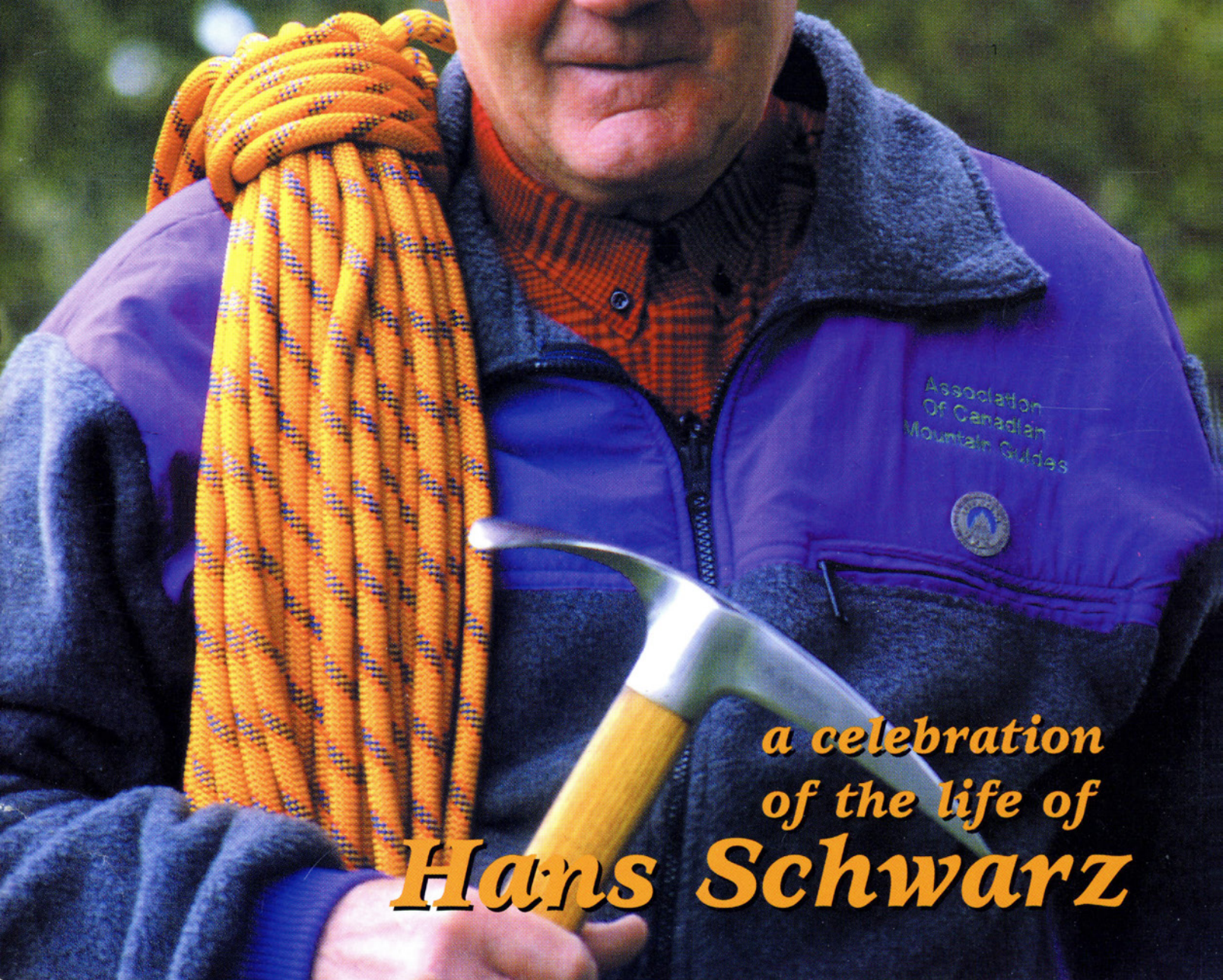


# *King of the Spiral Road*



*a celebration  
of the life of  
Hans Schwarz*





## ***Growing Up Swiss***

**H**ans Schwarz was born on a small farm in the Canton of Bern, in Switzerland on September 8th, 1930. There were five children in the farm family, two older brothers Emil & Christian, an older sister Heidi and one younger brother Fritz. It was nearly 1200 vertical feet from his family's farmhouse to the school in the valley below. Each day Hans skied to school and skied back up the steep slope toward home. Some days he carried milk and cream down to the cheese factory below the school. Hans was one fit little Swiss.

