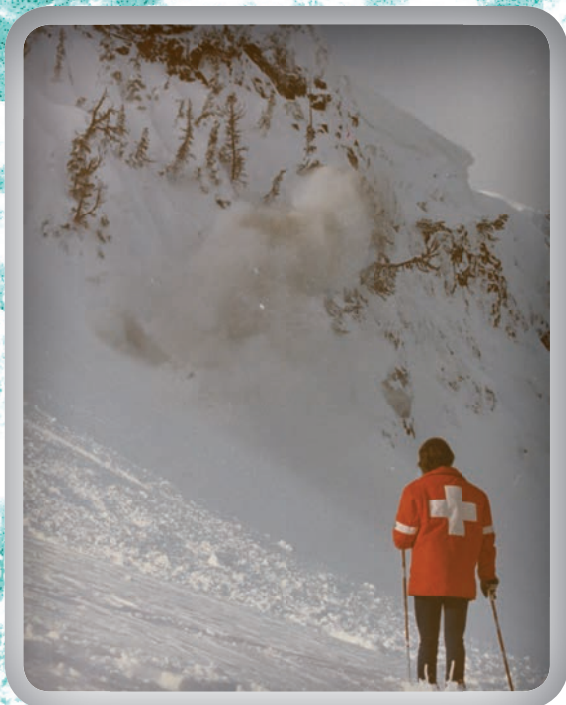


SEARCHING FOR A LEGACY

Search and rescue in Whistler has come a long way in the last 50 years—thanks in part to lessons learned from a fatal avalanche in 1972



A member of Whistler's patrol team observes avalanche control in the 1970s. Photo courtesy of the Whistler Museum, George Benjamin Collection

BY MEGAN LALONDE

[Editor's Note: For Part 1 of this story, check out last week's print edition of Pique, or find it online at piquenewsmagazine.com/cover-stories/they-just-vanished-5242364.]

The team of about a dozen was on the west side of Whistler Mountain, probing an old avalanche path for anything solid, when Jamie Pike heard a sound overhead.

It was an overcast April morning in 1972, and the group was part of about 120 volunteers and professionals who'd been searching the alpine terrain in and around the resort for hours. Four Vancouver skiers had been reported missing Saturday evening after failing to ski out, following a heavy afternoon storm.

The mood was grim. What began as a search for lost or injured friends had transformed into a recovery mission, after it was concluded an avalanche was the most likely explanation for the skiers' disappearances.

Pike was standing alongside fellow searchers at the base of what was then called Far West Bowl when a noise prompted him to look up. Snow began pouring over a cliff, about 30 to 40 metres upslope from where he was standing. "I watched it impact the top of our slope and a subsequent fracture line go across the top. I shouted a warning and hopped around into a tuck, straight down the mountain, easing off to the south when I could," he recalls. "When I was able to look around, the avalanche had travelled twice as far as I had. The only reason there wasn't a greater disaster that day was that the avalanche simply missed us.

"The person at the north end of the probe line, closest to the avalanche, had fallen as he tried to turn and ski away from it. He was about a metre away from the edge of the avalanche path."

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**NOTICE
PARCEL TAX ROLL REVIEW**

This notice is applicable to owners of property situated within the Resort Municipality of Whistler and whose properties are subject to one or all of the following parcel taxes:

- Emerald Sewer Specified Area Parcel Tax
- Water Parcel Tax
- Sewer Parcel Tax

The Resort Municipality of Whistler advises that the parcel tax roll for the 2022 roll year are available for public inspection at the Resort Municipality of Whistler Municipal Hall, 4325 Blackcomb Way, business hours 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday to Friday only (inclusive) (statutory holidays excluded).

The Resort Municipality of Whistler also advises that any complaints of the tax roll must be received by the Manager of Financial Services no later than 4:30 PM, Tuesday, April 19, 2022.

Valid Complaints are:

- Errors or omission of a name or address,
- Errors or omissions on inclusion of a parcel,
- Errors or omissions of taxable area or taxable frontage,
- An exemption has been improperly allowed or disallowed.

