



## AAC Publications

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### **Bill Forrest, 1939-2012**

A legend of the Colorado climbing scene, Bill Forrest died of a heart attack on December 21, while snowshoeing on Old Monarch Pass with his wife and outdoor partner of 26 years, Rosa. He was 73. For those of us who made Boulder our climbing home in the 1980s, Forrest was a household name, both for his big-wall ascents and his gear inventions.

William E. Forrest was born on October 20, 1939, in Glendale, California, but grew up mostly in Salt Lake City. After graduating from high school in 1957, he attended college for one semester on a basketball scholarship then left to join the U.S. Army. While serving three years in the infantry in Germany he began technical climbing.

After the military he went to Arizona to get his bachelor's degree in English, then entered Arizona State University as a graduate student in English. But in 1968, he founded Forrest Mountaineering in Colorado, churning out inventions that would become a staple of Boulder's high-end climbing shops, not to mention our climbing racks.

He came up with a fiberglass wall hammer and ice tools with interchangeable picks, the swami belt with adjustable leg loops, the daisy chain and shock-absorbing quickdraws, copperheads, and Tritons, those all-in-pieces for belaying, rappelling, and protection. Later he became a designer and tester for Mountain Safety Research and won awards for his snowshoe designs.

He did the first solo ascent of the Diamond on Longs Peak in 1970. Then, in May 1972, he and partner Kris Walker put up the first ascent of the Painted Wall in the Black Canyon of the Gunnison, taking nine days to establish a 26-pitch route up Colorado's largest cliff. In July 1979, he made the first ascent of Uli Biaho Tower in Pakistan with the powerhouse climbers Ron Kauk, John Roskelley, and Kim Schmitz. The four climbed the East Face alpine style in 34 pitches, spending 10 nights in hammocks to put up the first Grade VII by Americans.

Friends, many of whom turned out for his memorial service in his adopted hometown of Salida, Colorado, remember his kindness and decency, his generous advice as a mentor for others, his restless spirit of innovation and adventure, and that he wasn't easily ruffled.

"You know, steady, and the kind of person you'd want to be with in the mountains," said Jed Williamson, who worked with him at Colorado Outward Bound, where they led 26-day courses out of Marble, then each headed off to get in some of their own climbing.

Williamson, the editor of *Accidents in North American Mountaineering* and a past president of the American Alpine Club, recalls coming back from a quick trip to the Tetons over the summer of 1966, only to discover that Forrest and Glen Denny had teamed up for a traverse of the Maroon Bells, Snowmass, and Capitol Peak—three 14,000-footers separated by miles of wilderness—in under 24 hours.

Forrest told *Climbing* magazine in 2011 that his best ideas came "from seriously participating in the activity. When you love the activity—and live it—the ideas flow."

Months before he died, he talked to *The Denver Post* for a story about the 40th anniversary of his first

ascent of the Painted Wall, calling the 24th pitch the hardest he'd ever done up until that point—a near-death experience that he still thought about. He said he loved climbing, but always preferred scouting first ascents and new routes to following guidebooks.

"It's not accurate to say it was everything to me, but it was a huge part of my life," he said of climbing. What did he get out of it? "Just a lifetime of adventure, tremendous friends and a lot of self-knowledge," he added. "Climbing for me is the finest sport in the world. It's a beautiful thing."

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