Hans' interest in climbing began early. There was a limestone cliff immediately behind the schoolhouse that he loved to climb. Lunch soon followed a regular pattern: five minutes to eat and 55 minutes to climb. To the astonishment of his

friends and the horror of his family, he also climbed trees, telephone poles and roofs just for the joy of it.

When, at twenty, Hans entered mandatory service with the Swiss Army, the four-month training began with artillery, then advanced to skiing and climbing in which Hans excelled. Each refresher course advanced him closer to joining Switzerland's elite mountain corps. This experience exposed Hans to professional Swiss mountain guides who offered instruction to troops in the reserve. Hans soon decided on a life course. Climbing was in his blood. He wanted to be a guide.

Hans was also thinking about leaving Switzerland. His first thought was New Zealand and the Southern Alps. New Zealand was a long way away, however, and expensive to reach. Canada, however,



*In 1961, Hans carried a cross to the peak of Mt. Edith Cavell that later became the backdrop for hundreds of summit photographs.*

was an option. The Rocky Mountains were attractive, indeed, and Canada was easier and cheaper to get to.

In the spring of 1956, Hans arrived in Toronto. Armed only with a dream and a few words of English, Hans inquired at the immigration office about work. The immigration office got him a job in Algonquin Park. Here Hans learned to canoe and to speak English. When the resort at which Hans was working closed in the fall, Hans returned to Toronto. He then went north again to work in a pulpwood camp near Kapuskasing, Ontario. He hated it but he didn't know what else to do. The answer, however, soon presented itself. His fellow pulpwood workers kept talking about a place called Hinton, where *Northwest Pulp and Power* was building a new pulp mill. Surmising there must be more dry ground in Hinton than there was in Kapuskasing, Hans took a Canadian National train west in October of 1956. He arrived late in the evening and, after spending the night in the waiting room of the train station, he walked down to the mill and an hour later had a job. He stayed for two years. Then, with the Rockies beckoning, Hans moved to Jasper to work with the national parks service, to help cut the new route for the Jasper-Banff Highway. In the summer, he worked in the government sawmill that existed then up the Whirlpool Valley. With only one day off each week, Hans barely

had time to climb. This, however, in no way diminished Hans' enthusiasm or his accomplishments. In the 1960s, Hans Schwarz was one fit mountaineer.

## **Hans Solo**

**T**here is an amusing story that surrounds Hans' first ascent of Mount Athabasca. It was 1960 and Hans was working for the national parks service at the Columbia Icefield. One evening Hans told Fred Schleiss that he wanted to climb Mount Athabasca on his day off the following day. He left at 5:00 AM from the camp and arrived with the rising sun on the shoulder. He traversed the entire north ridge to the summit without touching the glacier. He then descended down the back where he was able to stay on bare ice. At the toe of the glacier there was a shack where climbers had to sign out before attempting the mountain. Hans found Fred Schleiss at the door. Schleiss looked up and said that it didn't look too bad and that he thought Hans could do it. Hans replied simply that he had already done it. He had reached the summit at 8:00 AM. Fred was stunned. With a good part of the day still before him, Hans then went off to climb Wilcox Peak in the afternoon. Later he climbed Tangle Ridge and Nigel Peak in one day from the camp at Beauty Flats. Days off were precious to Hans and he used them wisely.

Hans Schwarz appeared to have boundless energy and enthusiasm. In the fall of 1961, Hans managed to find a day to make his first ascent of Mount Edith Cavell. On that ascent, he managed to drag a cross to its summit. This famous cross remained a backdrop for summit photographs for forty years. Alas, it has disintegrated, and it is not likely another Hans Schwarz will come along to drag a new cross to the summit.