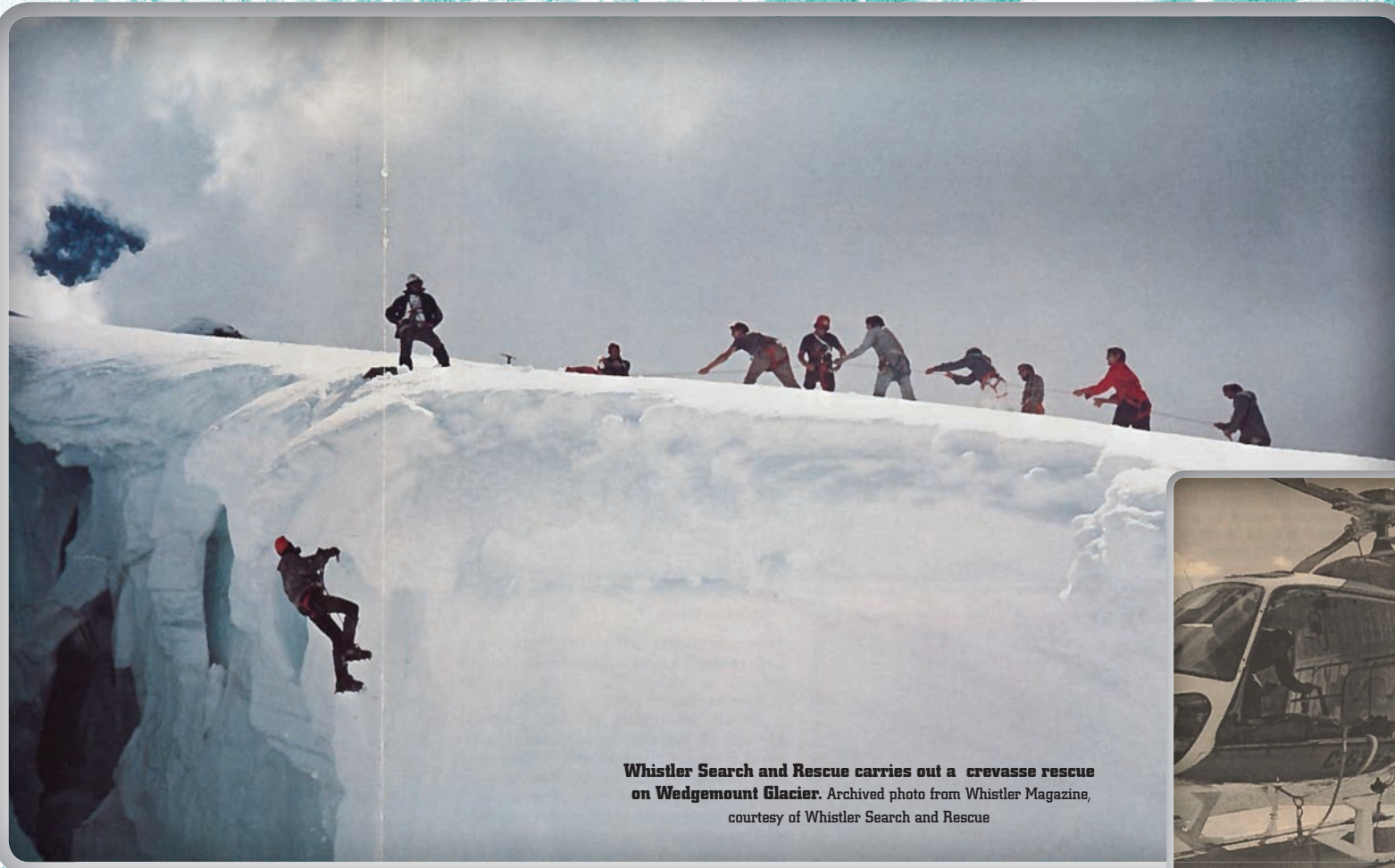
A complaint must be in writing and must:

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- Identify the property of which the complaint is made,
- Include the full name of the complainant and telephone number where they can be contacted at regular business hours,
- Indicate if the complainant is the owner of the property,
- Indicate, if applicable, the name of the complainant's agent and telephone number where they can be contacted at regular business hours,
- State the grounds that the complaint is based upon,
- And any other prescribed information.

