



AAC Publications

Steven A. Brown, 1970–2022

Steve Brown was a native New Englander who, as “a precocious intellect in his youth,” attended Harvard University, completing a bachelor’s in biochemistry in 1990 and a Ph.D. in molecular biology in 1997. As an undergraduate, he was an activist in the famous Harvard Mountaineering Club (HMC), where he developed his skills climbing the local rock and ice. Throughout his graduate years, he was also a regular visitor to Yosemite Valley and to Red Rock. In 1990, Steve and his father made the trip to Denali, and the HMC was where he met his future wife, Patrycja. The University of Geneva made an ideal place for an extended stint as a postdoctoral researcher, and Steve made frequent visits to the Mont Blanc range, as well as further afield in the Alps.

Professionally, he became one of the world’s leading researchers in the field of chronobiology, which is the understanding of how the circadian rhythm of any organism (particularly the human body) is linked to its biological function (and dysfunction). In 2008, he took up a professor position at the University of Zurich, and in 2009 joined the Academic Alpine Club of Zurich (AACZ), where he was an enthusiastic participant in a wide range of climbs, ski tours, and club events. In addition to the technical side of climbing, for Steve the exploration aspect and the big mountains were a special passion, and after Denali he joined small teams attempting difficult and aesthetic mountains in Kazakhstan (Khan Tengri, 1991 and 2014), Pakistan (Muztagh Tower, 2005), and Xinjiang (Xuelian, 2009). In 2022 he contributed all his experience and enthusiasm to the planning and execution of the AACZ's 125th-anniversary expedition to the remote Changla Himal in West Nepal (see report here).

Away from climbing and research, Steve applied his skills and attention to detail in areas including cookery, winemaking, and flying his own small aircraft, which provided numerous adventures and made him a very experienced pilot. On December 14, 2022, he and Patrycja were flying from the U.S. to Switzerland when they were forced to crash-land three miles short of the runway in Goose Bay, Labrador. Both sustained serious injuries, and Steve succumbed some hours later. On behalf of the AACZ, I extend our deepest sympathy to Patrycja and to all of Steve’s family, friends, and work colleagues.

– Bruce Normand

Images



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