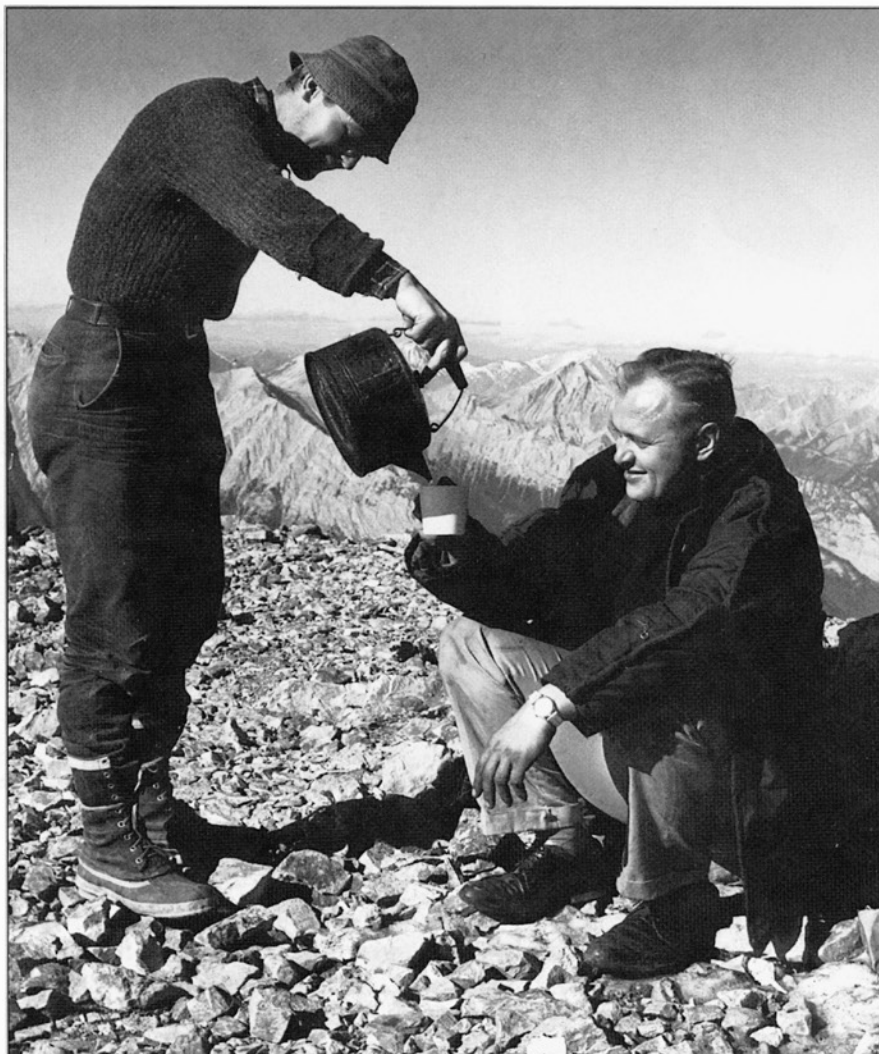
It was at this time that Hans met another great mountaineer, Tony Messner who also worked for the national parks service. Hans and Tony began climbing together and soon became a famous duo. They climbed Roche Perdreux, Whirlpool Peak and Mount Colin. When the parks service

gave them some time off to climb, they went into the Mount Alberta area. After climbing Mount Woolley and Diadem, they were ready for Mount Alberta itself. Weather, however, intervened. Forty years later, Hans still wishes he and Messner would have tackled Alberta first.

In the winter Hans worked with the government at the park ski hill on Whistlers Mountain. It was then that things began to move very quickly for the young Swiss mountaineer who fell in love with the Rockies. Over the period during which Hans was working at the ski area on Whistlers, he took mountaineering and mountain rescue courses with the national park warden service. In the spring of 1962, all his hard work and dedication paid off. When he passed his guides' test, examiner Walter Perren pronounced Hans Schwarz a fully accredited mountain guide.

