



SnowLine

The Official Newsletter of the

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

The next meeting of Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team is Monday night, April 7, 6:30 PM at the Granlibakken Resort's Ski Hut. If you have anything else on your schedule that night, just highlight it, and press PURGE. See you at Granlibakken!

27th G.S.R.

Shaun Marshall-Pryd, from Bozeman, Montana, shook my hand vigorously and wouldn't let go. "The Boulder [Mountain] Tour used to be my favorite race, but not anymore! Now it's The Great Ski Race!" Shaun had just exited the finish line corral and was *super* excited about the race, the course, his 12th place finish, and the event overall. "Great job! Great job! I'll *definitely* be back next year!"

When someone you don't even know approaches and hurls compliments at you, you get the feeling that either something went very right, or 30 kilometers worth of endorphins have suddenly been distilled into rapid-fire veneration. In this case it was both.

The 27th Great Ski Race, by all measures, turned out to be one of the—if not *the*—most successful Great Ski Races of our brief and shining history. Great Ski Race day, dawning clear, cold, and calm, landed smack dab in the middle of a week of cloudy, cool, snowy weather. The stellar day brought out the racers: the fast and not so fast, the lycra-clad, the woolendowed, the blue jeaned. 988 skiers registered this year, the second largest Great Ski Race in history. Patrick Weaver, of Bend, Oregon, reigned skier-supreme once again, winning the race in one hour, thirteen minutes, sixteen seconds. Patrick was also the 2000 Great Ski Race winner; the ear-to-ear grin on his face this year imparted the sweet success of a second victory. Truckee's own Olympian Katerina Hanusova, just 25 years old, won the women's field with a time of 1:18:47. Her speed-racer performance further reduced the gap between the men's and women's fields. Katerina placed *seventh* overall. That's the highest place finish for any woman in the history of the race. Stay tuned for a woman's first place finish in a future Great Ski Race!

Clear weather this year dictated the entire race party outside, and party we did. While Lisa's Central Market handed out organic apples to blood sugar deprived racers, and local chiropractors tweaked other racers into a better posture, the beer flowed, the band rocked, the burritos rolled. For the first time ever, the band played outside. *Deaf, Dumb, and Blonde* kept the crowd hopping and beebopping in the brilliant sunshine. The band proved to be neither deaf nor dumb, but yes: *oh so blonde*.

The Great Ski Race cheerleaders, led by the one-woman dynamo known as JoJo Toeppner, blessed us all with their angel-like affections. And then danced with us too.

Literally hundreds of tasks, big and small, make up the success of The Great Ski Race. From the countless volunteer hours to the exquisite grooming, The Great Ski Race is the combined efforts of many, many people. But most of all, The Great Ski Race exists because of community support. Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team extends its most heart-felt thanks to all the race's sponsors and supporters without whom The Great Ski Race, nor Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team, could exist. But the biggest thanks are reserved for every participant of The 27th Great Ski Race—you all are the best!

#8

Like a sled-dog's need to pull, and a bird's need to fly, so too does the Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team skier need to search. At almost two months since our last callout—and *more* than two months since our last search—the Team skiers have become a little squirmy in their breeches. When the Nordic Team was dispatched at 9:15 PM on March 3, almost half the Team's roster responded.

Local telemark skier Chad Oritt had been backcountry skiing on his own in the Ward Creek watershed when the low visibility and snow flurries of the day got him turned around. At nightfall Chad had not returned. His girlfriend reported him missing.

By 10:45, six search teams (skiers and snowmobilers) were combing the Ward Canyon terrain at all points of the compass. Just after 11:00 PM, four Nordic Team searchers made voice contact with Chad. He was just over a kilometer from the road-head,

below SP Bowl on the Sherwood side of Alpine Meadows.

"We thought we heard something," reported Team searcher Joe Pace, "but it wasn't 'Help' or 'Over here'." He [Chad] was cooing 'Yooooou hooooo', and whistling." Chad was tired, hungry, thirsty, and had taken more than a few endos. "He had snow all over him, his goggles askew on his head," Joe added.

In addition to the Team skiers and snowmobilers, many of Chad's buddies had gathered to help with the effort. This was the Team's eighth search of the season.

Beacons

A recent avalanche in a closed area within Jackson Hole ski area caught two skiers, buried both, and killed one. The survivor, who was seriously washing-machined in the slide, extricated himself but was unable to effect a rescue because his transceiver was damaged when it (and his chest) smacked a rock during his ride for life. He was rather incensed that his avalanche beacon could not stand up to the hammer blow of a rock outcrop.

Avalanche transceivers (beacons) have come a long way in the past 25 years. The transmitting and receiving frequencies have been standardized, digital processors have been added, and you no longer have to mail your Skadi back to Lawtronic's upstate New York garage workshop every summer to have a fresh battery installed. Beacons have become faster, more powerful, more user friendly, and sleeker. But in able to maintain the sexy profile that the fashion-conscious backcountry skier demands, modern transceivers are designed relatively light and compact. Marrying light and small with a certain level of robustness is one of the many challenges facing the transceiver engineer.

