



AAC Publications

Mark Hesse, 1950–2014

Mark Hesse, climber, conservationist, and access activist, passed away in early 2014. A fit 63-year-old man, he was climbing alone in a Boulder, Colorado, climbing gym and no one saw him fall. The gym employees who rushed to his aid were unable to revive him.

Mark had a long and storied climbing career, including a solo ascent of the Scott-Haston Route up the huge South Face of Denali in 1982. A few years later, in 1986, Mark partnered with Craig Reason, Jay Smith, and Paul Teare to make an alpine-style first ascent of the northeast buttress of 22,241-foot Kangtega in Nepal. He also did new routes in the Canadian Rockies.

Mark climbed extensively in Colorado, Utah, and other states, doing many first ascents. In 1973, Mark joined Dan McClure to climb a new route up the overhanging right side of the Diamond on Longs Peak, which they called Its Welx, as well as the Central Ramp up the remote east face of Mt. Alice in Rocky Mountain National Park.

These vertical adventures instilled in Mark not only a lifelong love for climbing but also an abiding passion for climbing environmentalism and the protection of sensitive climbing areas. In 1984, Mark took over the American Mountain Foundation (AMF), which morphed into the Rocky Mountain Field Institute (RMFI) in 1987. He served as the organization's executive director until 2008, and under his leadership it built sustainable climber-access trails and staging areas below cliff sectors throughout Colorado and Utah. These areas include Shelf Road, Indian Creek Canyon, Eldorado Canyon, the climber trail to Castleton Tower and Moses, as well as Colorado 14ers like Crestone Needle. For his conservation efforts and stewardship of climbing areas, Mark was awarded the David Brower Conservation Award by the American Alpine Club in 1995.

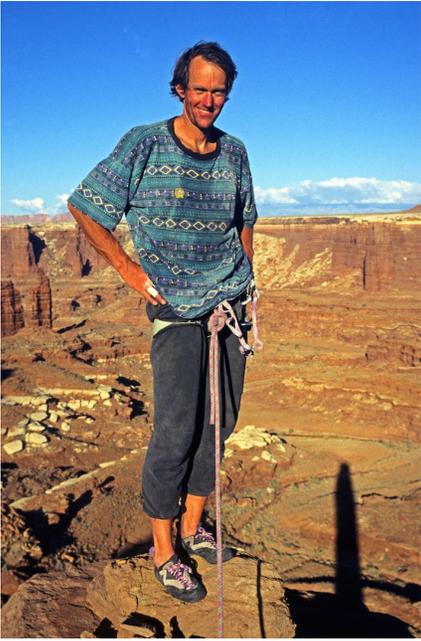
Mark also was program director for Southwest Outward Bound School and worked on projects with Colorado College, the Access Fund, and the Colorado Fourteeners Initiative (CFI), of which he was a cofounder. One of his greatest achievements was the founding of the Santa Fe Mountain Center in 1977. This nonprofit program used wilderness adventure as a therapeutic tool for at-risk populations, and it continues that work today.

Prior to his death, Mark Hesse had moved from Colorado Springs to Boulder, spending more time with his wife, Julie, and enjoying climbing, hiking, and mountain biking. During this time he began writing a trail-building manual for the Access Fund and worked to establish the Front Range Climbing Stewards, a hotshot trail crew.

Besides his many achievements, Mark had a wonderful sense of humor and a ready smile. He was a loyal husband and father and a friend to many. Mark is survived by Julie Asmuth, his wife of 30 years, and their two daughters, Hartley and Laurel. While he left this world of rock and ice far too young, he left behind a legacy that will continue to touch the lives of American climbers.

– Stewart M. Green and Dennis Jackson

Images



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