



SnowLine

The Official Newsletter of the

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

In keeping with decades of tradition, and in true holiday spirit, the next meeting (and the first of the century) of Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team will be Monday night, **January 1, 6:30 PM** at the Granlibakken Resort's Ski Hut. For many years Granlibakken owners Bill and Norma Parsons have generously donated meeting space to our Team. The Ski Hut, with its funky blend of ski memorabilia from 40 winters and year 'round Christmas lights, has become sort of an icon for our group. Those log walls, permanently infused with the smell of hot chocolate and ski wax, have quietly witnessed the history of Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team. Emotional meetings between rescuers and rescuees have taken place there, as well as somber silence following the death of Team members. Numerous romances have been launched, if not with the lure of planning the next hair-brained ski tour then with that intriguing guy or gal sitting next to you. The Ski Hut has seen the reign of five different Team presidents and a slough of elections hundreds of times closer than any in Florida. Beer has been spilled, projector bulbs have exploded, awards have been presented—all before the 100 or so raccoon-eyed, wind-burned Team members. And the laughs. The loosely structured meetings and strong camaraderie have always brought out the funniest and funnest of people. That, and the unlikely circumstances that search and rescue work often dictates, jacks up the comedy potential more than a few notches. A couple of years ago during a relatively slow monthly meeting, I was seated next to long-time Team member Steve Matson when I noticed he had dozed off, starting to snore a fantastic bass. A few minutes later he suddenly awoke, looked around somewhat dazed, and asked no one in particular, "What are all these people doing in my bedroom?"

The Ski Hut has been and continues to be a great place for us to meet. We should all take a moment and send our thanks to Bill and

Norma Parsons and the Granlibakken staff for their generosity year after year.

It's Not All Science

In addition to rescue, most classroom and field avalanche safety courses stress cognizance across three disciplines: weather, snowpack, and terrain. Three broad questions address these areas. Is the weather contributing to instability? Are there weak layers or weak interfaces within the snowpack? Could this terrain produce an avalanche? These are not always easy

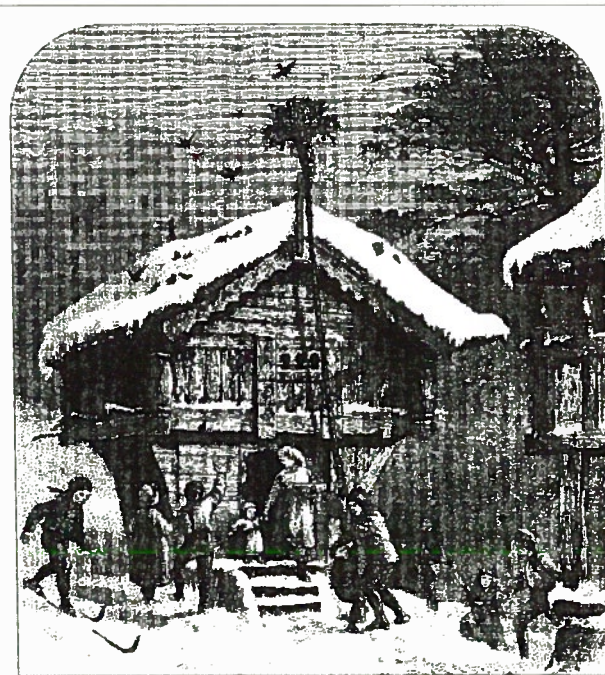
data. Anyone with proper training can measure how much snow fell, or the mechanical stress on a snow layer, or the angle of a slope. These are data, these are *objective* information. Since there are considerably less than a well-spring of hard data available to the backcountry skier, what little *are* available are extremely valuable.

There's a fourth component to the avalanche evaluation business that is even harder to predict than George W.'s next intelligent remark: the human factor. Information or not, rulers and strain gauges and thermometers do not make decisions in

the snowy mountains, we do. Unfortunately, how we, as individuals or as a group, make snow stability evaluations may depend more on how tired or cold we are than on what the data are telling us. This *subjectivity* greases an already slippery situation.

There are many influences on a group that may cause it to ignore or plain just not see those very valuable pieces of avalanche evaluation data. Fatigue, cold, running out of daylight, or becoming lost can change one's priorities from avalanche survival to just survival. A group member's (or members') inflated ego can play an overbearing role in controlling and deciding what the group will do. The skiing subculture of Lake Tahoe, like sport subcultures (climbing, sailboarding, surfing, kayaking) everywhere, honors and reveres those that do daring deeds. In the sport of skiing that means operating on steep ground, often in avalanche terrain. Ironically, what is common among the majority of those that have dived into steep, untracked snow never to witness the light of day again is an ignorance of their immediate surroundings. When snow is highly unstable there almost always exist blatant indicators of that instability:

most commonly recent, heavy snowfall and other avalanches on steep terrain. The amount of new snow, how many recent avalanches and where, and slope angle are all pieces of data. They are not gut feelings,



Tahoe Nordic Search & Rescue Team wishes you and yours the very best this Holiday Season. Happy New Year!

questions to answer. The limited information available to us and/or our ability to correctly interpret the necessary information is what keeps avalanche science an elusive science. What these three areas of concentration have in common is that they are about information,

Next General Meeting is Monday, January 1, 2001, 6:30 pm at the Granlibakken Resort's Ski Hut

intuition, or horoscope predictions. They are tangible, meaningful, and extremely important to backcountry skiers like us who love the sport way too much to die for it.

