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

Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team has been mixing it up a lot lately, and a review of such will be at the next Team meeting, Monday night, April 3, 6:30 PM at the Granlibakken Resort’s Ski Hut. Then, we’ll go over recent searches and rescues, the 30th Great Ski Race, and tell heroic tales of deep powder skiing in the Sierra Nevada. Come join the revelry!

GSR v30.0
Here’s the scene: It’s the evening of February 17, 2006, one week before the 30th Anniversary Great Ski Race. It’s been sunny and warm for, like, four weeks. Several kilometers of the ski course at the Truckee end are completely devoid of snow. And tonight, it’s pouring rain. However, this gathering of Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team—our final Great Ski Race organization powwow—was anything but somber. Doug Read had concocted a Plan B (to run the race on an alternate route paralleling the North Shore), but few could embrace it with much heart. The Great Ski Race is full of things to do for everyone. The Great Ski Race is skiing from North Lake Tahoe to Truckee Town. With little discussion, we all pivoted toward the north toward those long tracts of snow-free sagebrush, and decided. We’re going for Truckee.

The wasn’t a blind decision of course. It all hinged on the long-range weather forecast for the week. Everyone received a slightly different version of this, whether it came from one of the NOAA sites, the Weather Channel, or some late-night TV “meteorologist.” Doug brought a weather forecast printout from CalTrans that, with its pre dot matrix font, looked like it came over a teletype, circa Nixon administration. It not only boldly told what the weather was going to be like in Truckee the next seven days, it spelled it all out in 10-minute increments. WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1, 1830 HOURS: MOSTLY CLOUDY. WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1, 1840 HOURS: SNOW SHOWERS, ACCUMULATION 1/2 INCH. And so it went. Everyone’s different version of forecast had a common theme: that the real snowfall wasn’t expected until later in the week, dangerously close to race day. Under the best scenario, it left little margin to groom and prepare the course, and not enough time to implement Doug’s now-orphaned Plan B.

Then, it snowed.
Patrick Weaver, from Bend, Oregon, once again dominated the race field with his winning time of 1:19:08. He was 26 seconds ahead of the second place finisher, a big margin in this sport. Word came over the radio that when Patrick crossed over Starratt Pass, 11 km into the course, he had already pulled ahead and was skiing by himself. The first woman to finish was Beth Reid, of Palo Alto, with a time of 1:29:55, 21st place overall. Beth came through the finish fast and solid; her ski clothes conspicuously devoid of the eye-jarring corporate logos flaunted by team racers. The next five hours saw hundreds of Great Ski Race finishers, 727 in all. This year, every racer received a commemorative gold pin at the finish line, engraved with the 30th Anniversary Great Ski Race logo.

The race went off with nary a hitch, in large part because of the selfless support of the community and the race sponsors and supporters. Special thanks go out to Northstar-at-Tahoe, Tahoe Cross Country Ski Area, Alpine Meadows, Cottonwood Restaurant at Hilltop, Washoe Medical Center, Granlibakken, and all the skiers and volunteers of the past 30 Great Ski Races.

[Race morning was cool and breezy, by two-o’clock that afternoon it was snowing. It’s pretty much snowed ever since.]

S and Rs

On the morning of February 17, Ray O’Brien and Brian York from Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team responded to a mutual aid request from North Tahoe Fire to help transport a hurt snowshoer out of Page Meadows. The woman had injured her hip and was no longer able to walk. Ray and Brian responded with their snowmobiles and transported the patient to the roadside without incident.

At 4:43 PM February 25, Maureen from Incline Village, dialed 911 on her cell phone to report that her cross...
country ski partner, Carlos Faura, 44, from Reno, had fallen on his skin and tweaked his knee bad enough that he couldn’t move. They were somewhere in the upper Ward Creek drainage, about the same elevation as the bottom of the Sherwood chairlift, she reported. Team member Joe Pace, a resident of Ward Canyon, talked to Maureen on the phone, and afterward Joe had a pretty good idea where they were. At about 5:30, three of us started skiing south from the chairlift, contouring the terrain. Just before dark, we located Maureen and Carlos in an open glade 2.5 kilometers from the paved road. Carlos complained of severe pain in his left knee, but both he and Maureen were getting cold.

In short order Paul Cushing and Mikey Kennett arrived on the scene, skiing in the Team’s break-apart sled. After splinting his knee and packaging up Carlos in the sled, and with the aid of three more Team skiers, we began to man-haul Carlos out of there. As we weren’t going to be moving very fast, Maureen opted to walk out. We carried her ski.

The surface snow was a supportable crust (mostly); the route out was sidehilled to the east, but there was little, if any, elevation gain. We had eight strong guys pulling across hard snow and under stable weather. It was a total grunt.

Pulling Carlos through the mountains under near ideal conditions was a perfect example of how difficult this task is. A big guy, near the end of the pull I asked Carlos what his curb weight was. "210," he replied.

We reached the road at about 8:00 PM. Several of our skiers commented on how they recognized Carlos’s voice. It turns out he’s the on-air "Daybreak Meteorologist" for KOLO TV channel 8 in Reno.

We had a couple back-to-back searches for lost snowmobilers, both incidents originated north of Truckee.

The Team was called the morning of March 6 to look for a snowmobiler who had been "left behind" by four of his other rider friends the previous afternoon.

The Team responded with six snowmobilers, the Team snowcat, and 5 skiers, all of whom started combing the Babbitt Peak/Sardine Peak area north of Russell Valley, the region the lost guy was last seen. Snowmobile tracks were everywhere.

At 1:00 PM, the lost guy called in from Bordertown, the little sagebrush hamlet to which he had walked. Eventually running out of gas trying to find his way, he had spent the night out, then hiked to safety the next morning.

The next callout was for three missing snowmobilers, who, again, were "left behind" by their buddy. The Team responded the morning of March 9 with skiers, snowmobiles, and the Team snowcat, this time to search the Weber Lake/Mt. Lola/White Rock Lake area. Late that morning, hearing the Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team machines, the three lost sledgers came riding up, tired, cold, almost out of gas, and angry at their friend who had "ditched" them. (Team snowcat driver Ray O’Brien did his best to keep the reunion between the lost guys and their friend from going to fistfights.) They had spent a good part of the previous night riding in a big multime mile circle trying to remedy their situation, eventually gave up, and went to sleep on their machines. They were found in Perazzo Canyon, about 14 km from the roadhead.

The four snowmobilers from these past two incidents were all local residents.

These were the Nordic Team’s fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh responses of the season.