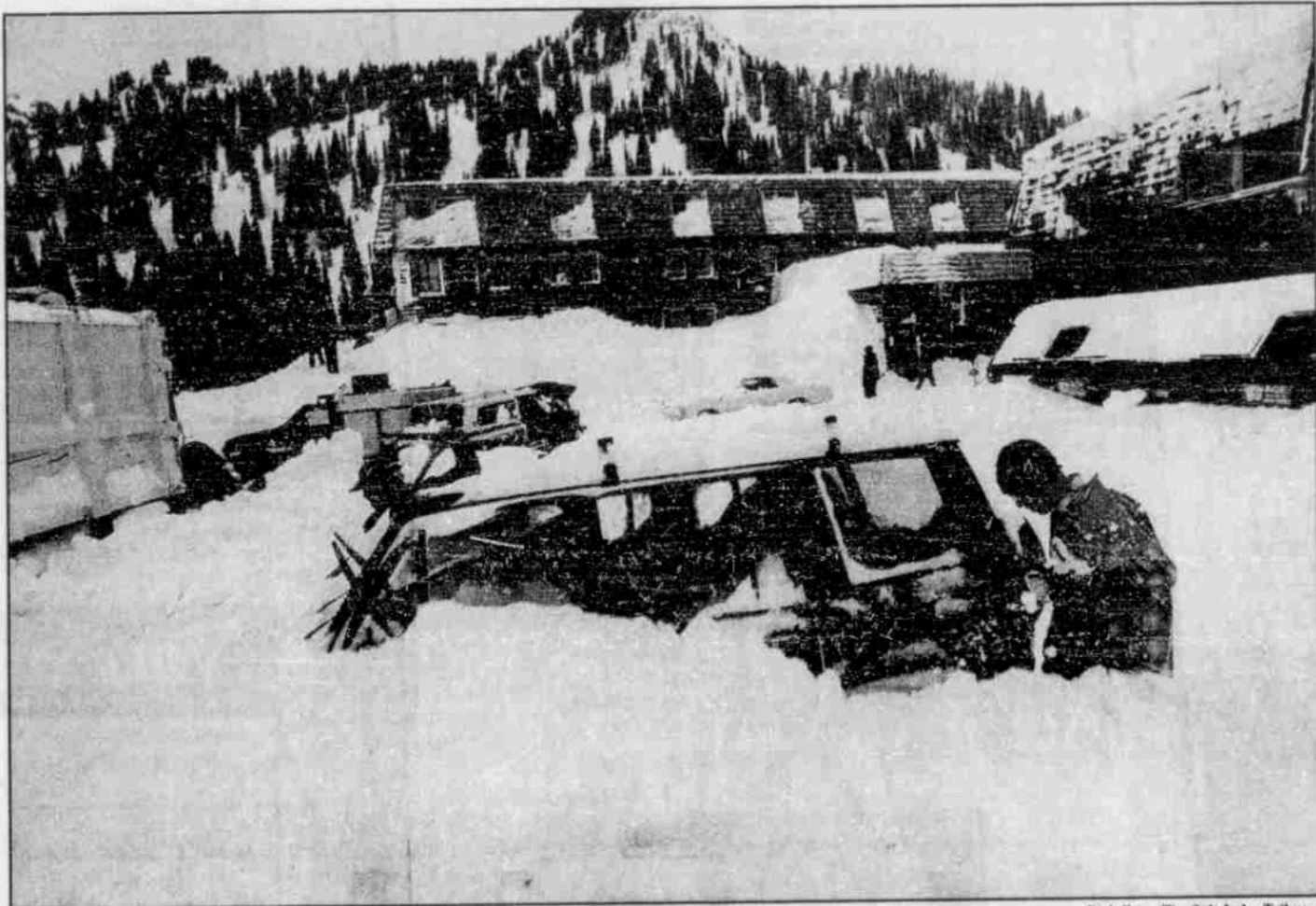




Rick Egan/The Salt Lake Tribune

Alta Peruvian Lodge employees Jon Wade and Greg Hoon attempt to dig out a vehicle buried Friday morning in the hotel's parking lot by a massive **avalanche**. The slide, set off by an artillery shell, also damaged the lodge. No injuries were reported.

Avalanches Roar in Canyon, Damage **Alta** Hotel

Controlled Slide Hits Lodge; Snow to Keep Danger High

BY BRIAN MAFFLY

THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

ALTA — Rivers of snow tumbled down the upper chutes of Little Cottonwood Canyon Thursday and Friday, stranding skiers, burying roads and parking lots and damaging a lodge.

But for residents of this Wasatch mountain town of 400, it was winter as usual this blizzardy week, despite the declaration of "interlodge" and the other minor losses of freedom in the name of public safety.

