



SnowLine

The Official Newsletter of the

TAHOE NORDIC SEARCH & RESCUE TEAM, INC.
 Lake Tahoe • Truckee • Donner Summit

Many new faces graced the last meeting of Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team, barely outnumbering the infants and dogs in attendance. Another busy year challenges the Team, and everyone needs to get involved! Getting involved is easy: participate in the Team training exercises and join a Team committee.

One of the more fun and important committees is Education. Nordic Team Board member Karen Honeywell leads this group, and she is organized. But she needs your help. Early this winter the Team will visit all the fourth grade students around the North Shore and Truckee and give them fun, informative presentations on how to properly deal with the winter environment, especially if they find themselves lost. Everyone can participate in these Winter Awareness presentations. Make sure to talk with Karen in the next couple months. More on the Education Committee will be presented at the Team's monthly meetings.

And that next meeting is Monday night, **November 6, 6:30 PM**, at the Granlibakken Resort's Ski Hut. See you there!

The Swiss Way

The International Snow Science Workshop is held every other year, during October. The ISSW 2000 took place in Big Sky, Montana, just a few weeks ago. While many aspects of snow research are addressed at the conference, the snow avalanche is the main topic of discussion. Of the 400 or so participants, most are from the United States, most of those from the western United States. Nevertheless, there are more than a few snow scientists and practitioners from the world over. The Norwegians are there with stories of huge, wet, slow-moving avalanches sweeping fishing villages into the sea; the hearty group from Iceland has tales of attempting to stop glacial avalanches mixed with molten lava. The French, with photos of skiing improbable alpine routes under dazzling clear skies (dressed, of course, in cutting-edge Euro skiwear), seem always to offer up the next invention. If you're French (don't forget the wine, cheese, and condoms) and find yourself being overrun by an avalanche, ski fast and

pull the ripcord on your harness. This will deploy a full-body air bag, a special marker balloon, or perhaps an aerial signal flare identifying your position. Whatever it is, the French always seem to have a ripcord. While Indian hydrologists from the Garhwal measure avalanches with starting zones the size of Glenshire, the Japanese are modeling turbulent flow by releasing 200,000 ping-pong balls down a ski jump. The Canadians, forever defining state-of-the-art avalanche science in North America, sport frost-nipped cheek bones, regardless of season. And then there's the Swiss.

Being a predominantly mountainous country, Switzerland has a long and intimate history with snowslides. Avalanche protection structures have been defending buildings in Switzerland just about as long as there's been mud enough to build structures. The Swiss bank the world's cash, make some awesome pocket knives, and bore impressive tunnels, but they also survive avalanches, almost on a daily basis. Avalanches, in a sense, are what the Swiss do.

There's no doubt the bulk of world knowledge on avalanche meteorology, flow dynamics, forecasting, protection, and rescue have originated from Swiss research and experience. The combination of wealth, intellect, and steep, confined, Alpine terrain have driven the Swiss to the forefront of the field. Thousands of hectares of Swiss starting zone are criss-crossed with snow-stabilizing structures, roads and railroads are galleried into country rock, diversion mounds and snow splitters protect everything from government buildings to cow pens. The Swiss Federal Institute for Snow and Avalanche Research has parceled entire mountains into snow avalanche research labs, complete with observation/measurement bunkers—within the active track—that sport several ton window shutters automatically deployed when slab failure is detected 1000 meters above. Alarm systems, nation wide, warn school bus drivers, railroad engineers, and the general public of avalanches, rockfall, and/or floods up ahead. These alarm triggers consist of combinations of seismometers, strain gauges, and trip wires. When a train is delayed, every clock, timepiece, and wristwatch in Switzerland automatically compensates.

Just kidding. The Swiss have also developed the first avalanche transceiver (the *Barryvox*, look for it) that addresses both the physics and subjective problems associated with finding someone buried in the snow—and finding them quickly. I'm sure I'm not the only one to recognize the irony that for winter 2001 the "avalanche cord" of the 1970s is again being marketed in the U.S.

