



SnowLine

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

Hype, hype, hype. That's what it was all about as we shoveled our way out of the snowiest October (126 cm (50") on Donner Summit) on record. The ski areas all opened—though reluctantly, it seemed. The marketing departments cheered Ya-hoo!, while the folks in mountain operations quietly sighed at the four feet of new snow burying their construction projects. Now that the weather has been idling a bit, and everyone seems to have gained their sea legs, it's time to snow—again: it's late ¡Noviembre!

Winter will be back before you know it, so you're going to want to meet me and so many other nice people at the Granlibakken Resort's Ski Hut on Monday night, **December 6**, at 6:30 PM for the next Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team rally. Rally, I say!

Search, Kind Of

On the morning of November 11, Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team was called to help with a ground search in the area of a missing man's home on the West Shore. The missing guy's car was in his driveway but he hadn't been seen for two days. Just as a few Nordic Team members were beginning to congregate outside Russ Viehmann's house (the search was in Russ's neighborhood), a call came into the resident deputy that the man had been located at Tahoe Forest Hospital. Thinking, rightly so, that there'd be no need to grid search the ER, the Nordic Team disbanded, heading back to their respective day-jobs.

Almost every season Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team responds to a search that inclines a little

more toward the front country than the back. These episodes carry a decidedly different vibe, though certainly no less urgency. Since every neighborhood in and around the Tahoe Basin has a cusp where pavement gives way to wilderness, an "urban" search can quickly become a backcountry operation. We've tracked lost cross country skiers who started from their home, Alzheimer's patients wandering the dirt paths above the North Shore, and little kids whose curly-cue routes impelled them kilometers outside of mom's sphere.

These "cusps," where the blacktop ends, are always confusing areas from which to start a search: full of tracks and municipal jetsam. The mark of every kid who takes a shortcut to his bus stop; the landmines of every dog that's long-leash walked in the morning; that dangerously stained Serta mattress too questionable even to sit curbside for FREE—they all end up in the first break of pines. These are busy areas. Too hammered to give up clues easily; too important to be overlooked. Somewhat synonymous with the

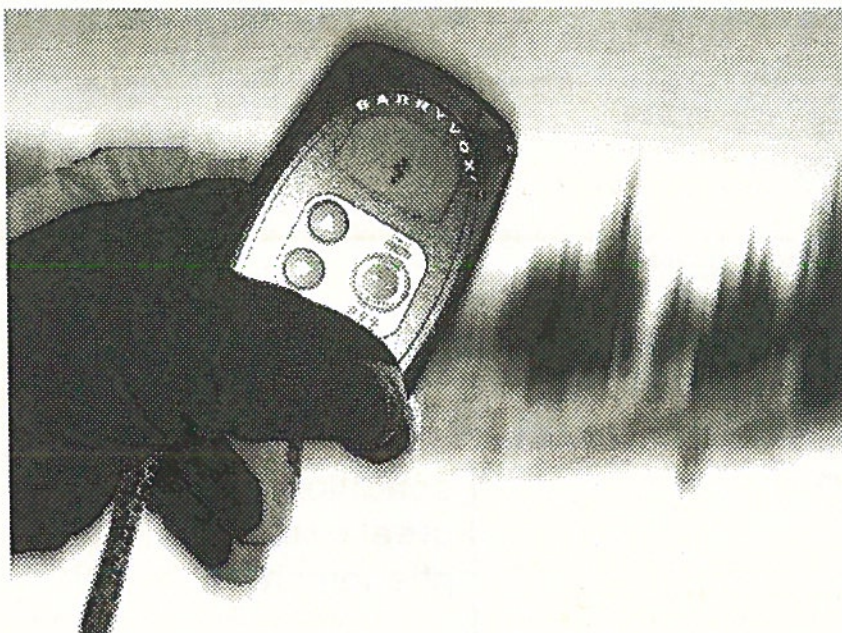
rope lines at ski areas, there exists a spot where the lost person exits the linear world and enters the fractal. If in fact the lost person isn't hiding underneath a travel trailer somewhere (or in the Tahoe Forest ER), most times it pays for us to get clear of this gray zone and run perimeters a fat margin around the maze of tracks. Out there, where we—and *them*—can really start to stretch our legs, is where we'll intersect a single track. A track loudly and interestingly out of place.

ISSW

Back to Jackson, Wyoming, September 2004... Manual Genswein, the Swiss engineer who designed the first digital Barryvox avalanche transceiver, is an interesting character. With a physique that errs toward the roly-poly, and a penchant for pastel polyester stretch slacks and cardigan V necks, he might not immediately impress upon you that he's kind of an avalanche rescue expert. But, he kind of is, I think. At Jackson he presented findings from a study he ran in Canada last winter. The results are worth mentioning.