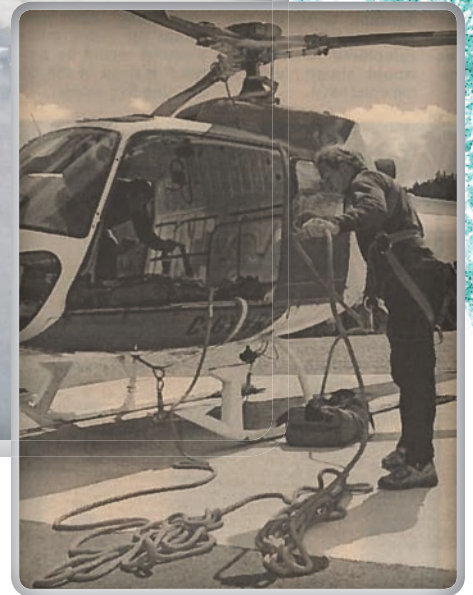
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Whistler Search and Rescue carries out a crevasse rescue on Wedgemount Glacier. Archived photo from Whistler Magazine, courtesy of Whistler Search and Rescue



WSAR volunteer Wayne Flann is pictured gearing up to rescue a group of fallen climbers on Sunday, July 19, 1998. Archived photo by Bonnie Makarewicz, the Whistler Question

The powerful, quick-moving slide continued on for kilometres down the mountainside and took out everything in its path, aside from the searchers who miraculously managed to get out of the way. As they'd soon come to understand, a second search party exploring higher-elevation terrain directly over Pike's group had triggered the avalanche. "The obvious lesson was that search coordination needs to know where every party is," explains Al Whitney, who was probing alongside Pike when the slab released.

The searchers later skied out over the avalanche path, where "the rubble had set like concrete," Pike remembers. "I gained a great respect for the power of avalanches

that day that served me well for the rest of my days in the mountains."

It was one of several near-misses illustrating the hectic nature of the two-day effort that culminated in the retrieval of four bodies from Whistler's Harmony zone, with the help of an RCMP dog. (A fact that would eventually inspire one Whistler patroller to found the Canadian Avalanche Rescue Dog Association, but more on that later.)

In its immediate aftermath, the tragedy highlighted Whistler's existing need for a rescue group that could rapidly deploy and save the lives of mountaineers, hikers and skiers in the backcountry and challenging terrain, recalled Cliff Jennings in an email earlier this year.

He, alongside fellow Whistler locals Dave Cathers, Stephen Les, Trudy Salmhofer and Paul Burrows, would go on to found Whistler Search and Rescue (WSAR)—initially dubbed Alta Lake Search and Rescue—that same year. Ever since, the organization and its crew of highly-trained volunteers has been tasked with finding and saving the many people who find themselves lost, injured or otherwise in need of help in the Sea to Sky's unforgiving backcountry. In those 50 years, Whistler SAR has saved thousands of lives—and, just as important, offered closure to dozens of loved ones.

A coordinated search-and-rescue organization wouldn't have made a

difference half a century ago in whether the four lost skiers—Heather and Peter Howard, Dave McPhedran and Gerry Schlotzhauer—survived the avalanche in Harmony Bowl.

"They were killed on impact," acknowledges Heather's brother, Chris Patrick. "But the system would have been set up far better to search for them."

