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EXPERT’S GUIDE

**to**

**PURGATORY**

at

DURANGO MOUNTAIN RESORT

Home of

**San Juan UNTRACKED**

**Snowcat Skiing**

Tucked into the spectacular San Juan Mountains between Durango and Silverton, **Purgatory**, like its neighbor Telluride, boasts some of the finest scenery in the lower 48. At just over 2000’ vertical, 1300+ acres, and 10 lifts, **“Purg”** just squeaks into the large ski resort category. The southerly locale favors sunny days and mild weather, but the 9000' base elev. provides an impressive 260 average annual inches of snow.

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Far removed from the busy I-70 corridor, it is known for a hometown, laid back, friendly atmosphere at affordable prices. Lift lines are a rare occurrence, thus allowing for endless laps on the uniquely “benched” roller coaster terrain. Although lacking in such attributes as bowls and chutes, there is easily enough here to keep a good skier happily occupied for many days straight.

The mountain is essentially an 11,000' ridge that runs east to west with mostly north facing slopes roughly divided into three segments. First is the “front side” terrain served by the “six pack” **Express Lift #1**. This area has a nice mix of varying terrain. The second mid-mountain area is served by **Hermosa Lift #3** and is dominated by some nice rolling groomers. The third “backside” area is served by **Legends Lift #8** and has some of the resort’s better expert terrain and tree skiing. A system of extensive cat trails is used to get back and forth between these areas.

This guide is meant to be used in conjunction with the trail map and also the daily grooming report, which are both usually available at the ticket windows, in the lift line map dispenser, and various other locations.

**Obey all rules printed on the trail map!**

**>**From the base area, aside from some beginner lifts, most skiers start up on the six person **Express Lift #1**. While a typical daily choice for a groomer warm-up might be **Upper Hades** or **Paradise** which are usually alternately groomed every other night, some special grooming reports are worth noting. **Pandemonium** is usually groomed once or twice a week and makes an already classic run a real screamer on fresh corduroy.

**TIP:** On the backside **Ray’s Ridge** is also groomed once or twice a week and makes it well worth heading straight over to it for a couple laps before it gets skied off. If they also happen to break out the winch-cat for the bottom section, it’s guaranteed to put a smile on your face. (A true gem is the very rare grooming of **Styx** on the front side and it is lucky to occur only once a season if that).

**Purg** has no shortage of nice groomers with **Boogie** and **Peace** off **Lift #3** and **Sally’s** and **Chet’s** off **Lift #8** all offering some of the area’s signature rolling terrain.

**>**After a couple warm-up runs (or not), most serious skiers start heading west. To get all the way to the backside, one must transit **Lifts #3** or **#5**. In addition to the two intermediate groomers mentioned above, **Lift #3** does have a few worthwhile offerings for the expert skier. **Dead Spike** on skier’s far left is popular due to the fact that they groom only the left side leaving the right to form small moguls on a moderate slope that are great for learning technique or tender knees.

**TIP:** When base depths are ample and the snow is soft, **Harris Hill** and **Snag** offer a nice variation with the bottom sections including **Crazy Joe’s** and **Grizzly Gully** being some fun bump alleys.

From the top of **Lift #3** continue west on **Legends**. Much like the traverse from **Lift #1**, a tedious cat trail is ultimately rewarded with a fun lower section.

**TIP:** A good choice here is continuing all the way to the bottom of **Lift #8** on **Siegele Street** which, if it’s been groomed, is a must do.

Future plans have **Lift #8** being replaced with a high speed quad, but for now the fixed three-seater offers minimal lift lines for expert skiers trying to maximize their vertical on the backside runs. This is where most expert skiers tend to spend the middle of their day, and aside from the trio of groomers on the skier‘s far right, the terrain is predominately expert. **Ray’s Ridge**, as mentioned earlier, offers the most consistent fall line and is a very popular “blue / black“. The steep lower portion below the cutoff to midway loading can be especially fun.

Following a storm, the best bet to find the last remaining stashes of powder would be the **Paul’s Park** glade area, especially in the alleys just skier’s right of the lift. **Boudreaux’s** can be one of the last trails to get completely tracked out along with **Vincent’s -** but beware if the snow is a bit heavy there can be some troublesome flat spots.

**Blackburn's Bash** from the top offers a challenging steep pitch under the lift and tends to have excellent snow due to its shaded aspect. Just make sure and come with your “A-game” since you're sure to be critiqued by every skier on the lift! Continuing

down under the lift, you'll come to a very popular moderate bump section just above the midway

loading station. From there the bottom pitch can be

 

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hit or miss. Try it at least once noting that skiers right and left can offer quite different conditions with longer moguls blending to shorter to groomed as you trend to the left on the slope.

Purg’s only dedicated tree skiing runs are the moderately pitched **Poet’s Glade,** the steep and dicey **McCormack’s Maze** area on the far back side, and the new **Ambassador's Glade** on the front side.

