



## AAC Publications

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### **Bela Vadasz, 1953 – 2015**

**Mountain guide Bela Vadasz, of Truckee, California, passed away on September 15 at age 62. He is survived by Mimi Maki Vadasz, co-founder and director of Alpine Skills International, and his grown sons Tobin and Logan.**

Bela escaped the communist takeover of Hungary with his parents in 1956 and emigrated to the United States, ultimately settling in San Francisco. His mountain-loving parents introduced him to the Sierra Nevada in all seasons at a young age. Bela met Mimi while studying outdoor education at San Francisco State University. The couple climbed and skied together, married, and in 1979 they formed Alpine Skills International (ASI): a climbing and ski school and guide service. They converted a dilapidated building on Donner Pass into the European mountain hut–inspired Donner Spitz Hütte, from which ASI operated for 25 years.

In his foreword to Lou Dawson's *Wild Snow*, a historical guide to North American ski mountaineering, Bela remembered how, as a boy, he kept the great mountaineering guidebooks and manuals by his bedside and read himself to sleep staring at the photos and memorizing the stories of first ascents and descents – “As my eyes grew heavy, I would begin to dream myself into those pictures and stories, and beyond, into the adventures I hoped I would someday lead.” Bela guided and taught thousands of climbers and skiers to be not only competent mountaineers, but to love the mountains and carry that spirit with them in all aspects of their lives.

Among his personal climbing and skiing achievements, Bela made the first free-heel descents of Denali and of the V-Notch couloir in the Palisades of the Sierra Nevada. With Mimi, he made the first American ascent of the long and complex Peuterey Integrale route on Mont Blanc in 1988. In 1990, Bela skied from 22,000 feet on Makalu in the Nepal Himalaya.

It was guiding and teaching, however, that meant the most to Bela. He guided on five continents, but long ridges and ski traverses in his beloved Sierra Nevada remained his favorites. Bela was among the leaders of the American Mountain Guides Association (AMGA) who pushed for and designed the guide-training program to achieve international guide certification and membership in the International Federation of Mountain Guide Associations (IFMGA). In 1997, Bela was among the first American guides to earn the IFMGA pin. He served as an instructor and examiner of other guides for the AMGA, and in 2008, Bela received the organization's Lifetime Achievement Award for his vast contributions to the guiding profession. He also posthumously received the AMGA President's Award.

The U.S. military also called on Bela's talent for teaching mountain skills. Under Bela's leadership, ASI taught Mountain Leader courses to the Marine Corps for over 20 years. More recently, Bela developed and taught climbing training for Navy Seals and other special operations forces at Camp Pendleton.

Bela was an avid surfer and musician his entire life.

For all his mountain prowess, Bela will be most remembered for his spirit, his passion, and for sharing them with others.

– David Riggs

## Images



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