



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, November 4, 6:30 PM at the Granlibakken Resort's Ski Hut. Last month the meeting room was packed, everyone in high spirits over the past summer's adventures. As the weather creeps colder and colder, everyone's in high spirits over the upcoming winter. Let's face it this group is in high spirits a lot. Come join the vitality of Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team.

Defining Wild

Consider the case of a 14-year-old Boy Scout who became separated from his group in the Pecos Wilderness of New Mexico. Missing for two days, the boy was eventually spotted by a searching helicopter. The scout's tent was pitched, and he appeared to have sufficient camping gear. The pilot requested permission to land, but because the Scout seemed to be in no immediate danger, and apparently had food and water, permission to land within the designated wilderness area was denied by the Forest Service. The boy's position was noted and a ground search team was dispatched to rescue the boy. The ground crew searched, lost radio contact with everyone, and could not find the boy. Two more days pass. The helicopter was requested to search again, but the pilot refused to fly unless the Forest Service first granted him permission to land within the wilderness. Permission was granted and the helicopter executed the rescue.

You make the call as: a.) a Forest Service manager; b.) the Boy Scout's parent.

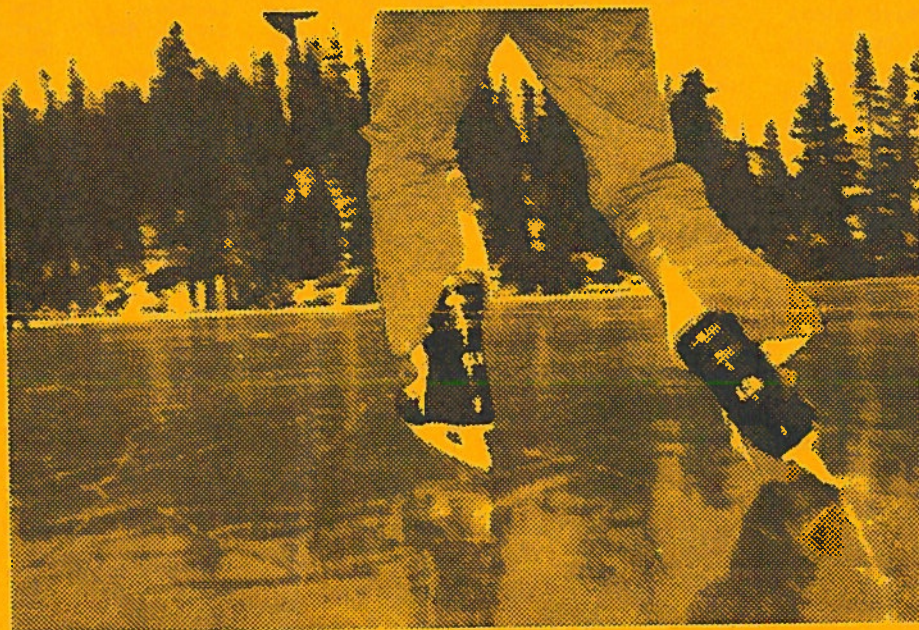
Last winter Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team carried out 12 search and rescues, 10 of which took place (at least in part) in a designated Wilderness Area. Following the congressional Wilderness Act of 1964 (under the Johnson administration, of all people!), large tracts of land in the United States have been set aside to remain "wild", "...where man is a only a visitor, and a temporary one at that." In theory, defining "wild" is pretty simple. No man-made stuff. Human impact negligible or not at all. No buildings, roads, radio towers, vehicles, or espresso bars. Just the delicate alpine wildflowers going crunch under your boot.

But rarely do the theoretical and the practical make a happy marriage. Should power tools be used to maintain wilderness trails? What about pre-existing structures and roads, or a small array of scientific instrumentation? Do we fight wildfires that

Of concern to Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team is vehicle access. Snowmobiles, snowcats, and helicopters routinely play an important role in our rescues, many of which take place within the boundaries of the Mt. Rose, Granite Chief, and Desolation Wildernesses. After one of our Granite Chief Wilderness searches last February, Bob Moore, Forest Service Snow Ranger operating out of the Truckee Ranger District, and former Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team Director, faxed me a 15 page document (1997) outlining what the Forest Service deems acceptable behavior in the Granite Chief during a search and rescue operation. The document also highlights the agreements the Forest Service has with the Placer County Sheriff's Department during "wilderness" searches.

First, it needs to be pointed out that this document outlines what the Truckee and Foresthill Ranger Districts deem acceptable. What you'll find is that there is little consistency among wilderness area governing agencies on how their particular wilderness charge is to be "managed." Each individual ranger district apparently interprets the Wilderness Act its own way, presumably to compliment their own land use agenda with regard to recreation, livestock grazing, resource extraction, scientific inquiry, and historical significance. In California, the National Park Service tends to be much more lenient than does the Forest Service with regard to wilderness-sited weather

instruments and non-emergency helicopter landings. What flies in the Yosemite Wilderness may not ever leave the ground in Desolation.



