



SnowLine

The Official Newsletter of the

TAHOE NORDIC SEARCH & RESCUE TEAM, INC.
Lake Tahoe • Truckee • Donner Summit

Looking for a fast-paced evening on the town? Searching for night life, action, and high-mountain intrigue? Then climb into your dinner jacket and come join the season's last meeting of the Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team, Monday night, May 1, 6:00 PM at the Granlibakken Resort's Ski Hut. Dinner will be served to only the first 200 arrivals so don't be late! The final meeting of the 1999-2000 winter season will prove to be an important one: elections for director positions and the bestowing of the *Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team Member of the Year* award are but a couple of the anticipated highlights. With petrol at 50¢ per liter and the sun shining 'til 8, it's a perfect time to ride your bicycle to the meeting. How will you get home? (Reelaaaaaax; you're asking too many questions.)

The *Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team Member of the Year* award has been a Team tradition since the early 1980s and is the Team's highest citation. Nominated this year for the honor are Bernie Mellor, Ray O'Brien, Doug Read, and Jackie Thomas—all four worthy candidates.

Bernie Mellor has become more and more involved with the Team during the last couple seasons. Between participating in numerous search and rescues and maintaining the Team garage, this year he became co-Chair of the Team's Training Committee and has kept the training docket full, October to May. Bernie injects humor and goodwill into all he does.

Leading the Team's snowmobile division, Ray O'Brien has redefined where snowmobiles

can go and what they can do. Ray's sense of humor and professionalism during searches has easily bridged the historic gap between the granola-eating skiers and the throttle-heavy motorheads. Ray and crew have completely changed the look of The Great Ski Race course by injecting Soup Station 2 with

extrordinaire, roaming Team Director—Doug's energy is one of the biggest reasons the Team is where it is today.

Once in a blue moon the public spotlight falls on the Team; when it does, it usually falls on the front line: the searchers. But we are a *Team*, and little could get done without the involvement of many different people, several of whom are behind the scenes. One of those key people is Jackie Thomas. Jackie's been Team Secretary for many years and the head of the Team's Dispatch Committee for many more. Efficiently coordinating multiple callouts with multiple dispatchers is a vital task, one that perpetuates fast response and the saving of lives. Jackie's done all this (seemingly) effortlessly.

Thanks Jackie, Doug, Ray, and Bernie!



a big dose of imagination, energy, and fun. Ray also displayed some real heads-up alertness during the Sara Norvill search in March.

David Fenimore put it succinctly: "What can you say about Doug Read that hasn't already been said about carpenter ants?" Seriously, if anyone is Mr. Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team, it's Doug Read. Great Ski Race coordinator, skier and searcher

A Sense Of Place

While reading the in-flight magazine on a recent trip, I noticed Casio now markets a GPS wristwatch. The fine print at the end of the ad stated the unit weighs in at a pound and a half. That's a healthy slug of metal to be carrying around on the end of your arm; was there ever a doubt that tipping back all those full pints would be such good training?

The Global Positioning System, consisting of 24 satellites orbiting 17,600 kilometers above your windblown hair-do, is proving to be more and more practical to the earthly business we conduct down here in the bushes. The Team owns three GPS receivers and is purchasing four more.

Keeping track of a scrambled path skied through the mountains, at night, in a storm, demands a lot of mental bookkeeping. How far have we traversed on this contour? How long have we been quartering the SW wind? Have we skied into a different drainage? In zero-zero visibility there is a finite amount of information available with which to triangulate one's position. A compass can tell you the angle of a slope, the aspect of that slope, which way a creek runs, and the general direction to

Next General Meeting is Monday, May 1, 2000, 6:00 pm at the Granlibakken Resort's Ski Hut

Barrow, Alaska. These data, combined with a topographic map, can narrow the possibilities of your position. But unless your course has been relatively straight forward, the exact location from which you gaze out into the night may—and undoubtedly will be—a hot topic of debate between you and your search partner.

Of those 24 satellites somewhere out in deep space, our hand-held receivers might pick up signals—at the speed of light (fast enough, as Woody Allen might say, to blow your hat off)—from four, five, or six at any one time. The logic buried within the receiver's silicon will cipher its (your) position relative to the spacecraft.

Asking how much to spend on a GPS receiver is like asking how much to spend on a bicycle; it's the great thing about this country: there's no upper limit. Depending on the thickness of your wallet, a GPS receiver can pinpoint your position with an accuracy measured in fractions of centimeters, several feet, or tens of meters. What are you using it for: finding a fishing hole or lobbing missiles at some foreign nation? Even the receivers sold from the catalog behind airline seats will give you information good enough to find the tent you pitched yesterday ("It's right around here *somewhere* !").

In addition to telling you where you are, GPSs display information on how to get somewhere else. That's all fine and futuristic, but relying on those features during a search has some disadvantages. The units we carry have liquid crystal displays (LCD) powered by AA flashlight batteries. When GPSs are used as a compass, displaying distance and direction data constantly, they chew batteries like the Energizer bunny on a caffeine jag. We have already experienced GPS battery failure on a search: in that instance batteries were temporarily swapped from an avalanche transceiver. Powering a GPS at the expense of an avalanche beacon may not necessarily be a life-promoting resolution. You make the call. LCDs operate as a very suave physic of

silicon; one sour drawback is they tend to fade to blank at about -4°C—they keep working, you just can't read 'em. For these reasons GPSs are not practical on the run, in the cold mountains.

Only a Montana-transplanted Californian would be caught relying on a GPS without an accompanying map and compass. With minimum battery consumption and minimum time, a GPS receiver can tell you where you are. With that precious piece of information a map and compass can tell you *all* the rest. During the first shift of the Sara Norvill search, we stopped—albeit only briefly—four or five times during the night to assess our position. One guy would whip out the GPS, another the Norden quad, and without hardly breaking stride we'd adjust our bearing and ski on. The weather wasn't snarly enough to preclude other means of navigation; all the same, the GPS saved an enormous amount of time that would have otherwise been spent, say, shooting the height of Cassiopeia and consulting the logarithm tables. At the April meeting of the Nordic Team, Team character and searcher Tony Bochene suggested we compel each search team to carry a GPS. One could inaugurate a strong argument in favor.

Team Trainings

These are the last Team trainings of the winter season. Remember, the times listed are *departure* times—be ready. Also, as of this writing the snow-dissolving sun has been shining with a vigor on the Tahoe Sierra. Call the contact person in charge of the training to verify that the listed ski tour is not now a bike ride.

April 22: Contact Mike Kennett (581-2101) for information about skiing in the Third Creek area, Incline Village. Depart the Team garage (223 Fairway Drive, Tahoe City) at 7:00 AM or meet at the Safeway in Kings Beach at 7:15.

April 30: Spring skiing at Grouse Rock and beyond with Tony Bochene (550-1548).

The group will be leaving the Team garage at 7:00 AM.

Spring Cleaning

If you wish not to receive future issues of *SnowLine*, have a change of address, or know of anyone who does, *please* contact us with this information. Send address change info to Randall Osterhuber, PO Box 83, Norden, CA 95724 or randall@sierra.net.

Have a great summer, get naked a lot, record it all on film.

—Randall Osterhuber



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
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	Medora Weiser	583-2620
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Committee Chairs

Cuisine	Debra Schroepfer	546-2809
Dispatch	Jackie Thomas	587-2687
Education	Karen Honeywell	546-8609
Equipment	Russ Viehmann	582-1695
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
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