

Avalanche 'Pro' Reflects on Alta

By Craig Hansell
Tribune Sports Writer

What began as a trip to Utah, in 1960, to work for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, has evolved into a different career entirely for Dr. Ron Perla.

New Yorker Perla has moved from dam building to avalanche study since he came west. He is chief avalanche research scientist for the Environment Ministry of Canada.

After his work on the Colorado River Storage Project ended, he spent three years teaching physics at East High in an effort to stay in Utah near the old Alta Avalanche Study Center while he worked on the ski patrol.

Salt Lake Area

Dr. Perla is in Salt Lake at the request of Bard Glennie, University of Utah associate professor of engineering, to speak at a seminar about the fluid dynamics of avalanches.

"I was on the Alta Ski Patrol in 1961 and began to get interested," he said. "I worked in two positions, dividing my time 50-50 between research and working as a snow ranger."

He lived at Alta on a full-time basis from 1966 until he left in 1972. After receiving his PhD in meteorology and applied mechanics from the University of Utah, he left and moved to the National Avalanche Study Center in Fort Collins, Colo. He has recently completed a handbook on avalanches based on two years intensive research and his experiences at Alta.

The book is largely based on his days in the Wasatch.

"The technology reached its peak here," he said. "If you look at the accidents, they result where practices developed in the Wasatch were not followed."

Extraordinary Problems

"The (avalanche) problems in the Wasatch are extraordinary but the safety record is also extraordinary as a result of the fine work by the ski areas and the Forest Service."

"I try to come down here at least once a year to find out what is happening because it is a very exciting, interesting area," he said.

While still at Alta, he took two "rides," a term used by some avalanche experts to mean a ride in an avalanche.

"The first one was in 1963 where I went down about 1,000 feet in an avalanche off High Rustler. The run had been shot in the morning with a recoilless rifle and it didn't slide so I didn't think it would slide as I entered it late in the afternoon but it did. This emphasizes the need to follow up your avalanche control work with snow compaction."

"Another instructive avalanche occurred in 1967."

While working on the cornice along the Baldy ridge above Alta, Dr. Perla survived one of the most incredible "rides" ever taken in the Wasatch.

"I was belayed from above but the rope was sawed in half by the ice blocks pressing on my body," Perla recalled.

The avalanche carried him down the face of Baldy, east of the main chute, for 1,000 vertical feet.

"We revised our cornice procedures based on that episode," he said.

That is Enough

"I would like to think that is enough," he said about his two major rides, adding, "If you don't get into a little trouble you are standing back too far."

"One should always enter an avalanche slope with caution even when it has been controlled."

Dr. Perla's work in Canada is centered around two research stations.

"At the Rogers Pass station we study avalanche motion and dynamics, then we study starting zone and avalanche release problems at Banff National Park."

Explosive techniques and development of avalanche rescue devices are two major North American contributions to avalanche science in recent years.

"Every year the problem (of avalanche control) becomes more and more difficult. In Canada more skiers are touring into areas of avalanche danger every year. Canadians have long flat approaches to get to avalanche danger but in the Wasatch, you immediately get into avalanche problems."

Public Education

"The answer is public education for back country skiers."

"Fifty percent of the avalanche victims have died within the first half hour and rarely have people survived being buried deeper than two meters."

"An avalanche can move at speeds up to 100 meters per second (over 200 miles per hour) and can produce 100 tons pressure per square yard, enough force to create major alterations."

"Alta is the perfect area for an avalanche study center. The Forest Service really blew it by closing it down. Through the years, Alta has produced a substantial amount of information and our budget was one tenth that of Fort Collins."

"Benji (Sandahl) Alta Snow Ranger has operated under amazing financial restraints. The Forest Service and Utah are very lucky to have a man like Benji. He is truly a public servant," Dr. Perla concluded.



Avalanche scientist Dr. Ron Perla learned much practical experience working at Alta.

'New' Hank Eyes Mark

By The Associated Press

The start of the 1975 baseball season will be like an instant replay for home run king Hank Aaron, even though he's with a new team in a new league.

