



E. Jack Miller, 1938–2022

Jack Miller, 83, passed away on March 1 from serious injuries sustained in an automobile accident, attributed to black ice on the highway between Montrose and Ridgway, Colorado. Like many other avid mountaineers, Jack had the heart of an adventurer and the drive to carve his own path throughout his life.

Born in Spokane, Washington, Jack was drawn to the Cascades, and among his achievements were several first ascents in those mountains. Early on, Jack showed an inventiveness for reaching his goals. At the age of 16, he hopped a rail car that took him to Seattle, fulfilling a desire to watch his high school football team's playoff game. After achieving a degree at the University of Washington, Jack married a classmate and secured a job with the state of Alaska's planning commission. While there, he and his new bride explored the wilderness, once crossing the Juneau Icefield with only one set of crampons; ever persuasively pragmatic, he had talked her into tying their inside legs together and placing a crampon on each of their outside feet.

Up to this point, Jack's course was relatively traditional, but the world of ice and unexplored mountains drew him in just as an aviator is drawn into the depthless clear sky. His first visit to Patagonia occurred in 1964, when he and two others attempted the first ascent of Cuerno Principal in the Paine massif, turning back just 100 feet from the summit. (He returned in 1975 to climb the mountain.) In 1967, he was invited to join an expedition to Peru. Jack, Don Anderson, and Larry Carter (son of longtime AAJ editor Ad Carter) made the first ascents of Cashan Oeste in the Cordillera Blanca and Yayamari in the Cordillera Vilcanota range.

If he hadn't grasped it before then, he certainly realized during his time in Peru that exploration and climbing were a true calling. As his young marriage unfortunately unraveled, he recognized that he wanted work that built upon his outdoor experiences and skills, and he took a job under Wayne Merry, who had recently established the rock climbing school in Yosemite.

Jack's meticulous, safety-oriented nature, in combination with a subtle, dry sense of humor, made him a popular teacher with students in Yosemite. An example of his passion, stamina and strength can be glimpsed in an additional Merry project. After the season of rock climbing had passed, Merry planned to establish cross-country ski classes. To promote the new winter program, he enlisted Jack, Ned Gillette and Jed Williamson to cross the Brooks Range with him on wooden skis. The group didn't utilize climbing skins or sleds but simply carried 80-pound packs, constituting their supplies and gear for a 30-day outing.

Jack's guiding moved in a different direction when, in the mid-1970s, an offer arrived to lead a tour among the mountains and fjords of southern Chile. Mountain Travel–Sobek had asked him to plan a trip to the region. Although he became a successful guide for Mountain Travel, he knew he would have more flexibility if he established his own company, which he soon did, calling it Andean Outfitters. This flexibility would allow him to build a cabin for himself on a high mesa near Ridgway, Colorado, as well as to plan hiking, kayaking, and mountaineering trips of his own to South America.

While Andean Outfitters did not endure amid the growth of adventure travel companies, Jack's desire to explore the areas in southern Chile and Patagonia was still ascendant. He, Peter Bruchhausen, and Paul Dix were the first to cross the Strait of Magellan in a rubber raft. In 1976, he and Dan Asay became the first to visit Chile's Cordillera de Sarmiento. Three days in an inflatable boat got them into

the Fiordo de las Montañas, where, during three weeks of stormy weather, they completed the first ascents of two peaks.

Fourteen years after his first visit, Miller was driving near Puerto Natales and was startled to see a completely clear Cordillera de Sarmiento. With no thoughts other than this exceptional opportunity, he dropped everything and found a plane and pilot to fly him along both sides of the entire range. The grandeur of the resulting photographs was enough to convince the National Geographic Society to support an expedition to explore and map the little-known range. On this 1992 expedition, Miller and five friends—Pete Garber, Rob Hart, Phillip Lloyd, Tyler van Arsdell, and Gordon Wiltsie—explored these mountains from both the Fiordo de las Montañas and the rarely visited Fiordo Taraba on the west side of the range. They climbed six mountains and published an article in National Geographic exposing Sarmiento to the world.

Jack led an extraordinary life, filled with unimaginable sights and challenges. For the public's benefit and good fortune, he wrote about his travels and climbs. In this excerpt from an article he wrote for *Patagon Journal*, one could easily imagine being there with Jack in his tent at the start of his National Geographic expedition to Sarmiento:

Rains, this black night, hammer the tent like buckshot poured out of a pail, even drowning out the gale force of the wind overhead and the bashing of waves on the headland. I lay sleepless in my tent... However, it's not the violence of the storm that keeps me awake, but something quite different: the sheer excitement of having finally reached a longtime goal.

— **Jil Anderson, with Camilo Rada**

Editor's Note: Portions of this tribute were adapted from the AAJ 2014 article about the Cordillera de Sarmiento, "Recon: Towers of Wind and Ice," co-authored by Camilo Rada and Jack Miller.

Images



Jack Miller during the 1992 National Geographic expedition that put the mountains of the Cordillera de Sarmiento on the map.

Article Details

Author	Jil Anderson
Publication	AAJ
Volume	65
Issue	97
Page	361
Copyright Date	2023
Article Type	In memoriam