



SnowLine

The Official Newsletter of the
TAHOE NORDIC SEARCH & RESCUE TEAM, INC.
 Lake Tahoe • Truckee • Donner Summit

You've had a busy month, I know. What with hand-making all your gift wrapping paper and spot welding those new cookie cutters out in the ol' metal shop, who has time for search and rescue? **YOU DO BABY!** And there is no better stage from which to put your time and energy on display than the next meeting of Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team: Monday night, **January 6, 6:30 PM** at the Granlibakken Resort's Ski Hut. As the snows pile deeper and the ice grips the hemlocks, Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team comes into full flower. Ski trainings, searches, education programs, The Great Ski Race: the next Team meeting has something for everyone.

Lost Biker, Boarders

On November 29, visiting Londoner Peter Street, 56, was be-nighted (not to be confused with knighted) after failing to find his way out of the Miller Lake/Barker Pass area. His forward progress via bicycle had been thwarted by a maze of dirt roads, snowed-over passes, and nightfall.

Upon being reported overdue by a relative, Placer and Eldorado Counties initiated a search.

ATV, bicycle, and ground searchers responded, including about 10 Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team members. At 10:00 AM the next morning (November 30), Peter was spotted and rescued by the Placer County Eagle J helicopter crew. Peter had bivouacked under a crude shelter he erected near Bear Lake. The temperature that night touched the low 20s °F. Peter Street suffered due to the cold and hunger, but was otherwise OK.

During the afternoon snowstorm of December 19, two 18ish-year-old snowboarders, Beavis and Brainchild (not their real names), from Windsor, apparently ducked several CLOSED AREA signs at Northstar to access the north side of Lookout Mountain. Northstar was running only four lifts that day due to the ski area's still being without electricity following the particularly violent storm of the previous weekend. Beavis and Braincloud, both season pass holders at Northstar, figured they'd poach some untracked. In short order, however, B

and B found themselves lost in the low visibility. Even though it was only 2:30 PM, and their tracks would have led them right back to the operating ski area, they decided to dig in, erecting what Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team Secretary (and Northstar administrator) Terri Viehmann would describe as a "snow tunnel." After the boys did not show up at day's end, one of their grandmothers contacted the sheriff. Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team was dispatched at 1:00 AM on December 20; twelve searchers responded.

The brainchildren hunkered down (they both were dressed well) until the storm seemed to abate a little (3:00 AM), a bright moon now illuminating the snowscape. What Beavis and Brainsquare did to keep themselves occupied for those long hours is up for speculation.

Northstar snow grooming machines were doing passes on the lower slopes of Lookout Mountain when a driver spotted the two leaden young men a few minutes after 5:00 AM. The groomer picked them up, and ferried them on their ride of shame back to the awaiting sheriff. Evidently the boys will be cited for naughty playground behavior, and have had their season passes revoked. Their trespass violation comes on the heels of another closed-area snowboarder at Mt. Rose ski area (the previous weekend) who perished in an avalanche.

These were the second and third search and rescue operations for the Nordic Team this season.

To Probe (Or Not)

Like it or not, as explorers of winter mountains we depend a lot on our gear. If suddenly thrust back in time 150 years, some of us would fill the Jeremiah Johnson mold better than others. The plastics of today (how much of your backcountry equipment is not synthetic?) allow even the

dandiest among us to skip through terrain that rarely saw the likes of the beaver-greased mountain man. Even though the "modern" days of 60/40 parkas and hotdog avalanche transceivers are far behind us, some gear is still slow to evolve. Case in point: avalanche probes.

For the most part, every probe marketed today works, at least temporarily. Traditionally made of lightweight alloy, the probe your local mountain shop will sell you will break in short order. But only if you use it.

Over the years, I have seen every brand—every brand—of collapsible probe fail. This



Winter, the season for blowing up stuff. Cornice maintenance at Alpine Meadows.

Photograph by Randall Osterhuber

Next General Meeting is Monday, January 6, 2003, 6:30 pm at the Granlibakken Resort's Ski Hut

includes, but is not limited to, probes carrying the logo of Snowmetrics, MSR, Ortovox, G3, LifeLink, Komperdell, Black Diamond, etc, etc. Though it might bust, you need to carry one of these finicky flyrods. A probe is essential to effecting an avalanche rescue, especially one involving a deep burial.

So that we'll actually stick them in or on our packs, the probe manufacturers have made them light. This is fine except for probing snow even a meter deep can be heavy work for such lightweights. Repeated use, for as little as an hour, can render these glorified tent poles useless. Cables stretch and break, swedges open, soldered joints suddenly see the light of day. The stock bends beyond repair, ferrules slip, gnurled thumbscrews won't thread, or doubly frustrating, won't unthread. My (formerly) 3-meter-long LifeLink probe has been sawed, snipped, swedged, silver soldered, spliced, scribed, and pop riveted. That thing has seen more surgery than Michael Jackson. It now assembles via a complicated algorithm I have to study anew each winter. If you have a probe that's seen some use, and still operates, consider yourself blessed.