In July of 1962, Hans guided his first client in Jasper. It is clear from the following account that Hans was already master of some of the most important guiding techniques. Harold Stevenson was obviously impressed with Hans' natural ability and guiding spirit:

*Hans led me up peaks in the Fryatt Creek region, to high camp on Mt. Robson, Pyramid Mountain and Mt. Edith Cavell during a two week period. His new tent camp at Fryatt was comfortable and testimony to the industriousness of Hans in setting up the means for future expeditions. His strength, courage and cheerfulness were evident on these trips — but particularly in carrying his own and extra packs up to high camp and still looking out for his client. He is considerate of the comforts and needs of his client and is a first rate cook in a high camp. His skill in guiding on a climb is without peer — a minor deficiency at this stage is his inability to command blue sky and sunshine in quantity. His weather forecasts are optimistic and bright as his friendliness is. He is also inclined to say "that's the last of the steep difficult parts to the summit"(after the first fourth of the climb). The climb of*



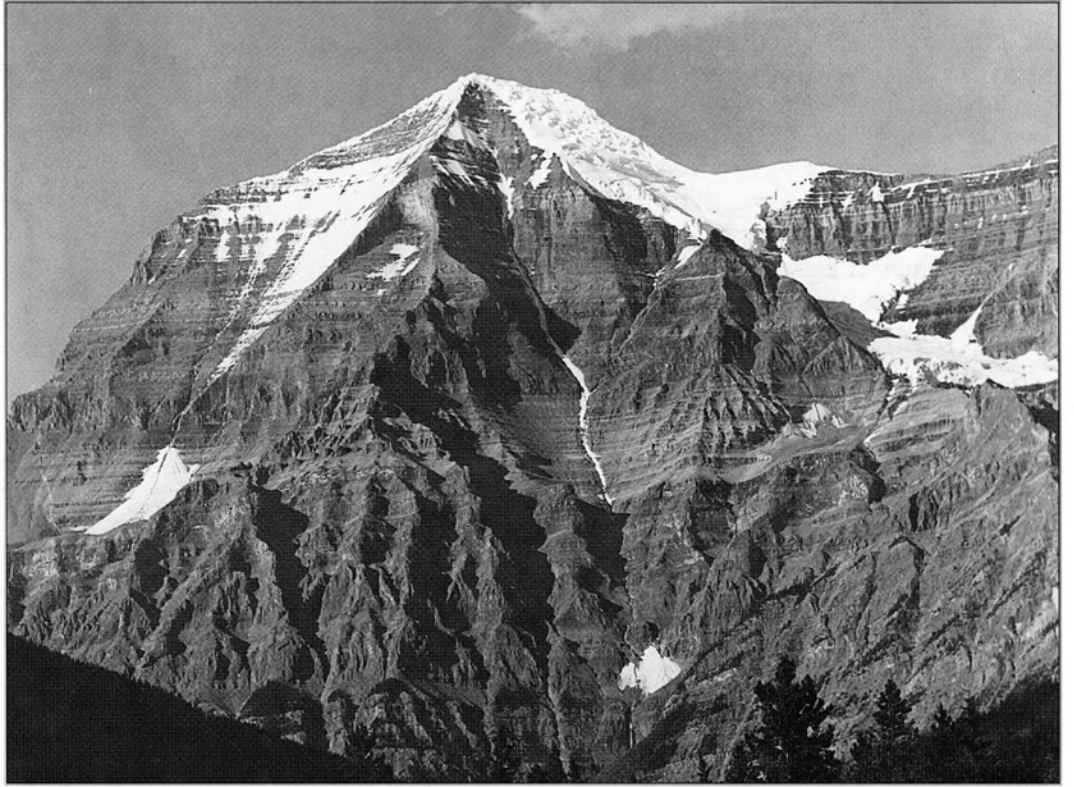
*Mt. Edith Cavell in new snow was a masterpiece for Hans. I'm proud to have helped Hans at this stage of his career. I can boast I climbed with Hans of Jasper.*

*Berg Heil — Harold Stevenson*

Because of his mountaineering abilities, Hans Schwarz found himself in some very interesting jobs. In the summer of 1962, he was hired as safety inspector for the installation of a microwave tower on the summit of Pyramid Mountain above the town of Jasper. He spent thirty-seven days on the mountain where he solidified a life-long friendship with the legendary Jasper photographer Joe Weiss.

