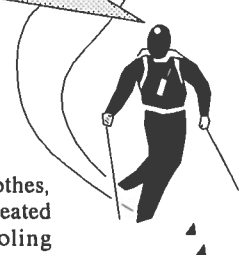


Snowline

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

Lake Tahoe · Truckee · Donner Summit



The "moral" training films of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s—shown to wide-eyed impressionable teenagers—warned of the implicit dangers of communism, marijuana, poor personal hygiene, and venereal disease. If you were to fall in with the "wrong" crowd, you might succumb to all these derangements in a single, productive evening. A sister-film to these now cult classics was an early 1970s drama cautioning the effects of hypothermia.

At the film's opening, clad in blue jeans and fluffy duck-down jackets, an unwitting, albeit exuberant group of twentysomething backpackers heads out into the brave new world of a winter day. Because of the film's title, *HYPOTHERMIA, KILLER OF THE UNPREPARED*, we know that trouble's soon to pour ice water over any idea of winter fun. Sure enough, people get wet, people get tired, people get lost, people get cold. The film makes it pretty clear what the culprit is here: cold.

To say cold slows things down is to say Jimmy Buffet should run for mayor of Margaritaville. Cold, by definition, is slow. In the physical world (as opposed to the ethereal) "cold" is a purely subjective term, reserved to mean some lowly form of heat. Temperature is in fact the measure of a body's average kinetic energy, its molecular motion. Colder things have less motion. The music of Chopin is slower than that of Alice Cooper only because, try as you might, you could never really heat those drafty 19th century salons. And just as cold slows down sound, it slows us and all our bodily functions.

Today much more is known about physiological response to cold than was in the 70s, when the terms *exposure* and *hypothermia* were often synonymous. Today we know why freezing people stop shivering, take off their clothes, and are susceptible to liver damage and bad heartbeats. But even 30 years ago *KILLER OF THE UNPREPARED* still had it right: as a skier starts to cool, they get

clumsy, mentally deficient, then unconscious. If the cooling process is not reversed death will follow.

Obviously, cold people have to be rewarmed. Exactly *how* to rewarm a hypothermic patient has been—and is still—a hot topic of debate within the emergency medicine community. But warmed they must be, since the only alternative is to keep them on ice. The old adage *No one's dead until they're warm and dead* is founded in miraculous emergency room recoveries of victims from deep, suspended-animation cold. In an emergency room environment many warming methods are used: warm IVs, warm humidified oxygen, warm lavages directly into the chest cavity, warm inflatable blankets, heated

tent) and their wet clothes, and into a preheated sleeping bag, the cooling process may be arrested.

But to rewarm a deeply hypothermic victim in the backcountry will most likely require resources that tax even a highly prepared and experienced rescue team. The solution to hypothermia, therefore, is prevention, not treatment.

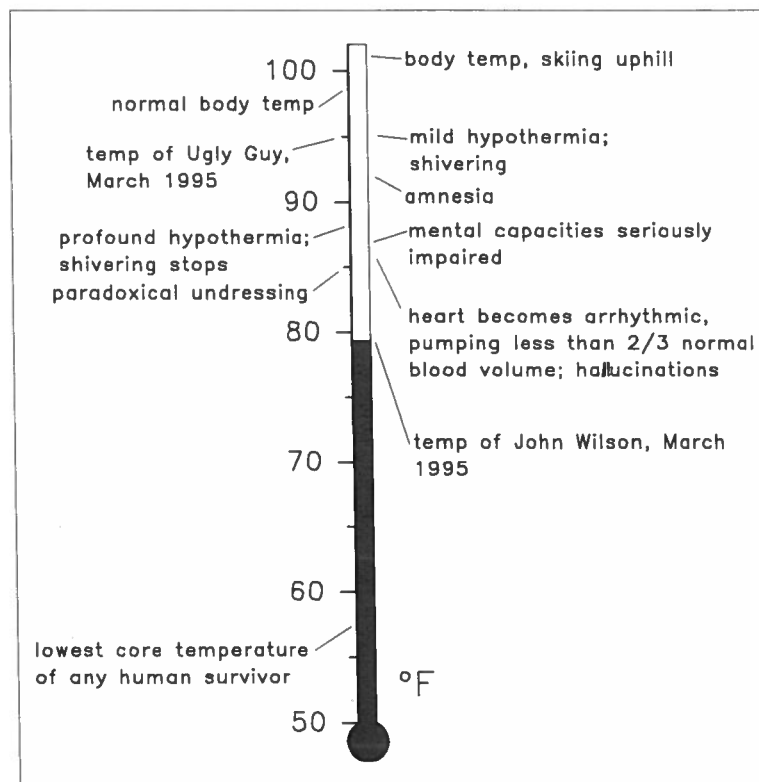
Hypothermia is an undercurrent that runs ever-present—if not deeply—throughout all Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team does. With the exception of airplane crashes, most of the fatalities of the backcountry that the Nordic Team has searched for have died of cold exposure. And most the survivors have toed that fine line between being obnoxiously cold and gravely cold.

