



AAC Publications

William A. Read, 1936–2024

William “Al” Read, a.k.a. “The Great Yak” of Moose, Wyoming, passed away peacefully on January 15, 2024, in San Francisco from lung disease. His wife, Susan, and daughter, Kristen, were by his side. He was 87.

Al’s childhood years were spent in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and he had many stories about traveling on horseback to the Navajo Reservation of northern New Mexico with his father, a respected paleobotanist and geologist who worked for the U.S. Geological Survey. After his parents divorced, he moved with his mother and stepfather to Denver. His years in Colorado introduced him to climbing and skiing. He graduated from the University of Colorado in Boulder and went on to graduate summa cum laude from Georgetown University with a master’s degree in political science and international affairs.

In 1953 he was introduced to the Tetons on a road trip, and by 1958 he was working for Grand Teton National Park as a seasonal ranger and sharing a campsite with Bob “Chief” Dunnagan. Camp was not far from Guides’ Hill, where Al met many of the Exum guides. The following year, he joined Willi Unsoeld, Barry Corbet, Jake Breitenbach, Bob French, Ed Exum, and Sterling Neale as a guide. He eventually earned the title of chief guide, and years later, in 1978, Al, Peter Lev, Rod Newcomb, and Dean Moore purchased the guide concession and continued the Glenn Exum legacy, employing some of climbing’s most well-known and accomplished mountaineers. He was president of the renowned company for 20 years.

Exum guide Armando Menocal articulated Al’s philosophy: “He loved and cared about Exum, the guides, and the staff. He managed to instill that attitude and respect in each of us, the idea being, ‘It’s your client’s day of climbing, not yours. You climb what clients will enjoy, not routes you think are more fun or want to try.’”

In 1963, along with Lev, Newcomb, and Fred Wright, Al drove from Jackson Hole to Alaska to join Jed Williamson and Warren Blesser for the first ascent of the East Buttress of Denali. He also achieved numerous first ascents in the Tetons, most notably perhaps the Enclosure Ice Couloir on the Grand Teton.

Al was a ski instructor at Badger Pass near Yosemite in the winter of 1967 and the following year joined the ski patrol at Vail in Colorado. Summers were spent guiding and climbing in the Tetons and gaining the skills and experience to pursue climbing expeditions in far-flung ranges such as the Himalaya.

When Boyd Everett Jr. organized the 1969 American Dhaulagiri expedition, Al was named deputy leader. They attempted the difficult southeast ridge, and high on the mountain, at 15,000 feet, Al suffered from serious altitude sickness. Jim Morrissey, the team doctor and a lifelong friend, initiated emergency care, including having Al carried to lower elevation, which saved his life and, in an odd twist of fate, Jim’s life as well. Seven of the expedition members forged on, and an avalanche swept all but one of them, Lou Reichardt, off the mountain.

Pursuing his lifelong passion for foreign affairs, Al chose to be a Foreign Service Officer and was accepted to the elite ranks in 1970. He was extremely proud to have graduated second in the CIA’s

Career Training Program. In June 1971, in Moose, Wyoming, Al married Jennifer Thomas, whom he had met in Kathmandu before departing for Dhaulagiri. The agency then posted him to Calcutta, India, and later to Kathmandu, Nepal, which would become home for 13 years. He stayed with the embassy there for three years, but eventually quit the Foreign Service so he could keep returning to the Tetons during the summers.

Al became the managing director of Mountain Travel Nepal, developing trekking, tourism, and expedition support, as well as creating the first river rafting company in Nepal, Himalayan River Expeditions (HRE), with Mike Yager, a friend from Jackson Hole.

Kristen Annapurna Read was born in December of 1974 in Kathmandu. The Read house served as a staging area for many expeditions, with Al acting as deputy leader or base camp manager for several of them. He also organized some of the first trips by foreigners to Tibet, and in 1986 served as base camp manager for an expedition to Everest's north ridge.

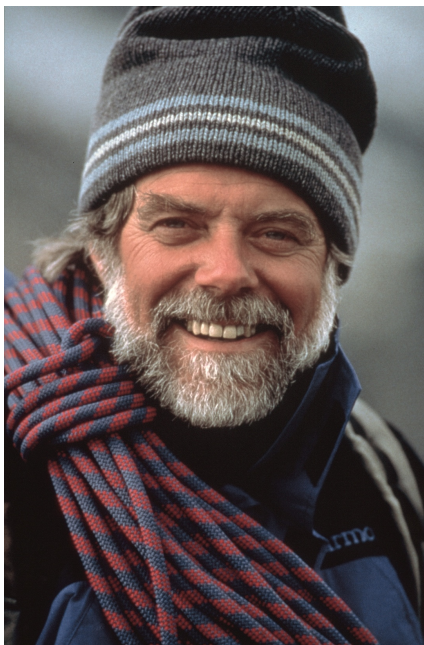
In 1982, Al helped to establish InnerAsia, a San Francisco-based travel company that later became Geographic Expeditions, a.k.a. GeoEx. His unique experience and zest for adventure helped Al craft exotic itineraries to far-flung destinations the world over, including repeating Shackleton's crossing of South Georgia Island and early tourist trips to Bhutan, China, Tibet, Pakistan, Russia, Mongolia, Turkmenistan, and Patagonia, to name only a few.

Al and Jennifer separated in 1984, and three years later, he married Susan Grossnickle, with whom he shared life for 37 years. In his later years, they were the envy of many by somehow managing to split time between Jackson Hole, Wyoming; Chamonix, France; Bariloche, Argentina; and Marin, California.

Al will be most fondly remembered as a leader and a mentor. He enjoyed supporting colleagues to reach their highest potential. He loved sharing his passion for mountains and adventure with all, and his cabin door was always open during the summer months at Lupine Meadows. Now, Al is among good company in the halls of Valhalla and is no doubt raising a glass with great friends and legends, telling tales of exploration and adventure in the remote mountains of the world.

—Kristen (Read) Tripp

Images



Article Details

Author	Kristen (Read) Tripp
Publication	AAJ
Volume	65
Issue	98
Page	346
Copyright Date	2024
Article Type	In memoriam