



AAC Publications

Dave Rearick, 1932–2024

Bob Kamps (left) and Dave Rearick preparing for the first ascent of the Diamond in 1960. NPS Photo
Pioneering free climber, mathematician and teacher, long-distance cyclist, master woodworker, self-taught classical guitarist, aspiring astronaut, and entertaining storyteller Dave Rearick died on August 21, 2024. He was born in Illinois, raised in Florida, and as a young man spent summers at the YMCA camp in Estes Park, Colorado, the gateway to Rocky Mountain National Park. He loved to tell how, still a teenager, he snuck out of camp with a friend and scrambled to the summit of Longs Peak via the north face, arriving back at camp many hours overdue. Later that summer, they returned to Longs with a hatchet, a few pitons and carabiners, and a 50-foot rope and climbed the technical east face, returning to camp after midnight.

Early in his climbing career, Rearick climbed in the Gunks, where he learned from Hans Kraus, Jim McCarthy, and Bonnie Prudden; in the Tetons, where he met John Gill; and at Stoney Point, where he met Bob Kamps. These partnerships with some of the best climbers of the time hastened his rise as a climber. He did the north face of the Grand Teton with Kamps and made the second ascent of the Totem Pole in Monument Valley, Utah, with Tom Condon and TM Herbert.

After earning a bachelor's degree in physics at the University of Florida and working for a defense contractor on Long Island, Rearick migrated to Southern California to earn a doctorate at Caltech. There, he joined the ranks of climbers who were advancing the art of free climbing at Tahquitz and Yosemite. He made the first ascent of The Vampire at Tahquitz—including some 5.10 free climbing—with Royal Robbins in 1959. He and Robbins did the first free ascent of the East Chimney of Rixon's Pinnacle in 1960, the first 5.10 in Yosemite. The pair also made the third ascent of the Northwest Face of Half Dome.

In 1960, authorities at Rocky Mountain National Park lifted a long-standing ban on attempting the Diamond on the upper east face of Longs Peak. This coveted wall had been in the sights of at least two Colorado climbers, Dale Johnson and Layton Kor. But they were out of town, and the California team of Rearick and Kamps got to the head of the line. Over two days in August 1960, Rearick and Kamps made the first ascent of the most prominent and direct line on the Diamond, now called simply D1.

The following year, Rearick took a faculty position in the Mathematics Department at the University of Colorado in Boulder. He continued to climb at a high level for the next 20 years, one of the early climbers who focused solely on free climbing. Rearick made notable ascents in Eldorado Canyon (first free climb of T2 with Bob Culp in 1962); at Castle Rock (free ascents of Coffin Crack and the third pitch of Athlete's Feat with Pat Ament); in Rocky Mountain National Park (Sykes' Sickle on Spearhead in 1958); in the Sedona, Arizona, area (The Mace with Kamps and Herbert in 1957); and in the Utah desert.

Rearick eventually gave more of his time to cycling, and he had some heroic adventures. His garage was filled with road bikes, many of them vintage European models. He often rode through Colorado and Utah to climb peaks, sometimes round-trip from his home. He was among the first to do what's now called the Longs Peak duathlon (bike and hike up Longs Peak, then hike and bike back home).

The last climb I did with Dave Rearick was in August 1985, the 25th anniversary of his D1 ascent. We climbed the North Chimney below the Diamond and sat on Broadway for at least an hour, absorbing

the immensity of our surroundings. I am sure Dave was reliving that unforgettable day, 25 years earlier, when he and Kamps were in the same place, preparing for the climb of their lives.

—**Bill Briggs, with Pat Ament**

Images



Dave Rearick at Chasm Lake, below the Diamond on Longs Peak, in 2012.



Bob Kamps (left) and Dave Rearick preparing for the first ascent of the Diamond in 1960.

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