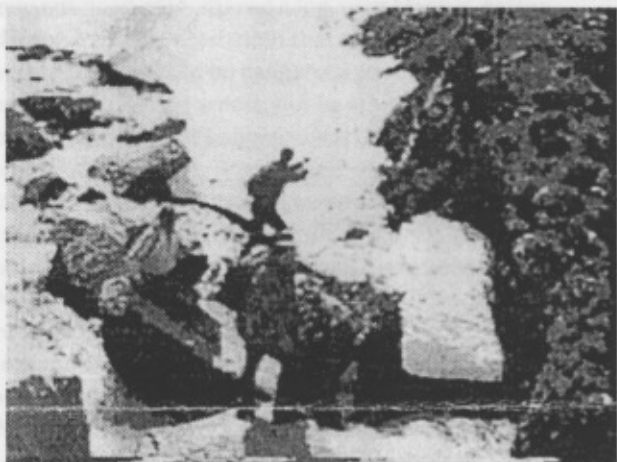


RLH  
4/95

# MUGELNOOS

APRIL 18, 1995

Number 718



*Nancy supervising morning stream crossing.*



*Skier jumping cornice into chute on Leavitt (extreme telephoto).*

## Sonora Pass

On May 14, 1994, some SMS members and others drove from Mammoth to Sonora Pass, where we met Pete Yamagata and Katy and Steve Bachmann from Pinecrest. Those who left from Mammoth were Walt Boge, Joe McCoy, Burr Hartmann, Don Pies, Nancy Gordon, and Owen Maloy.

All sorts of people, including Mammoth alpine and telemark instructors, were getting out of cars with various kinds of skis. We drove down the steep hill in the western side, crossed the raging creek, and skied up Blue Canyon through beautiful snowy bowls with a stream opening up in the meadow. We had lunch on a pile of rocks below the minor peak just NW of Leavitt Peak. We fended off chipmunks trying to steal our lunch (Katy said, "Of course he's trying to steal the chips; he's a chipmunk!"). We watched some skiers who had found killer chutes to ski; being new to the area, we did not know the chutes existed, but next time we will try them.

After lunch we took a couple of runs down the easy intermediate slope we had climbed. This was pure heaven; perfect corn, and a choice of big sweeping turns or shorter turns through rocks on a steeper (but gooier) slope. Soon we had to leave, and we somehow found that we had to ski a steep chute, having gone above the easy path we took in. One person on his first backcountry trip experienced his first chute panic (haven't we all!); for the rest of us it was showoff time.

Cont. page 3

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EDITOR ANDY FRIED  
 MUGELPRINTER ANDY FRIED  
 MUGELMAILER PAT HOLLEMAN

**NEXT MEETING**

MAY 16, 1995 7:30 PM GRIFFITH PARK RANGER STATION AUDITORIUM 4730 CRYSTAL SPRINGS DRIVE, LOS ANGELES, CA.

**NEXT ISSUE: MAY 16, 1995**

ISSUE DEADLINE MAY 10, 1995 ALL PHOTOS, SLIDES, AND ARTICLES SENT TO: ANDY FRIED, MUGELNOOS EDITOR, c/o TEC GROUP, 10727 WHITE OAK AVE. SUITE # 205, GRANADA HILLS, CA 91344. 3 1/2" OR 5 1/4 " DISKS (IBM) OR AT 71237.1270@COMPUSERVE.COM. IF YOU WISH TO HAVE PHOTOS RETURNED AFTER PUBLICATION INCLUDE A SELF ADDRESSED STAMPED ENVELOPE. WE ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR LOST PHOTOS.

