



AAC Publications

Aimee Barnes, 1962–2023

Losing Aimee Barnes after a long chase by cancer has left a gaping hole in the vast fabric of her friends and family. It's a hole that can't be darned or patched, so we do our best by decorating around the edges and calling into the void to see if there's an echo or her familiar heart- warming cackle coming back. We whisper to her about routes she recommended and beta that panned out, and we struggle against the urge to call her up for advice and encouragement. The climbing and mountain-guide community has lost a titan, a tenacious mentor, and a friend.

Aimee started rock climbing in 1980 and was soon an outdoor trip leader at Idaho State University and the usual winner of the Pocatello Pump. After school, she became a rare female professional guide in the male-dominated worlds of climbing and skiing in the 1980s and 1990s. She started working for Sawtooth Mountain Guides in 1985, and in 1998 she began guiding for Jackson Hole Mountain Guides, where she spent most of her career, ending up as lead guide and director of the Moab branch. Aimee was a member of the 1990 U.S. women's climbing team and also worked for a time for Black Diamond Equipment, initiating their pro purchase program. She had started skiing at age five, which eventually led to work as a backcountry guide at Jackson Hole Mountain Resort as well as guiding heli- skiing in Valdez, Alaska, where she met her husband, Jimbo Collins.

Aimee traveled, climbed, and skied throughout the world, taking part in ski descents in South America, climbs in Asia and South America, and adventures across Bhutan. In Utah and at the City of Rocks, Idaho, she participated in first ascents of dozens of classic routes.

The landscapes that Aimee floated through—the splitter cracks around Moab, the mysterious canyons of the Colorado River, the ridgelines of the Tetons, and the bottomless snow of the Chugach—forged an individual with deep respect for history, the beauty of the natural world, and the ability to work with a significant amount of uncertainty. She called her job “blue collar” and embraced it all with an incredible sense of adventure. Aimee lived out her values and made ample room for her friends, family, colleagues, clients, and so many budding climbers and skiers to thrive.

Aimee grew up with seven sisters of her own and as an adult forged a bond with at least another hundred through what she called the “sisterhood of the rope.” Tying in with Aimee, physically or emotionally, meant you were guaranteed a friend who was going to be a powerful force in your life. In her own under-the-radar way, Aimee carved a path for so many, connecting us to one another for a climb or a job, sharing beta for an adventure, calling just to catch up or answering the phone when we needed advice, or even through giving us a flat parking spot to sleep for a night, a week, or maybe an entire season. Aimee's generous spirit built a road for us all to travel a little bit easier, and in gratitude.

Scores of Aimee's friends attended a memorial in Jackson, Wyoming, where this apt poem by Rupī Kaur was shared: “i stand / on the sacrifices / of a million women before me / thinking / what can i do / to make this mountain taller / so the women after me / can see farther.”

— Eve Tallman and Izzy Lazarus

Images



Aimee Barnes at Indian Creek.

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