

perfect warm-up run, a moderately pitched slope that descends about 2.000 vertical feet through open snowfields and scattered pines. "This is the Zen part of the trip", said Hughes, 31, a seasoned backcountry leader and snow-safety expert with a subtle New Age bent. "You don't need to concentrate much on your skiing. Just let Your aura grow". Hughes' methods may have been unorthodox, but they worked. Even the timid skiers seemed to levitate through 20 inches of the freshest, driest powder to fall in the Wasatch all season. Our group included four expert skiers from Colorado and Utah and five intermediates. The Backdoor, we split up. Two guides would take the flatlanders, who were using regular alpine equipment. Although our routes would be roughly the same, they would stick to easy traverses and gentle slopes. Because of our experience and equipment, our group could climb to tougher off-piste terrain. Hughes was on telemark gear and the rest of us had "touring adapters", which snap into alpine ski bindings to free the heels on flat stretches or uphill climbs. The backdoor drops Big Cottonwood and ends across the road from Solitude. We hiked to the base, then rode two lifts to the 10.030 foot summit. +This is the departure point for the Highway to Heaven, an aptly named traverse that angles south across a half-mile of wilderness toward Little Cottonwood. Along the way, it accesses some of the finest off-piste skiing in North America:

thousands of acres of bowls, chutes and glades blanketed by what Ski Utah calls "The Greatest Snow on Earth". The Highway to Heaven cuts through a swath of public land between Solitude and Alta. Skiers often approach this prime terrain by using the resorts' lifts, and the practice has been known to irk certain rescue agencies and earn-your-turns backcountry purists. Dissension aside, in most cases it's perfectly legal to ski public land outside a boundary. The prerequisite: a thorough knowledge of snow safety and first aid. Fortunately, we were with a snow-safety ringer. Earlier that morning, Hughes had called in an artillery strike, and Solitude patrollers had settled the snowpack by strategically detonating several explosive charges. Hughes guided us a few hundred yards down the Highway, then hung an abrupt left and headed down a virgin 35-degree powder stash. We sent cold smoke 15 feet into the air with every effortless turn. Hughes said the kneedeep snow was 2 percent water and 98 percent fluff.

A half-mile trek led us east across a frozen lake to Brighton, where we took one run before traversing back to Solitude along a different trail. We rode this lift to the top and headed down the Highway once again. This time, we passed the Brighton cut-off and kept going south. The Highway is a fairly easy traverse, even for intermediates in fixed-heel alpine gear. It's a high-altitude pole-and-glide across an open bowl, just below a sweeping ridgeline. At the southern end, we sidestepped gradually onto the ridge and peered into Grizzly Gulch, which drops down into Little Cottonwood. There are several ways to descend the Gulch; our flatlanders probably had opted for the big, open bowl that curved gently away below our feet. We dropped into Grizzly at its steepest point. The snow was getting heavy on the south-facing slopes, but remained dry as talc when facing north. We dug a snowpit to assess the slope's safety, then picked a north-facing shot of about 40 degrees and skied one at a time through clearings in the dense trees. After emerging from the woods at Alta's base, we got our bump fix on Westward Ho and headed across the Alta boundary to the Bird. We'd missed the last tram, but it was a good day's work. Eight hours, five resorts and plenty of untracked powder. When we caught up with the intermediates at the base and loaded into the Interconnect shuttle van, they looked as if they'd just returned from a 10th Mountain Division war campaign. "We've spent everything: calories, lactic acid, testosterone", said one. "I feel like a noodle. But boy, was it worth it!" The van rocked gently. The rest of the flatlanders were nodding emphatically in agreement.

**IL DECALOGO DEL VERO TELEMARCA
oppure I 10 COMANDAMENTI DEL TELEMARCA**

- 1° NON AVRAI ALTRO SPORT ALL'INFUORI DI ME!
- 2° NON NOMINARE IL NOME DEL PRESIDENTE DEL CLUB INVANO (ACCID..... MANAGG..... CHE TE POSSINO.....)
- 3° ONORA IL DIRETTORE E LA DIRETTRICE (DEL GIORNALINO)
- 4° NON UCCIDERE IL TEMPO CHE PASSA, PIEGATI!
- 5° NON INQUINARE, SPEGNI IL MOTORE DELL'AUTO IN SOSTA (FAUSTO, QUESTA E' PER TE.....)
- 6° NON RUBARE LE IDEE DEGLI ALTRI, PENSA CON LA TUA TESTA !!
- 7° RICORDATI DI RICICLARE CARTA, VETRO E PLASTICA ! (SOLO COSI' IL MONDO AVRA' UN FUTURO)
- 8° NON LASCIAR FORMICOLARE IL MUSCOLO, PIEGA IL GINOCCHIO E VAI !
- 9° NON DESIDERARE LA GONNA DELLE ALTRE, FATTENE UNA ANCHE TU !
- 10° NON DESIDERARE GLI SCARPONI DEGLI ALTRI, ANCHE I TUOI SONO BUONI !

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**Il primo orologio della "Skieda"
The first watch of the "Skieda"**