But will this cool love kill us? Last winter, during a training exercise, a mountain rescue group—not unlike ourselves—started off in the bright morning full of excitement and enthusiasm for the day. But an hour later they were swept off their feet in surprise as the snow failed below them. Embarrassed (with avalanche safety gear stashed away) but unharmed, they collected their wits and sheepishly accepted the slap on the hand. Around them were indicators of unstable snow: recent wind loading, abrupt temperature rise, other avalanches. And they were on steep snow. How steep? I don't know, but I'd wager to say no one in their party knew either.

Assessing snow stability can be a complex task. Weather, snowpack, terrain, and each group member all have to be considered. It's a thick soup. If you feel uncomfortable with a snow stability assessment ask yourself what the assessment is based on. Ego? Enthusiasm? Fatigue? Data? Experience shows that if during the decision making process you speak up, and speak of facts, others will listen. As everyone stands around and pontificates on the slope angle before them, you know what will quiet them right down? Getting out there and measuring it.

Team Trainings

Training Committee coordinator Bernie Mellor reminds everyone to please call each training organizer to let him or her know you will attend, and make sure you've signed on for an OES card. (Keith Shannon from the Placer County Sheriff's Department will be at the **January 1** Team meeting to assist in signing up for OES cards.)

Since groups larger than two tend to progress slowly, please be on time for Team trainings—it'll help everyone keep moving.

The Nordic Team garage is located at 223 Fairway Drive, behind the Tahoe City Chevron. Here's the beta:

January 4: Karen Honeywell (546-8609) will hold a training session for those who will participate in the fourth grade Winter Awareness presentations in January. Meet at the Team garage at 6:30 PM.

January 6: A route and terrain familiarization outing on Donner Summit. Since this ski will be during the night, make sure your skiing and navigation skills are at least at an intermediate level. Nevertheless, all intermediate skiers are encouraged to attend and ski these routes from the Summit down to Donner Lake, routes we've skied many times during searches. Dirk Schoonmaker (583-2929) will lead this one. Meet at the Team garage at 4:00 PM or at Wild Cherries Coffee House in Truckee at 4:45.

January 9: Gerald Rockwell (583-5376) will hold another computer tutorial for anyone interested in manning the Nordic Team truck during a search. Meet at 6:30 PM; call Gerald to find out where.

January 13: Mike Kennett (581-2101) will lead a ski tour which will include an ascent of Mt. Tallac. Meet at the Nordic Team garage at 7:00 AM.

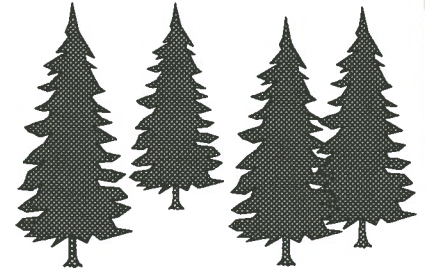
January 21: Joe Pace (583-1806) will host a tour of Homewood Mountain Resort and environs. About half the day will be spent in-bounds; the second half will include skiing Ellis Peak. Meet at the Team garage at 7:30 AM or at Homewood at 8:00.

January 27: Tony Bochene (581-9156) and Dave Olson (582-1843) will lead an overnight excursion into the Rifle Peak area above the North Shore. Specialized and unique winter skills will be taught—skills that you may find peripheral but complimentary to the skiing/navigation/first aid we often train for. If you don't want to spend the night you can still participate for the day. Meet at the Nordic Team garage at 9:00 AM.

February 4: A ski and terrain familiarization training in and around Alpine Meadows ski area. About half the day will be spent in-bounds. Meet at the Team garage at 7:30 AM or in front of the ski patrol building at Alpine at 8:00. Contact Jim Granger (581-1251) about this one.

Yours always,

—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	Karen Honeywell	546-8609
	Ray O'Brien	581-4358
	Dirk Schoonmaker	583-2929
	Russ Viehmann	582-1695
Directors-at-large	Randall Osterhuber	587-3092
	Douglas Read	583-6381
	Gerald Rockwell	583-5376

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
	Randall Osterhuber	587-3092
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

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