



SnowLine

The Official Newsletter of the

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

Much to talk about this month so let's get at it. The Great Ski Race! Yes, yes! It was a great ski race—again—with 854 registered racers, lots of fun and prizes, and a generous dollop of new, wet snow.

There is no weather rumor mill like that that churns the weekend before the race and The Great Ski Race 2001 was no exception. The Saturday before race day was mostly sunny, fair and cool. The Rossignol and Alpina ski reps were working the crowd at Tahoe XC and what few clouds skidded overhead skidded away just as fast. But with each registering ski racer came another dooming weather prediction for the next morning. "At least two feet tonight, more after that." "Rain to 8000 feet." "Rain to 8000 feet with 60 mph winds." "A convergence of an Alaskan cold front with a deep tropical Pacific low: The Perfect Storm." That night, just before midnight, the skies had markedly clouded and light flurries were beginning to dust the pavement in Truckee.

By morning a less-than-perfect storm had developed but a snowstorm nonetheless. As had been the case for much of this winter, most the evening's snowfall concentrated on the Sierra Crest (better than two feet), while it dropped four to six inches on top of the race course at Starratt Pass. But unlike so much of this season, the new snow wasn't cold and powdery, it more resembled the density of old petroleum, like that mixed with alluvium after a clandestine desert oil change. A couple inches of sludge slowed the racers but it certainly didn't hold them back—668 reached the finish line in Truckee, the last after six hours and 19 minutes. The race was won by Frenchman Stephane Passeron in 1:30:02, slow by modern nordic racing standards, but considering he had to break trail for 30 kilometers and was better than five minutes ahead of the second place finisher (Peter Webb of Ketchum, ID), more than substantiates his spectacular win. The women's field was won by Jeannie Wall of

Bozeman, MT, with a time of 1:42:19, *ninth* place overall. That ninth place finish is the highest overall place by a woman during *any* Great Ski Race! Congratulations all!

Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team would like to thank *every* participant, volunteer, and sponsor of the 2001 Great Ski Race. There is no way Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team could have continued operating for the past 25 years without community support. We send out our heartfelt THANKS TO YOU!!!

Search and Rescues

During the last month Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team has been dispatched for four search and rescues. The first of this series was on February 14.

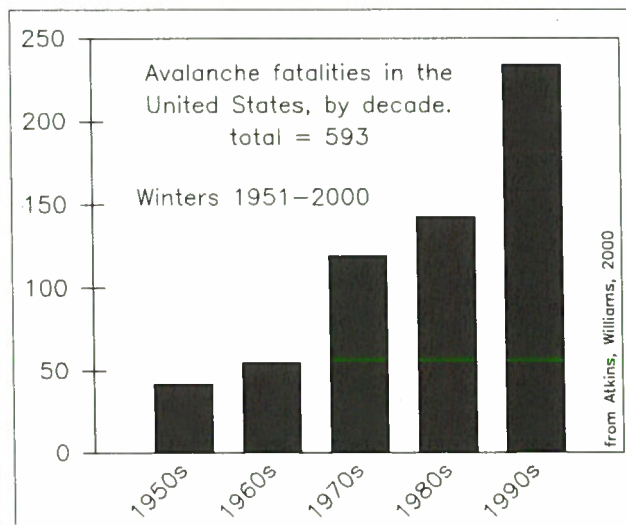
At 5:15 PM Truckee resident Nona Gilmore, 36, was snowshoeing off the Cabin Creek Road and decided she had had enough. She

came flying up from the Sacramento area, and through the marvels of modern communication Nona's cell phone was dispatched to the AIR21 pilots. The plane kept buzzing the Cabin Creek area until Nona informed the pilots that they were "right overhead!" At that instant the airmen activated their GPS, then radioed the coordinates down to the search teams. Nordic Team snowmobiler Ray O'Brien and Placer County deputy Fred Carey entered Nona's coordinates into their GPS and started heading out toward the way-point. They had little problem spiraling in on her, using both the GPS data and her snowshoe tracks as they got closer. She was found about 7:00 PM and whisked back to the trailhead by Ray on his trusty steed.

The Nordic Team was called next the evening of February 21. Two local 17 year old boys, Brendan Allan and Bryan Richmond, both on the Squaw Valley Ski Team, were reported missing. They were thought to have left the Squaw Valley ski area to ski the out-of-bounds terrain back to Brendan's house in Alpine Meadows.

The next 18 hours saw a flurry of search activity. Numerous Nordic Team skiers and several Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley ski patrol skied/searched various routes between the two ski areas, all to no avail.

Late the next morning (February 22), Nordic Team skiers Glen Poulsen and Dave Fulton (Fish) took off from the top of the KT-22 chairlift, ducked the boundary rope, and started skiing down toward the Alpine Meadows road. When they entered the top of the West Gully—a well-established avalanche track—Glen noticed that it had avalanched sometime in the past 24 hours. The debris had in fact been searched earlier in the day, only briefly, but with the aid of two avalanche search dogs from Alpine Meadows. The dogs had not alerted to anything. Glen thought the avalanche runout had been inadequately searched so he and Fish began spot probing the most likely burial locations. Meanwhile, Team skiers Scott Edmondson, Joe Pace, Steve Reynaud, and Peter York were just



called 911 on her cell phone and declared she was lost. Dark was approaching. She described to the dispatcher where she was: large open area, sun at her back, mountains in front. [?!] Placer dispatch called the Nordic Team and requested skiers, snowcats, and snowmobiles. All responded, leaving their sweethearts with some Valentine treats and a rain-check for love. Meanwhile, a California Highway Patrol fixed-wing aircraft, AIR21,

finishing searching another route not far from the West Gully. Glen radioed them and asked for additional help. At about 11:30 AM, Glen and Fish located the first buried body, at a depth of about five feet in the deepest part of the debris. A few minutes later they struck the other boy, just a few feet away. Upon digging them out, both were found dead, most likely of suffocation.