In the summer of 1960 Hans had met a charming young woman named Helen Alessi. Helen was born in Rome, New York and had come to Canada to study ballet at

*After being accredited as a professional guide in 1962, Hans was safety specialist for the installation of the microwave tower on Pyramid Mountain in Jasper.*



*Hans Schwarz will be forever associated with Mount Robson, which he first climbed in 1960.*

the Banff School of Fine Arts. While in Banff she met photographer Harry Rowed who offered Helen a job in his photographic store in Jasper. One day, while Hans was in Rowed's store to buy film, he met the very striking Helen. They were married in December of 1962 and have remained so for nearly forty years.

Early in 1963, Hans and his new wife started a guiding service. With a client list he bought from Willi Pfisterer, Hans set out on his own to build a life and a legend in Jasper. Concentrating initially on summer guiding opportunities, Hans worked sedulously to establish a record of successful ascents, and to develop the lifelong personal relationships with clients that make the guiding professional so rewarding. His name became very closely associated with a number of Jasper area peaks. The foremost of these was Mount Robson.

## ***The King of the Spiral Road***

**O**ver the course of his climbing career, Hans Schwarz's name was inseparable from the climbing history of five major peaks in the northern Rockies. It is probable that he has climbed Mount Edith Cavell more often than anyone in history. He led dozens of ascents of Mount Athabasca and Mount Morro. His name is enshrined on Mount Colin. Though his feats on these other peaks are important, the great respect in which he is held in the climbing community is most closely tied to Mount Robson.

In their guidebook, *The Rocky Mountains of Canada North*, authors Robert Kruszyna and Bill Putnam offer that local natives, in deference to the peak's distinctive horizontal banding, called Mount Robson *Yuh-hai-haskun*, "The Mountain of the Spiral Road." If this is the case, then Hans Schwarz is the King of the Spiral Road.

Hans Schwarz has climbed Mount Robson a dozen times. His knowledge of the peak in all its diverse conditions is

encyclopedic. One of the major features — the Schwarz Ledges — on the normal, or South Southwest Ridge of the mountain, are named for him. It is no wonder that two generations of climbers have consulted Hans before approaching the mountain.

Hans Schwarz was 30 when he made his first ascent of Mount Robson. In the summer of 1960, Hans Gselman, an Austrian photographer and writer came to Jasper to do a story about a three month canoe trip he was undertaking on the Athabasca River that would take him from the headwaters of the river all the way to the Arctic Ocean. Gselman was anxious to climb Snowdome so that he could begin his journey at the very headwaters of the Athabasca River and the hydrological apex of the continent. Hans convinced him to climb Mount Robson instead. Only once again in his entire career would Schwarz find the mountain in such good condition. After three glorious days of perfect weather, Schwarz and his client passed through The Hourglass to stand on the summit.

Hans Schwarz's third ascent of Mount Robson was done in the company of Dr. Robert E. Davies of the University of Pennsylvania in August of 1964. Hans had climbed with Davies before. Two years earlier, they had attempted Robson but failed. It is the test of a proficient guide that a client can speak highly of him even if they have been unsuccessful in gaining the summit of the mountain. Here is what the defeated Davies said about Hans Schwarz after their foiled first attempt on Robson in August of 1962:

*We are just back from an attempt on the south face of Mt. Robson which failed on account of the ice and snow on the traverse of the high rock ledges. The return was marked by snow and rock avalanches and considerable cannonade from the glaciers. There was also a high wind, heavy rain and an impressive thunderstorm before and after making camp at the timber line on the way down.*

*In fair weather and foul Hans exuded good cheer and confidence. I thoroughly enjoyed this three day climb on Robson and on the basis of experience with*



*Guiding on Robson, 1965.*

*guides from England, France, Switzerland, Austria and the United States can heartily recommend Hans of Jasper as the best guide with whom I have ever climbed. Equally at home on rock and ice, he has great skill as a cook in a gale and can grimly hold onto a tent about to blow away or rip, without a murmur of complaint. All in all he is a good man on the hills and I hope to climb with him again before too long.*

Davies did climb with Schwarz again. Two summers later he returned to Mount Robson. This time they made the summit. Hans had already been to the summit with Dr. Robert Harlow three days earlier. In 1965, Hans climbed Mt. Robson with Rocky Morin of Hinton. Hans Gmoser and Peter Fuhrmann climbed Robson at the same time with other clients. Hans climbed Robson again in August of 1967 with John Breckenridge. Two weeks later, he climbed it again with Don Kronstedt. In 1968, Hans took Doug Lampard to the summit. On July 13th, 1970, Hans made the summit with Steve Herrero, who later became famous as a grizzly bear researcher and conservationist. Hans made the summit of Mount Robson again in August of 1973 with Dick Roe and Gerry Wright, both members of The Alpine Club of Canada.

