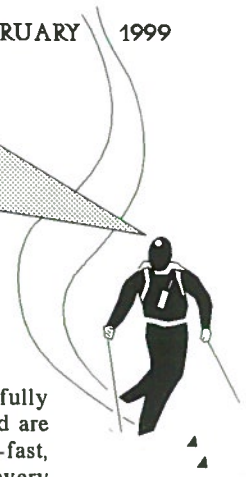


# SnowLine

The Official Newsletter of the  
**Tahoe Nordic Search & Rescue Team, Inc.**

Lake Tahoe · Truckee · Donner Summit



one observation I've made on the human creature: many are unusually susceptible to the "weather now, weather forever" condition. That is, we feel that whatever the weather is today, that weather will continue.

It's especially championed by Californians, a group accustomed to long periods of unchanging weather. Once they turn the corner into May, residents of the Golden State will be hard pressed to use their windshield wipers again until November. When long spells of dry weather play out during "winter" months, Californians quickly get pricked with that six-month open-sky feeling. A guy at the post office told me today (January 15): "You know, it just *feels* like we've had all the heavy stuff. Now it'll be dry 'til summer." [!] Evidently postal employees, like climatologists, assume that the weather of the future will somehow mirror that of the past. If you think about it that's a huge assumption; one that plays out true on some scales, and bottoms-out quick on others. If you were to peruse the historic weather records of the Tahoe Sierra, you'd find wet years, and not so wet years, during every recent decade. If you took a step closer you'd notice something about how the precipitation of any one winter is distributed: mostly in quantum leaps. Wet years or dry, the small events throughout our "wet" season add up to only small scraps of the whole. Though seasonally there may be many small storms—30 or more—it is the big storms that define the precipitation year. Whether our winter is possessed of four big storms or seven or eight will determine how long the summer snowfields feed the rivers. Because the big low-pressure commas slamming the California coast tend to be powerful and of very finite duration, you could stack them up, ignoring the puny storms, and your annual precipitation totals wouldn't be far off of the Weather Channel's. So even though the snow

shovels have been docked for the last month, a three day event could bring us right back up. Want a guaranteed weather prediction for 1999? It definitely ain't over.

There is a link—tenuous perhaps, but a link—between the number of winter storms and the number of winter searches. So far, we've been enchanted by an "average" winter. And have we suffered an "average" search year? If I had to muster a guess I'd say zero searches is most certainly below the norm. (The cold guy lost below Granite Chief last month would have generated a search, had anyone missed him.) The lack of searches has been making a few of the Team skiers a little edgy. There is a certain sand-in-the-skivvies psychology to being all dressed up and waiting and waiting and waiting, not knowing when your prom date will arrive. But as reported in last month's *Snow Line*, the Team is ready. We will not let the corsage wilt.

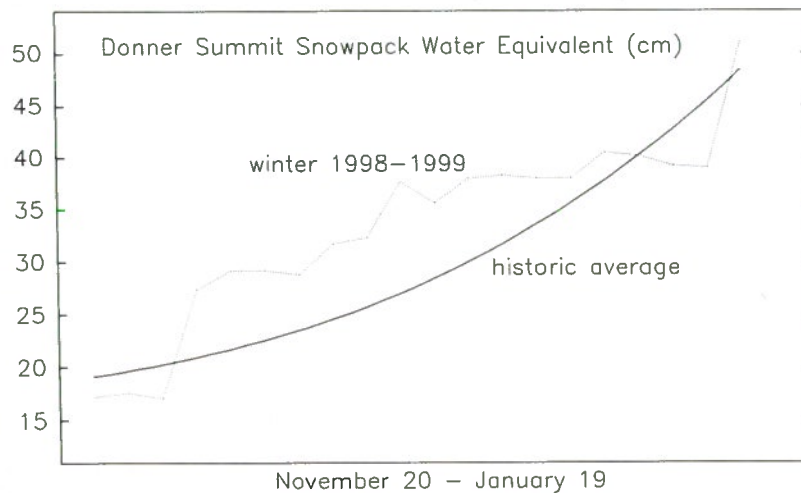
crystals quite cheerfully resist age-hardening and are a fantastic ski surface—fast, deep, a quiet hissing every turn. Most assuredly these snows will become a weak subsurface structure once buried under the next storm. Don't forget about them...

## A Semi-Related Anecdote

Between 1977 and 1998, 60 individuals were recovered from snow avalanches in the United States with the aid of avalanche transceivers. 32 (53%) were recovered dead; 28 (47%) were dug up alive. The average depth of burial was 1.2 meters; the average time buried was 25.7 minutes, or about 52 times longer than most of us can comfortably hold our breath. When the Nordic Team runs transceiver practices, we try to find a buried beacon in under three minutes. These practices are (mostly) controlled situations on "avalanche" paths of modest girth with shallow burial depths. It is only with repeated practice that any skier can expect to demonstrate adequate transceiver search skills under the physical and emotional stress of an actual burial. 26 minutes is a completely unacceptable burial time; make sure you can do much better.

## Heads Up Skiers

As we're barely a month past the solstice, the solar energy input into the snowpack is minimal, and near zero on the hardest north aspects. Clear skies, shallow snowpacks, warm days, cold nights—this is the perfect



recipe for highly constructive metamorphism within north-facing snow layers. And that is exactly what we have. Areas that were protected from the strong east winds of January 8 are plentiful in the sweet sugar snows. Large grained and cohesionless, these

architect extraordinaire, Tony offers up a few thoughts on the Team...

