



## AAC Publications

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### **William "Bill" Ellis Long, 1930–2022**

**On January 24, 2022, William "Bill" Ellis Long, age 91, of Palmer, Alaska, and Tucson, Arizona, died of leukemia in Tucson, surrounded by family and friends.**

Bill's intelligence, strength, and physical ability, combined with a love of the mountains and adventure, shaped the direction of his life; he had a talent for turning his employment into professionally important and personally meaningful undertakings and adventures.

He was born in Minot, North Dakota, and lived in several small towns in northern California before his family settled in El Sobrante, northeast of San Francisco. He graduated from Sobrante's Richmond Union High School in 1947; he had excelled in track and field, and participated in school plays and student government.

Bill attended UC Berkeley, Stockton College (University of the Pacific), and Samuel Gompers Trade School. At Berkeley, he joined the mountaineering club and became passionate about the emerging sport of rock climbing. He also was active with the Sierra Club and American Alpine Club. As one of Yosemite Valley's early climbers, he made the first ascent of the East Buttress of El Capitan. Other notable pre-Korean War ascents include the first ascent of Castle Rock Spire in Sequoia National Park and the third ascent of Shiprock in New Mexico.

Bill enlisted in the Air Force at the beginning of the Korean War and was assigned to the newly formed Strategic Air Command's Survival School, where he taught B-52 crews. He was granted leave to participate in the first attempt to climb Makalu with Willi Unsoeld, Allen Steck, William Siri, and others. He and Unsoeld reached the expedition's high point, 23,300 feet, before storms drove them from the mountain.

Following discharge from the Air Force, Bill completed his undergraduate degree in geology at the University of Nevada, Reno, where he was a leading member of the UNR ski team, winning its "Ski Meister" award twice. According to Bill's brother Richard, he entered every skiing competition available. Richard recalls being unable to congratulate him on his second-place finish in a Heavenly Valley ski jumping competition because Bill rushed off after his last jump to compete in a cross-country skiing event.

While at UNR, Bill worked as a smokejumper in the summer, and with the California Cooperative Snow Survey the following winter. His Snow Survey duties included skiing the passes of the Sierra and measuring their snowpack. Through this work, Bill met Dr. James Church, who encouraged him to apply for a scientist position in Antarctica during the 1957-58 International Geophysical Year. Bill's application was successful, and he spent the winter of 1957 at the recently completed Byrd Station, serving as a glaciologist.

Bill continued working in Antarctica as a research associate while pursuing graduate studies at Ohio State University. In the austral summer of 1958-59, he was a glaciologist on the Marie Byrd Land Overland Traverse. When the traverse party's snowcats were disabled by mechanical issues for several days, Bill led an ascent of a nearby mountain, subsequently named Mt. Glossopteris. On this ascent, he discovered coal and found fossils that matched those in the Gondwana stratigraphy found on other continents. These supported the emerging theory of continental drift. At the time, plate

tectonics was unheard of and continental drift was a very controversial subject. His results made the cover story in Scientific American in April 1962.

Bill procured National Science Foundation grants and led three more Antarctic research expeditions to the Ohio Range and Nilsen Plateau. In honor of his work in the area, the Long Hills were named for him. His last trip to Antarctica was as a member of an elite American mountaineering team sponsored by National Geographic magazine. In less than a month, they made six first ascents on the tallest mountains of the Sentinel Range in Antarctica. The expedition was featured in the June 1967 issue of National Geographic, and team members were awarded the American Alpine Club President's Gold Medal as well as the National Geographic Society's La Gorce medal.

After receiving his M.S. and Ph.D. in geology, Bill moved to Alaska, where he taught at Alaska Methodist University (1965–1976). He and his first wife, Sallie, homesteaded 160 acres, living in rustic conditions on Blueberry Hill near Anchorage. He later bought another property on Moose Creek, where he and his second wife, Katie, developed a large horse ranch. He was then asked to start the Alaska State Hydrology Survey and took a position with the Alaska Division of Geological & Geophysical Surveys (1977–1997).

Along with being active in the equestrian community, Bill participated in the Iron Dog, an Anchorage to Nome snowmobile race, five times while in his 60s. He also was a longstanding member of the United Protestant Church.

Upon retirement from the State of Alaska, Bill began a consulting company (1997–2021) and subcontracted for the Palmer Soil and Water Conservation District in the role of a program manager for environmental projects on military training facilities. He was also an adjunct faculty member for Matanuska-Susitna College. As a glaciologist and a geologist, his many years in the field provided him with a knowledge base that extended well beyond any textbook. He knew how to nurture the excitement of science in young people; he was himself a lifelong learner who continuously looked at the world with wonderment and limitless possibilities. By all accounts, to enroll in one of his college courses was to be part of an intimate, personalized experience—a virtual trip to Antarctica and other parts of the globe.

His professional life was one of a tangible, quantitative, and scientific world, on which he built a foundation for a life that was much more. His smile bore a special quality; it was a rare quality that spoke a story of true happiness, fulfillment, love for life and adventure—none of which could be expressed or measured in scientific terms. He showed each of us, from family to friends, to co-workers to students, what it means to savor each moment, to treat one another kindly, to pursue one's dreams, to live supremely, to love deeply, and to always find time to marvel at this beautiful blue planet.

Bill was survived by his loving companion Nancy Stewart, brothers Richard and Jack, sons Bill and Brooke, stepchildren Charlene Schmidtkunz, Gregory Morris, Chuck Morris, and Diana Blakely, and grandchildren Danielle, Bianca, Eli, Hattie, and Jessica. He was predeceased by his parents, Fred and Meda.

Images



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