A year ago, Aaron started his final season with the National League Atlanta Braves gunning for Babe Ruth's 714 home run record. He tied that mark in the season's opening game and then shattered it a few days later.

After Ruth

Now, playing for the American League Milwaukee Brewers, Aaron is after Ruth again and again, the record could come early in the season. This time he needs just eight runs batted in to surpass Ruth's all-time record of 2,209.

Aaron drove in 2,202 runs in his 21 seasons with the Braves, knocking in 90 or more in 16 of those years.

The home run king also holds a fistful of other records and with 3,600 hits is only 30 short of the No. 2 man, Stan Musial. Ty Cobb's 4,191 is the all-time record.

Unique Targets

Frank Robinson, baseball's first major league black

manager, also has some interesting targets to shoot for as he doubles as a designated hitter with the Cleveland Indians.

Robinson needs 25 home runs to reach 600 — a total reached only by Aaron, Ruth and Willie Mays. He also is exactly 100 hits short of 3,000 for his career. If he manages that total, he would be the 13th man in history to achieve it.

Lou Brock, who established a single season record with 118 stolen bases for St. Louis last season, now has 753 for his career. That's 139 away from Cobb's all-time record of 892.

California pitcher Nolan Ryan has a shot at two records. He will be after his fourth career no-hitter, a feat managed only by hall of Famer Sandy Koufax, and he will be trying to become the first pitcher in history to strike out 300 or more batters in four consecutive seasons.

Another pitcher, Tom Seaver of the New York Mets, became the first National League hurler to record seven consecutive 200-strikeout seasons when he reached that total in his final 1974 start. That tied him for the major league record with

Walter Johnson and Rube Waddell, a mark Seaver will try to break this year.

Bob Gibson, starting what he says will be his final season of pitching for St. Louis, ranks second in career strikeouts with 3,057, trailing only Johnson's 3,508. With 248 victories, Gibson is the winningest active hurler and his 56 career shutouts give him the lead among active pitchers in that department too.

Two American League pitchers, Detroit's Mickey Lolich and Gaylord Perry of Cleveland, are also close to important plateaus.

Sprint Car Ace Eyes Ohio Test

ROSSBURG, Ohio (AP) — Larry Dickson of Marietta, Ohio, guns for his second straight victory to the 1975 U.S. Auto Club sprint car season Sunday at Eldora Speedway.

Dickson, a two-time USAC sprint champion, won the season's opener last week at Reading, Pa.

Dickson is the early point leader with 50. Joe Saldana of Lincoln, Neb., is second with 38, followed by George Snider of Bakersfield, Calif., 29; Billy Cassella of Weirton, W. Va., 27, and Sam Sessions of Nashville, Mich., 24.

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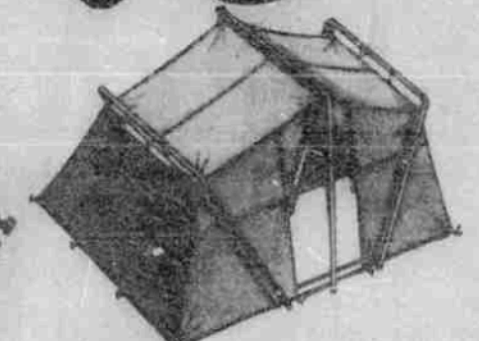


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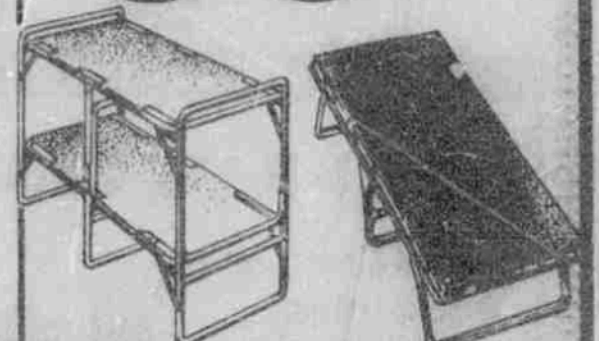
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