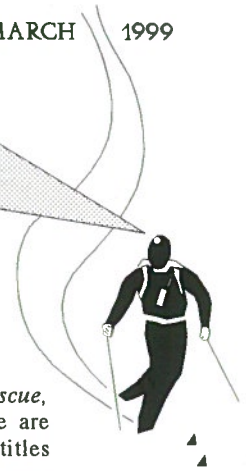


# SnowLine

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

Lake Tahoe · Truckee · Donner Summit



**R**ummage bins and bake sales; foam fests and wine tastings; ski swaps and sports exchanges—fund raisers of many flavors abound at Lake Tahoe. Few however combine the enthusiasm and pure potential of The Great Ski Race.

As you may know, The Great Ski Race is the main fund raising event for the Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team, Inc. Size alone sets The Great Ski Race apart. Once again The Great Ski Race will be the largest Nordic ski race in the western United States: on Sunday, **March 7**, 900 cross country skiers will toe the START line dressed in everything from leopard skin lycra to oil stained dungarees—all anxious for the gun to go off. At the 9:00 AM (sharp!) gun, the 23rd running of The Great Ski Race commences. Preparations for the race and race day have been underway for months, and as we count down the last weeks, there is still much to do. At the next general meeting of the Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team—Monday, **March 1**—final plans and groundwork for the race will be laid bare. Please plan on attending the **March 1** meeting and volunteering for The Great Ski Race 1999. Your help is critical to the race's success, and ultimately the Team's success too!

## Callouts, Searches, Rescues

The Nordic Team was called out on its first search of the season January 25. The Team was paged at 10:15 PM and requested to search for missing Jared and Chris, both nineteenish, from Norden, California. Jared and Chris, Donner Ski Ranch employees, had boarded off the Summit for a late afternoon ride down to Donner Lake. Their friend waited several hours for them at the West End Beach, and eventually filed a missing persons report. By about 12:30 AM (January 26), Team skiers Steve Reynaud and Russ Viehman had located

two snowboarder tracks just below Rainbow Bridge (Donner Pass Road) and followed them downslope until they hit one of the streets at the west end neighborhood. Both Steve and Russ were convinced the tracks belonged to Jared and Chris, who reportedly did not know the route or the terrain down to Donner Lake very well. Still, there was some conjecture (among everyone else) that the boarder tracks could have belonged to two other riders. We spent the next two hours interrogating one of the reporting party (a skinny lad who wore his pants half way down his ass), following tracks near the west end phone booth (the proposed meeting place of Jared and Chris and friend), and following up on every other remote clue. We ended up at Donner Ski Ranch (2:00 AM) interviewing the lost guys' roommates, and in doing so were treated to a way-too-intimate tour of the Ski Ranch's "employee housing" (bunk beds servicing an undetermined number of boarders, 40 year old carpet, overflowing fireplace, stacks of porn videos). A few minutes later a Nevada County deputy located Jared and Chris at "Tracy's" house, somewhere in the Armstrong tract.

Since no restaurants were open, the Nevada County cops treated all who had responded to

*Tahoe Search and Rescue*, etc., etc., etc.... These are but a sampling of the titles the media has given our Team over the years. After 23 seasons Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team still battles a name recognition problem. So it was a bit of a shock to hear our Team name (correctly!) stated on the February 3 KUNR evening broadcast. The news story referred to a search that morning for a snowboarder lost from Alpine Meadows ski area.

Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team was called at 12:15 AM to look for Eliot Light, 46, of Pebble Beach, California. Eliot failed to show up for work that previous day; his car was found in the ski area parking lot.

As our searches started arriving at Alpine early that morning, they were informed by the Alpine ski patrol that they had a pretty good idea where to find Eliot's track. Responding to an unrelated incident the previous day, an Alpine patroller had spotted an errant snowboard track off the back side of the ski area's High Traverse. The patrol guided eight Team skiers down to the track; and off our skiers went. Meanwhile, Team snowmobilers Rod Mayne, Bryan Devore, and Shawn Kelly 'biled down to the upper reaches of Five Lakes Creek to make sure Eliot had not doubled-back uphill.

In a few hours the Team skiers found Eliot's first night's camp (he ended up spending two nights out) along Five Lakes Creek downstream of Grouse Canyon. He had erected a secure, pine bough-lined shelter under a fallen tree and had stamped out HELP in the snow, lining the letters with pine needles and branches. It was here that the Nordic Team boys found Eliot's snowboard too. They then tracked Eliot uphill—over a "good piece of vertical"—headed back in the direction of the ski area. At about 5:30 AM Eliot was found at his second camp, on the ridge separating the Bear Pen drainage from Grouse Canyon. He again had engineered an outstanding shelter in a tree well and stamped out HELPin the snow. The radio towers

on top of Ward Peak (Alpine Meadows ski area) were visible from his camp. He was hungry, thirsty, and very tired, but dressed well and mostly dry. After kicking up a bonfire, five of the Nordic Team skiers skied



*Placer County's Eagle 1 prepares to airlift Eliot Light from the Tahoe backcountry.*

*Photograph by Steve Twomey*

the search with a tank of gasoline. Very cool.

