



AAC Publications

Wolf Bauer, 1912 – 2016

Pioneering Northwest skier, climber, rescuer, kayaker, and conservationist Wolf Bauer died on January 23, a month shy of his 104th birthday. Born in Bavaria on February 24, 1912, Bauer immigrated to Seattle with his family in 1925. As a Boy Scout, he was awarded a free membership in the Mountaineers in 1929, beginning his long association with the club and the larger outdoor community in the Northwest.

Bauer was already an accomplished skier when skiing was in its infancy in the Northwest. He competed in regional and club races in the 1930s and was one of 60 competitors who started simultaneously from Camp Muir on Mt. Rainier during the legendary Silver Skis downhill race in 1934. In 1936, Wolf's three-man team won the Mountaineers Ski Patrol Race between Snoqualmie and Stampede passes in a time that was not bettered until 2016, a month after his death.

In 1935, Wolf organized and single-handedly taught the Mountaineers' first climbing course. He corresponded with European experts to obtain technical books written in German, thus importing modern climbing techniques to the Northwest. During the course, he teamed with his students to complete first ascents of Ptarmigan Ridge on Mt. Rainier (1935) and Mt. Goode in the North Cascades (1936). Ptarmigan Ridge was not climbed again for 24 years, a reflection of its difficulty. On Goode, Wolf ushered in the Iron Age of climbing in the Northwest, placing pitons for the first time on a new route in the Cascades. After Wolf moved on due to the demands of career and family, his students continued and expanded the course. Wolf's student Lloyd Anderson later founded Recreational Equipment Inc. to provide gear to the growing ranks of course graduates. In 1939, Anderson began teaching a teenager named Fred Beckey, who later became America's most prolific exploratory climber.

While traveling in Germany in 1948, Wolf learned about the Bavarian Bergwacht, a volunteer rescue group. He concluded that a similar organization was needed in the Northwest. With the help of veteran rescuer Ome Daiber, physician and mountaineer Otto Trott, and others, he founded the Mountain Rescue Council in Seattle and served for six years as its first chairman. Similar rescue councils were formed in other Northwest cities, and in 1959 the national Mountain Rescue Association was organized, largely through the work of Seattle council members.

Wolf's pioneering contributions were not limited to the mountains. In 1948, he founded what would eventually become the Washington Kayak Club. With friends he explored and mapped dozens of rivers throughout the Northwest, as well as now-popular sea kayaking destinations on the coasts of Washington and British Columbia. His involvement in kayaking led to an interest in conservation of shorelines and free-flowing rivers. This spawned a new career as the Northwest's leading shore resource consultant. In recognition of his contributions to volunteering and conservation, Wolf was named a First Citizen of Seattle in 1979 and a recipient of the national Thomas Jefferson Award for volunteer service in 1985. In 2010, Wolf published his autobiography, together with Lynn Hyde, entitled *Crags, Eddies & Riprap: The Sound Country Memoir of Wolf Bauer*.

– Lowell Skoog

Images



Wolf Bauer in 1936.



Wolf Bauer in 2006.

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