*Team member Steve Matson scores the surface of Marlette Lake.
 Photograph by Randall Osterhuber*

threaten the other side of a wildland boundary? Answering these questions have forced compromise on how we "define," "manage," and "maintain" a wilderness. ("Wilderness Management," an oxymoron?)

Next General Meeting is Monday, November 4, 2002, 6:30 pm at the Granlibakken Resort's Ski Hut

Nevertheless, the document Bob faxed over is all about common sense. In a nutshell, the Forest Service gives the green light on vehicle access in the Granite Chief during "Emergencies where the situation involves an inescapable urgency and temporary need for speed beyond that available by primitive means." A lot can be interpreted by, and fit neatly inside, that broad definition. Complimenting this, and adding even more latitude, is the recommendation that when deciding whether to employ mechanical aid in the wilderness, "...it is better to err on the side of safety." All good.

There is, however, some confusing information. The Forest Service "Never Approves" motorized help if someone is "fully mobile" after suffering an injury such as a "simple fracture of the arm" or "sprained ankle." And, according to the document, the limit on a party size in the Granite Chief of 12 people should not be a hindrance because "...it takes approximately six persons per mile to carry an injured person." I'm sure these irregularities are not outwardly malicious, but they do expose some naiveté on the Forest Service's part of what it is like to operate during deep winter in wild lands. Also under the "Never Approve" category, is using motorized vehicles for the removal or retrieval of stranded equipment or dead/injured pets. Using tractors to remove dead people is OK; to remove your dead shitsu, not OK.

Don't get me wrong: the Forest Service is not the enemy here. Quite the opposite. The folks at the Truckee Ranger Station did not write the Wilderness Act, but they are charged with interpreting it as best they can. It's a lose/lose situation when you have hikers, bikers, and equestrians stomping fragile sub-alpine meadows into powdery wastelands. Keep them out, build more trails to divert them, or let them stomp away? And as the Forest Service has pointed out, snow machine tracks (from search and rescue activities) leading into the wilderness tempt other snow machines to follow. Educating

snowmobilers falls on someone's shoulder, but whose?

Though the document is hesitant and somewhat loath to admit it, ultimately ("technically" as the Forest Service puts it) the county sheriff is in charge. But the Forest Service officials, under whom the "management" of the wilderness lies, need to be informed about our intention to use vehicles. They probably have to justify—in triplicate—to some higher ranking Forest Service bureaucrat, anytime a helicopter skid touches snow or a snowmobile descends Powderhorn Creek. The Forest Service has to be kept in the loop, just like ski area personnel or private land owners on whose property we search.

During a rescue we should all err on the side of safety. Our rescuees are rarely strong mountaineers, so we must seriously consider what dangers we expose them to (including snow machines and helicopters) during their extrication. One thing we've learned over the years is that time is always of the essence—"simple" injuries in the snowy mountains can become life-threatening in short order. Anyone arguing against using any and all available resources during a winter search and rescue would have a hard case to sell. Especially to the friends and family members of the rescue subject.

Team Outings

The following is a listing of Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team outings and trainings for November. The weather this time of year will dictate the mode of travel during the trainings—if skiable snow is on the ground plan accordingly. Team trainings generally take place regardless of weather. In two words or less: come prepared.

The Nordic Team garage is located at 223 Fairway Drive, behind the Tahoe City Chevron station.

November 9: Paul Honeywell (546-8609) will lead a hike (or ski) up Billy's Peak. Meet at the Team garage at 7:30 AM or at the bottom of Deep Creek at 8:00. Billy's Peak is named after Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team founding member Billy Dutton, who died of cancer in 1989. Great terrain—don't miss this one.

November 16: Steve Matson (546-7968) will lead a hike (or ski) up Snow Valley Peak. Meet at the Team garage at 7:30 AM or at the parking lot across from the Kings Beach Safeway at 8:00. On November 12, 2000, we found more than a meter of good, skiable snow on the backside of Snow Valley Peak. Is this a weather endorsement? No.

November 20: Bernie Mellor (546-2238) and Randy Sharp (587-2877) will lead a GPS navigation exercise at Paige Meadows. Bernie and Randy request you call ahead if you're planning on attending—and to be on time! (Better do it. You don't want to get on their dark side.) Meet at the Nordic Team garage at 6:00 PM.

November 24: A hike (or ski) up Martis Peak. Meet at the Team garage at 7:30 AM or the top of Highway 267 at 8:15. Jim Rienstra (546-7188) is the contact for this one. We've had more than a couple searches around Martis Peak over the years. Clear air on the summit means awesome Lake views.

Remember to call the training organizer to let them know you will attend. A current OES card is required to participate in any Nordic Team training. No one wants to be an OES-card cop, so do behave!

Behaving, mostly,

—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
Newsletter	Randall Osterhuber	546-4491
Snowcats	Scoop Remenih	583-1684
Snowmobiles	Ray O'Brien	581-4358
Technology	Gerald Rockwell	583-5376
Training	Paul Honeywell	546-8609
	Bernie Mellor	546-2238
Website	Peter Sporleder	546-0588
All phone numbers area code (530).		

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