rest of my life. I feel like a Catholic fresh from confession,

THE MOTHERLODE

Shabby Chic Boutique & Consignment Shop



**New Fashion Closeouts
Jeans, Jewelry,
Leathers**

Send Love

Let me sell your antique furniture

Open Weds.-Sun.

Handcrafted Furniture • Antiques • Eclectic • Affordable

21 N. Main • Alma, CO • 719.836.0401

Mark McLain
architects

Creating beautiful, healthy spaces with efficient, durable design, in a sustainable manner.

Photo of a passive solar, straw bale home in Santa Fe.

970.618.3517

CONFLUENCE architecture



ConfluenceArchitecture.com

a kid on a trampoline, a traveler arriving home, setting down my bags, rummaging around in familiar cabinets for a snack. On my snowboard it feels like time suddenly withdraws. Everything around me begins to travel very slowly, almost ceases to move and I cut and arc through it feeling more like myself than I have in months. I hear only the soft shushing of my edge as it grips the snow, and I soar in and out of the still bodies. I close my eyes for a moment and find that in the darkness I can still see exactly where all the divots and shadows hide.


I have spent the entire two hours trying not to think about the politics of snowboarding. While I relinquish my own controlled existence to the gods of the mountains, I consider the myriad levels of control and power, rules and ownership, regulation and responsibility that permeate all of our lives. Every aspect of my own life has become controlled by my daughter, 18 pounds of redheaded demands who cannot even speak yet. Although she is the wondrous result of a series of choices, she

too has taught me about the lack of control any of us truly have over our own lives or the lives of others. I think about mountains and who gets to control their destinies. It seems to me that the person with the most passion or best intentions should win, but I know a lot of times the real winner is the person with the most money. I think about the different forces that press down on us and form us, or even explode us.

As we walk back to the car, I look back at the mountain, saying a silent apology for giving my money to a corporation intent on assaulting it. It is another series of choices that I have made, and although if I had the day to live over again I would make the same set of decisions, I recognize that I am funding the attack of an entity I consider sacred. My hypocrisy bothers me, but not as much as not snowboarding bothers me.



Leah Rogin-Roper's last story for the Gazette was "One sip past half full," which appeared way back in #107.

MG



windrider
of the rockies

Frisco Bay Marina



> tours
> lessons
> rentals

Want to experience majestic Lake Dillon but don't want sailing lessons? Sit back, relax and enjoy a spectacular sailing tour adventure.

New to Sailing? Come get your feet wet with an introductory course from one of our ASA certified staff.

Already an experienced sailer? Just answer a verbal sailing quiz and you are on your way.


**Call for reservations
970-468-5006**

www.windrider.us
your friendly sailing connection

TRAILFLEX™ MODULAR PACK SYSTEM




WITNESS A TRUE BACKPACK REVOLUTION



Maximize Adventure with the Breakthrough Technology of TrailFlex.

Attach and reconfigure 20+ customized components. It's your gear—
Where you want it. How you want it. When you need it.

www.trailflex.com



Harness the Power of Your Sport™