

Learning To....]

# The Mountain Creek Switch Academy!

# NEW-SCHOOL FOR OLD-SCHOOLERS!

by Mitch Kaplan

## Doing What "THEY" Do in the Terrain Park...Sort of! Mountain Creek Resort, Vernon, New Jersey

In 2007 Mountain Creek decided to convert the resort's South Peak area into the east's largest terrain park, encompassing 60 acres and nearly 100 features for beginners to experts.

The long-term goal was to create a Free-style cultural/lifestyle hub that focuses on action sports, anchored by a base lodge tricked out with a video lab, DJ booth, and other accoutrements of snowsports' hip, trend-setting set.

So, it was logical to ask this question on a snowy day last February: what in the heck were these three old, 50-plus dudes, doing in the park?

But there we were: Mr. Griff, Trenton Times ski correspondent; yours truly, father of a Mount Snow terrain park crew member; and Mr. Jones, this magazine's editor/publisher.

What we were doing there? Testing Mountain Creek's new terrain park school, the Switch Academy Intro to Terrain Parks, created to teach terrain park basics. This lesson

is an affordable \$30, two-hour investment, and it is worth every penny. The Switch Academy will likely save you (or your park-curious kid) from beating yourself raw trying to tackle feature fundamentals.

Our Switch Academy teacher was the youthful Chris Allen, accompanied by his even more youthful assistant, Matt Campbell. Both Allen and Campbell were on skis, and they immediately dispelled the common myth that parks attract snowboarders only.

"Nearly half the people in parks around the country are on skis," Allen said.

Parks, we learned, are categorized as "small," "medium," "large" and "XL" to describe feature size and the skill level required to handle them. We began with a slow exploration of the "small" park, examining each feature while Chris and Matt described the kinds of moves executed on them. We were practicing "Look Before You Leap," the first rule of "Smart Style," the basic guidelines to park use.

To illustrate look-before-you-leap's importance, Chris stopped us uphill from



"Looks like a small jump doesn't it?" he asked. It did. WRONG!



Our teacher, Chris Allen gives Mr. Griff some pointers.



Mr. Griff "nails it"... With a little help from his pole.

What in the heck were these 50-plus dudes doing in the park?

an element. "Looks like a small jump from here, doesn't it?" he asked. It did.

Wrong. Looking before we leaped, we discovered it to be the on-ramp to a low-riding rail. Jump that blind and, if you're lucky, you'll only suffer a high voice.

Next up were the jumps. How to approach them, how to launch, how to land. Speed is the most important element. Not too fast (danger of losing control or traveling too far and missing the landing); not too slow (you'll hit short of the landing-ouch!); but just right (landing on the down-slope).

Eventually, we gathered in the learning park, a small, isolated, gently pitched area that had a practice rail set just above snow level. Here we tried jumping and turning ninety degrees in midair to land on the rail with feet flat so we could slide its length sideways.

Just three old guys trying to "session." "That's what kids do," Campbell told us. "They keep walking back to a feature, over and over and over, until they can get the trick."

We sessioned that rail until we began sessioning competitive complaints about legs worn out from 50-plus years of abuse (now we were adding a new kind of abuse...groan, ed.).

Still, we kept at it. And, "hey awesome dude," each of us reached the point where we could hop onto that rail and ride it. Well, sometimes.

Back up the lift we went to session a box and a jump or two. And we nailed it!

In the end, though, as the new falling snow began to accumulate (a storm was coming in) into an enjoyable few inches of powder, I begged my leave, and Griff and Jones asked to be excused from class so

they could "just ski the powder without jumping." Maybe our age was showing just a little.

While some folks' 50-plus legs don't have the spring they once did, our 50-plus minds are still sharp and open to new things. And, even if we didn't master riding a rail, at least we three codgers now understand the "what" and "how" of parks, if not necessarily fully comprehending the "why." Age can be like that. ❄️



Showing the SNOWEAST Flag! The editor nails the box.

## Learn To



"You're going to do what!" Emily chased me as I slipped out the back door.

"You won't quite until you kill yourself," echoed as I slipped into the car.

I've heard this for what seems my entire life. It started with my mother as I jumped out of the second story window into a bush. I was 8.

Then there are the motorcycles...well, you know the story. Mountain Creek's Switch Academy was a blast, a scary blast. I'm glad I was invited to participate.

But, next time I am wearing my motoX shoulder and arm protectors (In-line skate stuff should also work). You should too. The shoulder still hurts! - B. Jones