



## AAC Publications

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### John Evans, 1938 – 2020

"You should come have dinner with my brother, John. He's done some climbing," Rick Evans said in a meeting one day. My brain didn't make the connection between this guy who had "done some climbing" and the John Evans who was a hero of mine since childhood—the Evans of Everest, Tyree, Logan, the Pamirs, Nanda Devi, and more.

Upon arrival at the Evans family home in the foothills above Denver, we ambled past images of the high mountains, deep canyons, and dazzling rivers. It began to click: This John Evans was that John Evans. To say I was nervous is an understatement. However, John's kind, humble, inquisitive nature quickly put me at ease.

That is a remarkable character trait for anyone, but especially someone with such a long list of brag-worthy accomplishments. Adventure and doing things differently were in his blood early: To help pay tuition at University of Minnesota, John spent summers wrestling alligators in South Dakota. A climb of Gannett Peak in the Wind Rivers opened up the mountains to the Ohio native, and the passion never ebbed.

An early Yosemite climber, John made the fourth ascent of the Nose in 1965 (with Dick McCracken and Gary Colliver) just days before departing for the Yukon and Mt. Logan's Hummingbird Ridge. The climb, done with teammates Allen Steck, Dick Long, Frank Coale, Jim Wilson, and Paul Bacon, is one of legend: Despite many subsequent attempts on the Hummingbird, the original route has yet to be repeated. I remember John recounting the legendary and harrowing Shovel Traverse in his usual modest fashion: "It wasn't so much that we had great skill," he said. "We just knew we couldn't go back the way we came, so we figured we just had to keep going forward."

John had worked in the Ellsworth Mountains of Antarctica as a geology student, so he was a natural pick for the 1966-67 American Antarctic Mountaineering Expedition, led by Nick Clinch. The team made first ascents of Mt. Vinson and Mt. Shinn, and John and the late Barry Corbet made the first—and only—ascend of the northwest ridge of Mt. Tyree, the continent's second-highest peak. Describing the climb at the time, John wrote in his journal: "The uncertainties in the outcome include a mile of horribly serrated ridge starting at about 14,000 feet or so and culminating at the summit of Tyree.... Temperatures probably around -30°F, scanty food supplies, and, most of all, the weather.... How's that for an exhilarating bunch of uncertainties? Fortunately, Barry is a splendid climber and companion, and even if we get no further than today, morale is high and the conversation stimulating."

After Antarctica, John continued to push boundaries on big mountains, attempting Everest's unclimbed southwest face in 1971, climbing as part of the U.S. delegation to the Pamirs in 1974 and on Nanda Devi in 1976, and leading the 1981 American expedition to Everest, which conducted groundbreaking research on high-altitude physiology. After working as a banker for years, he was given the chance to manage the U.S. part of Ice Station Weddell in Antarctica, which he parlayed into a full-time job running logistics for the U.S. Antarctic program, a role he filled until his retirement in 2012. He was devoted to his family, including Loie, his wife of 52 years (and a stalwart adventurer herself), a daughter, Lynne, son-in-law Mark, and two granddaughters, Zoe and Spencer.

John lived a life most can only dream of, but he never succumbed to braggadocio. His climbs were not motivated by clicks and likes, but by the pure, unadulterated love of adventure. Like many of his generation, John was afraid less of death than of not living life fully, with love, heart, passion, and

compassion.

– Jake Norton

**Editor's Note:** A collection of photographs and journals from Evans' expeditions is available at [johnnevansclimbing.com](http://johnnevansclimbing.com).

Images



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