



## AAC Publications

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### Ron Matous, 1952–2024

Ron Matous below the Eiger in 1976, when he and Mike Munger made the second all-American ascent of the north face. Photo: Mike Munger

**Ronald August Matous was born on October 25, 1952, in New York City. He died at 72 on December 18, 2024, as a result of septic shock after years of battling illness, injury, and alcohol use disorder (AUD).**

On outings in Central Park with his grandfather and younger brother Steve (we two brothers climbed together for decades), Ron grew up “rock climbing” on urban cliffs using clothesline. He skied on wooden skis in the Catskills, roamed the woods of New Jersey by the Sokol summer camp his parents ran, and at 14 headed to the Adirondacks for a two-week backpacking trip.

Attending the University of Connecticut, Ron received a degree in philosophy; however, climbing was his focus. He always said he was drawn to climbing for the elimination of the dichotomy between mind and body and the aesthetic pleasures of executing moves. He learned to climb rock at Ragged Mountain, near Hartford, Connecticut, and in the Shawangunks of New York, with alpine ascents on Mt. Katahdin in Maine and in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. In summer he visited the Tetons, staying at the AAC Climbers’ Ranch. Picked up while hitchhiking one day in 1971 by Glenn Exum, he asked how he could become an Exum guide, to which Glen answered, “Sonny, I hire only the finest mountaineers in the world.”

After graduating, Ron headed to Boulder, Colorado. Working as an instructor for Colorado Outward Bound School (COBS), he climbed in Colorado, Yosemite, and the Canadian Rockies. In the summer of 1976, he and Mike Munger went to Europe to climb classic routes in the Alps and Dolomites, culminating with the second all-American ascent of the north face of the Eiger. Of his story “Man Meets Myth” in the 1981 edition of *Ascent*, Andrew Harvard wrote in the *AAJ*: “Ron Matous has succeeded where many before him have failed. He demonstrates that the umpteenth ascent of the Eiger is, in many essential ways, very like the first ascent. Along the way, Matous gives us a delightful and familiar picture of a climber fencing with doubt, resolve, fate and the weather.”

In 1977, Ron became a Jenny Lake climbing ranger and spent summers in the Tetons until moving there full time. That year he met his life partner, Ruth Valsing, who participated in many adventures and made a home with him in Kelly, east of the Tetons.

He climbed in Alaska (Denali and Mt. Huntington), Peru (Alpamayo, the first ascent of the west ridge of Nevada Santa Cruz, and Huascarán), Pakistan (Nanga Parbat, Masherbrum), and Nepal (Makalu, Gyachung Kang, and Manaslu). In 1979, Ron did the first free ascent of The Spoils (5.12b) in Boulder Canyon, the first route in the canyon graded 5.12.

Ten years after Glenn Exum challenged him, Ron started guiding for Exum. He continued to guide for the next 25 years, both with Exum and internationally, leading clients to Aconcagua in Argentina, Island Peak in Nepal, and Mt. Cook in New Zealand. He also ski-patrolled at the Jackson Hole and Snow King resorts and instructed avalanche courses for the American Avalanche Institute.

Ron had many talents and interests, penning articles about climbing in *Ascent*, *Mountain Gazette*, *Summit*, and *Parabola* and writing over 305 articles as the Excursion columnist for *Jackson Hole News*

& Guide for 12 years. He loved to play chess and won the Wyoming state championship in 1989 and 1990.

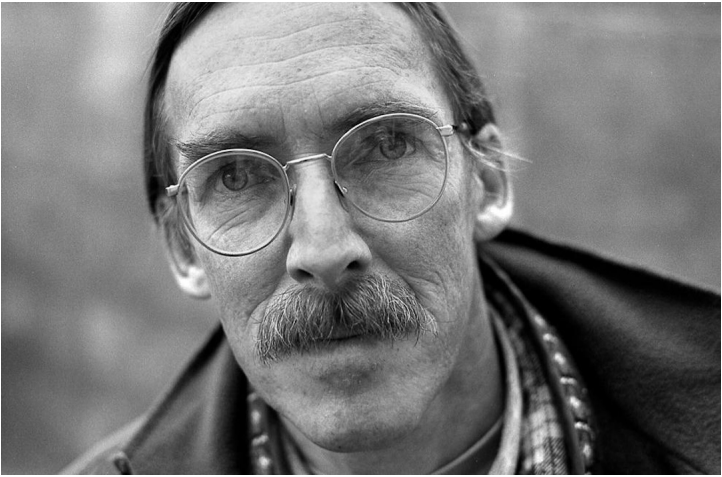
In the late 1980s, Ron took up hang gliding, logging hundreds of hours of flying. Throughout his life, he took multi-day solo camping trips, winter and summer, in Yellowstone and the Teton wilderness.

In 1988, his and Ruth's daughter, Anna, was born, and Ron enjoyed teaching her to climb, ski and fly, but primarily to love the wild world. Later, Ron welcomed his future son-in-law; one of his last guiding trips was taking both of them up the Grand as teenagers. When grandchildren arrived, Ron was fully immersed in the world of small children, delighting at throwing rocks in puddles and discussing the finer points of loaders and backhoes.

Even though his body failed him in recent years, Ron never stopped being a climber in mind and spirit, still writing and speaking about alpine climbs and watching the mountains he loved, the Tetons, from his home in Kelly.

**—Steve Matous, with help from Ruth Valsing**

## Images



Ron Matous.



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