



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 6, 6:30 PM at the Granlibakken Resort's Ski Hut. I don't need to convince you why you should attend, but I'll try anyway: friends, laughter, hair-brained schemes, funky plastic chairs, free stuff, beer, truth, lies, patent exaggeration, unruly dogs, mischievous kids, rugged men, honed women, room-silencing stories, cheers, boos, steamed windows, and a chance to heckle Russ Viehmann. Now why would you miss that?

Who Are We?

Many people—most people—don't know.

After you give 600 ml of blood at one of our community blood drives, you get to sit at a table for 10 minutes with our local Rotarians (the blood drive sponsors) and drink orange juice and eat junk food laced with partially hydrogenated oils (am I the only one to recognize the irony here?). This 10 minute party is to get your freshly low-volumed blood sugar back up, and assures the nurses that you won't leave the blood-letting directly and pass out in the parking lot.

This past August I sat down at the snack table next to a woman in her mid 60s—a second homeowner from the west shore. She had just given blood and was in the middle of telling a story. She was pissed. It seems the night before she had received a phone call from the “local search and rescue team” [my quotations], and a pushy phone call it was. The caller had given her this long pitch about how her cash donation would be critical to saving lives and that the local search and rescue was solely dependent on folks like her. What really got her mad is that the caller kept evading her requests for further information, telling her she would receive the full story if she chose to donate. All that was needed was a credit card number. The call ended with the caller—according to her—being short-tempered, rude, and then hanging up on her.

I stuffed another pack of Lorna Dunes in my mouth, said how glad I was to have heard her story, and introduced myself.

Her tale made me realize, yet once again, how surprisingly little name recognition we

have in the Tahoe Basin. Even after 30 years on the job, after all of our community outreach, all our education programs, all the years of running the area's biggest athletic event, and saving hundreds of lives, people haven't necessarily heard of us. I say necessarily because “search and rescue” remains a highly ubiquitous phrase, attributed to all the different agencies that conduct search and rescue, including, of course, us.

I don't think this lack of name recognition has to be a bad thing. The Team is doing very well in all its endeavors, notwithstanding the “You're who?” from so many people. Over the years, the Team has gone through brief periods of shameless self-promotion, but mostly we have kept our heads reasonably small, as small as can be expected in the egocentric world of search and rescue. One traditional reason for self-promotion is money, but the Team has had little worries there, and perhaps this is what has kept us somewhat unassuming.

Our being “new” to so many is a strong reason for us to regularly consider how we are viewed by, and fit into, our community. The way we conduct all of our business—in the backcountry or in the boardroom—even the way we drive our Team truck through town, reflects on the Team and is as important today as it was in the 1970s. Our rescue work, and the Team, cannot rest on its laurels because other than us, nobody knows what we've been doing for 30 years! It's probably healthy for us to constantly have to prove ourselves to the community, if not in name then certainly in action. This will help keep the swelling down and assure we can still fit our heads through the door.

Back at the cookie table, I befriended the woman from the west shore, assuring her that though I didn't have a clue who had called her, it most certainly was not us. I filled her in on who we are and what we do—and don't do (we're telemarketers, not telemarketers). Even the two gentlemen from the Rotary sitting at the table, both residents of North Lake Tahoe since before Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team, were unclear of the Team's name, role, and autonomy.

Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team, Incorporated: celebrating our very 1st year!

Equip 2007

With the advent of a new winter comes new winter equipment, with such brilliant innovations as to make you feel like *Whoa, you're still on 2006 model skis? Sorry, dude.* Skis. They never really change, the top plate graphics just go from a kind of Bruce Jenner inspired patriotism to looking more like a movie poster for Saw III. If you thought skis had reached a width threshold, think again. Paralleling the physique of a mid-Western American, skis today are plumper than ever. People that spend way too much time skiing around the coffee table have coined terms such as “mid-fat,” which means the ski underfoot is about as wide as an omelet pan. Just get over it and buy a snowboard.

On the snow safety front, several manufacturers have “redesigned” the shovel for added “snow moving efficiency.” In my book, “snow moving efficiency” means *you* shovel. The manufacturers of the ABS (Air Bag System) packs, the backpacks with built-in gas-cartridge-inflated balloons, have chopped considerable weight. They're still heavy (5.3 to 7.4 lbs. empty), but their statistics, if believed, are impressive. According to Juju Jullien, the North American rep, *every* person (some 119) that was caught in an avalanche and managed to pull the ripcord and inflate the balloons remained at least partially on the snow surface. No burials. Impressive. Black Diamond now has a line of backpacks with AvaLungs built into the pack harness. I think Randall Osterhuber predicted this; that guy's a genius! Several manufacturers are offering lighter carbon fiber (\$\$) avalanche probes in lengths 3 meters or greater. This provides further incentive to carry an appropriate length probe. If you do succumb to Marketing Pressures and buy new skis (priced by the ski industry so as to all but guarantee the continued decline in people entering the sport), you'll be slapped in the face when you learn you now need new climbing skins at \$160 a pop. Enter two young guys from Wilson, Wyoming (formerly a town of climbers, cowboys, and cowboy climbers). They're both ex- (read: Fired!) Black Diamond Ascension employees and they claim they make climbing skins superior to all. Their most expensive skin (complete with tip and tail kit) is \$99. Check

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'em out/take your chances at climbingskinsdirect.com. And Barryvox, beating the highly anticipated Ortovox S1 to market, is now retailing an avalanche transceiver that looks like a marriage between a Blackberry and a GPS. Fast processors grafted to a high-res screen with quick refresh shows a map of the buried transceiver(s) in the snowfield, their distances and directions. Retail price? Pffft! Just lay down the VISA card. There's lots more, of course, but blah, blah: once I get my jet pack (promised me in 1963), all this stuff will look like beige walls.

