

February 4, 2011

Update

Just got off the phone with the King Country Sheriff's Department, who wanted a detailed account of how Kevin and I came upon Monika's gear and determined that she may have fallen from the cornice on Red Mountain Tuesday.

The authorities are consistently mystified by how we could have identified her gear so positively to have called her work and friends in Seattle from the summit of Red. This has come up several times; they just don't get it. We SKI together. It's like a cop being able to identify their partner's firearm and shoulder holster or the license plate on a stolen Honda. We're skiers, and as much as we try to deny it, our gear is our signature. When I saw the Dynastar Little Big Troubles with the purple Ascensions, the Grivel Evo axe with hammer, and red Arc'teryx pack I knew right away. When I lifted the pack and revealed the silver Giro full-face helmet there was no question. Oh shit, that's Monika's stuff.

In a way I suppose it's good that we happened to be on Red the next day; the Sheriff said no one seemed to have any idea where she was skiing, though with her car parked at Summit West it would have been a natural progression to search Kendall, Red and Lundin. For the moment, the search is still on hold due to the nasty weather and avy danger, though if the weather clears enough they have plans to take crews and dogs in by helicopter rather than send ground crews. Meanwhile, in the city, the news outlets have begun identifying Monika by name and a huge outpouring of love and support has sprung up on the most appropriate spot, Turns-All-Year.com.

Greg Ireton's come up with an idea for a tribute to Monika for those participating in Vertfest next week - strap a stuffed kitty on your pack for the race. I'll be down at Goodwill looking for one that weighs less than 500 grams.



The news media are all using this photo without my permission, so I may as well use it too. Paradise, MRNP, October 30, 2005

February 5, 2011

Rest In Pow

I got a voice mail this afternoon from Jan Kordel of the Alpental Pro Patrol, who had gone to the north side of Red Mountain early this morning with the Alpental BARK (Backcountry Avalanche Rescue K9) team. He said that through a combination of good planning and plain luck, they were successful in recovering Monika Johnson's body buried in slide debris in the search zone. A volunteer search party composed of several local guides and skier friends of Monika was kept on hold this morning, as the BARK team feared extra human presence in the zone would possibly confuse the dogs, but Ryan and Oyvind were included in the BARK group.

I met Monika in the spring of 2005. She was an instructor in the Mountaineer's Glacier Travel for Skiers and Snowboarders class, and classroom sessions were conducted in the magnificent former Art Deco Mountaineers Building at the foot of Queen Anne Hill. It was early in the course, and one of the students was having no luck at all tying a Mnter Hitch, a foundation of both belaying and rappelling techniques. After about the fourth unsuccessful attempt, Monika and I looked at each other and a stream of nonverbal communication passed between us. "Oh. My. God."

We chatted a bit about light skis and Dynafit bindings, as skiers are wont to do, at subsequent class sessions, but it was on the class field trip on Mt. Rainier's Nisqually Glacier that I began to find out what she was all about. After the Saturday session of self-arrest practice, pulley system practice, and anchor building most of the students and instructors were pretty tired, but I headed out for a ski run or two and was promptly joined by Monika, who proceeded to kick my butt skinning up the hill and matched me going down. Yikes, who was this girl?

In later years we both acted as instructors in the glacier travel class, and skied together periodically. Once she and Oyvind Henningsen surprised us at about 1:00 AM in our bivy at 10,000 feet on Rainier, clanking into camp with their headlamps on, ready to ski the Fuhrer Finger in a few hours. "Hi guys, mind if we join you?" Over the years it became apparent that not only did she possess the heart and lungs of a world-class endurance athlete, she never got grumpy or ill-tempered when things got tough. I remember skinning through blinding wind and snow somewhere between Pan Point and Camp Muir, with her smiling and trying to convince me that it really wasn't that bad. Monika was happy to work twice as hard, break trail all day long, and carry the rope and extra water in her pack, as long as it was uphill. Hiking downhill was another story; her knees were a

source of pain on the descent, and she would ask you to take the heavy stuff so she could walk down backward.

For the past three years I had worked on Tuesdays, which were Monika's day off from her work as a physical therapist, but this year I had them free and was looking forward to skiing with her more. We talked about shared interests on a tour three weeks ago - bikes, ski gear, dental implants - Monika suffered a serious bike accident due to a fork collapse a while ago and needed a bunch of implants, while I had recently had molars # 31 and # 18 done; we both finished our treatments at about the same time. A couple of times she tried to convince me to join her crew for impromptu ice hockey at the frozen-over Arboretum, but having neither skated nor played hockey in my youth I opted out. If the positions had been reversed, I have a feeling Monika would have gone and simply learned to skate on the spot. More recently we were discussing buying some mohair Pomoca skins online from Sport Amplatz in Italy . . .