*Placer County Search and Rescue, Tahoe Search and Rescue, Tahoe Donner Search and Rescue, North Tahoe Search and Rescue, Lake*

*Next General Meeting is Monday, March 1, 1999, 6:30 p.m. at the Granlibakken Resort's Ski Hut*



back to the ski area and the remaining three, along with Eliot, were flown out by Placer County's *Eagle 1* helicopter. Team skier Steve Twomey reports that Eliot was very thankful, appreciative, and congenial. And evidently humble and humorous as well. As Eliot (a doctor) stepped off the helicopter back at Alpine Meadows, someone from the media asked what kind of doctor he was. A stupid one, he responded. (Self-effacing, yes, but while in the woods he had done much more right than wrong.)

Team skiers included Ron Driller, Jim Granger, Bernie Mellor, Joe Pace, Doug Read, Steve Reynaud, Steve Twomey, and Russ Viehman. The callout was spearheaded by Jackie Thomas, and Cory Engles managed the Team truck all night long.

The Team was called out the night of February 6 to respond to an avalanche on Donner Summit. Though no one from Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team ever "hit the snow", the callout is worth mentioning.

At approximately 10:00 PM word came from the Placer County Sheriff's Department in Auburn that an avalanche had buried an undetermined number of persons on Donner Summit. The avalanche had apparently occurred four hours earlier. At 10:30, as the Team was en route, word came from the sheriff that all had been recovered from the slide alive. Three men and a woman were buried in a small avalanche above the east shore of Lake Mary (near the top of Donner Pass Road) for at least three hours before one of them self-extricated and sought help for the others. Indeed all the remaining three were dug up

alive, but Malcolm Hart, 21, of Berkeley, California was pronounced dead at Tahoe Forest Hospital at 3:30 AM the next morning. He had succumbed to hypothermia. This incident is remarkable in several respects. The slope that slid was relatively small, but still managed to bury all four of them. They weren't skiing or boarding, just sledding and goofing around in the snow. And that three survived burial for all those hours is highly unusual. Chances of surviving burial in the snow for more than three hours is less than 1 in 10. This avalanche occurred right around the corner from the slide that killed Jamil Kahn on February

11, 1998 (see the March 1998 *Snow Line*).

The Team next responded to another callout from Alpine Meadows the afternoon of February 13. Perhaps a little spooked from the February 3 incident, the Alpine Meadows management found an abandoned car in their lot and called the sheriff. The Team responded, with our fearless leader Gerald Rockwell climbing aboard *Eagle 1* and doing an aerial search of the immediate backcountry. *Eagle 1*'s pilot, though (according to Gerald) completely competent, was unfamiliar with flying in the mountains. He evidently calmed his nerves by repeatedly whistling the theme to *Apocalypse Now*. The young man whose car remained in the parking lot was located in short order, but not in the backcountry. He had won the favor of a young woman the night before, and went home with her.



Eliot Light recovers from his two-day ordeal. Photograph courtesy of Reno Gazette-Journal

## Tahoe Nordic Search & Rescue Team Officers

President	Gerald Rockwell	583-5376
Vice President	Joe Pace	583-1806
Treasurer	Scott Schroepfer	546-2809
Secretary	Jackie Thomas	587-2687
Board Members	Steve Matson	546-7968
	Dirk Schoonmaker	583-2929
	Steve Twomey	525-7280
	Medora Weiser	(775) 831-2127

## Committee Chairs

Cuisine	Debra Schroepfer	546-2809
Dispatch	Jackie Thomas	587-2687
Education	Whitney Foehl	(775) 322-4368
The Great Ski Race™	Karen Honeywell	546-8609
	Douglas Read	583-6381
	Randall Osterhuber	587-3092
Newsletter	Randall Osterhuber	587-3092
Snowcats	Tony Remenih	583-1684
Snowmobiles	Ray O'Brien	581-4358
Training	Paul Honeywell	546-8609
Truck/Equipment	Russ Viehman	582-1695
Tahoe Nordic Search & Rescue Team garage		581-4038

All phone numbers area code (530) unless noted otherwise.

## Team Training

Team President Gerald Rockwell will lead a night time training in Paige Meadows on February 27. Training exercises will include tracking, map and compass navigation, GPS navigation, and avalanche transceiver practice. Meet at the top of Silvertip Drive (Talmont) at 5:00 PM. Additional Team trainings for the month of March will be announced at the March 1 meeting.

## Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team, Inc.

Post Office Box 7703  
Tahoe City, California 96145

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