Team Trainings

A common question of celebrities new to Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team is *How do I get on the Team's callout list?* Cash payments to the right person are always a sure bet (a friendly tip: \$100 will go a lot farther than \$20), but with the price of petrol these days—not to mention new skis—we all have to be so much more selective with our blood money. If money's not an option, face-time should be. To become a Team searcher you've got to attend a lot of Team training sessions. By participating in Team trainings, you get to know others, they get to know you—it's all about love, people! It's about love, *and* being a strong skier (or snow machine operator), *and* a practiced navigator, *and* a confident medical first responder, *and* a knowledgeable avalanche forecaster, *and* a skillful manager of front and backcountry resources. That's all. Since we often break up into small teams of two during our responses, it is a very real possibility that *you* may be called upon to lead the entire operation. That every searcher have the skills to run the show is at the very heart of the Team's philosophy. The result is that we field an especially strong rescue team. Participating in Team trainings—especially on-the-snow trainings—remains the most direct route to becoming a searcher. Get your OES card; ring-

up the training organizer; we'll see you out there!

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

November 4 and 5: I'm pretty sure it's not too late to sign on for this weekend's Wilderness First Aid class. This is a private course run just for Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team members, so it's a mighty good deal (read: FREE!). Call Mike Kennett (581-2101) for more info.

November 11: Dave "bar tack" Olson (582-4732) will be setting up a mock search and rescue somewhere between Donner Pass Road and Interstate 80. Gather at the Team garage at 8:30 AM or, for a quick quad-shot, at Wild Cherries Coffee House in Truckee at 9:00.

November 15: Learn to find stuff in the dark. Bernie Mellor (546-2238) will run a GPS training this evening, up in Page Meadows. Meet at the Team garage at 6:00 PM or the end of Silvertip Drive (Talmont) at 6:30.

November 19: The Mt. Rose area's the venue today for more backcountry skills training. Jeff DeVries (546-4083) will be choreographing the goings-on; meet him at the garage at 8:00 AM or at North Tahoe Beach (across from the Kings Beach Safeway) at 8:30. (FYI: November 19 is the statistical average date of seasonal permanent snow cover for much of the Tahoe Sierra. If there hasn't been big snow by this morning, the maths declare it will occur before the sun has set.)

December 3: Karen Honeywell (546-8609) will lead the Team on a trek up the Deep Creek drainage today.

The Deep Creek watershed encompasses terrain that spans 905 meters (2969 feet) of elevation, more than enough to present a strong disparity in snow cover between top and bottom. If you're one of those Birkenstock wearing, Volvo driving, NPR subscribing tree cuddlers that listens to Al Gore, you'll know why this is. Even if you've been bicycling along the river road this week, there still might be a chance for

a stem Christie or two up below Tinker Knob. So today, bring everything from running shoes to your powder skirt. Meet Karen at the garage at 8:00 AM or the bottom of Deep Creek at 8:30.

Postscript

Starting next month, *SnowLine* will be ramped up a notch as Team member Bob Wright takes over writing this here newsletter. Bob has great communication skills we'll all benefit from. Please forward your changes of address, contributions, comments, etc. to Bob at (530) 546-7273 or bob.wright@integratedenvironmental.net.

Thanks for reading,

—Randall Osterhuber

Team Officers

President	Russ Viehmann	525-6978
Vice President	Brian York	583-0465
Treasurer	Scott Schroeffer	546-2809
Secretary	Pam LeFrancois	546-7393
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	Mark Johnson	583-1308
	Mike Kennett	581-2101
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	Randall Osterhuber	546-4491
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	Doug Read	583-6381
	Gerald Rockwell	583-5376
	Steve Twomey	525-7280

Committee Chairs

Cuisine	Debra Schroeffer	546-2809
Dispatch	Jackie Thomas	587-2687
Education	Jim Coffey	583-1276
Equipment	Brian York	583-0465
Great Ski Race	Doug Read	583-6381
	Dirk Schoonmaker	583-2929
Newsletter	Randall Osterhuber	546-4491
Snowcats	Scoop Remenih	583-1684
Snowmobiles	Ray O'Brien	581-4358
Technology	Gerald Rockwell	583-5376
Training	Mike Kennett	581-2101
	Bernie Mellor	546-2238
Truck	Peter York	583-0465
Website	Mark Johnson	583-1308

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"Really? That's the first time you've eaten somebody?"

please keep us informed of your correct address!