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Whistler—or Alta Lake, as it was then known—was a very different place half a century ago. When Whistler Mountain first opened to the public in January 1966, any search-and-rescue demands fell to ski patrol. But in the years leading up to the

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**2309 B BRANDYWINE WAY
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Bedrooms: **3** Bathrooms: **2** Square Feet: **1,297**
Lovely 3 bedroom 2 bathroom townhome located in Bayshores. Many upgrades including new kitchen cupboards and appliances, windows and bathrooms. Lots of Storage. Bayshores is close to Creekside lifts and shops.

Townhouse \$1,595,500



**316 G1 – 4653 BLACKCOMB WAY
WHISTLER**

Bedrooms: **1** Bathrooms: **1** Square Feet: **635**
Spacious 1 bedroom 1 bathroom quarter share located in the popular Horstman House. Owners can use their unit one week per month. Horstman House is fully managed. Great and quiet location within walking distance to Lost Lake Park and the Chateau Golf Course.

Condominium \$235,000

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Chalet in Alpine



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SOLD

**#9 - 1445 VINE RD
PEMBERTON**

Bedrooms: **3** Bathrooms: **2** Square Feet: **1,361**
Beautiful 3 bedroom townhome that is move in ready. Kitchen has been updated with stainless steel appliances, a modern backsplash, top & bottom floors are engineered hardwood and a double garage.

Townhouse \$900,000



**#8 - 7381 LAUREL ST
PEMBERTON**

Bedrooms: **3** Bathrooms: **2** Square Feet: **1,387**
This 3 bedroom townhome in a family friendly neighbourhood at Monte Vale with new flooring, new carpets and new paint is a must see. Features an open floor plan ideal for entertaining, a master bedroom with walk in closet and a three piece ensuite.

Townhouse \$800,000



**#101 - 1436 PORTAGE RD
PEMBERTON**

Square Foot: **2,525 sq.ft.**
2,525 sq.ft. retail space in Portage Station. Previously a restaurant, this retail space is zoned for a multitude of possibilities: offices, personal service, restaurant, civic, arts and culture, or retail, recreation and leisure.

Commercial Space \$1,100,000



keith@wrec.com | 604 935 2650

KEITH MCVIVOR
Personal Real Estate Corporation



**#20 ELEVATE, 4000 SUNSTONE WAY
PEMBERTON**

Bedrooms: **3** Bathrooms: **2.5** Square Feet: **2,200**
This spacious, elegant duplex features an open-concept layout complete with designer finishes and expansive deck to enjoy unobstructed mountain views. Thoughtfully designed for your active Pemberton lifestyle, Elevate duplexes are ideal for growing families or the perfect weekend home with plenty of room to entertain.

Duplex \$1,489,000



**1504 ALTA PLACE
WHISTLER**

Lot Size: **1.9 Acres**
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Vacant Land \$2,349,000

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SOLD



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DANIELLE MENZEL
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**1481 HEMLOCK STREET
PEMBERTON**

Bedrooms: **7** Bathrooms: **3** Square Feet: **2,923**

A beautiful home in The Glen, one of Pemberton's favourite spots! Backing on to green space with incredible mountain views, new sundeck, updated bathrooms, very functional open living space. 2 bedroom suite.

Chalet \$1,500,000

**1827 LUMPY'S WAY
OWL RIDGE, MOUNT CURRIE**

Bedrooms: **2.5** Bathrooms: **2** Square Feet: **1,582**

4.99 acres of absolutely gorgeous space in Owl Ridge! The post and beam home is warm and welcoming, and the land is professionally landscaped and irrigated. A great spot for horses in the future, or your own little hobby farm

Chalet on Acreage \$1,790,000

**1469 HEMLOCK STREET
PEMBERTON**

Bedrooms: **5** Bathrooms: **3** Square Feet: **2,413**

This home is in immaculate condition with views of Mt. Currie from the living room. The home backs onto ALR land which provides plenty of privacy on the large deck and from the fenced, irrigated yard in the back. A 2 bedroom revenue suite helps to offset mortgage costs.