Anyone who's met or skied with Monika will miss her infectious enthusiasm at simply being in the mountains and sliding on snow; my condolences especially go out to her SO Ryan Lurie and Oyvind Henningsen, who seemed to ski with her more than anyone. If the mental image of a lanky girl with a full-face helmet on her pack disappearing up the skintrack gives you the extra energy to get to the top of a mountain sometime this winter or next or the one after that, she isn't gone. Breathe deeper, take your cadence up a notch, and maybe even take another turn at breaking trail. Yuki Girl would want it that way.



Monika Johnson, Queen of the Pacific Northwest Backcountry. 1970-2011

February 13, 2011

Vertfest 2011

It's done and over, except for a few more post-race beers.

Vertfest 2011, the rando race portion, is in the books. A day that looked pretty marginal on the DOT webcams at 6:00 AM - driving snow and 33 degree temperatures - turned to sun with just enough heavy fresh to cover the ice and make for perfect skinning conditions. A new record of more than 120 competitors signed up, many if not most sporting stuffed kitties (or last minute substitutions) on their packs. The layer of fresh on top of the ice made it possible to avoid last year's debacle in front of the lodge, and made for a much more strategic race than usual among the front runners, with the fast guys reluctant to spend time breaking trail. We all know the feeling. That said, the overall results were quite traditional, with the Andy and Mike Traslin coming home in first and second. The remarkable Dave Brown rocked his powder rig to 4th place, with Seth 5th, Jan Kordell 6th, and Lowell 7th. Because of the tactics at the front and a higher percentage of super-fit and experienced competitors, the times in Men's Race were closer than ever before, and I was stoked to come in under 2 hours. On a side note, my modded F1 boots (on the feet of Jan Kordel) and Trab Duo Sint Aeros (with Brandon Kern at the wheel) both beat me to the finish . . .

In the mid-pack race, I found myself trading spots with the same guys I usually end up with - Benj Wadsworth, John Spiess, and John Stimberis, along with Ryan Lurie and his giant kitty and Eric Wehrly. On the second lap Benj put the hammer down and I couldn't respond, but backed off enough not to blow and fortunately saved some energy for skiing. Fitz Cahall, the men's splitboard winner, was absolutely flying with a time of 102:13, and local talents Heather Kern and Greg Ireton took their respective Rec classes. Juya Ghanaie took Women's Race and gave all credit to Monika Johnson, who has ruled this event for the past several years - at the awards ceremony Christian Folk announced that in years to come the race portion of VertFest will be named the Monika Johnson Memorial. Finally, there were actually two competitors in Women's 50+ this year, with Tobae McDuff taking top honors.



Ryan the Lyon-hearted carries the load for Monika Photo courtesy Mill Creek Multimedia



Attentive crowd at the race ceremonies, mid-frame from left: Seth (with blue pack), Holly & Eli, Marg, Trevor and Benj, Jason H. and Juya in foreground



Vancouver's Traslin brothers took their traditional spots at the top of the podium, with Mike (left) in second and Andy 8 seconds ahead in first