**UPCOMING TRIPS:**

Date	Location	Leaders / Program
April 22-23	Day Tours Mammoth Lakes	P. Harris, N. Gordon
April 29-30	Pear Lake Snow Camp	M. Goebel, G. Holleman
May 5-6	Rock Creek, Treasure Lake	K. Deemer, R. Stenzel
May 13-14	Ski Mountaineers Pk	G. Hollman, P. Harris
May 27-29	Mt. Ritter/Banner Ski Camp	R. Stenzel, K. Deemer

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**Announcement**

Looking for experienced backcountry guides- preferably **german speaking**-for ski and backpacking trips in CA, WY, CO, UT. Please contact Susanne Lorenz at (303) 278-6328

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- Walt Boge  
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Van Nuys 91401  
818 781-4576
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**Record Snow in Sierras**

**APRIL 1 SNOW SURVEY RESULTS**

Rush Creek Drainage	176% of normal
Mammoth Lakes area	195% of normal
Rock Creek Area	180% of normal
Big Pine Creek Area	176% of normal
Cottonwood Area	188% of normal

Mono lake went up 1 foot in March and is expected to rise about about 3 more feet by year end,



Pretty soon we encountered a log, with Nancy Gordon sitting on it. She advised us, in that severe SPS-leader way, that the stream would be dangerous to cross. Peter dismissed the risk and splashed across, but he is an experienced mountaineer; Nancy's judgment was undoubtedly best for a mixed group. Anybody who slipped where we had crossed would be history. We carried our skis a half-mile or so to a snow bridge. Uphill through brush, of course; ski mountaineering is good for the soul, if you have one left.

I took a little video camera on this trip to capture the action. The pictures with this article were downloaded to a Macintosh through a video capture board, made into stills, then sent to the 'Noos via Compuserve with a Mac to PC translation. Please excuse the quality; I'm still learning. What looks pretty good in color on a TV screen looks lousy in grayscale.

The week before I had been hit by an out-of-control hit-and-run snowboarder just below the West Bowl at Mammoth. I thought I had been badly bruised; it didn't hurt much. After this trip something seemed to be clunking around, like a failing transmission that makes noise when you shift. The doctor said I had a broken rib, and shut me down for a month. Rats.

Owen Maloy



## New Gear for 1995-1996

By Al Tapia

Asolo will be coming out with two plastic 3-pin Tele boots next winter. The Tele Pro and Tele Breeze replace the Extreme Racer and Extreme Plus. The Extreme and Snowfield leather boots return unchanged except for their unique lace pulley system.

The Asolo plastic boots look like a cross between a downhill and inline skate boot. This is no surprise since the parent company of Asolo also owns Nordica and Rollerblades. The Tele Pro has an Alpine height and three buckle straps. The Tele Breeze is lower cut using laces with miniature pulleys in place of d-rings across the instep area.

Asolo is using a very unique double hinge system on the plastic boots. The sole of the boot has an actual hinge. The top of the boot has fabric where the boot flexes behind the toes. This system will avoid the flex problems Scarpa has had with their Terminators.

Prices are \$350 and \$290 for the new plastic boots and will be available in Monopoint sizes.

The Tua Wilderness is renamed Grand Neige. The ski will be wider and has an added fiberglass layer making it more durable. The price will be reduced by \$25. The Montet MX will see a price increase of \$50 to \$450. The Cirque is going cap and will be quicker, snappier and is designed for use with medium weight Tele boots. The Excaltor will also be capped and the Escape S will have more camber.

Roteffella is working on a DIN certified release binding.

Last month I saw a guy snowboarding on an articulated snowboard. The board has a front and rear half which pivot in opposite directions allowing a variable sidecut. The board should go into production soon after testing.

Several snowboard step-in bindings for soft boots will be available next winter.

## Certified Ski Instructors

By Al Tapia

Congratulation to Nancy Gordon and Jim Valensi along with 5 other skiers for passing their Level I Nordic Downhill Ski Instructor exam from the Professional Ski Instructors of America (PSIA). Nancy and Jim completed their pre-exam and exam in Southern California's first Level I exam hosted by Bear Mountain. The exam tests candidates for competency in teaching, technical, and ski skills.

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### SCHEDULE SUBSCRIPTIONS

Due to rising costs, the Angeles Chapter, beginning with the next Schedule of Activities (#269), is instituting a subscription charge. The Schedule has long been one of the benefits most valued by Angeles Chapter members. It is integral to the activities of our regional groups, hiking and mountaineering sections, committees, and conservation subcommittees. The Chapter's Executive Committee is proud of this tradition and sincerely believes it will continue. A survey, conducted by members of the Chapter, indicates that a \$9 yearly subscription (3 issues) would be a reasonable charge. This will provide the Chapter with enough revenue to continue its member publications. We thank all of you for your past involvement in Chapter activities and appreciate your willingness to continue to support the Schedule of Activities.

