Code 1144 is always the last thing a rescue search party wants to hear (or say into a radio), but unfortunately it was the last thing for those searching for James Kim in Oregon’s remote coastal mountains. In spite of the melodramatic media hype, this story really resonated with many of us. Maybe it was because we couldn’t help getting caught up trying to solve the riddle. Why did he leave the car? Why didn’t he stay on the road? After two days of wandering, why didn’t he just go back to the car? Or maybe we were drawn into it because we couldn’t help rooting for Mr. Kim. Because we all wanted him to succeed. We wanted him to find help and to save his stranded family, his wife and two young kids. We really wanted a happy ending. Maybe we were drawn into the story because we thought he was a fool. He shouldn’t have left the main road. He should have turned the car around before he got stuck in the snow. He should have stayed put and waited for help. Maybe we were drawn into the story because it was just so damn tragic. A desperate man in a desperate situation giving his life in a heroic effort to save his family. They say there are always two sides to any given story. Unfortunately we’ll never get to hear his side of it. The riddle probably does have a solution, it’s just not ours to solve.

Friday the 13th, 1972. Uruguayan Air Force Flight 571 disappeared in the Andes somewhere between Argentina and Chile. Search parties from three countries combed the mountains looking for the plane wreck and the 45 rugby players on board. After eight days the search was cancelled because not one reconnaissance flight found any remains of the wreck. After more than two months, two survivors hiked for 10 days to find help. In the end, 16 passengers and 12 crew survived for 72 days at 14,000 feet in the Andes because those two survivors went for help.

March 4th, 2000, a young woman accidentally skied beyond the boundary lines at Sugarbowl. After realizing she was lost and had little hope of finding her way, she hunkered down in a snow cave for two days until TNSAR searchers were able to find her. She survived because she stayed put.

December 10th, 2006, three climbers go missing on Oregon’s Mt. Hood. One victim is found deceased in a snow cave nine days later. His two partners died while trying to go for help.

January 5th, 2007, TNSAR volunteers will head out to local area elementary schools to teach fourth graders what to do and not do in case they are ever lost in the woods. The message is simple: STOP. Stay put if you ever get lost. Do not wander around and try to find your way to safety. In other words, it is easier for searchers to find lost victims if the lost victims stop wandering around trying to find themselves. From our experience and from collective experience I am sure, and rescue operations across the US, we have learned that it is better for lost victims to stay put when they get lost. Everyone teaches it, it is printed in all the books, all the experts sound off collectively, "Stay Put!" But is this really good advice? Is this really what we should be teaching our kids?

What about those rugby players? If the two rugby players didn’t hike out of the Andes, then all 16 remaining survivors would have perished. What about Aron Ralston? Remember him? He was canyoneering in Utah and was trapped in a slot canyon and had to amputate his arm in order to survive. Of course he stayed put for six days before he was forced to cut off his own arm and walk back to safety. But he would certainly have perished if he stayed put. What about Joe Simpson, the British climber who was left for dead by his partner and then crawled back to life after six days face down in a glacier. No one really knows why Mr. Simpson survived, but he did so because he clawed his way out. And what about Beck Weathers? He was the climber who was left for dead near Camp IV on the south col of Mt. Everest in 1996. He miraculously ‘woke up’ and walked back down to the other tents after the other climbers were positive he was expired. Like Simpson, Beck Weathers probably should have perished but he didn’t because he got up and walked back to safety.

Should I Stay or Should I Go Now? Maybe the Clash were onto something bigger than a hit single. But it is not a question to be taken lightly. When lost in the woods, it is all too often a question whose answer is a matter of life and death. I don’t know what the statisticians would say. I know about as much probability theory as I do about theoretical probabilistics. I do know that I love my daughter. I want to know what to do in case she is ever lost in the woods. I want all kids (and most, but not all, adults) to do the right thing in order to survive if ever they become lost in the woods. I cannot say with 100% certainty that staying put is always the right thing to do. Likewise, I cannot advocate self serve amputation. I can, however, support TNSAR’s winter survival program with all of my heart and soul: STOP. THINK. OBSERVE. PLAN. Taken alone, no one element suffices. But collectively, these simple verbs can save one’s life. No matter how you slice it, it’s damn good advice.

Every Day we are faced with decisions. And every day we have to manage the consequences of those decisions. Some days are easy; Should I have two double big macs with bacon or just one? Some days our lives are on the line or someone else’s life depends on the decisions that we as a search and rescue team make during a search. We cannot always make the right decisions. But we can always strive to manage the consequences to the best of our abilities. It is not the decisions that matter the most, it is the consequences and how we deal with those consequences. TNSAR’s primary goal is to conduct fast, safe rescues for victims lost in the wintertime wilderness. But the Team’s secondary goal is to educate the public about wintertime safety. We cannot teach our kids to always make the right decisions. But we can teach them to think. We can teach them wintertime survival skills and we can teach them to practice those skills on the playground. In the back yard, on the back side of a mountain or in bounds at a ski resort. Thanks in advance to all those TNSAR volunteers who help with the fourth grade (and high school) wilderness survival programs. Choosing to participate is a GREAT decision.

---B. Wright

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Truck: Peter York 583-0465
Website: Mark Johnson 583-1308
All phone numbers area code (530) unless otherwise noted
Upcoming January Trainings

January 8th --- Monday
Where: Squaw Valley and Beyond
When: 7:45am garage or 8:15am Cable Car
Contact: Peter York 583-0465. Pets will lead an extensive tour in and out of Squaw's property line. Do not be late or you will miss the ONLY car reserved.

January 10th --- Wednesday
Where: Team Garage
When: 6:30pm
Contact: Scott Shane 775-240-7370. Scott will continue beacon and GPS field training for those who missed out last month.

January 16th --- Tuesday
Where: Team Garage
When: 6:30pm
Contact: David Hopp 546-7767. David is leading a two part high angle training. This first part is an intro and is a pre-requisite for the second part. PLEASE call David to RSVP in advance.

January 18th --- Thursday
Where: Burton Creek substation
When: 6:30pm
Contact: Jimmy Smith 582-4448. Jimmy continues critical communications training with COM Van 101

January 21st --- Sunday
Where: Cold Stream Canyon
When: 8:15am garage or 9:00am at the entrance to Cold Stream Canyon.
Contact: David Hopp 546-7767. This is high angle rescue training part II. This is the nitty gritty with ropes, ice axes, titanium screws, and dangling victims. All are welcome but participation is reserved for those who attended part I.

January 24th --- Wednesday
Where: Kings Beach fire station
When: 6:30pm
Contact: Scott Baumgardner 546-2544. Scott will be showing a water rescue 101 video and demonstrating the latest in wetsuit fashion.

January 28th --- Sunday
Where: Alpine Meadows
When: 7:30am garage or 8:00am patrol shack.
Contact: Sarah Barrett 546-????, Sarah has reserved 20 lift tickets which are first come first served.

January 30th --- Tuesday
Where: Team Garage
When: 6:30pm
Contact: Jimmy Smith 582-4448. Continuing com van excellence with COM Van 201.

The Official Newsletter of the
TAHOE NORDIC SEARCH & RESCUE TEAM, INC.
Established 1970

Lake Tahoe Truckee Donner Summit

Hi Happy Holiday from the Snowline Newsletter Team

Don't forget next team meeting is Monday, January 1, 2007

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