Bib	Full Name	YOB	Class	First lap	Second lap	Combined
829	Wadden Joe	1961	M50	1:17:06	DNS	
808	Davies Tom	1954	M50	1:18:21	DNS	
827	Broznowski Tom	1958	M50	1:21:21	DNS	
847	davock moore	1946	M50	1:28:56	DNS	
855	neumann frank	1941	M50	1:43:20	DNS	
809	Walsh Sean	1961	M50	1:47:23	DNS	
812	Ferber Garth	1959	M50	1:54:05	DNS	
842	Coleman Bob	1957	M50	2:16:53	DNS	
819	Britten David	1961	M50	DNS	DNS	
902	Traslin Andy	1976	MRC	0:51:15	0:39:30	1:30:45
904	Traslin Mike	1972	MRC	0:50:55	0:39:58	1:30:53
905	Schalles Brad	1985	MRC	0:50:55	0:40:33	1:31:28
931	Brown David	1981	MRC	0:51:58	0:40:02	1:32:00
900	Davis Seth	1976	MRC	0:51:18	0:41:47	1:33:05
910	Skoog Lowell	1956	MRC	0:52:32	0:45:11	1:37:43
928	Kern Brandon	1977	MRC	0:54:38	0:46:30	1:41:08
920	Larson Ryan	1981	MRC	1:01:22	0:49:12	1:50:34
922	Tomko Daniel	1976	MRC	1:02:13	0:51:23	1:53:36
903	Wadsworth Benj	1967	MRC	1:03:59	0:50:52	1:54:51
926	Lathrop Patrick	1953	MRC	1:05:18	0:50:54	1:56:12
929	Charles Cameron	1977	MRC	1:03:10	0:54:12	1:57:22
923	Louie Greg	1952	MRC	1:03:59	0:54:15	1:58:14
936	Spiess John	1977	MRC	1:04:37	0:54:25	1:59:02
915	lurie ryan	1972	MRC	1:05:23	0:56:05	2:01:28
930	Wehrly Eric	1967	MRC	1:05:26	0:56:04	2:01:30
901	Stimberis John	1969	MRC	1:03:55	1:01:59	2:05:54
935	McDavid Andrew	1983	MRC	1:03:38	1:02:49	2:06:27
913	Croun Gregg	1961	MRC	1:09:33	1:01:42	2:11:15
924	Stai Dag	1967	MRC	1:11:11	1:00:42	2:11:53
907	McKinley Scott	1956	MRC	1:12:34	1:01:44	2:14:18
921	Thompson Lucas	1975	MRC	1:10:21	1:05:47	2:16:08
917	Beck Ryan	1973	MRC	0:52:08	1:24:25	2:16:33
918	Janisch Tom	1959	MRC	1:13:47	1:06:03	2:19:50
906	Coulon Chris	1987	MRC	1:07:48	1:18:56	2:26:44
934	Hitch Adam	1980	MRC	1:20:48	1:10:07	2:30:55
914	Copson Steve	1975	MRC	1:18:59	1:14:27	2:33:26
916	MARTIN ANDY	1953	MRC	1:22:55	1:16:03	2:38:58
925	Hiatt Cody	1979	MRC	1:23:32	1:16:15	2:39:47
933	Heinz Scott	1983	MRC	1:31:08	1:24:11	2:55:19
884	Brown Travis	1974	MRC	1:29:01	1:27:40	2:56:41
919	Hill Andy		MRC		1:53:34	1:53:34
911	Kordel Jan	1967	MRC		1:33:41	1:33:41
859	Williams Kaan	1981	MRE	DNS	DNS	
832	Logan Bill	1973	MRE	3:27:59	DNS	
834	Thompson Eric	1998	MRE	2:41:40	DNS	
881	Eide Tom	1966	MRE	2:16:29	DNS	
822	Martin Mark	1966	MRE	2:15:18	DNS	
820	Moore Bj	1968	MRE	2:10:28	DNS	
824	Wiess Tim	1981	MRE	2:06:33	DNS	
844	Patton Ben	1975	MRE	2:04:39	DNS	
865	Brown Barry	1963	MRE	1:58:35	DNS	

Results are a little hard to decipher; look for the class first (ie. MRC = Men's Race), then the time. Jan Kordel should have been 6th and Andy Hill 10th in MRC but somehow didn't get first lap times.

864 Brown Lesh
927 Ghanaie Jh
908 Kraus Yvon
932 Parker Ellen

938 Hart Alexandra	1979 WRC	1:29:48	1:22:11	2:51:59
854 Kern Heather	1977 WRE	1:10:42 DNS		
875 Fredenburg Catherin	1983 WRE	1:15:45 DNS		
876 Close Ainsley	1982 WRE	1:20:10 DNS		
800 Davis Holly	1974 WRE	1:21:45 DNS		
807 Schalles Aimee	1985 WRE	1:32:51 DNS		
813 Bradshaw Becky	1974 WRE	1:33:24 DNS		
853 Hauge Kirsten	1976 WRE	1:33:25 DNS		
937 Abbey Rebecca	1983 WRE	1:33:32 DNS		
860 Wryht Dianne	1965 WRE	1:40:05 DNS		
874 Clark Kristy	1969 WRE	1:50:03 DNS		
823 Volken Gina	1967 WRE	1:54:44 DNS		
828 Stai Sharon	1966 WRE	1:55:53 DNS		
843 Dassel Kire	1981 WRE	2:03:56 DNS		
831 Majervs Mandie	1976 WRE	2:16:39 DNS		
806 Bruffey Teresa	1979 WRE	2:26:44 DNS		
856 Brown Stephanie	1981 WRE	2:37:24 DNS		
867 Meehan Maureen	1962 WRE	2:45:44 DNS		
810 Huster Karen	1967 WSP	1:25:29 DNS		
804 Conner Leigh	1970 WSP	1:52:13 DNS		

More results. Heather Kern stomped the Women's Rec division.