The United States is a fairly big country. It's big in size, population, and financial resources. But because the worlds of the Wasatch, Telluride, and Tahoe City are smaller than they might first appear, relatively little U.S. public awareness of snow avalanches continues into the twenty-first century. Great advances have been made of course, but on the whole, avalanches are still a very mysterious, wild phenomenon. I hope as this autumn's weather changes into winter, your thoughts—as a backcountry skier and searcher—tend, as mine do, toward advancing your knowledge and awareness of the behavior of steep snow. Maintain a weather-eye on our own backyard, and a heads-up toward our European neighbors.

Upcoming Trainings

As we progress further and further toward snow season, keep in mind that the training exercises listed below may revert from a hike to a ski. All it takes is one overnight snowfall sensation. Hiking *or* skiing, come prepared for the weather and terrain to be encountered during each specific exercise. During trainings, committee co-Chairs Paul Honeywell and Bernie Mellor have adopted a perfect blend of humor and flexibility with solid, necessary information—and adventure. As a result, each Team outing is fun and informative.

The times listed below are *departure* times. Please show up early and prepared so the entire group can move as a whole. As always, it's a special courtesy to inform the leader of the training that you will attend. The Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team garage is located at 223 Fairway Drive, behind the Tahoe City Chevron.

October 29: John Pang (581-2641) leads a day in the Castle Peak area addressing such topics as search strategies, terrain familiarization, navigation, first aid, route

Next General Meeting is Monday, November 6, 2000, 6:30 pm at the Granlibakken Resort's Ski Hut

finding, etc. Depart the Team garage at 7:30 AM or meet at the start of the Castle Valley dirt road at 8:15.

November 12: A hike up Snow Peak above the east shore of Lake Tahoe. This reach of the Carson Range encompasses the unique ecotone between the Great Basin of Nevada and the sub-alpine zone of the Tahoe Sierra. We've had more than a few searches here, too. Doug Read (583-6381) will lead this one. 7:30 AM at the Team garage.

November 16: So, you haven't had enough time in front of the monitor, eh? Well

here's your chance to soak up yet some more radiation. Team Director Gerald Rockwell (583-5376) will lead us through the particulars of the TOPO! software program, mouse click by mouse click. Meet 6:30 PM at the USGS office in Carnelian Bay, 5229 North Lake Boulevard.

November 18: Today, Russ Viehmann (582-1695) will combine a hike and a GPS practice session. Russ still hasn't figured out where this hike will take place, so call him incessantly until he gets his act together. He prefers phone calls anytime after midnight.

November 21: Jim Coffey (583-1276) will lead an avalanche transceiver practice at the Team garage, 6:30 PM. Being familiar with the operation and limitations of avalanche beacons is the only way you'll ever have a chance of using one properly during an emergency. This is an important exercise and Team training. If you own your own beacon, bring it along.

November 22: Randall Osterhuber's 41st birthday. Please fax him your adulation, 426-0319.

December 2: Paul Honeywell (546-8609), optimist that he is, is leading a ski (tour?) in the Mt. Rose area. With even a few inches of snow the sand hill at the far side of Sheep Flat is skiable. But take caution: don't fall, you'll get dirty. Depart the Team garage at 7:30 AM or meet up at Sheep Flat at 8:15.

Until next month...

—Randall Osterhuber



Aerial view of three large consecutive avalanches in Gschinen, Switzerland, February 1999. Photograph courtesy of Swiss Federal Office of Topography

Team Officers

President	Joe Pace	583-1806
Vice President	Steve Twomey	525-7280
Treasurer	Scott Schroepfer	546-2809
Secretary	Terri Viehmann	582-1695
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	Ray O'Brien	581-4358
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	Russ Viehmann	582-1695
	Randall Osterhuber	587-3092
Directors-at-large	Douglas Read	583-6381
	Gerald Rockwell	583-5376

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Cuisine	Debra Schroepfer	546-2809
Dispatch	Jackie Thomas	587-2687
Education	Karen Honeywell	546-8609
Equipment	Russ Viehmann	582-1695
Great Ski Race™	Douglas Read	583-6381
	Randall Osterhuber	587-3092
	Randall Osterhuber	587-3092
Newsletter	Scoop Remenih	583-1684
Snowcats	Ray O'Brien	581-4358
Snowmobiles	Paul Honeywell	546-8609
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Few people are aware of it, but I invented Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team.

Since the Nordic Team truck gets 7 miles per gallon, you're gonna need an oil man like me in the White House.



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