



What you can't see is the new casino at the bottom. Paul Bergeron at Mont Tremblant, Quebec.

DROPPING THE GLOVES

CAN CASINOS SAVE SKIING?

This season, Quebec's Mont Tremblant opened a \$61 million casino, connected via gondola to the ski resort's base area. Sure, gambling and skiing are fine on their own. But do these two great tastes taste great together?

THE CASE FOR THE CASKINO BY CHARLES BETHEA

Skiers are risk takers. And many, like me, gamble. I'm not a high roller but I like taking a hard-earned Benjamin to the tables every now and then. We all have ideal winters, and mine involves skiing and gambling at the same place. I call it a *caskino*. There aren't enough of them.

During a typical winter, I'll gamble at the three Indian reservation casinos a half hour from my home in Santa Fe, New Mexico, plus make an annual trip to Vegas. I ski too—at three resorts within 90 minutes, and on the odd trip to Colorado. Despite my proximity to both powder and blackjack, I must

choose. Ski resorts and casinos should enjoy a symbiotic relationship, like Subway restaurants and gas stations.

Places like Heavenly Resort, on the California-Nevada border, and Mont Tremblant get it. And there are a number of resorts in Colorado that have casinos close by. But these places are more exception than rule.

In 2008, Colorado and New Mexico's 45 casinos created 10,678 jobs and raised \$155.5 million in state and local taxes. Their 35 ski resorts' profits went to publicly traded companies or deep-pocketed owners. According to the National Sporting Goods Associa-

POWDER, NOT PAI GOW BY WES BERKSHIRE

I'll bet you're the same guy who gets his polypro panties in a bunch when he can't get wi-fi in the lodge or when they don't serve soy mochaccinos in the cafeteria. Skiing should already get your heart pumping; it doesn't need the added distraction of gambling, YouTube, or fruity coffee drinks to enhance it. Be happy that in this age of multitasking, skiing is without excessive distractions. Adding flashing lights, noise, and geriatrics dumping their Social Security checks into slot machines isn't going to make it better.

Opening up ski resorts to casinos would only serve to ruin the simplicity that so many skiers love. Have you ever been anywhere outside of the Vegas strip that has gambling? There are slot machines in grocery stores. It's the saddest thing I've ever seen.

Studies have shown a "substitution effect" on local businesses, casinos actually drawing money away from established restaurants and other social outlets. Gilpin County, Colorado, saw 36 percent of its retail business go under after opening its doors to casinos. In New York, one study showed that a



tion, the number of downhill skiers dropped 14 percent between 2000 and 2008. Over 24 million people consider themselves snow-sports participants, but only 6.5 million skied more than once in 2007. Resorts need more reasons to be visited—and snow tubing isn't going to cut it.

In January 2009, Vermont's state auditor, Thomas Salmon, proposed that the state shore up million-dollar budget gaps by putting a casino at Killington. In a letter to legislators, Salmon wrote, "Consider a state-owned casino in

a resort area like Killington, with net profits going directly to roads, bridges, and infrastructure."

So why, when a quarter of the U.S. adult population chooses to spend its disposable dollars at a casino at least once a year, is there resistance to the idea of the caskino? Is it fear of others with dubious morals or just the cacophony of slot machines? I don't love that noise either, but what if it's the sound of a healthy ski resort?