841 Vert John				
858 Cervený Charles	1969 MRE	1:57:10	DNS	
909 McNaboe Brian	1968 MRE	1:56:04	DNS	
869 Brunsteter Web	1975 MRE	1:55:56	DNS	
912 Crist Barry	1982 MRE	1:55:44	DNS	
870 Wrigley Dave	1967 MRE	1:48:30	DNS	
838 Peterka Rob	1985 MRE	1:48:00	DNS	
848 Flinn Jeff	1971 MRE	1:42:22	DNS	
840 Martins Gareth	1963 MRE	1:42:11	DNS	
857 Kawasaki Steve	1964 MRE	1:38:47	DNS	
835 Taylor Stuart	1963 MRE	1:38:38	DNS	
815 Gorski Adam	1974 MRE	1:37:43	DNS	
839 Gorohoff Andrew	1977 MRE	1:36:37	DNS	
817 Cheng Kenneth	1971 MRE	1:35:54	DNS	
833 Thompson Jon	1977 MRE	1:35:45	DNS	
825 Burden Henry	1968 MRE	1:32:25	DNS	
879 Zann Eric	1983 MRE	1:31:17	DNS	
821 Fortier Philip	1965 MRE	1:29:33	DNS	
803 Megenity Ryan	1973 MRE	1:28:52	DNS	
801 Harder Scott	1972 MRE	1:28:07	DNS	
849 Rowe James	1971 MRE	1:25:29	DNS	
802 tackman jamie	1975 MRE	1:24:10	DNS	
871 Truebenbach Tim	2011 MRE	1:23:42	DNS	
826 Clark Adam	1975 MRE	1:23:00	DNS	
861 Kushino Scott	1966 MRE	1:20:53	DNS	
814 Alderson Peter	1963 MRE	1:20:25	DNS	
873 Porte Paul	1975 MRE	1:19:58	DNS	
885 Riley Mark	1965 MRE	1:18:37	DNS	
836 Stanton Patrick	1968 MRE	1:16:03	DNS	
863 Kaufman Ben	1971 MRE	1:14:05	DNS	
877 Podolak Alex	1973 MRE	1:13:21	DNS	
882 Koch Scott	1982 MRE	1:12:53	DNS	
862 Clements Scott	1973 MRE	1:12:38	DNS	
818 Neilson Ben	1965 MRE	1:11:20	DNS	
830 Cass Chris	1977 MRE	1:10:40	DNS	
816 Watt Karl	1978 MRE	1:10:15	DNS	
866 Coleman Dave	1972 MRE	1:09:41	DNS	
837 Sanchez Jerry	1974 MRE	1:07:50	DNS	
878 Ireton Greg	1972 MRE	1:01:31	DNS	
872 Stenson Ruaraidh	1970 MRE	1:01:00	DNS	
868 cahall fitz	1974 MSP	1:05:47	DNS	
811 Huster Frankie	1978 MSP	1:02:13	DNS	
845 Kloster Bryce	1968 MSP	1:23:50	DNS	
851 Guzak Jordan	1980 MSP	1:27:05	DNS	
852 Guzak Chris	1965 MSP	1:29:03	DNS	
846 Kloster Tyler	1965 MSP	1:33:56	DNS	
880 Turck Jason	1980 MSP	1:38:55	DNS	
805 McDuff Tobae	1970 MSP	2:16:46	DNS	
864 Brown Leslie	1954 W50	1:43:24	DNS	
927 Ghanaie Jhya	1957 W50	3:17:45	DNS	
908 Kraus Yvonne	1982 WRC	1:13:25	1:09:57	2:23:22
932 Parker Ellen	1975 WRC	1:18:44	1:12:59	2:31:43
	1977 WRC	1:19:40	1:07:22	2:27:02

Still more results. Men's Rec is ordered from last to first; Greg Ireton took it