Chalet \$1,489,000



**7446 DOGWOOD STREET
PEMBERTON**

Bedrooms: **4** Bathrooms: **3** Square Feet: **2,302**

Come home to this perfect family home located in a fantastic Pemberton neighbourhood. The main level features an open concept living with high vaulted ceilings, 3 bedrooms and two bathrooms and a large deck that is directly adjacent to the dining and kitchen area. Property contains a legal suite.

Chalet \$1,675,000



**#201 - 4573 CHATEAU BOULEVARD
WHISTLER**

Bedrooms: **1** Bathrooms: **1** Square Feet: **795**

This "super-sized" one bedroom property in Glacier Lodge is unique. It's handicap accessible; has a large foyer for all your gear; plus, a separate bunk room for the kids. Located in one of the most ideal spots for your enjoyment of Whistler all year round.

Condominium \$1,299,000



KAREN VAGELATOS
karen@wrec.com | 604 902 2520



**10 EDELWEISS
WHISTLER CREEKSIDE**

Bedrooms: **3** Bathrooms: **2** Square Feet: **1,333**

A short walk to the lifts, parks, and lakes makes for an ideal weekend or full-time home. The shops and some of Whistler's best restaurants are also nearby. This well cared for home is ready for the next family to personalise and create their Whistler history!

Townhouse \$1,485,000



**211 WHISTLER VILLAGE INNS
WHISTLER VILLAGE**

Bedrooms: **1** Bathrooms: **1** Square Feet: **522**

Powder Lodge in the heart of the Village is the ideal place to spend your getaway. Minutes to the lifts and all the amenities -relax poolside, soak in a hot tub, try the dry sauna, or use the gym. Unit sleeps 4 with loft bdrm, fireplace, kitchen, and balcony.

Condominium \$269,000



**111A EVOLUTION
WHISTLER CREEKSIDE**

Bedrooms: **2** Bathrooms: **2** Square Feet: **1,026**

Steps to Whistler Mtn, shops and restaurants. Spacious layout including spa like bathrooms, double sided fireplace, euro kitchen, private laundry and features pool, sauna, steam, gym, hot tub, movie and games room! Enjoy being slope-side for a quarter of the price!

Condominium 1/4 share \$355,000



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jane@janeheim.ca | 604 935 0802

JANE HEIM



**#412 G3-4653 BLACKCOMB WAY
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Bedrooms: **1** Bathrooms: **1** Square Feet: **648**

Ski home to this one-bedroom quarter share at The Horstman House giving you one week every month to enjoy Whistler. Also enjoy two weeks of consecutive usage for Christmas and New Year's 2022 in this top-floor, west-facing, spacious suite. The fantastic location on Blackcomb Way is just across the road from the Valley Trail.

Condominium 1/4 share

\$225,000



**#339C - 2036 LONDON LANE
CREEKSIDE**

Bedrooms: **3** Bathrooms: **2** Square Feet: **1,247**

This 3 bedroom Legends property is in one of the best locations in town, right at the base of Creekside. Walk out the door and be at the Creekside Gondola within seconds, and then ski home at the end of the day! This home boasts a full kitchen, living and dining area, gas fireplace, in-suite laundry and large covered deck with a view of the ski hill.

Condominium 1/4 share

\$465,000



tracey@wrec.com | 604 905 9552

TRACEY CRUZ



**#8 - 4890 PAINTED CLIFF ROAD
WHISTLER**

Bedrooms: **2** Bathrooms: **2** Square Feet: **1,001**

Perched high up on Painted Cliff Road, this quiet and exclusive complex backs on to forested land and your ski home trail! This upper unit has vaulted ceilings, modern updates and a private hot tub. The phase 1 zoning allows for unlimited owner use and nightly rentals.

Townhouse

\$2,249,000



**#239 - 4800 SPEARHEAD DRIVE
WHISTLER**

Bedrooms: **2** Bathrooms: **2** Square Feet: **789**

The Aspens is a very popular building in an ideal ski-in/ski-out location right on Blackcomb Mountain. This well maintained unit is on the 2nd floor and has its own private balcony with barbecue. This is a turn-key property, ready for a new owner to step in and enjoy unlimited owner use and nightly rental income.