Under highly controlled conditions, he monitored the efficiency, timing, and performance of more than 100 mountain guides searching (using beacons and probes) a small (20 meters by 20 meters) snowfield containing four buried avalanche transceivers. Three of the transceivers were buried in close proximity to one another, and one was buried particularly deep. A 30 cm diameter electronic "strike plate" was buried just above each transceiver, and when struck with a probe, the exact time and order of each "find" would be recorded.

To the group as a whole, the results were anonymous, i.e., every guide received the complete results of the test



Be systematic, be precise, be fast!
 Photograph by Randall Osterhuber

Next General Meeting is Monday, December 6, 2004, 6:30 pm at the Granlibakken Resort's Ski Hut

but did not know the score of any one individual—except for themselves. They could then compare their performance against their peers without any embarrassment.

The results were categorized many ways. The most successful searchers maintained a good balance between search speed and precision, and approached the problem in a very systematic way, demonstrating efficient use of both transceiver and probe. One of the more interesting relationships was the one between time performance and age of the guide.

A significant correlation across the entire field of searchers was that the older they were, the slower they were. Since the test snowfield was relatively small, being slow on the search suggested having a search technique that was less than ideal rather than any slowness due to physical limitation. The youngest guides participating in the study were in their early to mid 20s, and all did remarkably well, finding the buried transceivers in four minutes or less. The older, much more "experienced" guides, in their early 40s to early 60s (many of whom have been ski guiding for decades), took as long as 20 minutes to complete all the finds on the test slope. These results may seem counterintuitive until you look closer at the training each guide has received, and when that training occurred. All the youngest guides have spent the last five or six years of their lives doing full-time training and education in skiing, climbing, first aid—and avalanche rescue. All to gain their various certifications necessary for employment in the highly demanding and competitive field of "professional" mountain guides. They are, so to speak, fresh out of school, young, fit, energetic, and for whatever they may lack in experience they make up for in being freshly trained in the latest search techniques. On the flip side, of course, are the guides that did their training 30 years ago or more. Their on-the-job experience apparently didn't make up for the lack of training with modern transceivers, or not using the latest beacon search theory techniques.

For the test, each guide used their transceiver of choice. All the younger guides used the latest models of digital transceivers, as

did some of the older guides. But many of the older guides chose relatively modern analog beacons. Surprisingly (and shockingly), for one older guide, his beacon of choice was an antique Ortovox dual-frequency analog beacon, one of the last models with a transistor-radio earpiece.

The moral of this story? *Practice with your avalanche transceiver!* Doesn't matter if you're 20, 40, or 90 (hey, especially if you're 90!); doesn't matter how well you ski or climb or kayak or how pretty you look in your over-priced fleece. Practice!

Who's the "older" demographic on the Nordic Team that fits this study model? Well, as I sit here typing, just 8 hours away from my 45th birthday, I can't help but think: it's me!

Happy Holidays!

Team Officers

President	Russ Viehmann	525-6978
Vice President	Ray O'Brien	581-4358
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Secretary	Sue Duerksen	412-3836
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	Joe Pace	583-1806
	Doug Read	583-6381
	Gerald Rockwell	583-5376
	Steve Twomey	525-7280

Committee Chairs

Cuisine	Debra Schroepfer	546-2809
Dispatch	Jackie Thomas	587-2687
Education	Jim Coffey	583-1276
Equipment	Brian York	583-0465
Great Ski Race™	Doug Read	583-6381
	Randall Osterhuber	546-4491
	Randall Osterhuber	546-4491
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Newsletter	Ray O'Brien	581-4358
Snowcats	Gerald Rockwell	583-5376
Snowmobiles	Paul Honeywell	546-8609
Technology	Bernie Mellor	546-2238
Training	Peter York	583-0465
Truck	Mark Johnson	583-1308
Website		
All phone numbers area code (530) unless otherwise noted.		

December Trainings

Make sure you're on the books with a current OES card before attending a Team training. And please let the training organizer know when to expect you.

The Team garage is located at 223 Fairway Drive in Tahoe City, behind the Chevron station.

December 9: The whole nine yards. Steve Twomey (525-7280) will lead a package-the-patient-onto-a-backboard-then-into-a-sled training. 6:30 PM at the Team garage.

December 11: Mike Le Francois (546-7393) will lead a terrain familiarization ski tour into Castle Peak. Meet at the garage at 7:30 AM or at Wild Cherries Coffee House in Truckee at 8:00.

December 14: Peter York (583-0465), the area rep for the Recco search system, will demonstrate such, tonight at the garage, 6:30 PM. Be prepared to practice with the Recco and your avalanche beacon.

December 16, 17, 18: Doug Read (583-6381) has reserved the Sierra Club Bradley Hut for the nights of the 16th and 17th, and will run a mock search in the area on the 18th. Ski in and spend the night, or meet at the Team garage at 7:00 AM (December 18) or 7:30 at the bottom of Pole Creek.

Slow, yes, but still fast enough to get out of the way,

—Randall Osterhuber



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"It may happen that small differences in the initial conditions produce very great ones in the final phenomena."

—Henri Poincaré

please keep us informed of your correct address!