



## AAC Publications

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### Huntley Ingalls, 1928 – 2018

**“IN THE EARLY '60s the speed limits were high and gasoline cheap. We thought nothing of running over to Moab or the San Juans for a weekend, where there were superb first ascents for the taking.** The anticipation, excitement, and carefree nature of these adventures seemed to be the cutting edge of life.” Huntley Ingalls, who wrote these words, has died, aged 90. He explored the desert and pioneered the earliest ascents in the Moab area, including Castleton Tower and the Titan. He meticulously documented these ascents with his beloved Leica camera. Later in life, he could and did recall these exploits in vivid detail, captivating and inspiring new generations of climbers.

Ingalls grew up in rural Maryland. His mother was distant, his father hunted for gold, an obsession that drove the family into poverty. They lived for a while with neither running water nor electricity, chasing away social workers when they became too inquisitive. The household was ruled by Huntley's grandmother, who was stern and puritanical. He struggled at school. “My teachers thought that I was impossible. There was constant pressure from both home and school to shape up, be a normal person...but I was appalled at what they regarded as a normal person... something so dull and ordinary that I thought it would be better to be dead.” He escaped by taking walks in the nearby forests and fields, finding the natural world “a constant source of amazing and delightful discovery.”

After high school he entered junior college, also in Maryland, and he began going rock climbing at Seneca Rocks and caving. He learned he had an aptitude for staying cool and making rational decisions, no matter what was going on around him. He became, as he wrote later, “attracted to...confronting difficulty, danger, and the unknown.”

Some trips out West excited his curiosity about the wider world. “I will never forget my first view of the Rockies.... They had a vastness, cleanness, and freedom which made them seem more vision than reality, and yet they were more real and true than anything I had ever seen.”

He spent the summer of 1956 on a “gravity survey” crew, exploring for heavier, metallic ore bodies underground; the ore might be uranium, much sought for weapons research. Ingalls' crew ranged all over the Colorado Plateau, including Indian Creek, the Moab valley, and Castle Valley. For Ingalls, it was a dream come true: “The work wasn't hard.... It was a great job—getting paid to be out in this incredible country.” He noted the potential on the towers and cliffs around Moab and climbed Shiprock that fall. But his biggest climbs would have to wait until he found a climbing partner who would give him the confidence to try these unclimbed towers.

Ingalls decided to finish his education at the University of Colorado and in 1959 he moved to Boulder, where he lived the rest of his life. He soon met Layton Kor, who was already demolishing existing standards and expectations on the rock. Ingalls, who preferred to follow rather than lead, had found what he was looking for: “There was an immediate rapport between us, and the next day we climbed the Bastille Crack in Eldorado Canyon. I was amazed, even shocked, by his ability. Here was the man for Castleton Tower.” Kor, in turn, spoke approvingly of Ingalls: “One of the great things about Huntley is that he never seemed to have any fear. Even when we climbed on the worst rock...there was no fear at all.”

Ingalls persuaded Kor to visit Castle Valley. Once there, the outcome, for Kor in his prime, was certain. Today, the Kor-Ingalls Route on Castleton Tower is one of the classic climbs of North America. The route follows pleasing jam cracks, the Wingate sandstone is impeccable, the climb ends on a heliport-

size summit with a “cineramic” view of Castle Valley.

Next, Ingalls turned his attention to the adjacent Fisher Towers, where, amid a labyrinth of gullies and hoodoos, protruded several enormous landforms. They looked nothing like the friendly spires of Castle Valley. The largest tower, the Titan, was twice the height of Castleton and devoid of any obvious weaknesses. Gloomy precipices and bulbous overhangs were festooned with curtains of flaking dried mud. Naturally, this was the one Ingalls set his sights on. Two reconnaissance trips in 1961 gained only 50 feet; Kor lost interest and in the spring of 1962 left for Yosemite. With Kor away, Ingalls teamed up with Maurice Horn and Steve Komito to climb another of Ingalls’ gravity survey discoveries: North Six-shooter, a beautiful tower in the Indian Creek basin.

Kor renewed his interest in the Fisher Towers project when the National Geographic Society offered sponsorship. Or it might have been when Ingalls finally said, “Well, if you won’t climb it with me, I’ll find someone else who will!” In May 1962, Kor, Ingalls, and George Hurley assembled under the Titan. At first they made rapid progress, then, approaching the Finger of Fate spire, beset by rotten, flared cracks, they were at the point of turning back. Just in time the rock improved. Toward the summit they followed a fantastically exposed arête. When they arrived on top, Ingalls recalled Kor exclaiming, “This is a superb climb! So superb I can’t believe it.”

Emboldened by this success, later the same year Kor and Ingalls climbed Standing Rock, in Canyonlands, with Steve Komito. They thought this the most dangerous of their desert climbs. It was also the time when Ingalls took one of his favorite climbing photos: Kor rappelling Standing Rock, leaning far out, ropes hanging in space, the tower illuminated by a golden light, with menacing clouds massing in the background. Ingalls would carry two Leicas on these adventures, so one was always ready at a moment’s notice. As he would later say, “You can take all the photos you want, but you only ever have one chance to take first ascent photos!” Standing Rock was Ingalls’ last desert-tower first ascent.

Along with their desert climbs, Ingalls and Kor did a number of other first ascents together, including the Shining Buttress in the Black Canyon and Psycho in Eldorado Canyon. Eventually, they reached the limits of what they were prepared to do on the aptly named Mud Wall, in Glenwood Canyon, where, beset by bad rock, poor anchors, and, finally, doubts, they retreated. Their route wasn’t completed until 2007.

Ingalls later wrote, “In the early 1960s there were not only unclimbed towers in the Colorado Plateau but untouched areas. Part of the wonderful experience of pioneering these climbs was the feeling of exploration. We were fantastically privileged to be the first.”

In the mid-’60s, Ingalls quit a job as a programmer for the National Bureau of Standards and spent over two years on the road. Mostly alone, he traveled around India, Nepal, Afghanistan, and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). He was not trying to escape but explore, experience, and learn. He noted how Western civilization, despite its materialism and other weaknesses, was, in his opinion, superior in other ways, such as with logic, originality, and initiative. He wrote of the hippies he ran into on his travels with a crisp Huntley-ism: “I am in sympathy with many of the things which they rebel against, but I consider their lifestyle weak and childish.”

On his return he resumed working at the Bureau of Standards. He still climbed occasionally, but in the early 1980s arthritis caused his fingers to begin curling inward to form tight fists that would never uncurl again. His curiosity about the world was undiminished; he co-founded the Rocky Mountain Skeptics Group and wrote essays on aspects of consciousness, with titles such as “The Organization of Sensory Experience into Sensory Spaces and Their Coordination with Physical Space” and “Speculations on the Brains and Minds of Cetaceans.”

I first met Huntley Ingalls two decades ago, and the Ingalls I got to know was a true gentleman, considerate, humble, interested in new things and new people, always polite and courteous. With his

sharp recall, his journals, and his slide collection, he became the keeper of stories and memories of the partners and friends with whom he'd shared so many trips. It's notable how he would invariably and subtly downplay his own role in these adventures. At a memorial at Neptune Mountaineering in Boulder after his death, dozens showed up and we tried to put this right, sharing stories of Huntley, bright vignettes of a life well lived. I feel fantastically privileged to have known him.

– Steve “Crusher” Bartlett

## Images



Huntley Ingalls



Huntley Ingalls on top of Standing Rock after the first ascent.



Huntley Ingalls.

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