



SnowLine

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

Recently, someone with a very long ruler measured 19 feet of new snow at Kirkwood. The media immediately grafted this anecdote onto a statement that Reno had broken their 1916 snowfall record, and the headlines came out as *Biggest Tahoe Snow Storm in 89 Years!* (yahoo!) Even some poor, confused local folk seemed to get sucked into the myth. Suddenly, ya know, the 32 inches of snow on the Subaru *did* start to look pretty close to 19 feet. Well, if 60 of us show up Monday night, February 7, at 6:30 PM for the next meeting of Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team, we'll each just have to shovel about 4 inches to get inside Granlibakken's Ski Hut. Bring your grain scoops, your steel blades, your wide-Bertha scrapers. We'll see you there!

Searches

At 9:00 PM on December 29, in the midst of a honkin' snow storm, Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team was dispatched to help locate two missing hikers last reported near China Wall outside of Foresthill.

The couple had apparently been hiking on foot—no skis or snowshoes—and had not returned at the end of the stormy day. The deep, new snows had thwarted the search effort of local snowmobilers.

This was day three of what would prove to be 17 consecutive days of snowfall in the northern Sierra. Already every road leading into, out of, and around the Tahoe basin was a snarl of gridlocked holiday motorists stranded in the blizzard. Nonetheless, Placer County Deputy Sage Bourassa, exercising her considerable authority, gave a vehicle escort to five Nordic Team skiers through 80 miles of tangled traffic all the way from Tahoe City to Foresthill. Arriving in the wee hours, the Team skiers set out into the maelstrom.

About 5000 feet elevation, the area had little (if any) old snow on the ground previous to the current storm. The Team skiers were

therefore blessed with a very special snowpack: 5 feet of new laid over manzanita and buck brush—an attention-getting combination! The lost couple was eventually located early AM by a Placer County snowcat cruising one of the area's snowed-over dirt roads. They were tired and wet but otherwise OK. The Team skiers were escorted by Deputy

28—despite a wide-spread and well publicized weather forecast of many feet of new snow—and were scheduled to return a couple days later. As of the 31st, they had not shown up. Being that they were reported to have sleeping bags, tents, and stoves with them, and the fact that the Tahoe Sierra was in some serious state of snowfall, we decided to wait



Okay, which skis belong to Doug Read? Photograph by Randall Osterhuber

Sage back to the Tahoe Basin.

Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team was next called on New Year's Eve with the report of two overdue backcountry travelers.

A couple of young men from Truckee had skied into the Rifle Peak cabin on December

until the next morning to launch a search.

Following a long, slow, stormy commute from Tahoe City to the netherlands of the Juniper Creek drainage, 13 Team skiers along with Scoop in the Team snowcat did indeed launch, and we began breaking trail through several meters of new snow. It was slow

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All phone numbers area code (530) unless otherwise noted.		

going for man and machine alike. The skiers split into two groups, one heading up toward Murphy Meadow, the other toward the mouse-plagued Rifle Peak cabin.

A couple hours (and not too many miles) into the ordeal, "Nordic 6" suddenly came alive on the radio. Now, since there were only two teams of skiers ("Nordic 2" and "Nordic 3"), we were all a little surprised to hear from Nordic 6. Nordic 6 turned out to be two friends of the two missing guys. They had a pretty good idea which route their buddies might take back toward their car (properly buried at the trailhead). In about 45 minutes, Nordic 6 located their straggling friends. Delayed because of all the new snow, and a tad thirsty, they were otherwise OK. Nordic 2 and 3

converged with Nordic 6 and the missing guys within the next ten minutes. All returned to the "command post" which now was graced with a Placer County panel van full of hot food, courtesy of Safeway in Kings Beach.

Footnote: There are many people involved with our searches, a large number of whom remain largely "behind the scene." Leaving for this search early that morning, I found a foot+ of new powder snow blanketing my driveway. That's no big deal, but during the night, the county plow driver had apparently stacked half of my neighborhood's snow in front of my drive in a spectacular, Himalayan burm. Not having budgeted a half hour's shovel time to get out of my house, I decided instead to ram the powdery burm with the rear end of my truck. After two unsuccessful high-speed collisions, I pulled forward readying for a third. Suddenly, a light appeared in my rear-view mirror. My neighbor from across the street was there in his Bobcat and quickly took two giant bites out of the snow pile. Excellent timing, Herb! He tracted on (starting another of his pre-dawn days of pro bono snow removal for all on my street). I breached the burm and was gone.

On January 22, shortly after wrenching on his Bobcat for the umpteenth time, my friend, neighbor, and long-time Tahoe Vista resident Herb James collapsed and died of a heart attack. He was 78.

• It was barely dinner time on January 21 when the Nordic Team was called again: this time to look for a lost 30-year-old snowshoer (from the Bay Area) who had dialed 911 from his cell phone. He was somewhere in the maze of Page Meadows. Miraculously, Page Meadows was above the pea-soup fog that had been laying over Lake Tahoe for better than a week.

The lost guy's phone had a fully charged battery, so Mike Kennett (the Nordic Team's coordinator for this search) et al kept him talking while Brian York cruised the Page meadowlets on his snowmobile. The lost guy was able to hear Brian's machine, call back to

Mikey, who then radioed Brian. Brian located him in short order.

These were Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team's second, third, and fourth searches of the season.

Team Trainings

Please call each training organizer and let them know to expect you. Remember: a current OES card is required to participate on any Team training. Contact a Team member for more information.

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

January 29: A combined skier and snowmobiler training today on Martis Peak. Ray O'Brien (581-4358) is organizing this. Meet at the garage at 7:30 AM or at the Martis Peak trailhead at 8:00.

February 5: Joe Pace (583-1806) will lead a ski tour somewhere above the West Shore today. Call for more info. Meet at the garage at 7:30 AM.

February 10: There will be a search coordinator's pow-wow tonight, 6:30 PM at the USGS office in Carnelian Bay. Steve Twomey (525-7280) is the contact.

February 13: A brief tour around Sugar Bowl will be followed by a ski off the backside into the Onion Creek drainage. Tony Bochen (426-3619) is the contact. Meet at the Team garage at 7:15 AM or at Sugar Bowl at 8:00.

February 17: Steve Reynaud (587-4723) will lead a ski tour to Signal Peak (above Cisco Grove). Meet at the garage at 7:30 AM, or in front of the coffee shop on the south side of the Albertsons/Longs Drug store parking lot in Truckee at 8:00.

February 27: Today, a ski tour of Mt. Tallac. Meet at the Team garage at 7:30 AM. Paul Cushing (581-4354) will lead this one.

Realizing, after the latest inversion, what living in Del Norte County must be like,
—Randall Osterhuber

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