



AAC Publications

Pop Hollandsworth, 1915–2013

James Guy “Pop” Hollandsworth, Sr., beloved founder of the Asheville School mountaineering program, first director of the North Carolina Outward Bound School, and past president of the Carolina Mountain Club, passed away at age 97 on June 21, 2013. Pop was not big or tall (no more than 5-feet-5-inches), but to the thousands of young people he introduced to the pleasures of mountaineering and wilderness travel, and to his many other outdoor companions, he was a mountain of a man.

Pop Hollandsworth grew up in a coal-mining town in southern West Virginia, where his father was the high school principal. By age 14, he had not only earned the rank of Eagle Scout but also (for reasons obscured by time) gotten the nickname “Pop.” In 1937, Pop graduated from Berea College, a school renowned for providing educational opportunities to Southern Appalachian students with great promise but little money. He began teaching in a one-room school in a coal camp near home. His school teaching was interrupted by World War II, during which he served as a combat engineer in Europe and was awarded a Bronze Star for actions in the Battle of the Bulge.

In 1947, Pop began what became a 38-year teaching career at the Asheville School, a private school in North Carolina. In addition to his duties as a science teacher, and eventually as a dean of the school, Pop was the founder and head of the school’s mountaineering program. He brought to this program the skills of camping and woodcraft he had mastered as a scout, a quiet toughness from his rural upbringing and wartime service, and an inspiring love of nature and outdoor adventure. He was chosen to be the first director of the North Carolina Outward Bound School in 1967, and soon returned to his Asheville School program with an expanded view of the benefits of outdoor adventure and challenge. Through a longtime collaboration with Wyoming guide Vince Lee, countless students learned that the mountains are a rich treasure trove to be explored and in which to take calculated risks.

For the next 15 years, Pop’s students were encouraged to test their limits and take on real challenges in the mountains, both at home in the Smokies and in the high ranges of the western United States and Canada. Real challenges, of course, present real perils. This sometimes involved genuine discomfort, prolonged hunger and exhaustion, and exposure to risks and hazards that many Americans today would find unacceptable. But such tests (starting in the early years with Army-surplus gear) produced in his students a great sense of accomplishment, and also forged many fond memories and enduring friendships.

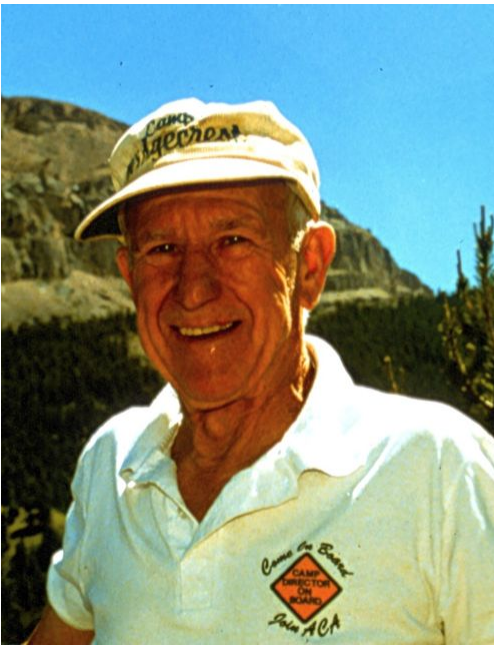
Some of the most demanding challenges among Pop’s western expeditions were in the Tetons and Wind River mountains of Wyoming and the Selkirks of British Columbia, which he explored extensively from the 1960s to the early 1980s. Pop’s favorite climbing objectives in these areas included Mt. Sir Donald, the Grand Teton, and Gannett Peak. These and many other climbs were often life-changing experiences for his students. As the mother of one wrote to Pop afterward, “I sent you a boy...and you sent me back a young man.”

Bob Jones and Vince Lee

Images



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