



SnowLine

The Official Newsletter of the
TAHOE NORDIC SEARCH & RESCUE TEAM, INC.
 Lake Tahoe • Truckee • Donner Summit

For all you joker and jokerettes out there, take note: the next meeting of Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team is Monday night, April 1 (no foolin'!), 6:30 PM at the Granlibakken Resort's Ski Hut. Don't forget your whoopee cushion, palm buzzer, and squirt ring. If you don't own those essential tools, then certainly bring your Nixon mask, rubber snakes, and conical Madonna boobs. Yes, the rescue business is a serious endeavor, even without Groucho glasses.



The fastest woman skier in the history of The Great Ski Race, Brooke Baughman. Brooke finished ninth place overall this year.

Photograph by Peter Sporleder

The 26th annual Great Ski Race was a raging success. Perfect weather, plentiful snow, and perhaps the lingering buzz of the Olympics all conspired to inspire. A record 1022 skiers registered for the race (the old record was 886); 948 crossed the finish line.

The ski course, groomed as a perfect 30 kilometer-long magic carpet by Tahoe Cross Country Ski Area and Northstar, inspired as well. A new course record was set by winner Patrick Casey (of Salt Lake City) of 1:09:04, more than a minute and a half faster than the existing record. Brooke Baughman of Ketchum, Idaho shattered the women's record with her winning time of 1:15:16. In fact, 374 skiers all completed the course in less than 2 hours, undoubtedly a record as well.

The Great Ski Race is orchestrated almost entirely with volunteer labor and the unselfish generosity of the local community. In fact it is highly probable that *you* are responsible for a big part of the race's success. The Great Ski Race is much more than a Team fund raiser. It's the Team's baby, often raucous, sometimes a little out of control, but always worth at least one more diaper change. Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team is sincerely grateful to all the sponsors and supporters of the race, and to all the hundreds of volunteers dedicating thousands of hours of their precious time to the effort. Thank you all! A special thanks to Tahoe Cross Country Ski Area, Northstar-at-Tahoe, Washoe Medical Center, Cottonwood Restaurant, Tahoe Backcountry Ski Patrol, Granlibakken, Alpine Meadows, Clif Bar, Odwalla, and Lake Tahoe Brewing Company. And the BIGGEST thanks to every participant of The Great Ski Race. You've once again established The Great Ski Race as the largest cross country ski race in the West!

Searches. Rescues.

We're a busy group, and it's not just about putting on ski races...

• Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team was dispatched by Placer County at 5:00 PM February 12 to search for a missing snowboarder from Alpine Meadows. Dennis Blinke, 31, an options trader from New York City, was reported missing at the end of the day by his two companions. Dennis was last seen embarking way too low on the High Traverse and heading into the Granite Chief Wilderness. Seven Team skiers dropped off the backside of Alpine at 6:30 PM and picked up on Dennis's alternating snowboard and boot track shortly thereafter. After three+ hours of tracking, we located Dennis about

one mile below Diamond Crossing. He was hungry, thirsty, and shivering uncontrollably. We got him properly dressed (with dry mitts, socks, hat), fed and watered, and clipped him into snowshoes. As soon as he started moving he warmed up considerably, and felt reasonably strong hiking back to Diamond Crossing. From there we headed up-slope into the Powderhorn drainage (along the way passing fir trees with trunks the diameter of refinery smokestacks) where we met up with Team snowmobilers Bryan DeVore and Rod Mayne a few minutes before midnight. Rod and Bryan loaded up Dennis (who was at this time quite exhausted) and Team skier Mike Kennett (to guide Dennis through some walking sections) onto their machines and worked their way, over the next two hours, up and out of Powderhorn. The rest of the Team skiers skied out over Powderhorn Pass (2:15 AM), there meeting up with Dave Gleske and Larry Severson in their snowcat. All were at Highway 89 by 3:30.

• The Team was next called at 8:30 PM on February 23 to look for an overdue backcountry skier that was last seen heading up toward Twin Peaks. Josh, 22, from Santa Cruz, and Curina, his 1-year-old Malamute, were reported missing by Josh's brother.

Eight Team skiers assembled and split into three search teams. One Team went up toward Stanford Rock, another toward the bottom of Twin Peaks, the third up toward Grouse Rock. After seven hours of difficult tracking (due to very hard surface snows) both up and down Grouse Creek and Bear Pen, Josh was located ascending the Bear Pen drainage. It was 4:00 AM. Both Josh and Curina were very tired but otherwise in good shape. Team skiers Joe Pace and Glenn Poulsen guided Josh and Curina back down to Diamond Crossing whilst all other skiers headed for the barn. The CHP helicopter H-20 arrived at first light and lifted all four mammals out of the mountains. In addition to the skiers, three Team snowmobilers, John Lasagna, Bill Koplin, and Bryan DeVore searched Blackwood and Ward Canyons.

• At the casual hour of 10:00 AM on February 25, Donald, a 51-year-old from Santa Barbara, was reported missing by his ex-wife. Donald had already been out in the mountains

Next General Meeting is Monday, April 1, 2002, 6:30 pm at the Granlibakken Resort's Ski Hut

all night, having gone AWOL from Alpine Meadows ski area sometime the previous day.

That night the snow surface in the backcountry was quite hard and a bright moon arced through the sky until dawn. Donald took full advantage of these conditions and spent most the night heading uphill on his locked-heel equipment. He had spotted the lights from grooming machines atop the Siberian chair at Squaw Valley and herringboned, sidestepped, and shuffled toward Squaw Peak for countless hours.

