



AAC Publications

David McGivern, 1948 – 2023

Lifelong educator, explorer, climber, musician, fine wood craftsman, and mentor David F. McGivern took his last breath on October 11, surrounded by siblings, a few friends, and his high school sweetheart and life partner Marie Dochnahl. David was a true renaissance man gifted with a profound sense of purpose and vision. While his beliefs were strongly held, he was always open to seeing the world from a different point of view—that is, once his stated position ran headlong into a spectacular crash with Reality. So, while he worked hard at pointing the way, he could laugh at himself when Reality responded with, “ Well...maybe not today.”

David’s commitment to education and exploration, specifically outdoor education and the appreciation of wild places, is summed up by the sheer volume of trips he led and the lives he touched over a 60-year career. Check out these stats: over 2,000 days leading outdoor education courses; winter ascents or attempts on Huntington, Goode, Gannett, Russell, Tolbert, and St. Elias (all in Alaska); two attempts to climb Denali, via the West Rib and Cassin Ridge, starting from the road; 70,000 miles of motorcycle travel crisscrossing North America and Australia; musical tours (violin) of Ireland, Thailand, and Peru; sea kayak passage from Haines, Alaska, to Vancouver Island; and numerous rock climbing forays to Yosemite, the Sierra, Red Rock, the Canadian Rockies, El Potrero Chico, Squamish, the North Cascades, and the Bugaboos. Dave got after it!

He grew up in a large Catholic family in Madison, Wisconsin, the second eldest of four brothers and two sisters. Drafted into the U.S. Army in 1968, he served as a medic in Vietnam. After his service he traveled west to Colorado and the mountain life in 1971. David earned undergraduate and graduate degrees at the University of Alaska. He taught at Outward Bound, the National Outdoor Leadership School, and Alaska Pacific University, where he influenced the expansion of its Outdoor Studies Program and led students on dozens of trips across Alaska and elsewhere, including annual rock climbing adventures to El Potrero Chico, Mexico.

With his peers, David was exactly who you needed when things got serious. In 1987, when he and I attempted the Elevator Shaft on Mt. Johnson, he was quick to cut the rope and resuscitate me when an ice block exploded onto us from above. I was unconscious for six hours and experiencing grand mal seizures, and David kept me alive until I could start crawling. He then guided us down to the Ruth Glacier, saving my life.

David’s influence on his students and adventure partners was profound—thoughtful, inquisitive, a true friend.

– **Charlie Sassara**

Images



David McGivern on Mt. Huntington in the winter of 1991.



David McGivern with a sleeping bag that has lost a little loft during a winter ascent of Mt. Huntington.



David McGivern (left) and Charlie Sassara en route to an ascent of Mt. Alpenglow, above Turnagain Arm, Alaska.



David McGivern in 1987.

Article Details

Author	Charlie Sassara
Publication	AAJ
Volume	66
Issue	98
Page	
Copyright Date	2024
Article Type	In memoriam