



AAC Publications

Leon Russell “Pete” Sinclair, 1935–2015

Leon Russell “Pete” Sinclair was born on August 25, 1935, in Boston and passed away due to complications of Alzheimer’s disease in Olympia, Washington, on November 28, 2015. He is survived by Connie, his wife of 52 years, daughters Melanie and Summer, and son Kirk.

In Pete’s passing we lost an important participant in and chronicler of the American mountaineering scene. Pete was introduced to climbing in his early undergraduate years at Dartmouth College, where he was a contemporary of Barry Corbet and Jake Breitenbach. Leaving Dartmouth prior to graduation, he served in the military and then headed to Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Shortly thereafter, in 1959, he made the breakthrough first ascent of the West Rib of the south face of Denali with Corbet, Breitenbach, and Bill Buckingham. Upon returning to Wyoming, he became a seasonal ranger in Grand Teton National Park and then ran the Jenny Lake mountain rescue team, one of the country’s finest, from 1960 to 1967. Pete’s pioneering climbs in the Tetons included first ascents of the northwest face of Thor Peak, the north face of Mt. Moran, a new variation on the north face of the Grand Teton, and the second ascent of Satisfaction Buttress on Disappointment Peak.

In 1962, Pete enrolled at the University of Wyoming, where he earned a B.A. in English and philosophy; a few years later he earned a Ph.D. in English from the University of Washington. He held faculty positions at the University of Wyoming from 1969 to 1971, and at Evergreen State College in Olympia from 1971 to 1998.

During summers at Jenny Lake, Pete supervised a number of dramatic rescues that later formed the backbone of his first book, *We Aspired: The Last Innocent Americans* (1993), in which he recounts the Teton climbing scene in the late 1950s and ’60s. The book was short-listed for the Boardman Tasker Prize for mountaineering literature. One chapter became the basis for the film *The Grand Rescue*, about a gripping 1967 rescue on the north face of the Grand Teton, for which the rescue team received the Department of Interior’s Valor Award.

In his second book, *Thinking Out Loud through the American West* (1999), Pete reflected on what it meant to live in the West and the values of wilderness. In addition to climbing, Pete was an avid sailor and sea kayaker, and some of his nautical adventures are chronicled in a third book, *Somewhat Troubled Waters* (2002).

In 1968, Pete partnered with Barry Corbet to form Jackson Hole Mountain Guides, where he served as chief guide for the first two years of operation. Pete was always searching for new and unique methods for the teaching of literature, writing, and climbing. In the final two decades of his life, Pete enjoyed old friends, easy climbs in the Tetons and Bighorns, and canyon adventures in the Cedar Mesa area of Utah.

— Ray Jacquot, Rick Reese, and Bob Irvine

Images



Pete Sinclair.



Pete Sinclair on the Grand Teton in 1995.

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