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**WHITE PINE CHUTE #2, LITTLE COTTONWOOD CANYON,**

19950117

**UTAH |** January 17, 1995

Two motorists caught, carried, and injured. During a period of high-intensity snowfall, a large natural avalanche hit a car, carrying it off the road, destroying it, and slightly injuring the two people inside.

**SITE**

White Pine Chute #2 is the “largest, straightest, and most active”<sup>43</sup> of six distinct, rocky, tree-lined gullies that affect roughly 1,100 feet of Utah Highway 210 in Little Cottonwood Canyon. The 37-degree start zone faces south and sits at 10,120 feet. The steep path has a vertical fall of 2,800 feet; much of the track is over 30 degrees steepness. While the head of Little Cottonwood Canyon is densely instrumented, there were few automated weather stations mid-canyon at the time of the accident.

**WEATHER AND SNOWPACK SUMMARY**

The central Wasatch Range saw three sustained storms in January 1995. The second of these lasted from January 10 through 17. During that period, the Snowbird SNOTEL (9,617 feet; 2.5 miles southeast) recorded 6.3 inches of snow-water equivalent.<sup>44</sup> In the last three days of that interval, from Sunday morning to Tuesday morning, Snowbird Resort and Alta Ski reported storm totals of 67 and 97 inches.

The heavy snowfall contributed to 10 avalanche incidents, including four burials and two deaths (19950114a). On the morning of the accident, several bands of snow were forecast to sweep through the area. Temperatures were in the single digits and winds were west-northwest and gusty

**ACCIDENT SUMMARY**

On January 17, “the third day of a pretty good storm,”<sup>45</sup> forecasters from the ski area and the Utah Department of Transportation decided that they did not need to use artillery to mitigate avalanche hazard above UT 210 in Little Cottonwood Canyon.

The decision was based on the fact that we had fired targets on the lower road 3 times in the past two days with only one significant release, and even though we had received 10” of snow the past 24 hrs. the densities were down from previous days, the wind speeds were 20mph and lower and the weather forecast for the next 12 hours was for 4” to 6.”<sup>46</sup>

Unfortunately, it quickly became apparent to forecasters that snowfall rates and totals would exceed the forecast. “An interval dump was done at 08:51 of 8 inches with .38 water.”<sup>47</sup> Tipping buckets at the ski areas showed more than 0.17 inches of snow-water equivalent for the period between 07:00 and 08:59.

At about 09:00, a large natural avalanche ran out of White Pine Chute #2. Witnesses reported seeing “two cars engulfed by the cloud, a small blue one and a red one. The blue one came out the other side, the red one did not.”<sup>48</sup> One witness described the avalanche as “like a flash going across the road. I couldn’t believe how fast it went.”<sup>49</sup> The avalanche knocked the red car, a Subaru, off the road, pushing it at least 120 feet from the fogline.