By late morning several Team skiers (once again) launched off the top of Ward Peak descending to Five Lakes Creek where they found Donald's track. They commenced tracking him but he had a healthy 17-hour head start. While Team skiers tracked and two helicopters with Team spotters flew overhead, Donald self-rescued to the top of the Siberian chair. It was about 1:00 PM. Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team Director Randy Sharp, spotting from aboard Placer County's helicopter *Eagle 1*, had to be abruptly dropped off, as *Eagle 1* headed back to the garage with some kind of "maintenance issue."

Donald was tired but in good shape after his all-night marathon. To celebrate the end of the search, and the spring-like weather blessing the Sierra, Team skier Jeff Rieger took of his skis, search pack, and clothes, and dove into Five Lakes Creek.

• At 5:30 PM on February 28, just as the Nordic Team was starting the mad-mouse chore of stuffing 1000 racers' bags for the Great Ski Race, the Team was called out to look for another lost skier from Alpine Meadows: 27-year-old Yang Yang was missing. Eight Team skiers responded, and like clockwork tracked and then located Yang near the bottom of Grouse Canyon. It was barely 8:30. After refueling Yang and getting him in some clothing appropriate for a night out in the Sierra, the Team skiers put him on snowshoes and started the 2400 vertical foot climb back to the ski area boundary. Meanwhile, back in Tahoe City, more than 20 of us had finished the bag stuffing and headed

to *Hacienda Del Lago* for dinner. There, as one pitcher of margaritas morphed into eight, we listened to every radio transmission from deep within Granite Chief Wilderness. Cheers and toasts went round the table as the searchers lost, then picked up once again Yang's tracks. A final hearty toast—glasses clinking—when the skiers found Yang. Drinking, eating, and laughing at the table while listening to our buddies working hard out in the woods was a somewhat voyeuristic experience; we were definitely getting away with something. Eventually the radio transmissions became few (as the rescuers and rescuee settled into the cadence of a couple long uphill hours); we all disembarked from the restaurant leaving the rescuers to their toil.

Unless you just happened to be on the Sierra crest at midnight, what occurred next most likely would have gone completely unnoticed. For two days previous of this search, a small but deep low pressure system had been raking across the northwestern United States. It was far to the north and east of Lake Tahoe, and in fact far to the north and east of California. But an hour or so before Yang and his Nordic Team entourage reached the crest, winds from this cyclone struck hard the high terrain of the Sierra. The Team skiers had skied off the top of Alpine at 6:00 PM in virtually no wind. Now, five hours later, the winds were far exceeding Beaufort Scale 12, winds that uproot trees and de-mast brigs on the southern oceans. Just 500 vertical feet from safety the Team skiers found themselves in rather dire straits. The hurricane blasts kept knocking everyone off their feet. Yang, physically spent from his ordeal, now was losing what little strength he had left. As the skiers surrounded Yang in a human shield against the elements, one gust laid flat the whole group. Yang fell into some iced-over rocks and cut his face. As one searcher put it, "As soon as he tasted blood he lost it [his energy] fast." Not only did the winds make movement, communication, and patient care near impossible, the upper and final snowfield was now frozen smooth and rock-hard. The glazed surface was traversed only with the utmost of strength and care, both of which Yang was without. A grooming cat had reached the top of the ski area and the skiers could see the lights, but couldn't traverse the icy slope to reach it. The chance that one of the crew would take the big slide-for-life whip down one fork or another of Grouse Canyon was real. Fighting tooth and nail, the group, now just 50 feet from the top, tried to reach the snowcat (which had winched down the west side of

the crest), but couldn't. The cat driver brought his machine back up, then winched down again to a place where the skiers could reach it. The drama ended with pizza in the Alpine patrol room at 1:00 AM. The anemometer atop Ward Peak whirled under 85 mph winds that night.

These were Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team's seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth searches of the season.

Mail List

The mailing list for *SnowLine* has grown steadily over the years, now at 620. But because it's mailed fourth class we are not notified of change or cancellation of address. It costs real dough to produce and mail *SnowLine*, and considering North Lake Tahoe's somewhat transient population, we have decided to re-do our newsletter mailing list. If you would like to remain on the mailing list for *SnowLine*, please send the address panel of this newsletter—marked with any necessary address changes—to Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team, Inc., PO Box 7703, Tahoe City, CA 96145 no later than **July 1, 2002**. Even though we'll print another reminder in next month's newsletter, you only need respond once. Thanks.

—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
	Randy Sharp	587-2877
	Russ Viehmann	582-1695
	Randall Osterhuber	546-4491
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Committee Chairs

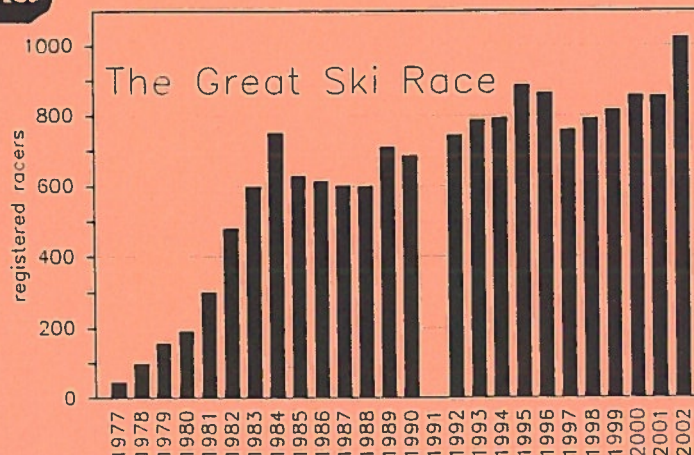
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Great Ski Race™	Douglas Read	583-6381
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