



# SnowLine

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

**A**t the next meeting of Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team—Monday night, **December 5, 6:30 PM** at Granlibakken's Ski Hut—Team members Colleen Connors Pace and Joe Pace will present a slide show of their recent adventures boating down the Colorado River. If it already seems too long since you engaged in warm-weather pursuits, drag your fleece-bundled self to the Ski Hut and prepare to live vicariously through Colleen and Joe's stories and images. In addition to white-water boating, the Team will discuss other frolicsome activities, such as The 30th Great Ski Race, search and rescue training opportunities, edge-of-your-seat-exciting Team committee reports (not to be missed), and all other flavor of stuff that gets—and keeps—the Nordic Team at the ready. As always, my month won't be complete until I see your attractive (if not weathered) mug at the Ski Hut: **December 5!**

## January '06

Next month is a busy one for Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team, and, as an all-volunteer group, everyone's help is needed to make the upcoming Team projects a success.

January is Education Committee month. The Nordic Team will once again present winter awareness hands-on programs to Truckee and North Tahoe fourth-graders. Education Committee chair Jim Coffey says he needs about 40 volunteers to handle all the area's spirited school kids. Jim will be laying low recovering from surgery [the Team wishes you all the best and a speedy recovery, Jim!], but in his absence Pam Le Francois (546-7393) and Marty Daniels Schomaker (583-2929) will be coordinating the individual school programs. Please contact Pam or Marty and volunteer your valuable and much-appreciated time.

Team director and paramedic-in-training Sarah Lagano (775-745-

7037) is spearheading a two-day winter backcountry training workshop for California and Nevada search and rescue teams. The workshop is geared specifically toward active in-the-field searchers. Hosted by Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team, the workshop will be held **January 28 and 29**, and will consist of both classroom and field time and cover the many aspects of backcountry search and rescue. Activities are scheduled for all day Saturday, Saturday night, and all day Sunday, so many bodies are needed to plan, coordinate, and successfully execute all the different clinics. Please contact Sarah and help out with this important event. More information and registration forms can be found at <http://www.tahonordicsar.com/Education/WBT.html>.

## It Starts

The first U.S. avalanche fatality of Winter 2006 occurred on November 5, near Berthoud Pass, Colorado.

Unlike the Sierra, parts of the Colorado Rockies have had substantial early-season snowpacks (upwards of 1.5 m) this year, part of which failed under the forces of a local snowboarder.

Though each individual avalanche accident is worth examining for its particular subtleties, within the greater scope of avalanche accidents one starts to recognize patterns of chain of events that lead, inevitably, to disaster. The vast majority of avalanche accidents are a result of a common set of mistakes made over and over again, year after year, decade after decade. The November 5 accident was no exception. The obvious question is *Why?*

The detailed answer continues to be elusive, but can be broadly categorized into one of two domains: Either the individual(s) 1.) did not possess the skills to recognize avalanche terrain and potentially unstable snow, or 2.) they did recognize the hazard, but chose, for some reason, to ignore it. Both scenarios are particularly bothersome.

A backcountry skier ignorant of avalanche safety who ventures onto steep snow and gets away with it comes home with either renewed confidence or renewed humility, depending on how fat the margin of "getting away with it" was. Many of us have been there. Surviving close calls is an education in itself, hopefully prompting further investigation and formal education. The solution to the undereducated skier? Education.

There is, however, a large demographic of dead, avalanched skiers who are described by their survivors as being, to a greater or lesser degree, "avalanche aware," or "avalanche



*Canyoneering is kind of like fun—only in 48-degree pooh water. After executing the second of many "floating disconnect" rappels, Team President Russ Viehmann exits a skanky pool deep within the narrows of Pine Creek, Zion National Park, Utah, October 31, 2005.*

*Photograph by Randall Osterhuber*



educated." Why these skiers made poor decisions is harder to answer.

It's tricky understanding how group dynamics, peer pressure, ego, and enigmatic sensations like "intuition," and "gut-feelings" affect decision-making processes among the avalanche educated. One researcher has suggested that in some instances all that's needed to override a ski group's avalanche sensibility is the presence of a single woman in a party comprised otherwise of men. It takes no great leap of faith to imagine that. The enchanted feeling of invincibility, or the illusion of some kind of backcountry cachet, or just plain old testosterone-juiced chest thumping, can suddenly occupy a dominant—and dangerous—place in the avalanche forecast.

