

## Wasatch Whiteout: Getting lost and finding it all

Contributed by James Dillon

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Mark, Jack and I were alone in the white—our only ambition was to reach the forest below. We were traversing from the comfort of Brighton Resort toward 10,420 Peak, one of Big Cottonwood Canyon's dominant summits. Our skintrack led upward from a low saddle between Clayton's Peak and 10,420 where we sought fresh lines in the northwest-facing trees.

Snow had been piling up in the forest since the night before, and our trailing skintrack was becoming phantom. That morning we had discussed our options for finding shelter from the howling winds and safety from dangerous wind loading. Mark suggested the trees off 10,420. "It's just one perfect tree line after another," he had said, "and the run is almost a mile long!" Jack and I bought it.

As we dropped out of the open, the wind screamed behind us, threatening to pull each snowflake skyward until only the rocky ground remained.

But all was quiet in the woods, and a fresh, untouched world lay before us. Trees fanned outward in an orchard-like expanse, each line spaced 30 feet apart. Haunting winds hissed around the branches overhead but the snow on the ground lay silent. In our search for fresh snow and unexplored zones we had found paradise on a whiteout day. The avalanche danger was low, the visibility had improved, and the snow was soft and deep.

We removed our skins and pushed off downhill.