



AAC Publications

Doug Abromeit, 1948–2013

Doug Abromeit, 65, the retired director of the Forest Service National Avalanche Center, died suddenly from an apparent undiagnosed heart condition while mountain biking with friends last spring.

Doug grew up on a family homestead on Lake Pend Oreille near Sandpoint, Idaho, where he spent his time in the woods and on the water, hiking, hunting, picking berries, and fishing. He graduated from the University of Idaho in Moscow with a degree in education. Doug and his wife and lifetime soul mate, Janet, worked as teachers in Nuiqsut, a traditional whaling village on Alaska's North Slope. He also worked as a ski patroller and smoke jumper before he landed a job as a Forest Service snow ranger at Alta, Utah. That's where I first met Doug, in the fall of 1986. I moved to Utah to take over as the director of the Utah Avalanche Center about the same time that Doug and Janet arrived. He instantly won me over with his mellow, easygoing charm and fabulous smile. As with a friendly golden retriever in a city park, everyone always seemed to gather around him—a quality that served him well in his long career in the avalanche business.

I was lucky to work with Doug for the past 27 years on a wide variety of avalanche projects and to join him on many climbing trips, mountain bike rides, and backcountry skiing adventures. In his early days as a snow ranger, he noticed the disarray of the program that used military weapons for avalanche control, and he dove in and started organizing a fractured community of ski areas, highway forecasters, and U.S. Army personnel. Doug, John Hoagland, and I joined forces to create the Forest Service National Center of Excellence for Avalanches, which eventually became the Forest Service National Avalanche Center. Doug often described it as being a "program with a big name and a very small staff," as he was the only employee until the prominent avalanche scientist Karl Birkeland joined him 12 years ago.

Throughout his long career, Doug not only organized the military weapons program but also mentored and organized a similarly fractured community of local and regional avalanche centers across the U.S. He was active in avalanche education as a longtime instructor at the National Avalanche School, and he produced the avalanche education video *Think Like an Avalanche*. He also represented the avalanche community and the Forest Service on countless national committees and organizations.

Doug lived his 65 years to the fullest, always fit and healthy and an avid backcountry skier, climber, and mountain biker. Although he accomplished a lot, he seldom let his work interfere with his enjoyment of life.

Bruce Tremper

Images



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