

NORTHFIELD MOUNTAIN NORDIC SKI PATROL



Volume 29

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PERFECT SNOW

by Tom Deam

The winter morning in early February of 1975 started out like any other in Northern Norway: cold, dark, and wondering if my boots were frozen. Eight of us occupied the tent, five US Sailors and three British Royal Marines. The reason for being in a tent during the winter, 200 miles above the Arctic Circle and ten clicks west of the Swedish border? We were all participating in the Royal Marine's Arctic Survival and Warfare Course. Survival seemed to be the key word.

Today was the day we would ditch the tent and it's associated polk. The polk is used to carry, by manual effort on skis, equipment used by a large group. After a morning ski, sans packs and weapons, a trip to the forested area would let us learn the methods of building a hasty lean-to. Of course, the group would break in half by nationality.

At the moment, I was hoping my bladder would hold a few more ounces. Yes, the tent was relatively warm but not compared to my sleeping bag. Ok, last drop, up and out. Putting waterproof covers over my Duvet Socks I left the tent. It was cold! And dark. A light would have helped, but the right path was chosen. Steam rose from my stream, puddle, and breath.

Being first up and out, I needed to check the skis, poles, and weapons caches. Only a light eight-inch dusting fell last night, so cleaning the covers off was easy. I paid special attention to my own equipment.

Back into the tent; others were stirring, or up and at it. Shaving and washing had been accomplished prior to wrapping into the sleeping bag last night. This helps skin oils replenish overnight and keeps chapped skin at bay. Now all efforts were on food and warm drinks. Hot water prepped last night let me get a quick mug of coffee, condensed milk, and hot chocolate. Warmth, sweetness, caffeine. What could be better?

Coffee, meal, and greeting grunts over, we packed and stowed the tent on the polk along with other unneeded items. The eight of us met up with the other two tent occupants and discussed the day's beginnings. Being Yanks, sailors at that, we were looked at with amusement by the other Royal Marines. We'd see how today might change their outlook.

Sergeant Montgomery, a Royal Marine Arctic Warfare and Survival Leader, mustered us and gave *one* command, "Follow me." Of moderate size and stature, he had a reputation as a hard taskmaster. He wanted the best you could give and expected you to give it. We had yet to hear him say more than a few words, yet understood what he wanted completely. The Royal Marines in the course tended to run when he approached, or shrink when his gaze turned their way. As he was our tour guide, we followed. Quickly.

Oh yes, our skis. They were wide, shallow-cambered wood slats with cable bindings. The NATO standard. *(continued on page two)*

MOUNTAIN MUSINGS

by Bill Gabriel

It has been a busy summer here at the mountain, and the month of September gives us a bit of time to regroup and make a renewed push toward the winter season. The backhoe is currently scraping away outside the yurt preparing the groundwork for a new deck. The footings should be in place by next week with actual building taking place the week after, so it won't quite be ready for the refresher, but it should be in place for the first snow (any guesses???) We have a new groomer this year. Chrissy D'Amour will be grooming with the cats and the snowmobiles, so watch for her smiling face if you're in early.

On a sad note, Alex Friedman passed away quite unexpectedly this year. For the past eighteen years, Alex was the boat captain in the summer and a ski shop cashier/instructor in the winter. His easygoing presence will be missed.

I'm still working on predictions for the winter. Using a scientific process of Magic Eight-Balls, I've obtained several responses, and It seems that "All signs point to yes." The interpretation of the answers and the questions asked will be in the spring Rattlebone.

CAPTIVATING CAPTION

Time to put your thinking and punny caps on again. Send your best patrol-related captions for this picture to Joannie Duris by December 15th: jvduris@charter.net. The best (or worst) will be published in the next issue.



WWW.NMNSP.ORG

Don't forget to check our website for the latest patrol news and dates of upcoming courses and events.

If you don't remember the user name and password for entering the 'patrol room', contact Bill Schweikert at: webmaster@nmnsp.org

CHOCOLATE POT CHAT

by Tom Deam

That time of year once again! Ensure your Patrol Pack has no lozenges, gum, or other sticky substance from last season and is stocked. Refresher is here!

We will be back at our usual place, the Mountain, for the OEC portion on October 20th. It kicks off with registration and the ever-present donuts and coffee at 7:30 am, REAL TIME. Saturday's end time will be about 4:00 pm NORDIC Patrol time. Please try and be on time as there is a lot to cover. Bring a lunch!!

Sunday the 21st is CPR/FPR recert starting at 8:00am. Pocket masks must accompany you both days as they will be used. This year Kirby Lecy and Dee Bulman from the Athol Area YMCA will be conducting CPR Recert. All they want is a slice of pizza for their efforts. Between CPR and an outdoor adventure, pizza will be provided for lunch on Sunday.

A new but sensible plan this coming season is to have an actual on-the-snow Nordic training portion. Of course, it will not be October 21st. Ski skills and other Nordic skills appropriate to our area will be covered at a later date.