When I first joined Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team I thought it might be a great place to meet single women. I took me a

## Tony's View

The cast of characters crossing the threshold of the Nordic Team over the years has been great, and certainly one of the most colorful is Tony Bochene. Since he joined Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue a few years back, the throttle on the Team's meetings, trainings, and parties has been jacked up more than a couple notches. Tony's like that guy from your high school you'll never forget. Writer, photographer, archer, electrician, chain-monkey, and snow cave

Next General Meeting is Monday, February 1, 1999, 6:30 p.m. at the Granlibakken Resort's Ski Hut

while to realize most the single women came there seeking refuge from Tahoe's roaming gangs of single men. So since I was already there and didn't have anything else to do I tried out for the "A" ski Team. About twenty years later I finally made it. Can't tell you what an honor it is for this aging loudmouth womanizing hippie to be part of one of the best ski teams in the country. What confused me, was in the mean time half a dozen other people joined up and almost immediately made the "A" Team. Took me a while to realize it was because they were better qualified. Oh well, I guess I'm learning.

A whole library of sad, contrary, ironic, heroic, humorous images come to mind whenever I think about this incredible group

of people who call themselves the Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team. What they do for each other and the community never ceases to amaze me. It seems impossible to summarize what so many have learned by being a part of this team. But I'll try.

The first vision I see is the ugliest man ever rescued standing naked and shivering in the beam of Dirk's headlamp in Coldstream Canyon. Never again will he ski out of bounds, or disrobe in front of strangers. Sometime later I see Scoop watching a four thousand pound snow cat break through the ice and slowly sink into a lake. He's always suspected that a Thiokol wouldn't float. Now he knows for sure. See, there's always something to learn. Next I see half a million third-graders swarming around a group of overwhelmed Team members and someone asks, "Why don't we wear cotton?" All the kids shout in unison: "Because COTTON KILLS!" The Education Committee mutters amongst themselves, "They already know this stuff guys, we can go home." Two mountain ranges away at the base of Castle Peak, a frozen guy is teetering on the edge of death. Lost in the depths of a hypothermic coma, dressed entirely in cotton and soaked to the bone he is muttering something to himself. The Team frantically races to save a life that seems already lost, and the impossible happens. He survives. The frozen guy risked his life to learn what third-

graders already know, cotton kills.

But without a doubt the most visual image I have of this Team has not so much to do with learning as it does experiencing. I see Doug [Read] and Steve [Matson] dangling from the cable of a helicopter hundreds of feet off the ground as they perform their incredible imitation of human yo-yo's. The cable winches in and they begin to spin in wild crazy circles. Round and round, faster and faster until the landscape is just a blur. There is a frozen corpse lying in the belly of the helicopter above their heads, a search victim who shouldn't have died. Caught themselves halfway between the sheer terror of death and the pure exhilaration of life, they scream at the top of their lungs like two kids at a country fair.

HAPPY NEW YEAR GANG!

## Tahoe Nordic Search & Rescue Team Officers

President	Gerald Rockwell	583-5376
Vice President	Joe Pace	583-1806
Treasurer	Scott Schroepfer	546-2809
Secretary	Jackie Thomas	587-2687
Board Members	Steve Matson	546-7968
	Dirk Schoonmaker	583-2929
	Steve Twomey	525-7280
	Medora Weiser	(775) 831-2127

## Committee Chairs

Cuisine	Debra Schroepfer	546-2809
Dispatch	Jackie Thomas	587-2687
Education	Whitney Foehl	(775) 322-4368
	Karen Honeywell	546-8609
The Great Ski Race™	Douglas Read	583-6381
	Randall Osterhuber	587-3092
Newsletter	Randall Osterhuber	587-3092
Snowcats	Tony Remenih	583-1684
Snowmobiles	Ray O'Brien	581-4358
Training	Paul Honeywell	546-8609
Truck/Equipment	Russ Viehman	582-1695
Tahoe Nordic Search & Rescue Team garage		581-4038

All phone numbers area code (530) unless noted otherwise.

## Team Trainings

Additional Team training exercises will be announced at the February 1 meeting. The Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team garage is located at 223 Fairway Drive in Tahoe City, behind the Chevron station.

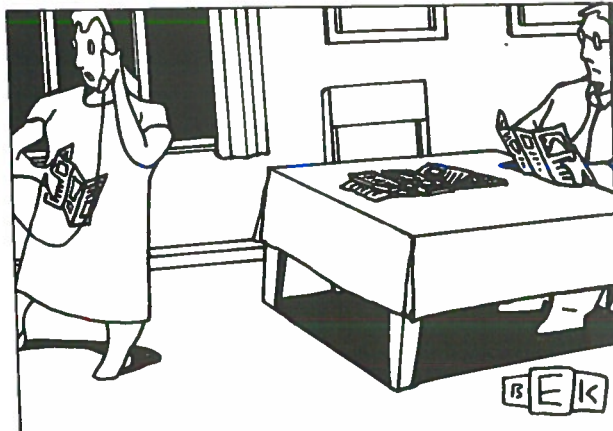
**January 23:** Dirk Schoonmaker will lead a mock search/rescue. Meet at the Team garage at 7:30 AM.

**February 27:** Gerald Rockwell will lead a map and compass, avalanche transceiver, GPS, and search training at Paige Meadows. Meet at the top of Silvertip Drive (Talmont) at 5:00 PM.



## Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team, Inc.

Post Office Box 7703  
Tahoe City, California 96145



"We have all the brochures, but we can't decide if we want to die on Mt. Everest or Mt. McKinley."

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