The contrast of a couple back-to-back searches during winter 1995 demonstrates interesting and contrasting cold-weather physiological response:

When we pulled John Wilson off Castle Peak and got him to the hospital, he was unconscious with a core temperature of 79°F. He recovered fully; and even though he was for all intense purposes naked on the snow when we found him, he suffered no frostbite to his limbs whatsoever. The processes that normally protect the body's core at the expense of the limbs failed, ironically, during his deepest hypothermia. A few nights later during The Ugly Guy search, we found The Ugly Guy after he had stood around in the woods behind Sugar Bowl for several hours during a very cold night. He was cold, to be sure, but not dangerously so (yet). In response to his hours out in the cold, the relatively healthy Ugly

Guy was sporting nice white wooden fingers—first degree frostbite—his body managing its reserve heat properly. He was so stiff he could hardly balance when he tried to walk.

Frostbite is rarely life-threatening, hypothermia always is.



whirlpool baths, turning the room thermostat up to 95°. No such tools are usually available to the backcountry rescuer.

Once an individual in the backcountry has cooled to the point where they have lost or are losing consciousness, it can be near impossible to reverse the situation. Often by getting the victim out of the weather (read:

Next General Meeting is Monday, February 7, 2000, 6:30 p.m. at the Granlibakken Resort's Cedar Room

What can Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team do about hypothermia?

Education/Prevention: The Team's Winter Awareness brochures and school programs extol the #1 defense from the cold, proper clothing. If the local fourth-graders know anything, they know about *killer jeans*.

Speed: In the mountains speed is safety. The faster we find lost people the better chance they have surviving the cold. Training, preparation, wise and efficient use of resources all cut our response time.

Awareness: We have to carefully manage our cold patients. I know we're a fun, bubbly group, but just because we've *found* a cold guy doesn't mean he's getting warmer. Underestimating our search subject's "cold content" is an easy—and dangerous—thing to do. Time and time again we find people that are mildly hypothermic; they've been in one place for hours, shivering. When we get them moving, we find they're stiff and awkward, like a bad actor. We must treat them all with kid gloves, constantly assess their health, and take every and all means to stop and reverse their body's cooling trend. If the victim cannot move under their own power, we must be trained (see the **February 6** training) and ready to move them.

And... Self-policing: Watching out for ourselves. Not only are our search subjects exposed to the elements, we're out there skiing in the rain and cold all night too. Even properly equipped, our searchers can still become tired, depleted, or injured. Athletes tend to cool fast when they stop moving—there's not much extra body fat on the Nordic Team's lead skiers.

Make your own decisions on socialist philosophy, pharmaceutical experimentation, how to comb your hair, and sexual promiscuity, but don't become one of the *UNPREPARED*.

Upcoming Trainings

Training Committee co-Chairs Bernie Mellor and Paul Honeywell design the Team's trainings to offer diverse opportunities to practice and learn mountain rescue skills. All Team members are encouraged to attend.

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

January 29: If you're one of the lucky ones to receive this newsletter before the 29th, do two things: thank your local postal carrier, and meet at the Team garage at 7:30 AM to carpool over toward Silver Peak. Bernie Mellor (546-2238) will lead this training, a ski tour of the peak. If you're coming from Truckee Town way, meet at the bottom of the Pole Creek road, Highway 89, at 8:00.

February 6: Russ Viehmann (582-1695) will lead a *move an injured person out of the woods* training in the Blackwood Canyon area. Moving a loaded rescue sled through backcountry terrain and backcountry snow is an incredibly challenging exercise, both physically and logistically. The times Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team has had to do this have been minor Herculean feats. Meet at the Team garage at 7:30 AM or the bottom of Blackwood Canyon 20 minutes later.

February 10: Dirk Schoonmaker (583-2929) will emcee an Anatomy of a Search discussion at the Kings Beach Fire Station, 6:30 PM. Members of Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team and other community rescue organizations will deliberate on current rescue topics.

February 13: Team skier Cory Engles (581-5481) will lead a terrain familiarization training in and around the Squaw Valley area. Skiers are to meet at the Team garage at 8:00 AM, or outside the tram building at Squaw at 8:30.

February 19: A ski ascent/descent of Mt. Tallac. This training, originally scheduled for January 15, was postponed due to lack of snow. There's snow now. Meet at the Team garage at 7:30 AM. Team member Steve Reynaud (587-4723) will lead this one.

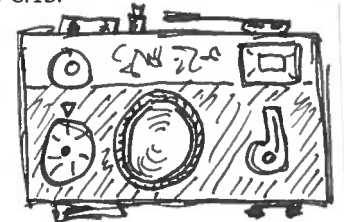
February 27: Bernie Mellor (546-2238) is spearheading this terrain familiarization training: a ski tour from Sheep Flat (big meadow off Mt. Rose Highway) to Kings Beach. Meet at the Team garage at 7:30 AM or up at Sheep Flat at 8:15.

Tahoe Nordic Search & Rescue Team Officers

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



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February's a
 Sweet Heart
 of a Month!



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