Brendan and Bryan had knowingly entered terrain that is closed (full time) to skiing. The West Gully is private property; this and adjacent avalanche tracks are controlled with explosives by the Alpine Meadows ski patrol (the slopes are controlled for the safety of the access road below, not for any skier use). There had been heavy snow loading the previous 24 hours both by precipitation and strong winds. Other avalanches, mostly of lesser size, had occurred on nearby slopes. The fact that the two boys were found close together may be coincidental, or it may indicate they were descending the slope together, instead of one at a time, safe spot to safe spot. Neither boy carried any avalanche safety or rescue gear.

It should be noted that Glen and Fish demonstrated great mountain sense in recognizing the West Gully as a high-probability search area, and being tenacious enough to stick with their decision to search it, even while some tried to influence them otherwise.

This was a very poignant end to a search that absorbed much of the Nordic Team's resources. This tragedy had a significant effect on our small mountain community, as well as on several of the Nordic Team searchers more intimately involved.

At about 2:00 PM on March 4 (right in the middle of The Great Ski Race), Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team was called to help search the debris of a large avalanche in East Gully, the next door neighbor to the path that killed Brendan and Bryan. A Squaw patrolman had discovered ski tracks leading into the debris but none coming out. Nordic

Team skiers Tony Bochene, Paul Honeywell, Steve Reynaud, and Russ Viehmann ditched the Great Ski Race scene and headed to Squaw.

When they arrived, they discovered the debris from a large avalanche, and about 60 searchers from Squaw (patrollers and students from an avalanche course) that were just finishing probing the runout. No strikes had been made. The Nordic Team boys helped out for a while, then the search was called off. As of March 19, no one has been reported missing.

The Nordic Team pagers screamed next at 7:30 PM on March 11. Two snowboarders, Lea Brown, 21, and Billy Fitzgerald, 22—both from Napa—had been riding at Alpine Meadows and had not returned at day's end. Lea and Billy had traversed way skier's-right off Ward Peak, beyond Grouse Rock to the big slopes beneath Twin Peaks. They started this mini expedition with their friend Matt. Matt separated from them, found himself lost and alone, and stumbled on. Late in the day a recreational snowmobiler crossed paths with Matt and gave him a ride back to the bottom of the Sherwood chairlift. At dark, Matt reported Lea and Billy missing.

Team skiers Mike Kennett, Dirk Schoonmaker, and myself geared up and skied off into the Ward Creek drainage below the Sherwood chair, pointed in a logical direction by Team member Gerald Rockwell. Right off the bat we yelled "Billy!" The cold, calm air and resounding canyon echo made for far-reaching acoustics. At 9:30 PM, after 20 minutes of high-speed skiing through breakable crust, we heard a faint reply to our last "Billy" exclamation. In short order we found the two disinclined adventurers under a close stand of fir. They had a small fire burning and had assembled a thick bed of cedar boughs to keep them off the snow. Lea and Billy were very excited to see us: "How did you find us?" "How did you know where to look?" "Where did you guys come from?" "Etc." "Etc." They were tired and thirsty from post-holing all day, but fine. While not intending to sound morbid, Mikey, fresh from an exacting wilderness first aid course, expressed disappointment that neither of them required his newly honed medical skills (especially, as we all noted, young, attractive Lea).

We all enjoyed deliverance from the woods by Team snowmobilers Bryan DeVore, Shawn Kelly, Bill Koplun, and Ray O'Brien.

These were the Nordic Team's fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth searches of the season.

Team Events

As of March 15, there are still 10 places available in the Wilderness Medicine Institute first aid class scheduled for March 31 and April 1. The two-day course will be held at the Squaw Valley Fire Department, 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM each day. Cost is \$83 (refunded to you upon completion of the course). To reserve your spot, send a check (made out to TNSAR) to Karen Honeywell, PO Box 368, Carmelian Bay, CA 96140.

Additional Team training exercises—including the scheduling of summer hikes—will be announced at the next general meeting of Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team: April 2, 6:30 PM, at the Granlibakken Resort's Ski Hut. I'll meet you there!

In between bouts of honest laziness,
—Randall Osterhuber

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	Dirk Schoonmaker	583-2929
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Education	Karen Honeywell	546-8609
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Snowcats	Ray O'Brien	581-4358
Snowmobiles	Paul Honeywell	546-8609
Training	Bernie Mellor	546-2238

All phone numbers area code (530).

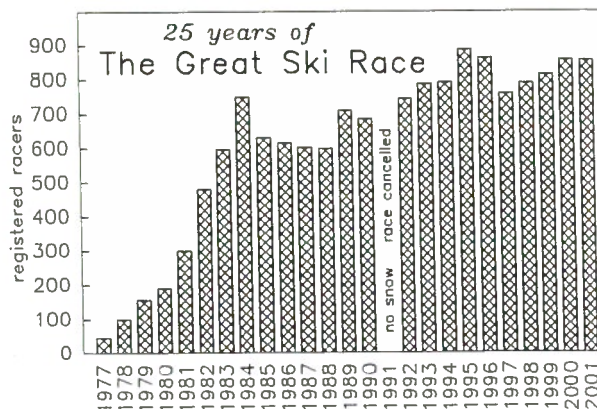
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