Condominium

\$1,689,000



dan@wrec.com | 604 938 4444

DAN SCARRATT
Personal Real Estate Corporation



SOLD

**2930 STANLEY ROAD
BIRKEN**

Bedrooms: **2** Bathrooms: **2** Square Feet: **1,385**

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Chalet

\$749,000

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#224C - 2036 LONDON LANE
CREEKSIDE

Bedrooms: 2 Bathrooms: 2 Square Feet: 951

You can't beat this Creekside location at the base of Whistler Mountain! The large floor plan offers an open living space with a fully equipped kitchen, a cozy gas fireplace, and a covered balcony for relaxing summer evenings. Enjoy 1 week out of every 4 for unlimited personal use or earn revenues through the onsite rental management.

Condominium 1/4 share

\$329,000



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AL MATTSON



317-4320 SUNDIAL CRESCENT
VILLAGE

Bedrooms: 2 Bathrooms: 2 Square Feet: 807

One of the best view units in the best hotel in the village. This two bedroom suite faces directly up the slopes and has views over the pool area, as well. The Pan Mountainside is one of the best revenue producing properties, and is located just steps from the lifts and all village amenities.

Condominium

\$1,395,000

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fatal slide, the establishment of an auxiliary search-and-rescue group was already beginning organically, remembers Burrows, WSAR co-founder and former patroller.

Without cell phones or internet, “Everything was very basic and very primitive,” says Burrows, over the phone from his home in Salmon Arm, adding, “There were only five of us [patrollers] to control the whole mountain. And so ... we had to get others involved in the community.”

WSAR began as “kind of an ad hoc thing,” Burrows explains, “where you just knew somebody who knew what they were doing and wasn’t in danger of [setting off] a search for themselves, rather than looking for somebody else, in the process.” As more people began visiting Alta Lake and smaller numbers began venturing into the backcountry, “The whole genesis of the search-and-rescue issue at Whistler is that it was a gradual reaction to the need of the day.”

Eventually, the organization was designated a member of B.C.’s Provincial Emergency Program and earned non-profit status. By the time current WSAR president Brad Sills joined the organization’s ranks in 1973, “it was a pretty ragtag crew,” he recalls. Even still, search team leaders like Jennings and Cathers were “very good role models” to the rest of the group, who, like a lot of Alta Lake residents at the time, were squatting throughout the valley, says Sills. “But we were climbing and we were ski touring and we were doing all those things,” he adds. “We definitely wanted to help, we just didn’t have telephones or anything.”

A call for help would normally reach the RCMP detachment in Squamish first. “Typically, they would phone somebody up here to see if they could get any help and the person up here would usually call the Boot Pub and see who was around,” says Sills with a laugh. Word would eventually reach the fire department, and travel on from there. “During the winter, everybody would know where to go. Somebody would come around to the squat, knock on the door and say, ‘Hey, what’s going on?’” says Sills.

SAR training provided by the province would only come into play about a decade later, meaning volunteers had to rely on their own climbing and mountaineering experience. They’d also have to rely on their own gear, Sills remembers, from hauling in their own climbing ropes to packing their



A Whistler Blackcomb patrol pup makes the most of sunshine and fresh snow while at work in the Harmony area. File photo by Joe Wakefield in 2019

own lunch.

“The first meeting I went to, I remember, the team owned two radios, a rope, and a backpack,” he says. In terms of both equipment and coordination, “it’s come a long, long, long way.”

One major shift came in 1994, after Ann Marie Potton went for a Thanksgiving Day hike on Whistler Mountain and never returned.

The search for Potton—an avid outdoors person and a recent university graduate who had moved to Whistler for a year from Ontario—lasted seven days. It was, at the time, the largest search ever in B.C. history, Sills told writer Dawn Green for a feature

story celebrating WSAR’s 40th anniversary, published in *Pique* in 2012. “We had well over 125 people every day ... It was very intensive, and yet at the end of seven days it yielded no results.”