*Angeles Chapter Executive Committee*

### NEW SIERRA CLUB MEMBERS

This Schedule of Activities contains much information about your Chapter and how to get involved in its activities. The front portion of this Schedule describes regional groups, issue committees and task forces, activity sections and other entities. The main body of the Schedule contains chronological listings of outings, meetings, and other activities. Each entry lists the dates and times, leaders, and a brief description of the event. On almost any weekday, evening or weekend throughout the year, you will find a range of Sierra Club activities in which to participate: Start with the monthly meeting of your interest. Each new member is mailed the current copy of the Schedule free.

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### MEMBERS OF OTHER SIERRA CLUB CHAPTERS

You, too, may receive 3 issues of the Schedule through the mail. Fill out the form above and mail it in with \$18.

## Avalanche Course, March 25-26, 1995

Leaders: Nancy Gordon, Howard Schultz, and Paul Harris

Avalanche Expert: Norm Wilson

The SMS avalanche course conducted at Sherwin Bowl near Mammoth Lakes was designed for ski tourers who use the backcountry away from trails and flat terrain.

We met at 7:30 AM in the parking lot of the Mammoth Ranger Station. The group signed in and caravanned to Sierra Meadows, a cross-country ski ranch at the base of Sherwin Bowl which was gracious enough to let us use their parking lot for our cars over the weekend. We gathered our gear, put skins on our skis, and assembled for Norm Wilson's introduction to the avalanche course and an overview of the Sherwin Bowl. Norm and Howard led the skipack into base camp on a sheltered slope overlooking Mammoth Lakes. For some participants, this was their first snowcamp.

After setting up camp, we skied to a bench where Norm discussed avalanche safety topics. Soon we got down to the nitty gritty of beacon searches. After tramping around a large area, a beacon was buried in this simulated avalanche, and Norm skillfully demonstrated the correct and efficient procedure for locating a buried beacon. Breaking up into two groups, everyone got an opportunity to practice. The more enterprising group attempted to locate two buried beacons, which is much more difficult. It reinforced the "safe skiing" rule about skiing one at a time on a slope that is questionable.

The two days were filled with information about evaluating avalanche hazards:

- consider the amount of snow and the intensity of snowfall
- consider changes due to temperature differences (depth hoar, recrystallization, metamorphism)
- consider slope angle (anything over 30 is suspect)
- consider making a snowpack analysis
- perform a Rutschblock test when in doubt

Norm doesn't give much credence to the shovel shear test and feels the Rutschblock test is the most reliable snowpit test. The object is to detect weak layers and assess their strength. After the snowpit is dug, you can use a finger or a credit card running down through the snowpack to locate the various layers. Dedicated avalanche observers, such as Norm Wilson, would include temperature, density and grain texture analysis of each layer. But I don't feel the need to get that technical in analyzing avalanche hazard. I primarily want to know what will happen on that suspect slope when the weight of a skier is on it, and the Rutschblock test provides this information.

We dug a pit more than 2 meters deep and hit a slushy layer that indicated it had rained in the Sherwin Bowl at our site, followed by heavy snow fall. Although Norm felt we were not at risk, I peered uphill noting the heavily loaded steep slope above us and was glad to be leaving that area and returning to camp!

