



AAC Publications

Robert Rockwell, 1935 – 2019

Dr. Robert “Bob” Rockwell’s love of the mountains began in high school when he and friends, quite unprepared, climbed Mt. Whitney and witnessed the glow of an atomic bomb test in Nevada from the summit. The door was off the summit hut; it was full of snow and they spent a cold night. It was Bob’s first frostbite. Since then, his passion for climbing and mountaineering has taken him up hundreds of peaks in the Sierra and throughout the world.

The Rockwell family moved from Eliot, Maine, to the desert of China Lake, California, in the shadow of the Sierra Nevada, in 1950. Bob received a bachelor’s degree in physics from U.C. Berkeley and a Master of Science and Ph.D. in aeronautics and astronautics from Stanford. His years of research and development contributions to the Naval Air Warfare Center at China Lake culminated in 1990 when he received the Meritorious Civilian Service Award upon his retirement.

Bob joined the China Lake Mountain Rescue Group (CLMRG) and Mountain Rescue Association in 1970 and stayed active through his life, even in the last few years when his illnesses slowed him down. He committed to hundreds of SAR operations and provided a wealth of mountaineering information, advice, and mentorship to new and veteran members of the group. He was a leader and friend.

A classic mountaineer, Bob organized expeditions to places across the globe, including Canada (Mt. Logan), México, Alaska (Denali twice, including a traverse from the Muldrow Glacier to Kahiltna Glacier), Peru, Argentina (Aconcagua), Africa (Kilimanjaro twice, the last time at the age of 73), Pakistan (Gasherbrum II), and Tibet (Xixabangma). Notably, he was part of a joint USA-USSR mountaineering exchange in the Pamirs, in the former Soviet Union, during the height of the Cold War, climbing Pik Kommunizma (Peak Communism). After retirement, he was part-owner of Mountain High, a mail-order climbing business.

His favorite climbs were in the Sierra Nevada, where he also served as a volunteer forest ranger. Bob would often have breakfast at home, drive 90 miles to Whitney Portal, climb Mt. Whitney, and be home by dinner. (He climbed Mt. Whitney over 160 times.) He was a regular on the Mt. Whitney message boards as “Some Guy.” Rockwell Pass in the Sierra is named after him. Bob’s wife, Sheila, is a coordinator in the CLMRG. His children are Kurt, Bruce, and Jennifer. A blood disorder took Bob’s life. His death left a huge hole in so many lives, but the memories are priceless.

In 2005, Bob wrote: “I want to point out that I have lived a full life. I have had so many magnificent adventures and experiences, learned so much, and have been surrounded by so many wonderful family members and friends. I have gotten more out of life than 99 percent of other people. Nothing missed and no regrets.”

– Dan Bishop

Images



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