Potton’s body was discovered in Glacier Bowl the following year. Severely injured, she had crawled under the rock where she ultimately died, hidden from view. “An ice storm had ensued, which would have encrusted her in a layer of ice, sealing her body from scent and making it virtually impossible, even with dogs and infrared, to find her,” wrote Green.

The incident and subsequent search effort not only strengthened WSAR’s

relationship with other emergency responders in the corridor, but boosted the organization’s budget. Prior to the search for Potton, WSAR’s annual budget was \$4,000. The following year, it expanded to \$40,000. In 2022, WSAR’s annual budget is set at approximately \$325,000, says Sills. Only about \$87,000 is funded by government. WSAR’s crew is currently comprised of 27 full members, and 14 members in training.

Even five decades later, after hundreds of search missions, Sills says lessons from the fatal slide in 1972 still apply—particularly when it comes to the internal battle to keep responders’ safety at the forefront of any rescue mission. “We still fight it on every call,” he says. “There’s something about an avalanche call that sets people’s hair on fire. Even practiced SAR people tend to get very, very excited ... It sets you off, because the timeframe is such that, you know you have to do something immediately, even if it’s not the most prudent thing to do.”

DOG DAYS

Today, the crew responding to one of those avalanche calls almost always includes a four-legged member, certified by the Canadian Avalanche Rescue Dog Association (CARDA).

In 1972, it was an RCMP tracking dog named Rocky and his handler, Cpl. Dale Marino, responsible for locating the four victims under avalanche debris in Whistler’s harmony zone. Despite the fact that Parks Canada had trained dogs on hand in case of a slide and Rocky wasn’t specifically trained for avalanche purposes, it was among the first instances in Canada of a dog taking part in an avalanche recovery call, following similar instances in Fernie and Jasper earlier in 1971 and 1972, respectively.

The incident—coupled with his own experience being partially buried and having to dig out a colleague without shovels or probes after a 1978 slide off Whistler peak—sparked an idea for then-Whistler patroller Bruce Watt. It had taken days for Cpl. Marino and his dog, based in Nanaimo, to join the search effort. So, Watt thought, why not train an avalanche response dog as part of Whistler’s patrol team?

“There was no real avalanche training, really, in those days. So it kind of spurred me on to think, ‘Well, we need to be able to

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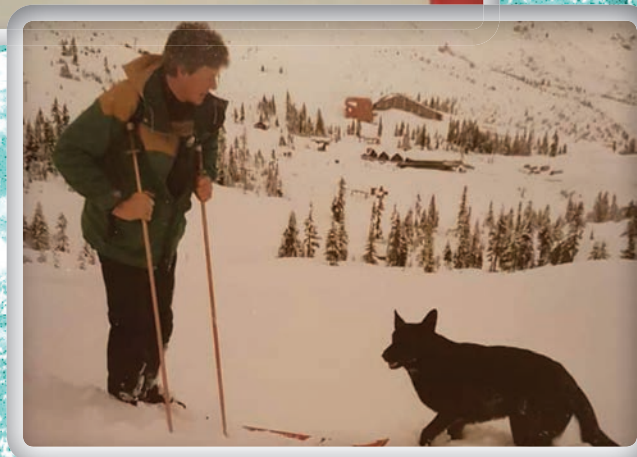
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FEATURE STORY



TOP: RCMP dog master Dale Marino, pictured here holding a shovel, was one of the responders responsible for locating four avalanche victims in Whistler's Harmony zone in 1972. **BELOW:** Bruce Watt and his dog, Radar, at an RCMP / PARKS CANADA validation course in Banff February 1983. Photo courtesy of Bruce Watt.

Rosamary June White

September 2, 1928 - March 21, 2022

Live like it's heaven on earth!

