

SnowLine

The Official Newsletter of the
Tahoe Nordic Search & Rescue Team, Inc.

Lake Tahoe • Truckee • Donner Summit



Eight of us, in full search regalia—headlamps beaming—skied down the street in front of our rescue truck, handing out candy to the little kids and Team *Winter Awareness* brochures to the not-so-little kids. For the first time, Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team participated in the annual SnowFest parade, February 26, through downtown Tahoe City. SnowFest is the yearly North Lake Tahoe winter/spring carnival consisting of good ol' small town celebrations: ski races, a dress-up-your-dog contest, pancake breakfasts, soirées with the DeKuyper girls. The parade goes all the way through town—grocery store to grocery store—and soon becomes lined on both sides of the street with women sporting black smudges on their glowing cheeks: tattoos left behind by the female-kissing Vulcans of St. Paul, Minnesota.

We had as much fun as you can have at a small town parade—unfortunately the peach schnapps hostesses and dogs dressed up like Phyllis Diller were elsewhere. For our efforts the parade judges endowed Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team with the **Committee's Choice Award**. Judges, look out next year!

Search During The Great Ski Race

Everything was falling nicely into place during the final preparation of the Team's main fundraising event and largest cross-country ski race in the Western United States: The 24th Annual Great Ski Race. Registration was up and running, the course was being immaculately groomed, the finish-line beer kegs were at the ready. At the close of registration Saturday, March 4, more than 725 skiers had signed-up for the 9:00 AM start the next morning.

At 8:00 PM that night, Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team was dispatched by the Placer County Sheriff to initiate a search for Sara Allis Norvill, 37, of Danville, California. Sara had been last seen at the top of the Silvertelt chair lift at Sugar Bowl ski area just before noon.

During many a pre-Great Ski Race we had discussed what to do if we had a search on the Saturday night before the race. In 24 years it had never happened. The majority of Team members are involved with putting on the race; many on our "A" skier list are *intimately* involved with putting on the race. How do we divide our limited resources? What are our responsibilities to the lost person(s)? What are our responsibilities to the 900 racers and 300 spectators showing up at our door?

Answering these questions on the fly, we assembled 12 Team skiers at Sugar Bowl by

At 8:55 AM, 856 skiers were registered, T-shirted, race bibbed, and lined up for the start of The Great Ski Race. The start gun, my 12-gauge flare gun, was with me in my search pack, so Carl Toepfner, at 8:59:57, stepped in front of the mob and announced: "Ready, set, GO!"

And the race was on.

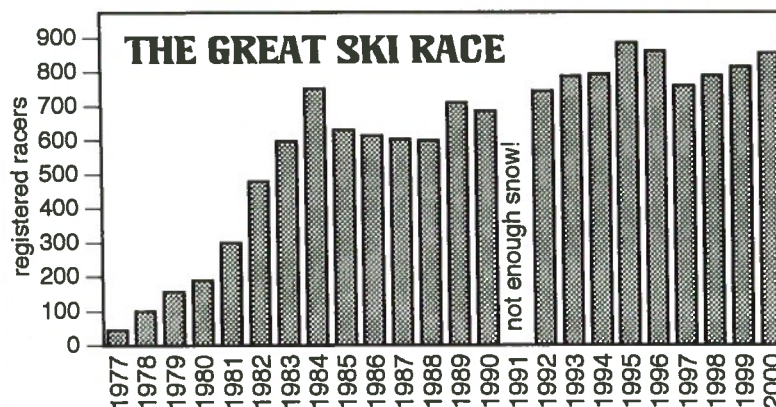
Back at Sugar Bowl, eight more Team skiers and several search dogs arrived, gearing up for another search wave. The skiers searched the top of the Onion Creek drainage behind Mt. Lincoln, Mt. Disney, and Crows Nest, and the north and south flanks of Mt. Judah. The dogs and their handlers started an in-bounds search of the ski area. By the end of the day no new clues had been discovered.

Throughout race day the Great Ski Race finish line was a flurry of activity. Patrick Weaver, of Bend, Oregon, streaked through the 30 km mark as the overall winner of the race with a time of 1:13:06. Following just 17 seconds behind was two-time Great Ski Race winner and

course record holder Ben Husaby, also of Bend. The women's field was won by Kelly Schalk of Laramie, Wyoming, with a time of 1:23:39. She placed 28th overall in the race. Before the afternoon let on, 758 skiers, dozens of them illustrating fantastic high-speed crashes at the bottom of the finish hill, completed the course. The youngest participant was Hailey Sinoff, age nine months, who negotiated the course in her sled, towed all the way by local ski racer and mom Kari Sinoff.

The rest of the race party is, as they say, history. Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team would like to thank all the sponsors and hundreds of race volunteers for their hard work and support. Special thanks to Russ Jones, Geoff Faraghan, Tahoe Cross Country Ski Area, Cottonwood Restaurant at Hilltop, and Northstar-at-Tahoe. It was truly a Great Ski Race!

At Sugar Bowl, however, the mood was not so festive. By 5:30 PM nine more Nordic Team skiers (several of whom had skied the race), Team snowmobilers, and Team



9:30 PM. We were debriefed, and towed behind various snow machines to the top of Mt. Lincoln. Up top, an icing fog and stiff SW wind reduced visibility to a few meters; skiers who loitered on the Sierra crest got rimed.