But the summit of Mt. Robson did not yield easily to climbers. Hans made it to high camp five times with clients, but either the weather turned them back, or the clients just weren't ready for the difficulties of the climb. Twice Hans had clients within a thousand feet of the summit and had to turn back. Weather was often a problem, and conditions often demanded careful choices to avoid catastrophe. Hugh Considine attempted Robson with Hans in 1965, again in 1967 and 1968. All three times they were defeated by conditions. As is often the case, however, guide and client became fast friends. In the spring of 1968, Considine joined Hans Schwarz and Peter Fuhrmann on a successful ascent on Mt. Huascarán in Peru. We will return to this adventure later. Guided by Hans, Considine did finally reach the summit of Mount Robson on his fourth attempt which was made in the company of Steve Herrero in 1970. In that same year, Hans help relocate the Ralph Forster Hut on Mount Robson. It remains today one of the great alpine huts in Canada.

It was one of Hans' disappointments that he never did the classic Kain Face on Mount Robson. He could never find a client that was prepared to pay a guide for five days on the mountain, and after he started guiding he was so in demand that he had little time for independent exploration.

Hans made his last ascent of Mount Robson in July of 1985. His clients were Michael and Jon Popowich. Both knew it would be Hans' last attempt on "his" mountain. On the last ascent, as on the first, Hans' clients knew that in their choice of guide they had entered history:

*The hike up to the hut was just about enough to make one turn around and if that was not enough the Schwarz Ledges make your knees knock and heart pound. Spice of life — fantastic! A climb I won't soon forget. Thanks Hans. I'm thankful and honored to do it with you on your last time up.*

Michael Popowich

## **The Wickersham Wall**

**I**n 1962, Hans Gmoser organized an expedition to attempt the first ascent of the massive Wickersham Wall on what was then still called Mount McKinley. At 20,300 feet, Mount McKinley, now known as Denali, is the highest mountain in North America and the Wickersham Wall was considered a great prize. When Gmoser broke his leg skiing in Utah, the expedition was delayed by a year. When the expedition departed for Alaska in May of 1963, it was composed of eight members. Thirty year old Hans Gmoser was the leader. Other members included Gmoser's close friend and long time climbing partner Leo Grillmair of Calgary, Gunti Printz, 27, also of Calgary, a 26 year-old ski patrolman named Dieter Raubach, Pat Boswell of Toronto (who later became the owner and editor of *The Banff Crag & Canyon*), Tom Spencer of Los Angeles, Hank Kaufman, 25, of Anchorage, Alaska and already famous guide from Jasper, Hans Schwarz.

The Wickersham Wall is a 15,000 foot wall of snow and ice. As Gmoser reported to the press upon the expedition's departure, the biggest problem was the final 5000 – 6000 feet of the wall, which was very steep and prone to avalanche. What happened on the climb is perhaps best told by Hans Schwarz. We begin his story with a letter that he wrote to his wife Helen en route to the mountain. How many letters have climbers written like this one:

*Dearest Helen,*

*Well, here I am sitting somewhere in Alaska with 1000 pounds of equipment behind my back. The trip went O.K. up to last night. It was a rough break we hit on the road to McKinley Park. This caused a weakening in the springs and the drive shaft started to drag on the body. So we had to unload the car and Boswell went to Fairbanks to deliver it. Hans was ahead of us and it is a matter of time now until he comes back and looks for us. It is only 180 miles left to go.*

*I do like Alaska very much and it has some very beautiful scenes. And talk*

about the nice weather and the sunshine we are getting. The sun still goes down but it does not get dark anymore. So all I needed were the parking lights last night while driving. You just will have to see that too, so on the next trip here you will be included. And how are you making out with your new job and do you miss me a little?