Outside of avalanche rescue, you might be probing the snow to find snow depth, identify inconsistent layering, or searching for that Sunday newspaper before snowblowing the driveway. Probing the snow properly is not difficult to learn. Always insert the probe plumb, always use gloves, don't force it or yard on it once it's in the snow. You shouldn't have to practice too much once you've done it. So, here's my advice to those who want a fully functioning probe at the moment of an emergency. Buy a probe (they're lightweight and fragile, but at least they're expensive), and in the warmth and comfort of your boudoir, assemble it and memorize how it works. Put it back in its protective envelope and put it in your ski pack. Never use it again until you have to. That these \$80 avalanche probes are to be considered disposable is not too much of an exaggeration. More than once I've witnessed a probe break, the price tag still dangling off its bag.

By the way, someone on the Nordic Team broke their probe above the Central Sierra Snow Lab during February of last year. I found it, sticking plumb out of the soil, last summer. The leftover sections can be claimed in the Team garage.

Trainings

Thanks for ironing out all those glitches. The reward? You can now brag about the fact that you hold a current OES card (right?); the carte blanche to Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team trainings.

Besides a bunch of get-up-and-go, the only other requirement for attending an on-the-snow Team function is to call the training organizer (even if it's at 11 PM the night before) and let them know to expect your bashful mug.

Despite last week's winds, the Nordic Team garage is still located at 223 Fairway Drive in Tahoe City, behind the Chevron station.

The schedg:

December 28: Jeff Rieger (916-769-5462) is leading an all-day ski tour—several route options are being considered. Meet at the Team garage at 7:30 AM.

January 4: A training up in the Mt. Rose area with Gerald Rockwell (583-5376). Meet at the garage at 7:30 AM or at the parking lot across from the Kings Beach Safeway at 8:00.

January 8: Karen Honeywell (546-8609) will offer a crash-course in educating fourth-graders on winter awareness. If you've signed on to help with the Education Committee (and I'm happy to learn you have), this training will streamline your shelter and signal pitch, your S.T.O.P. delivery. Meet at the USGS office on North Lake Blvd at 7:00 PM.

January 11/12: A two-day avalanche safety field course with Dick Penniman. Dick will address backcountry snow safety topics specific to our rescues and rescuers. As of this writing there are about 8 slots left for this course. To reserve yours, send Karen Honeywell a check for \$100 (PO Box 368, Carmelien Bay, CA 96140, phone 546-8609) made out to TNSAR. When you complete the two-day course your cash will be refunded to you.

January 14: Russ Viehmann (525-6978) will lead a GPS training at the Team garage. We'll do field practice behind the garage, so leave the street clothes in the closet. Meet at 6:30 PM.

January 18: Steve Twomey (525-7280) is organizing a ski tour to Rifle Peak and beyond. This will be a joint training with the Team snowmobilers. Meet at the garage at 7:15 AM, or the top of highway 267 at 8:00.

January 26: Peter York (583-0465) is leading the Team in a ski training in and around Squaw Valley. We'll ski as a group for a while in-bounds (no lift tickets issued), then punch into the backcountry. Meet at the garage at 7:15 AM, or at the bottom of the tram at 7:45.

February 2: The sister training to the above, only this time at Alpine Meadows. Jim Granger's (581-1251) the contact. Meet at the Team garage at 7:30 AM, or the bottom

of Alpine at 8:00.

Confused as to why real estate agents insist upon publishing photos of themselves,
—Randall Osterhuber

Team Officers

President	Steve Twomey	525-7280
Vice President	Russ Viehmann	525-6978
Treasurer	Scott Schroeffer	546-2809
Secretary	Terri Viehmann	525-6978
Board Members	Karen Honeywell	546-8609
	Ray O'Brien	581-4358
	Dirk Schoonmaker	583-2929
	Randy Sharp	587-2877
Directors-at-large	Randall Osterhuber	546-4491
	Joe Pace	583-1806
	Douglas Read	583-6381
	Gerald Rockwell	583-5376

Committee Chairs

Cuisine	Debra Schroeffer	546-2809
Dispatch	Jackie Thomas	587-2687
Education	Karen Honeywell	546-8609
Equipment	Russ Viehmann	525-6978
Great Ski Race™	Douglas Read	583-6381
	Randall Osterhuber	546-4491
	Randall Osterhuber	546-4491
	Scoop Remenih	583-1684
Newsletter	Ray O'Brien	581-4358
Snowcats	Gerald Rockwell	583-5376
Snowmobiles	Paul Honeywell	546-8609
Technology	Bernie Mellor	546-2238
Training	Peter Sporleder	546-0588
Website		
All phone numbers area code (530).		

THE UNDRRESSING PARADOX

My phantom companion
speaks German
and tells me to strip.

In one encounter he had ice-blue feet
and a fixed expression on his face.
The interpretation: I am letting go.

The drift is this.
Give the hypothermic girl
a stiff hot drink.
The mouth of a stranger is a pocket of
breathable air.
The spit is a warm vital flow.

—Dana Goodyear

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