"The hardest part is we have people who

can't get out [of the canyon]," said John McIntosh, a 12-year resident who manages the **Alta** Lodge. "We have guests who come into the [Salt Lake] airport and don't understand why they can't get up the canyon."

McIntosh's hotel, owned by **Alta** Mayor Bill Levitt, has been assisting the guests of the stricken **Peruvian** Lodge, which remained without power Friday evening due to **avalanche** damage.

"It's been a longstanding tradition that when the going gets rough, everyone chips in," McIntosh said. "Being at the end of the canyon, we know we're in things together. We get used to it. It comes with the territory."

No injuries were reported in the canyon Friday, even after the **Peruvian** suffered a glancing blow from a "controlled" ava-

■ Copter crash probed

B-6

lanche triggered by an artillery shell fired by Department of Transportation workers.

At 8 a.m., **avalanche**-control workers shot Toledo chute, an **avalanche** zone across the road from **Alta** Ski Lifts' lower parking lot.

The blast results were spectacular.

Simultaneously, four related slide areas unleashed snow loads, ripping out trees and sending a flow of debris across the road and into the east wing of the **Peruvian**.

"The slide was a little bigger than we were expecting," said Onno Wieringa, the general manager at **Alta** Ski Lifts. "The

See **AVALANCHES**, Page B-6

Avalanches

Damage Hotel

In Utah Canyon

■ Continued from B-1

whole bowl came out in one piece."

Because of all the recent snow sitting precariously on a weak underlying snowpack, recent avalanches have been behaving in unpredictable ways, experts say.

"It's rare that so many starting zones connect through so many aspects," said UDOT forecaster Steve Conger, referring to the Toledo slide that hit the Peruvian. "It wrapped around three different exposures."

UDOT avalanche control workers also triggered a massive slide in Tanner's Gulch on Friday that stopped just short of the highway. Avalanches in Tanner's rarely hit the road, but the slide path is the site of the only avalanche-caused highway fatality in Little Cottonwood Canyon, according to Tom Kimbrough of the Utah Avalanche Forecast Center. A plow driver was killed there nearly 50 years ago.

An avalanche warning remained in effect Friday evening,

when more snow was expected to arrive and continue falling through Saturday, said Kimbrough.

"The good news is that many steep slopes around the Wasatch have already released this week, reducing somewhat the danger of large, full-depth avalanches," Kimbrough said. "The bad news is those that haven't pulled have additional snow on them and have a potential to go really big."

In spontaneous slides early Friday, much of the snow released in the Meadow Chutes, a popular backcountry skiing spot in Big Cottonwood's Silver Fork.

This week's avalanche cycle comes almost a year to the day after similar conditions stranded hundreds of skiers in Little Cottonwood. Avalanches wrecked dozens of cars and one unoccupied structure.

Thursday afternoon, another UDOT-triggered slide buried the road at White Pine under 12 feet of snow and spontaneous slides struck a closed stretch of road near Snowbird's Cliff Lodge. The debris tore out the gates that were diverting canyon traffic onto the Alta bypass road.

The Alta and Snowbird resorts soon closed and interlodge was declared, stranding many skiers for hours or overnight. Everyone but essential public-safety personnel were confined indoors until about 11 a.m. Friday.

"It's like martial law," McIntosh said. "If you go outside, you get arrested."

Near midnight, some Alta employees and skiers were allowed down the canyon, but they had to leave their vehicles and take one of a handful of buses. The Peruvian put up about 40 skiers after the hotel was left partially empty because a large tour group could not get up the canyon, said general manager Todd Collins.

"Every couch was being used," Collins said. "I slept on the floor in my office."

When UDOT began blasting avalanches at about 7 a.m., "maximum interlodge" was put into effect, requiring guests to huddle in common areas of their lodges.

No one was in the ground floor rooms of the Peruvian's eastern wing when the debris from the Toledo slide poured through the windows and pushed in an exterior wall, Collins said. Five feet of snow filled the rooms.

The hotel was spared a direct hit, with the bulk of the debris piling up to the east of the structure. That slide buried at least four parked cars and flattened a small Snowcat like a cardboard box. A metal stairway was torn from the outside of the building.

It was the first time in 12 years that an avalanche struck the Peruvian, a three-story hotel that generally gets nailed once a decade, Collins said.

Periods of snow continued through the week. Towards the end of the week the more stable snowpack of Little Cottonwood had all the load it could take and began producing huge avalanches. One of these ripped through part of the Peruvian Lodge on the 16th but no one was injured. The avalanche cycle affected nearly the entire western U.S. including all of Utah.