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SNOW TRAX

## Hidden gems found on slopes near Salt Lake City

By Daniel Gibson | For the New Mexican Feb 22, 2019 Updated Feb 23, 2019



Daniel Gibson

Any serious skier knows of Alta and Snowbird in Little Cottonwood Canyon, Utah. But one canyon north, and even closer to Salt Lake City, is Big Cottonwood Canyon, home to two smaller and lesser known resorts, Brighton and Solitude. Both would be outstanding ski areas in any other region, but are often eclipsed by bigger places.

Just a 30-minute bus ride from downtown, they mix prodigious snowfall with terrain ranging from sedate to great, plus a local's vibe and far fewer people.

## Brighton Resort

Brighton sits at the top of a canyon, which runs toward the northwest, and traps storms moving across the Great Salt Lake, providing it with an average 500 inches of snow.

All express chairs mean you can ski or board a lot of vertical feet in a day, as I did a few weeks ago during a rare two-week pause in precipitation.

Powder was almost impossible to find, but the groomers were excellent once they warmed a bit, and in the shade of 10,452-foot Mount Millicent, I did find some carvable, chalky turns.

The thing here is that there's an incredible amount of in-bounds and side-country extreme skiing.

Millicent Peak, as well as Preston Peak (10,315 feet) and Clayton Peak (10,750 feet) are easily accessible through control gates, where one must have all the proper backcountry gear, including body transmitters. And there were thousands of tracks in even higher, out-of-bounds terrain, where you are really on your own.

Another cool thing here is the extensive and creative terrain park that was busy on a sunlit day. With its own chair, the Majestic, it's part of the largest night skiing operation in the West, with some 200 acres lit up.

Night skiing runs 4-9 p.m. Monday to Saturday.

Though notching only a 1,875 vertical-foot drop, the resort spans 1,050 acres, and with its high-speed lifts, it seemed much bigger.

Stretched across the broad head of the valley, it's a wide resort, and there's some traverses needed to see all of it. On the east side is the Great Western Express.

### If you go

u Brighton is the oldest lift-served skiing in Utah. It's a local's place, with lots of families and modest dining and accommodations in the tiny Brighton Lodge. It can be reached via the Utah Transit Authority bus system from Salt Lake. For details, visit [www.rideuta.com](http://www.rideuta.com). It is also part of new the

Ski City Super Pass. See [www.skicitysuperpass.com](http://www.skicitysuperpass.com). For details, call 801-532-4731 or visit [www.brightonresort.com](http://www.brightonresort.com).

## **Solitude Mountain Resort**

You can see this resort's lifts from adjoining Brighton, with an access point called Sol-Bright connecting the two. They share similar terrain, natural features and more than 500 inches of snow. Solitude has more cliffs and challenges.

There is also lots of big wide groomers with nice rollovers, and Honeycomb Canyon is a delight for anyone who is a strong intermediate to expert skier.

With a 2,030 feet of lift-served vertical, 1,200 skiable acres and a high-speed chair system, you can ski yourself into the ground or enjoy the loads of nice cruising runs around the Roundhouse — the resort's lunch spot.

There are lots of traverses you can take here to reach huge above-treeline bowls and glades, including an impressive 14 double-black diamond runs. Some of these require major climbs along knife-edges — only with avalanche gear and training — while others need only a modest boot pack. Some of the hike-to runs, such as Black Bess, are 50 degrees-plus.

Our recent visit was sunny, but it was still a blast zooming around and taking in the beauty of the Wasatch Range. I was tempted to try Cathedral Cirque or Parachute, but from the Summit Express Chair, I saw the toothy cliffs and baked snow and decided a local guide was needed. I did ski Headwall Forest, and it's northern exposure and trees made for some excellent turns.

### **If you go**

u Solitude will close April 14. Nearby is the Solitude Nordic Center. Solitude does have substantial lodging. You can also day trip from Salt Lake on the public bus. And, it is part of the four areas bundled with the Ski City Super Pass. For details, visit [www.solitudemountain.com](http://www.solitudemountain.com).

### **Conditions**

The recent storms have been very spotty, with some surprising areas, like Pajarito, picking up substantial snow while others, like Santa Fe, just getting brushed. Conditions could shift over the weekend.