



## AAC Publications

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### **Don Gordon, 1931 – 2016**

**An intensely private man, Don Gordon passed away in April 2016 in the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Seattle, where he lived for over 50 years.** Born Don Gordon Claunch in Ely, Nevada, on November 13, 1931, he changed his name for personal family reasons, according to longtime friend Ed Cooper.

Don Gordon joined the Seattle Mountaineers in the late 1940s. He soon displayed a knack for adventurous climbing, making first ascents of the Pyramid and East McMillan Spire in the Cascades' Picket Range in 1951. In 1953, with four companions, he climbed Mt. Robson in the Canadian Rockies by the south face, the first successful ascent of that peak since 1939. During the same year, with Fred Beckey, he climbed two new routes on Mt. Goode in the North Cascades.

Gordon's success on Robson laid the foundation for his greatest climb, the first ascent of Robson's Wishbone Arête, in 1955. The climb was made with Harvey Firestone and Mike Sherrick, a Yosemite rock climber who would later make the first ascent of Half Dome's northwest face. On Robson, Sherrick led the lower rock sections while Gordon tackled the summit ice gargoyles, which had repulsed a 1913 attempt led by Swiss guide Walter Schaufelberger.

In 1956, with Pete Schoening and four others, Gordon attempted Pioneer Ridge on Mt. McKinley, turning back at 15,000 feet due to storms and avalanche danger. Later that summer, with John Rupley, he climbed the north ridge of Mt. Stuart in the Cascades—a route that, along with Wishbone Arête, was later recognized as one of the Fifty Classic Climbs in North America.

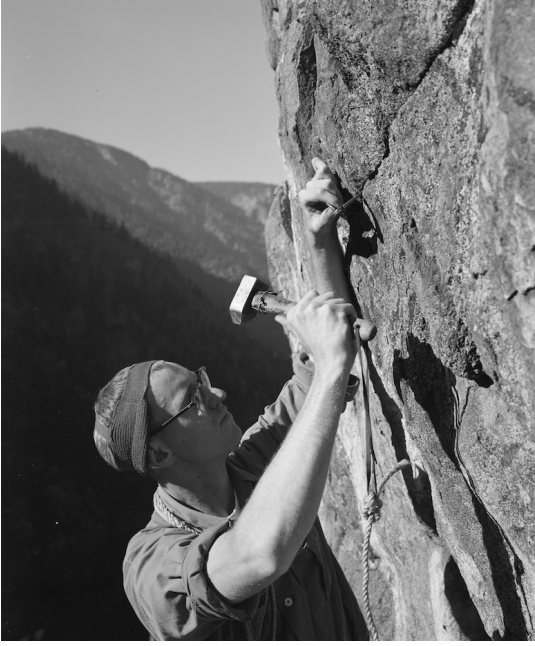
With Beckey, Cooper, and others, Gordon pioneered many routes in the Cascades, including some popular classics. They include the Mowich Face of Mt. Rainier (1957), north face of Mt. Maude (1957), west ridge of Prusik Peak (1957), direct east ridge of Forbidden Peak (1958), and south buttress of Cutthroat Peak (1958). Following many attempts, he succeeded with Cooper on one of the most difficult and protracted Cascade climbs of the era, the north face of Mt. Baring (1961). Gordon also helped open many low-elevation crags, including Castle Rock, Midnight Rock, Snow Creek Wall, Peshastin Pinnacles, and Stawamus Chief in British Columbia.

Ed Cooper recalled that Gordon always seemed to be on a spiritual journey whose nature varied over time. Among early Mountaineers, he was best known for his "all the way on foot" climbs in the Cascade foothills, starting and ending at his home in Seattle and not using any type of mechanical aid for travel. On a winter day in 1958, he walked some 35 miles from his home to Mt. Si, hiked to the summit, and made a good start on the return walk before lying down in wet roadside willows to sleep. Cooper believed that Gordon finally found his calling in the 1990s when he became a certified Reiki Master, specializing in energy healing and balancing.

Gordon's relationship to mountaineering was perhaps best expressed by his thoughts following his Wishbone Arete adventure (AAJ 1956): "I was alone once more. It was morning, the mists parted, and high above the fields and the cottonwoods was the immense south wall of Robson, gleaming in the early light. There it was, Robson, 'The mountain of the spiral bands,' almost touching the roof of the sky, rising far above the green Fraser Valley and giving an impression of tremendous height. Its snows were sparkling and its canyons seamed with the scars of avalanches. Here was the scene of a lofty and stimulating struggle."

– Lowell Skoog

## Images



Don Gordon climbing on Castle Rock, near Leavenworth, Washington, around 1955.

## Article Details

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