Today's beacons will take some abuse, but they certainly fall short as a rock hammer, as our Jackson unfortunate found out. A beacon is a potentially life saving device, and should be treated as such. This means a beacon should never be dropped, gotten wet, summered-over with batteries installed, or worn outside the body. *Skiers are still wearing their beacons outside their final layer of clothing*—WRONG! As any avalanche survivor can attest, the forces within even

Ne xt General Meeting is Monday, April 7, 2003, 6:30 pm at the Granlibakken Resort's Ski Hut

modest-sized snow slides are tremendous. The chances that your transceiver will be damaged and/or ripped from your body are great if your beacon is exposed. A transceiver should be worn inside a secure zippered pants, parka, or breast pocket, where it is warm, dry, and protected from abuse. If you can see your partner's beacon while you're skiing, they're wearing it wrong.

Wearing it inside a pocket also eliminates the problem with straps. Most every model transceiver today comes with two straps: one bandoleer for over the shoulder and one to cinch around your svelte little waist. Combine these with lanyards for compasses, whistles, and GPSs, then add suspenders, pack straps, water bladder hoses, and radio harnesses, and, whoa skier!, you might have to buy a subscription to *Strap Management Quarterly!* Cut your transceiver straps and customize them so they are operational and out of the way. And while you're at it, toss that cute little nylon beacon pouch in the trash.

All of today's most popular models work exceedingly well, there are, however, idiosyncrasies to them all. During tests this season, here's what I've found is lacking with some specific transceivers.

The Ortovox F1 (analog) remains one of the workhorses with a great operational distance range but could use one lower volume setting and a beefier switch. Also the straps are bogus.

The Ortovox M2 (analog, faux digital) seems the least intuitive to use. It's a weird shape and size, has a delicate switch, and the straps are bogus.

The Ortovox X1's (digital/analog) red LEDs are difficult to impossible to read under bright sunlight, bogus straps, 15 cent switch.

The Tracker DTS's (digital) straps are bogus and the switch needs to be redesigned—it's too convex and can be inadvertently pressed.

The Barryvox (digital/analog) has bogus straps, needs a more robust on/off switch, and AAA sized lithium batteries (preferred) are hard to come by. The Barryvox remains the most technologically advanced beacon available today. The advantage of both digital and analog modes has become more and more apparent, especially during rescues involving multiple, deep burials. The Barryvox is also the smallest, lightest, most energy efficient, and very powerful. It has a "grandma" mode for the beginner user, but because of its half dozen or so programmable functions, it remains a beacon for the advanced user.

The Tracker is extremely popular and perhaps the most intuitive to use. Because its operation is closest to being "point and shoot," it seems the best beacon for the least experienced user to carry. However, its lack of analog mode and a poorly designed and positioned switch (that has caused problems since the Tracker was first introduced) leaves it a little wanting.

Many tests—scientifically rigorous and otherwise—have been conducted on transceivers over the past decades. Two of the more recent, one by Peter Höller et al and one by Jürg Schweizer et al (Austrian and Swiss

avalanche dudes, respectively), address both the physical and "subjective" attributes of several of today's most popular transceiver brands. The short answer to their investigations is that all the beacons work very well, but they work best in the hands of the experienced, practiced user. The Barryvox finished on top in both tests.

In summary: be careful not to strip or tweak the switch on your beacon, ditch those straps, and practice! Why would you not want to be an advanced transceiver user?



Dear Mr. Editor,

I'd like to send a message out to all the team members who helped with the Great Ski Race. Again this year we had a super event. I meet a lot of people at other races and at the race and in town and I heard nothing but praise for all our efforts. I hope all of you know what a big thing it is to so many people, they just love doing our race. I want to make sure you all understand how much the race is enjoyed. Of course we couldn't have had a better day for the race. Tie that in with a wonderful team of people helping to make it happen and we really put on a show this year. I have never seen the track hold together as well as it did this year, the registration went smooth, the timing worked and the meal was really good. "I liked it because you could hold your meal in one hand and a beer in the other," was one quote that I heard. I heard a lot of positive comments about the race and it just goes to show what 200 volunteers can pull off with their spare time. I'm very proud to be a member of this team and proud to have so many of you great friends doing your part to put on the best darn ski race. Every year I get kind of teary-eyed there on the starting line and I guess it is just because I know how many have put out to make it all come together. Thanks a lot from me and all the racers and all who benefit from such a tremendous event.

—Doug Read

Last Call (?)

Don't miss the March 30 ski tour with Bob Wright (546-7273) into Desolation Wilderness. This could be the last scheduled Team training for winter 2003. Stay tuned. Meet Bob at the Team garage at 7:00 AM.

There you have it,

—Randall Osterhuber

After some recent rains in Sun Valley, Idaho, Dick Dorworth's ski report mentioned the funky snow conditions, and that the avalanche danger was rated as "moderate."

This from Tom Kimbrough of the Utah Avalanche Forecast Center: "A moderate rating is relative. I wouldn't go into a bar where I had a moderate chance of getting killed."

Team Officers

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