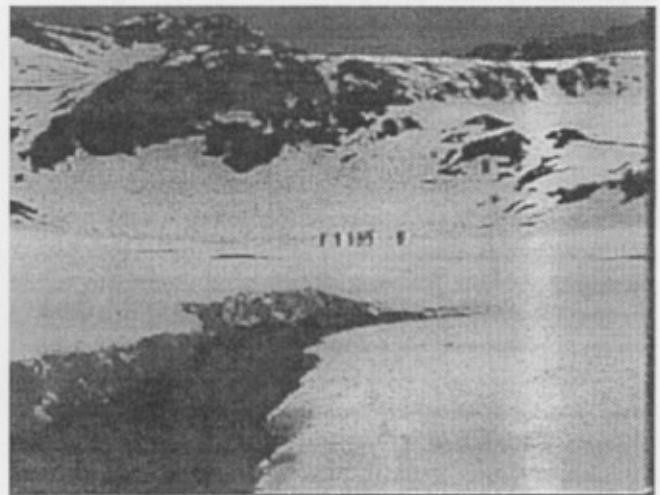
Since most victims trigger avalanches themselves and since chances of survival are pretty slim after being buried an hour (sometimes this is as short as 5 minutes!), it is important to evaluate the risks and to know how to proceed in a rescue, which Norm covered on Sunday. He showed us how to organize a rescue, do a hasty search, and proceed with a probe line (for a victim without a rescue beacon). Other important field exercises we practiced during the weekend were measuring slope angle, looking at tree growth and lean, looking for decapitated trees and for signs of flagging (trees with no limbs on the uphill side), and observing snow deposition and erosion.

The most important criteria for avoiding avalanche danger is being observant. Look for signs of previous avalanches, recognize avalanche terrain and stick to the high ground when route-finding, note temperature changes, amount of snowfall, and the wind direction and speed. Beside avoiding avalanche terrain, precautions most ski mountaineers take are: carrying beacons, probes, and shovels, crossing one at a time in a suspect zone, removing ski-pole wrist straps, using an avalanche cord, and selecting an escape route. Avalanche hazard is one very good reason to use releasable bindings.

We learned a lot. And guess what! The skiing was wonderful, too!

Safe skiing!

-Nancy Gordon



## Wyoming Spring ... In the Heart of the Forest.

It's the first day of spring. Today the wind is strong. The forest is more vocal as it howls and creaks its primal voice. But its the intermittent deafening silence that gets your attention. Stepping out of your shelter, the air is creamy. Families of trees now stand alone, as though hiding from the storm. A million ducks appear to be shedding their feathers. Your face feels the cold melting snow and the air bites. In moments you are wearing a coat of down yourself. The ground is soft under this new blanket. It is deep. Each step takes you to your knees, as though moving on a sponge. Each step takes your breathe away. You can only see a white wall ahead as if you were wrapped in a cocoon. The world now seems small. You feel a calmness. You feel like a child of wonderment.

You forget much about the world beyond your creamy view until days later when it all suddenly stops. From the thick forest floor you see the skeletons of trees supporting enormous billowy sculptures of snow. They sparkle and seem animated. As the sun warms the day, the heavy snows cascade from their arms in sparkling crescendoes. The forest family is alive and playful again. Peering up the towering elephant legs you see the pointed heads of the trees revealing a teal blue sky. Tall families leaning and dancing gracefully in the wind. The wind sings as it plays in the trees. Echoes of distant hawks pierce the swells of wind with their eerie screech. You can't resist to move out across the snowy blanket. At your feet the morning silver glitter transforms into radiant rainbows of diamonds.

Where are the animals? The naked Aspens give away their secret, as the branches crackle under their heavy weight. Listen, there's more than one. Curiosity to see, draws you to experience a phenomenon of disbelief. The secret games of a winter sun. In awe, you realize the great beast is the snow itself, gently stepping across the crisp aspen branches as it falls in the warmth. The wind moves across your face and the trees applaud crackling louder and faster at your astonishment.

Winter made its grand farewell. Today the breath of air is warm on your face, the heat of the sun penetrates deep into your soul, and you just know winter has passed. The trees stand free and light, bouncing in the breeze. As you move through the brilliance of the new fresh forest you can smell the earth. The trees weep with relief at the passing of winter and sprinkle you with their tears. The animals will come now. You wonder if the humps you ski across are sleeping bears soon to awaken.

(Journal exerpts while living two months in the Bridger-Teton National Forest, 1995)

Marcia Male

## No matter the size, avalanches are deadly

WENATCHEE, Wash.

It could happen at virtually any ski area in the West.

A fatal avalanche.