**TIP:** The trick to **Poet’s** is to stay within the tree island between **Sally's** and **Vincent's**. To avoid getting spit out skier’s left onto **Sally’s**, apersistent track back to the right will be rewarded with a continuous series of narrow alleys all the way down to the **Legends** trail.

**McCormack's** is indeed a **Maze** and it would be difficult to ever ski it twice the same way. Tightly spaced trees, steep pitches, and varying fall lines contribute to an adventurous experience. Here too, persistence pays by seeking out nice semi-connected alleys and spicey tree shots. Beware - this is new terrain with freshly cut timber and stumps requiring some extra snow coverage. NEVER SKI THIS AREA ALONE and always keep your partner in sight.

**TIP:** Instead of bailing out right at the exit trail onto **Lower Ray's**, stay next to the boundary rope all the way to the bottom for one last good tree shot.

**>**While it is possible to return from the top of **Lift**

**#8** to the front side base area in one run, working your way back provides an excellent opportunity to sample some of the more difficult terrain Purg has to offer. *If you do need to get back pronto, take the* ***BD&M Expressway*** *(aka S&M), a tediously flat cat-trail all the way to at least* ***Zinfandel****, and preferably past that to* ***Airmail*** *or* ***The Bank.***

Otherwise, from the top of **Lift #8** head back on **Joan's Jubilee** to **Dante's Restaurant** which, by the way, is a great place to break for a quality lunch with fabulous views. From **Dante's** take upper **Bull Run** for some tight warm-up bumps down to the challenging steeps of **Lower Bull** or over right to some serious bumps on **Wapiti**.

From the top of **Grizzly Lift #5** you can finally head straight back to the front side by accessing the **BD&M Expwy** as mentioned above, or unload at **Dantes** and transit back through **Lift#3** via **Dead Spike** or **Path to Peace**.

**TIP:** A slightly tricky, but good route down from the **Expwy**, or **Silvertip** from the top of **Lift #3**, is on **Airmail** down to a somewhat hidden hard right turn on **Walk-a-Lot**. A few pole strokes will get you over to **El Diablo** and down **Demon** to the base, or avoid the crowds by short-cutting up **Engineer Lift #2** back to the top of the front side.

Keep in mind **Demon** is a slow skiing zone and is routinely monitored. Ski cautiously down to the base area or risk losing your ticket.

**>**From here you can finish the day on some classic front side runs. While your legs still have some mileage left, **Styx** would be a good first choice. This is a great run with good vertical in a neat variety of shapes. Skier's left and right sides of this run offer an entirely different character and given the right conditions, this can often be a candidate for “best run of the day”.

TIP: If there happens to be a race in progress blocking the normal access past the **Nastar start shack**, another entry is open above, just past the **Ski Patrol shack**.

The **Ambassador’s Glade**, while a bit short, can be accessed on the front side from **Mercy** and offers some of the area’s only small, but sweet cliff shots.

**Upper** to **Lower Hades** is a cool mix of rolling groomer to a serious drop into rolling bump pitches. Combine steep bumps with typically challenging snow conditions and you'll find this section a good place to test your crud skills. The bottom section of **Lower** can often have some of the nicest bumps at **Purg**.

And finally, to ramp it down just a bit for the last run, **Paradise** to **Pandemonium,** which is **Purg's** signature front side run, is another nice groomer to a veritable steep roller coaster with a choice of smooth in the middle, bumps on the right, or typically deep loose pack on the left.

The base area between the lift and the lodge is known as “The Beach”, and on a nice sunny afternoon can provide a lively and enjoyable après' ski scene, often with live music on weekends. It's definitely a good place to enjoy a cold one and reflect on the day's highlights.

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**John *FRITZSKI* fritz**

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Nowhere in this guide does it recommend to ski anywhere off the marked trails. Always use caution and stay in control. Observe all posted signs and warnings. Trees, unmarked obstacles, and other hazards exist. Under Colorado law, a skier assumes the risk of any injury resulting from any of the inherent dangers and risks of skiing. Ski smart, ski safely!

**ADDITIONAL NOTES:**

If Lift #3 is crowded and you’re entering from the east (Boogie/Peace), ski around the outside of the crowd and enter from the other (west) side.

Demon is notorious for being a human pinball game. Slow down! – yellow coated safety guys are omnipresent and ready to clip your ticket. A good way to go is skiers left up on the shelf, then thru a nice open cut in the trees to the top of lower Demon. From here continue to stay far left to the bottom.

Although Purg has no “hike to” terrain, it does occasionally have some top quality “hike from”. No joke! Mon thru Thur Lift #5 does not run. If one of these days happens to be a powder day, Lower Wapiti and Lower Bull remain almost untouched. You’ll just need to make an easy flat hike over to Lift #3 at the bottom.