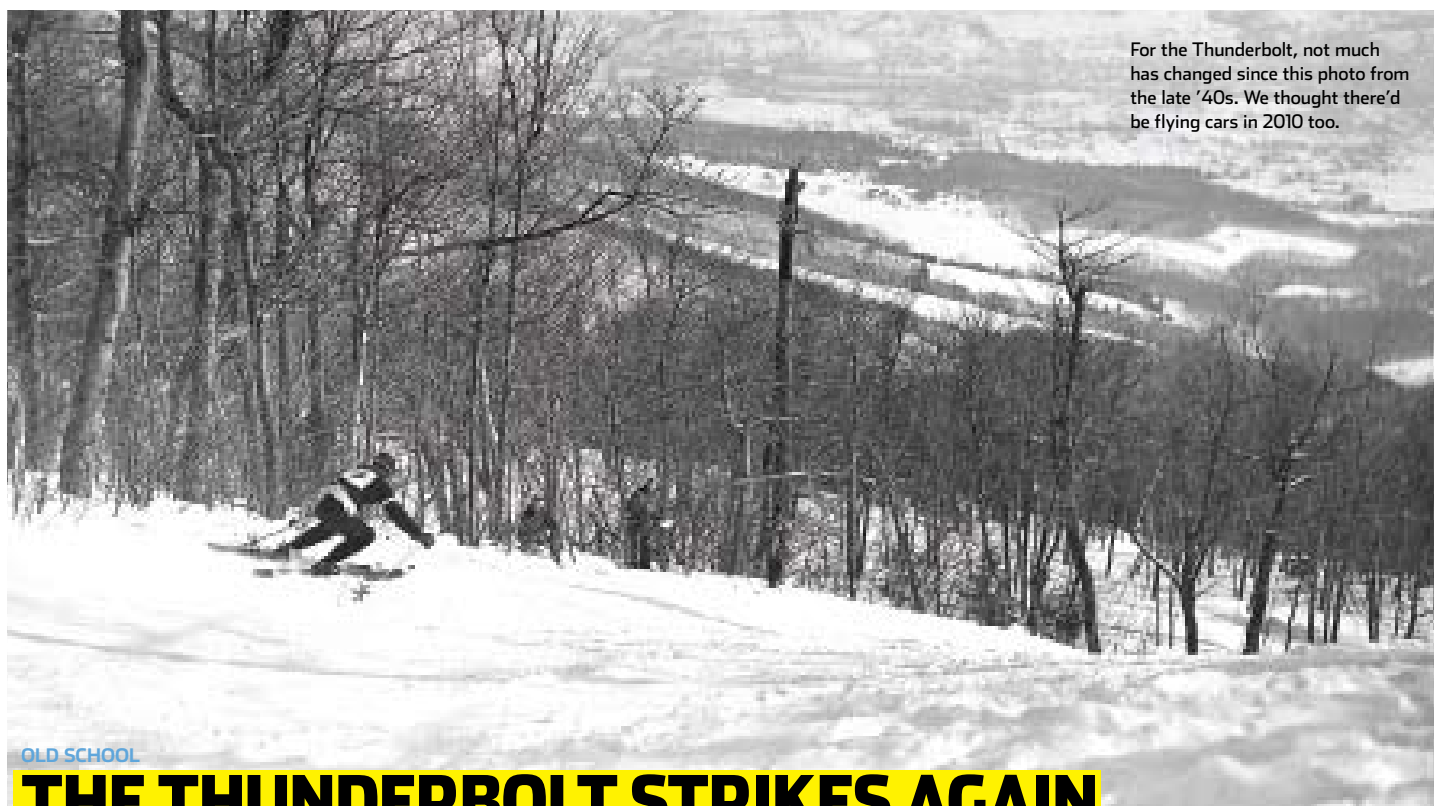
Santa Fe-based writer Charles Bethea once stayed up for 72 hours playing poker in Las Vegas.

gambling expansion would actually cost western New Yorkers more than 1,200 jobs. Sure, 25 percent of American adults plan on visiting a casino this year. But that means that 75 percent do not. And of that 25 percent who do hit the craps table, fewer than half of them plan on going more than once. The ski industry doesn't need one-hit wonders for customers. It needs repeat business, something that casinos clearly aren't delivering.

The truth is that gambling has been a part of skiing for a good

7,000 years—ever since the western Chinese first decided to slide down a mountain with a couple boards strapped to their feet. I grew up daring my friends to jump off rocks or racing them to the bottom of the hill. It's all about risk. Clinking quarters, haggard cocktail waitresses, and Pai Gow won't save your local mountain. Funnily enough, only skiing will.

Wes Berkshire lives in Tahoe City, California, where he may or may not place bets on cockfighting.



For the Thunderbolt, not much has changed since this photo from the late '40s. We thought there'd be flying cars in 2010 too.

OLD SCHOOL

THE THUNDERBOLT STRIKES AGAIN

A wicked-old ski race in New England readies for its 75th running.

While the cowbell whackers of the world will unite at the Olympics this February, Right Coasters will gather for an entirely different ski race on home turf, a race that has hosted legends and Nazis alike. On February 20, skiers and boarders will stand atop western Massachusetts's 3,491-foot Mount Greylock for the 75th running of the Thunderbolt Downhill on a steep and narrow trail that was once New England's premier downhill course. There are no lodges or chair lifts; the only way to the start gate is by hiking or skinning.

The Thunderbolt was originally cut and cleared by the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1934, with the first race held the next year. From 1935 through World War II, the course attracted world-class racers and drew fans by the thousands thanks to a ski train that came from Manhattan. Competitors included Aspen legend Dick Durrance and Toni Matt, who famously straightlined the headwall

at Tuckerman Ravine in 1939. In 1938, when Greylock hosted the U.S. Eastern Downhill Championships, Nazi Germany entered a team. Later, after skiers abandoned the course in favor of lift-served ski hills, it gradually deteriorated until it was just another hiking trail in the Mount Greylock State Reservation, skied by no one but a few devoted Thunderbolt Downhill racers. And we all know what happened to the National Socialist Party.

But after years of backbreaking course restoration by the Thunderbolt Ski Runners—a handful of local volunteers and history buffs—the Thunderbolt has risen again. The racers will compete in six categories: alpine, telemark, snowboard, female, fastest ascent, and, of course, the vintage-gear class. With all 120 race spots filled by early November, the 'Bolt is poised to reclaim some of its past glory. Hopefully no one invites the Nazis. —TODD FELTON