Two ski teams dropped off Roller Pass and Mt. Judah, searching the east face of Mt. Lincoln and the headwaters to Lakeview, Emigrant, and Coldstream Canyons. Two Team snowmobilers also were on the Truckee basin side, buzzing up every snowed-over road and all the backcountry they could roost through. The third ski team searched below the PR (Patrol Run), then traversed over to the top of the Cedar Creek drainage, and finished off the night in the bottom of the Onion Creek drainage. With deep, wet snow overlaid by a stiff, breakable crust, the skiing was bad. Where the skiing wasn't bad it was really bad, testing the limits of even the strongest quadriceps.

By 7:00 AM the next morning, all teams had exhausted their particular search routes—no clues. Sara remained missing.

Next General Meeting is Monday, April 3, 2000, 6:30 p.m. at the Granlibakken Resort's Ski Hut

snowcats set out for yet another night of searching. Winds and snowfall had increased. Many long kilometers and many stories come out of nights like this; but the bottom line was at first light Sara *still* remained missing.

The fourth Team callout ensued in the early AM rallying 12 Nordic Team searchers to gather at Sugar Bowl just after dawn on March 6. Sara had now spent two nights out, both of them snowy and cold. The chilling irony was that March 6 is the anniversary of the death of Sara's mother and grandmother. Out in the woods, still lost, she scribbled a good-bye note to her fiancé with an eyeliner pencil, not confident that she could survive a third night.

In the lower part of the Onion Creek watershed, but above the Onion Creek cabin, runs a small dirt road, climbing 150 meters in elevation over 3 kilometers or so before dead-ending. This road accesses three old stream measuring stations, long abandoned. That morning, Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team members Ray O'Brien and Bill Koplin snowmobiled down the Onion Creek/Cedars Road and made a left at the cabin. They began ascending the old road.

Upon reaching the top, Ray and Bill spun their machines around and began descending. A few minutes later, Ray, a guy acutely tuned-in to the vital signs of his snowmobile, started to hear a strange whine coming from his motor. He slowed then stopped. It wasn't a whine at all. Sara was down in the creek bed below screaming her lungs out.

Ray and Bill quickly reached Sara, assessed her health, which was remarkably good, and got her across the creek and up to the snow machines. They fired up the snowmobiles, and Sara was out of there.

Two days previous, under brilliantly clear skies, Sara had mistakenly skied out of bounds, skiing into the deeply incised and complex terrain of the Onion Creek watershed. There she eventually abandoned her skis and set off on her quest. She dug a rough snowcave and ate snow and acidic pine needles.

I spoke briefly with Sara in the ambulance and she seemed stunned, but fine. She suffered no frostbite, had stayed mostly dry, and in fact looked pretty good. Her makeup was still fresh, a testimony to her survival cool and the chemists at Revlon.

This search evolved into a huge effort by many agencies, including Placer, Nevada, and El Dorado Counties, WOOF and CARDA search dogs, the USFS, USMC, and CDF, and the Sugar Bowl and Alpine Meadows ski patrols.

This was the Nordic Team's seventh search and rescue of the season.



Sara Norvill looking way too good after 51 hours in the woods.
World News Service Photo

Chairmen Paul Honeywell and Bernie Mellor encourage calling the contact person for each training before arriving. The Nordic Team garage is at 223 Fairway Drive in Tahoe City, behind the Chevron station.

March 26: Terrain familiarization of Sugar Bowl and the Onion Creek watershed. Depart the Team garage at 7:30 AM, or meet at the Judah Lodge ski patrol room at 8:15. Contact Steve Twomey (525-7280) for more info.

April 1: A ski tour of Signal Peak. The Team will be leaving the garage at 7:30 AM (that's 0730 for you rescue types), or Wild Cherries Coffee House in Truckee at 8:00. Contact Steve Reynaud (587-4723) for the beta.

April 9: A Northstar ski social. Bernie Mellor's the man (546-2238); meet as a group in the Village at Northstar at 8:30 AM.

April 15: Paul Honeywell (546-8609) will lead a ski tour in the Red Lake/Meiss Hut area. Depart the garage at 7:00 AM.

April 22: Skiing in the Third Creek area, Incline Village, the Great State of Nevada. Depart the garage at 7:00 AM and/or the

Tahoe Nordic Search & Rescue Team Officers

President	Joe Pace	583-1806
Vice President	Steve Twomey	525-7280
Treasurer	Scott Schroepfer	546-2809
Secretary	Terri Viehmann	582-1695
Board Members	Steve Matson	546-7968
	Dirk Schoonmaker	583-2929
	Russ Viehmann	582-1695
	Medora Weiser	583-2620

Committee Chairs

Cuisine	Debra Schroepfer	546-2809
Dispatch	Jackie Thomas	587-2687
Education	Karen Honeywell	546-8609
The Great Ski Race™	Douglas Read	583-6381
	Randall Osterhuber	587-3092
Newsletter	Randall Osterhuber	587-3092
Snowcats	Scoop Remenih	583-1684
Snowmobiles	Ray O'Brien	581-4358
	Paul Honeywell	546-8609
Training	Bernie Mellor	546-2238
	Russ Viehmann	582-1695
Truck/Equipment	Tahoe Nordic Search & Rescue Team garage	581-4038
All phone numbers area code (530).		

Safeway in Kings Beach at 7:15. Mike Kennett's the one with the answers (581-2101).

April 30: Spring skiing at Grouse Rock and beyond. Leave the garage at 7:00 AM. Your spiritual—if not physical—leader for this one is Tony Bochene (550-1548).



Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team, Inc.

Post Office Box 7703

Tahoe City, California 96145

www.tahoenordicsar.com

Non-Profit
Organization
US Postage
PAID
Permit #135
Truckee, CA
96160

Upcoming Trainings/Events

Note: The times listed below are *departure* times; please be early and prepared so that the Team can keep on schedule. Training

please keep us informed of your correct address