Let us not forget what we are: a volunteer group supporting Northfield Mountain in aiding the skiing public and providing first aid assistance when needed. If the Patrol's support dwindles I imagine the Mountain's support will likewise "dwindle".

The Chocolate Pot is a good gathering spot during the season. It could be an aid station if manned by the patrol members. Just a thought for those who find too many aches and pains from falling, I mean skiing. It is a way to stay involved and if rotated could give a bit of rest from the trails. Just keep the chocolate hot, fire going, and leave the candy alone.

Two of our members have let me know that due to work commitments and changing priorities, they will no longer be able to continue. One is very close to my heart; Charlene will not be continuing. Kristin Peterson, who has been with the Patrol for twenty-three years has also decided to bow out. Charlene and Kristin will still be seen on the Mountain, but not in Rust and Blue. Their presence at Refresher and on the hill will be sorely missed. Both spoke to me personally to let me know their decision, which I much appreciate.

Finally, the average age of the patrol is definitely gray and going to white, hair color that is. How can new members be brought in? No, we won't resort to the tried and true methods used in harbors during the 1800s! Please think about it.

The next issue of the Rattlebone will be published in December.

Please get all articles, information, dates, etc.

to Joannie Duris by December 15th.

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DATES TO REMEMBER

October 20th & 21st: FALL REFRESHER, Northfield Mt.

See above for details. Questions? Contact Tom Deam.

Sunday, November 11th, 6pm: PATROL MEETING & CANDIDATES' NIGHT. Recruit a friend to join the patrol. Reorient yourself to patrol procedures. Special training session on UTM.

Sunday, December 9th, 6pm: PATROL MEETING & PARTY.

Training session: safety aspects of handling downed plane incidents. Bring friends and family for our annual holiday celebration after the meeting. Includes a potluck supper and the patrol version of a Yankee present swap. Bring a \$10 gift to join in the wheeling and dealing.

PERFECT SNOW (*continued from page one*) Wax was used the entire length, which made figuring out the kick zone a snap. Ski boots consisted of heavy and rugged Greenlander ski march boots. They were made of leather and had grooves in the heel counter for the bindings. Toes fit into the ski's toe plate. All in all the boots were very comfortable, stable, and warm.

Off we go! We briskly skied across a flat field headed for the base of a forested mountainside. Not a big mountain, but taller than a hill! At first we traversed up the hill to get our systems warmed up. Without a ninety pound pack and sixteen pound chunk of metal on our backs we felt as if we were floating over the snow. The only extra weight consisted of a thermos and day pack for clothing. Breathing became easier and our muscles warmed up. Bring it on Sergeant!

Montgomery picked up the pace and increased the technical aspect of skiing back country. Trees became more numerous and a few gullies had to be crossed at speed. Herringbone and half herringbone, side stepping, kick turns, and plain old running up hill were included in the "Tour".

At one break we noticed the group had thinned out. Faint sounds of labored breathing and heaving could be heard. Oh yes, there was a yard sale behind us! Our group of eight was still intact.

Once again to the chase. Sergeant Montgomery led us by a bit, but that was to be expected. He had challenged us not to race, but to follow closely. So far the challenge had been met.

Finally the mountain crest was reached. At this point I noticed, "Oh yeah, the sun's up!" Bright sun, dry air, and a clear blue Artic sky ensured the view was nothing less than spectacular. A bowl of pure white, dry fluffy snow, ringed by vibrant evergreen trees lay before us. At this moment it was just us nine on earth. Untracked, freshly fallen snow, begged to be skied. All of us just stood there speechless. How often does one experience this? Sergeant Montgomery appeared lost in thought, but just a nod of the head and off we went.

Our ski tips were buried. From the side it must have appeared as if we were floating and had no feet. Looking to my left I noticed how the shin of the skier acted as the prow of a ship, parting and curling the snow as he drove through. Down we went, each making our own mark on the world. The first and only ones to be there at that point in time! Beautiful!

Time moved too quickly and gravity helped quicken it. I slowed, milking each inch, but then it was over. A moment was taken to look back, no words spoken. Father Frank for once was silent! Nine sinuous paths led down to our feet. Each individual, yet all fit together in the moment.

Again, a nod of the head and off we went back to reality. The tour included a few more gullies and precipices, and finished back at the packs. We split into fours, and now weighed down, skied a bit more to the night's bivouac site.

That Friday night, after our gear was cleaned and stowed and clothes washed and drying, we all went to the UK Royal Marines ersatz Sergeants' mess for food and beer. We five Yanks were looked at a bit differently now as only we and our Brit counterparts had completed the "Tour". Yes, we might have been loud, a bit obnoxious, and asked to quiet down once, but that was it.

Sergeant Montgomery, ever serious, was carrying a tray laden with beer when he veered toward our table. The Brits in our party looked ashen and tried to hide under the table. We just looked, well, normal.

The Sergeant arrived, put the tray down, smiled, and said, "You stuck with me." Taking a mug of beer he joined us.