It happened a few weeks ago at the Mission Ridge Ski Area, near Wenatchee. About 8 inches of snow fell one night, and the next morning - before dawn - Pro Ski patrollers began the essential job of making the area safe for skiers arriving in a few hours.

Almost two hours before sunrise, the top of the mountain was dark. Fog blew across the ridge. At times, the early morning was clear; at times, visibility dropped to yards in the blowing clouds. Steve Burchett, 26, a Pro Ski patrolman in his fourth season, and his partner, Twin Falls native Scott Eisen, began their assigned snow control route. Burchett's route, one that he'd been doing for years, was an "in-bounds" bowl at that required a 30-minute hike from the lift.

The temperature rose rapidly, and was above freezing by time the two men arrived at the top of the bowl. They threw explosives into the snow, but it did not slide. Then they skied into the bowl to finish their chore. One at a time, they criss-crossed the bowl, slicing the snowfield into small pieces. Both men carried radio transceivers for locating buried avalanche victims, as well as shovels and probe poles. They were prepared for self-rescue, which is exactly what they needed. Burchett was buried by an avalanche. Eisen stayed cool, radioed for help, and began hunting for his partner's buried radio transceiver. He found Burchett, dug him out, and began cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

In the half light of early morning, a second avalanche swept down the hill, burying both men. Eisen freed himself and, with the aid of others who'd arrived at the scene, found Burchett again and resumed CPR. They loaded the victim into a sled and skied him to the bottom of the hill, where an ambulance was waiting.

Burchett was taken to a nearby hospital, but he never regained consciousness and died the next morning.

By alpine standards, the avalanche that killed him wasn't very impressive - only about 300 feet across with a fracture depth of 18 to 24 inches. The snow slid only 300 feet down the slope.



Avalanch cont.

Size isn't really important. In Montezuma Basin, near Breckenridge, Colo., a slide only 6 feet across and 10 feet long once killed a cross country skier kneeling for a drink in the creek. It was more of a slough, than an avalanche.

What should we learn from these tragedies? Mountain snowpacks are unpredictable, even for professionals. A rule of thumb is that there are no rules of thumb.

If you plan to ski out of bounds, or in the back country, educate yourself about avalanches. Attend the next avalanche course that's offered in your area. Borrow a couple of transceivers and practice finding one that's hidden. Play hide and seek with them. Use 'em and be used to 'em. But remember, transceivers, probe poles and shovels are simply rescue tools; they will not prevent an avalanche. Rescue skills

and equipment are essential, but they are not enough to suspend the laws of nature. Steve Burchett would've been the first to tell you that. He knew more about snow, skiing, and the mountains than most of us ever will - and he died in an avalanche. We, the living, owe it to ourselves to learn about avalanches, and stay out of them. We also owe it to Steve, lest we fail to learn from his death.


Steve Burchett was a brother of a special sort. He lived to make skiing safe for thousands of people who visit Mission Ridge - thousands of people he never knew.

Sometime this winter, when you're alone on the hill, stop for a moment and think about a good man who is gone. Take a couple of deep breaths, look at the beckoning snow, and say, "These turns are for you, Steve."

T. Keith Liggett is a full-time skier and part-time homebuilder. He lives in Portland, Ore.

Cont. page 3

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**Todd Yuen / Jeff Reeb**

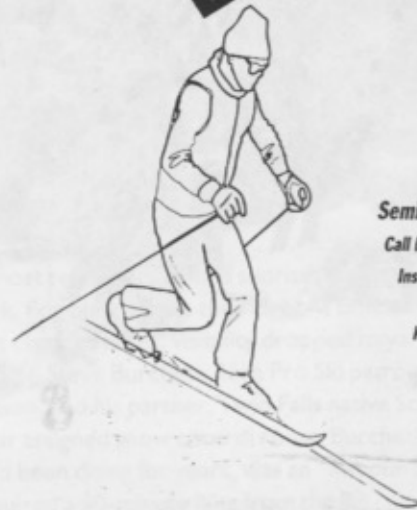
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Pat Holleman  
1638 6th St.  
Manhattan Beach, Ca 90266

Richard L. Henke  
652 Marine Ave.  
Manhattan Beach, CA 90266  
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