SnowLine
The Official Newsletter of the
Tahoe Nordic Search & Rescue Team, Inc.
Lake Tahoe • Truckee • Donner Summit

Sunday, March 5, 9:00 AM
SHARP! will begin the twenty-fourth "running" of The Great Ski Race. Not only is The Great Ski Race the main fund-raising event of the Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team, it is the largest Nordic ski race in the western United States. Preparations for the race and post-race activities have been underway for many months; the final organization meeting will be held Monday night, 6:30 PM, February 28, at the Granlibakken Resort’s Ski Hut. This will, of course, be coincident with the next general meeting of Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team. Please plan on attending: your help is crucial to the success of the race and ultimately the life-saving efforts of the Team. See you there!

Heads Up

As an all-volunteer non-profit group, Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team acquires its money through various fund-raising events and personal and corporate donations. The Nordic Team becomes custodian of these funds and is responsible for feeding this money back into the community. The Team does this by producing public education programs, and effectively training, equipping, and fielding a mountain rescue team. Training the members of Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team remains the most important and vital use of the Team’s cash resources.

One of the many challenges facing a search and rescuer in a mountainous, winter environment is unstable snow. Nordic Team skiers and all-around good-guys Tony Rochene, Cory Engles, Mike Kennett, John Pang, and Steve Reynaud will be attending snow avalanche safety courses this next month. They are being sponsored by Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team through the Bernie Kingery Fund.

Almost universally misleading in our youth by our parents, we grow up thinking snow is a cute fluffy substance that’s fun to throw at friends. It doesn’t take long as a resident of the snow zone to realize Sierra snow more commonly resembles mud than feathers, and behaves more like a plastic (sometimes pliable, sometimes rigid) than a cotton ball. And even though throwing snow at each other remains a requisite pre-mating ritual for adolescents, snow as a projectile is best targeted toward your enemy: dash him in the head with a slush ball!

As snow is deposited on steep mountain slopes, subtleties of temperature, humidity, wind, and radiation all exert their influence on the snow crystals and grains; the fruit of these cultivations are remarkably unique layers. A healthy mountain snowpack may consist of thousands of individual strata. Because of structural differences some snow layers will bond poorly to others. When slabby snow accumulates above a weak interface and a trigger is introduced (e.g. a Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team skier), failure may occur. Snow avalanches come in all sizes: from sloughs that entrain a handful of crystals to those that literally move mountains.

Discipline with many unknowns, Team skiers have to be trained in the use, and carry the tools of avalanche rescue: transceiver, collapsible probe, shovel.

The false security endowed by skiing in a group (large groups=large loads=large/many triggers), clear blue skies, or crystalline powder snow has more than once caused several of our skiers to be blinded to the avalanche hazard around them. One of the first “degrees” of effective rescues is to consider the safety of the rescuers. We cannot expect to take care of others if we cannot protect ourselves. From a snow safety standpoint that means always—winter, spring, sun or storm—being aware of the snow environment and your position within it. And always—winter, spring, sun or storm—carrying and using a transceiver, collapsible probe, and shovel.

Search And Rescue

Canadians Chris Hodgkinson and Dan Kossowski, both 21, were skiing and riding Alpine Meadows on January 29 when they misinterpreted the ski area’s trail map. Trying to head for the “back bowls”, they took a wrong turn and found themselves outside the ski area boundary and inside the Granite Chief Wilderness.

After a long descent, Chris, on downhill skis, and Dan, on a snowboard, realized their mistake and started heading back uphill toward Alpine Meadows’ Ward Peak. Sidestepping on his skis, Chris quickly outdistanced his friend who postholed to his knees. Seven hours later Chris made it back to the ski area; Dan was nowhere to be seen.

Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team was dispatched at 8:00 PM to locate and bring back Canadian Dan. The report was that the Alpine Meadows ski patrol had located Dan’s out-of-bounds track and had established voice contact with him.

By about midnight, Nordic Team skiers (led by Joe Pace and Jim Granger) located Dan atop a knob more than two kilometers from the ski area. Indeed, an area patroller had been yelling back and forth with Dan (telling him...)

Next General Meeting is Monday, February 28, 2000, 6:30 p.m. at the Granlibakken Resort’s Ski Hut
Team Goings-On

February 11: Fourteen members of Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team traveled to Alpine County and met with a sheriff's deputy and the ski patrol from the Bear Valley Ski Area. Bear Valley was the scene of two searches that have raised the attention of the Nordic Team: a search on January 30 for a lost out-of-bounds skier who was found and rescued by a CHP helicopter the next day; and a woman skiing out-of-bounds last winter who became lost, and died of exposure. Her body was not found until summer.

Alpine County is a mostly rural county with some exciting mountain terrain but has few backcountry searches and rescue resources to call upon. (On dry roads, the Nordic Team's response time to Bear Valley is about five hours.) Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team thought it valuable to introduce ourselves and get acquainted with the ski area's boundary and surrounding landscape. We had a couple hours of good visibility before the ceiling lowered, allowing the ski patrol to point out terrain traps, likely exits from the ski area, and potential difficulties in searching the immediate backcountry.

Many thanks to the Bear Valley Ski Patrol and Alpine County for hosting us.

February 19: A mountain skills/terrain familiarization training on and around Mt. Tallac. Steve Reynaud (587-4723) will lead this day in the mountains. Meet at the Team garage (223 Fairway Drive, Tahoe City) at 7:30 AM.

February 26: Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team will participate in this year's Snowfest parade through Tahoe City. If you'd like to be part of the skier "drill" team, show up at the Safeway parking lot (Tahoe City) at 9:00 AM. Wear storm gear, headlamp, backpack, and skis suitable for the pavement. Think kick-turns in formation.

February 27: Bernie Mellor (546-2238) will lead a Team ski tour from Sheep Flat (big meadow off Mt. Rose Highway) to Kings Beach. Meet at the Team garage at 7:30 AM or up at Sheep Flat at 8:15.

February 28: Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team monthly meeting and Great Ski Race coordination meeting, 6:30 PM at Granlibakken's Ski Hut.

March 2: Goodie bag stuffing for the Great Ski Race, 5:30 PM at Tahoe Cross Country Ski Area.

March 5: The 24th Annual Great Ski Race, Tahoe Cross Country Ski Area, 9:00 AM, SHARP!