Forecasting snow stability in the backcountry will never be completely transparent. We're not machines. We're breathing, sweating, dynamic animals traveling over and through a medium of almost infinite complexity. Unlike machines, we do have the ability to step back and look at ourselves, our group, and our situation. It's only from this place can we clearly see the objective pieces of the avalanche puzzle that need assembling. Making the best decisions we can is our greatest defense against tragedy.

## Team Training

If you haven't already done so, please contact a Tahoe Nordic Search and Rescue Team board member about how to obtain an OES card from the Placer County Sheriff's Office. A current OES card is required to participate in any Team training or rescue. Among other things, it promises both medical and equipment insurance during official, Team sanctioned functions.

As of this writing, the schedule for the December trainings is somewhat provisional; updates will be available at the Team meeting December 5, on-line at [tahoenordicsar.com](http://tahoenordicsar.com), or from the training organizers themselves. It's

always a good idea to call ahead. Also as of this writing, there is but little skiable snow within the Tahoe Basin. But, that could change faster than the shelf life of sushi. Keep in touch.

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

**November 29:** Brian York (583-0465) will be hosting a "technology night" at the Squaw Valley Fire Station. We'll get goin' with the Team's GPS units and their on-again off-again marriage to the TOPO! software program. If you have a laptop and/or a GPS receiver, bring them. The Team's hardware and software will be in attendance. Meet at the fire station at 6:30 PM.

**December 3:** Russ Viehmann (525-6978) will lead a ski of Donner Summit's Castle Peak. We'll be leaving the Team garage at 7:30 AM and will be joining any stragglers for a quick caffeine mainline at Wild Cherries Coffee House in Truckee at 8:00.

**December 11:** An orientation in- and out-of-bounds at Alpine Meadows. Our group will be departing the garage at 8:00 AM and meeting outside the patrol building at Alpine at 8:30. Sarah Barrett (386-2751) is the contact.

**December 16-18:** Make a weekend of it. Someone (maybe Doug Read (583-6381)) will be coordinating a couple days and nights at the Sierra Club's Bradley Hut up in the Pole Creek watershed. If our reservations for the hut come through, you could spend a night or two and a day or two sleeping, skiing, sleeping, and skiing. There'll be training exercises, too. Get the beta on this weekend—before you head out—from someone in the know.

Basking in the inevitability of snowfall,

—Randall Osterhuber



## Team Officers

President	Russ Viehmann	525-6978
Vice President	Brian York	583-0465
Treasurer	Scott Schroeffer	546-2809
Secretary	Sue Duerksen	412-3836
Board Members	Mark Johnson	583-1308
	Sarah Lagano	775-745-7037
Directors-at-large	Bernie Mellor	546-2238
	Dirk Schoonmaker	583-2929
	Randall Osterhuber	546-4491
	Joe Pace	583-1806
	Doug Read	583-6381
	Gerald Rockwell	583-5376
	Steve Twomey	525-7280

## Committee Chairs

Cuisine	Debra Schroeffer	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
Newsletter	Randall Osterhuber	546-4491
Snowcats	Scoop Remenih	583-1684
Snowmobiles	Ray O'Brien	581-4358
Technology	Gerald Rockwell	583-5376
Training	Paul Honeywell	546-8609
	Mike Kennett	581-2101
	Bernie Mellor	546-2238
Truck	Peter York	583-0465
Website	Mark Johnson	583-1308
All phone numbers area code (530) unless otherwise noted.		

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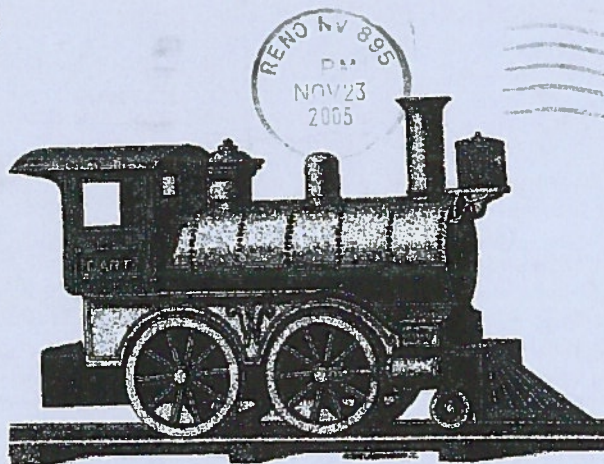
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please keep us informed of your correct address!