



## AAC Publications

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### Howard Peterson, 1951–2020

**Cannon, a Climber's Guide, written by Howard Peterson, was the first guidebook to Cannon Cliff in Franconia Notch, New Hampshire. While writing the three editions between 1972 and 1975, he was able to contact many of the climbers who established the first routes on the cliff, providing information and photos from the earliest climbing in the East. Howard's work preserved a part of climbing history that otherwise would have been lost.**

Howard and I, along with our friend Robert Rittenhouse, started climbing together in the mid 60s after coming across the MIT Outing Club's "Basic Rock Climbing" introduction. Crow Hill in Massachusetts was our go-to ledge, and later we made frequent trips to Cannon Cliff, before Howard and I moved to that area in the early 70s. The three of us made many first ascents on Cannon and other smaller ledges in the White Mountains. We also traveled to the Alaska Range to climb on the Rooster Comb, Moose's Tooth, and Mt. Dickey and made a first ascent of Pease Peak with Chris Shepley and Gerald Smith.

Howard often enjoyed pulling practical jokes, and many of his jokes were based on misperceptions. After we had finished a climb on Cathedral Ledge in North Conway, he told a group of our climbing friends he was going to collect tolls from the visitors who could normally drive free of charge to the top of the ledge via a paved road. Stopping each car at the base as it approached the entrance, it was clear he was accepting money from nearly every car. Word got back to a prominent local climber, who arrived screaming at the top of his lungs. It was not until later that Howard revealed to me just what he was really doing. At this time, the climbing community was putting together a mountain rescue team. Howard was informing visitors of the new rescue organization and asking if they would like to donate. These funds were later used to help purchase equipment for rescue crews. Howard and I were among the founding members of the area's Mountain Rescue Service.

Leading a group from a Connecticut outing club up an ice climb on Mt. Washington in 1976, Howard met his future wife, Susan Renton. Encountering severe cold and high winds during the climb, he made sure everyone in his group was safe, but froze several of his fingertips while working the ropes. I later teased him about this by saying it was "love at frost bite."

It was the world of skiing where Howard left his greatest mark. He landed a job with the Bretton Woods Resort in New Hampshire and soon became the operations manager at the ski area. His business skills caught the eye of the U.S. Ski Association's (USSA) eastern director, and Howard accepted a job in their marketing division. After his office was moved to Colorado, he became the CEO of USSA and later merged USSA with the U.S. Ski Team, based in Park City, Utah, where he took over as CEO and secretary general.

A true visionary, with the ability to lay out a clear pathway to reach his objectives, he worked with the U.S. and International Olympic Committees and the International Ski Federation (FIS) to bring cash prizes and sponsorship money to skiing athletes, the first Olympic athletes to receive this benefit. He successfully lobbied to allow sponsorship logos on uniforms that brought needed funding to athletes and the ski team. He introduced several new events to Olympic skiing, including freestyle skiing and snowboarding. Adhering to a strong moral compass, he uncovered bribery corruption within several organizations where committee members were accepting expensive gifts in exchange for votes. He is credited as being the organizer who brought the 2002 Winter Olympics to Salt Lake City. Within the skiing community, he was sometimes referred to as Mr. Cross-country, Mr. Freestyle, and Mr.

Snowboard.

Howard retired from USSA in 1994 and soon after turned his attention to developing the cross-country and biathlon venue at Soldier Hollow in Midway, Utah, for the 2002 Olympics. He later helped create and became the director of the Soldier Hollow Legacy Foundation and Nordic Ski Center, a ski training facility and a cross-country ski area that has introduced over 100,000 kids to cross-country skiing. In the off season, he organized special events at Soldier Hollow, like the Sheepdog Classic that draws 30,000 visitors each year.

In the third and last addition of his guidebook, Howard wrote, "There are many crags in the Franconia Notch area, [and] this guide will only give route descriptions to Cannon Cliff...leaving their continual discovery to those pursuing the freedom of the hills."

Howard passed away on May 11, 2020, at the age of 69 in Heber City, Utah, following a long illness.

— David Tibbetts

## Images



Howard Peterson in the Alaska Range in May 1975.



Howard Peterson winter climbing on Cannon Cliff in 1971.

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