Rosamary passed away peacefully at home after 93 years of treating every day as a gift. She joins the family members she longed to meet again—her son, Barry (1950-1979), husband Alan (1925-2018), brothers Ted, Jim, Bob, and Lee, her parents Bud and Esther, and the grandparents she had loved so much as a girl. She is survived by her daughter Brenda Lea, son-in-law Charles, grandson Harrison, her nieces and nephews, and her many close friends at Whistler.



Rosamary was born and raised in the Yukon. She met Alan in Dawson and, once they married in 1948, they left for Vancouver, then Trail, Burnaby, Taiwan, and back again to Vancouver where they raised their family.

Kids launched, she undertook a new chapter as an athlete—running, downhill and cross-country skiing, biking, and hiking all over the Lower Mainland with Alan. They built a little cabin at Whistler in 1973 and began a four-decade love affair with all the mountains and valleys around them. They became an inspiration to their younger outdoor-loving friends, known for their ambitious hikes, enthusiastic year-round volunteering, and for being constant fixtures at Meadow Park Gym into their late 80s. They were immensely proud when Lost Lake Cross Country dedicated a bench in their honour on Tin Pants overlooking Lost Lake.

Rosamary never lost her love of Vancouver and in 2018 she moved back to live at Terraces on 7th, where she found firm friendships in the community and wonderful support from kind and caring staff.

Friends and family will gather to celebrate Rosamary's life from 2 to 4 pm on Saturday, May 14, at 9246 Emerald Drive in Whistler. In July, once the high snows have melted, her friend Eric will take her on one last hike, up Wedge, to join Barry and Alan in their final resting place.

have better rescue gear,' and the dog was the ultimate rescue gear to have."

Watt adds, "If an avalanche comes down and you don't know if there's anybody in it, you can send a dog in and they'll search that area very quickly, so you don't have to put a probe line in and you don't have to put people in danger under cornices or hangfire."

Watt brought the proposal to lift company president Franz Wilhelmssen. Whistler Mountain had already committed to increased snow-safety measures following the fatal spring avalanche in '72, bringing up an expert from Alpine Meadows, Calif. named Norm Wilson to help develop an avalanche safety and control plan and outfitting patrollers with transceivers. The lift company also started working with the National Research Council to complete avalanche studies and had begun developing an avalanche-forecasting program, explains Watt.

But when it came to an avalanche dog, "Franz wanted an actual piece of paper that said, 'Hey, you are legally allowed to be on that slide path,'" recalls Watt. "So that was our first goal, to get that piece of paper. And we did, but it took about four or five years to actually get that through all the red tape."

Watt found a dog, a German shepherd he named Radar, and started connecting with RCMP dog masters—including Cpl. Marino—for training tips.

"But when it really mattered, they said, 'Well, we can't just allow you to come to these RCMP courses all the time, so why don't you form an organization of your own? So that's where the Canadian Avalanche

Rescue Dog Association started, so that we could get those validations and stay up to date on a yearly basis—because that's what all dog handlers have to do." Alongside Rod Pendlebury, a Fernie-based patroller Watt met through B.C.'s informal avalanche forecasting network, Watt officially co-founded the non-profit organization in 1982, with the mission to train and validate avalanche dogs.

Watt and Radar eventually became the first civilian handler and dog team to be certified for helicopter long-line rescue. "That was kind of a big deal at the time," says Watt. "Now, of course, everybody uses that and it's a really effective way to get in and be safe about getting into the slide, and getting the dog on that debris fast." For years, the pair would respond to both Whistler Ski Patrol and WSAR calls.

Today, the program has grown significantly. At Whistler Blackcomb in particular, with two dogs working on the mountain each day and space for about 10 in total, says Watt.

The biggest mark of success for CARDA, and for Watt's efforts, came in December 2000, in Fernie, when Robin Siggers and his dog Keno carried out the first live recovery in Canadian history.

"It took a while, and you know, there hasn't been another one since," says Watt.

"It's hard to get people out of avalanches quickly, but the dog was right there. It was quite an emotional thing—we were pretty pumped up about that.

"We always said 'If we could only just save one life, it would be all worth it.' Well, we did. It was great." ■