We left Calgary on Wednesday and stayed near Dawson Creek the first night where a member of the Alpine Club did his best to please us. A tent was put up by him and an excellent moose meat supper was dished up. From there on we drove in one stretch to here. We always changed off driving and I had the graveyard shift. The Alaska Highway is in good condition but awful dusty. But all in all it was a real experience and I am glad to be here.

I do think an awful lot of you and at times even miss you a bit. I was afraid not to have time to write to you but since I am waiting for 12 hours already did I come to the conclusion to do it now.

The panorama here is simply terrific and I wish you would be here to see it too. There is a little lodge nearby and the people in it just came up from the States. A wife with ten kids and I am telling you they do have a free life up here. One of the boys was out to see me with no shirt on and bare footed. And there is still quite a lot of snow and a cold wind blowing. I should send this letter to you from McKinley Station after I get there. I slept a solid eight hours this morning and discovered that we are three hours behind standard time.

There was an article in the Albertan about our expedition and here in the Alaskan paper too. I did not get a hold of one copy. Maybe someone will send one to you. Mrs. Wright might spot it.

Well, we are now all together in the camping ground by McKinley Station. We did not go to Anchorage. Hank gave me your very lovely letter which I take with me on the mountain.

All my love,  
Hans

And many kisses too!

**Eight Men Climb A Wall Of Ice**

In nine days they cover three miles of ground, gain two miles in altitude—and win a struggle with Mount McKinley

By Bruce Moss  
Western Magazine

The Canadian Wickersham Wall Expedition did not go as smoothly as everyone would have liked. As often happens on a huge peak like Denali there were a lot of problems. Members of the expedition got sick from altitude and exertion. Later Hans Gmoser told a Calgary reporter that one of the reasons he and Hans Schwarz were successful on the Wickersham Wall was that they forced themselves to keep eating even though the altitude had blunted their appetites. "Hans Schwarz and I were the two garbage cans on the trip," Gmoser noted in his diary. "We usually polished off whatever scraps there were and I guess that's one of reason why we fared better than most."

Hans Schwarz's report on the expedition barely mentions the Wickersham Wall which was their great accomplishment. His report is worth offering in full lest anyone think that great accomplishments in mountaineering don't come without difficulty and sacrifice:

*We left Calgary on May 22, 1963, and drove up the Alaska Highway. We had several flat tires on the way because of the heavy loads. By May 26th we were all together (eight of us) at McKinley Park camping ground and there we sorted food and equipment for the airdrop. Taking only enough food to last us until we received this airdrop still left us with 80 lb. packs. To be dropped off was*

*The McKinley Expedition  
of 1963.*

approximately 200 lbs. of food per person, extra clothing, ropes we needed later on in the climb, gas, flag markers etc.

On May 27th, we began the hike towards the mountain. We crossed two big rivers and endless miles of tundra (rough flats), and on the first of June arrived at the point of Peters Glacier where the actual climbing of the wall (cliffs of snow and ice) started. The next day we pushed up to 7000 feet, called Jeffery Point and waited while a two-day storm raged before Don Sheldon, the pilot who was to fly in the rest of our gear could make the airdrop. Then it came and so did more bad weather. We were all soaked from the wet snow that fell all day, but we did manage to take a food cache up to the 8500 foot level.

Finally on June 6th we moved our camp up to 9000 feet. The loads were now very heavy and everyone was tired after making two trips to get everything up. That day we made the first contact with Fairbanks on our radio which cheered us all up. They gave us the weather forecasts. By Friday we moved to 10,000 feet, and Hans Gmoser (the leader of the expedition) and I went to 13,000 feet and broke trail. We made the trip between 10,000 and 13,000 feet three times. Sunday the 9th was a real tough one. We started moving camp from 10,000 to 13,000 feet and Hans [Gmoser] and I went up with a load of food to 15,600 feet. We always carried from 40 - 50 lb. packs on that steep face. (Just imagine climbing up 5,600 stairs with a 50 lb. sack of flour on your back.)

Monday the 10th was a great day for we pushed all the way up the Wickersham Wall and camped at 16,600 feet. Some of the men were beginning to be troubled with altitude sickness. We were now high above the clouds and I enjoyed the dry air.

The following night an earthquake shook us so hard that all of us woke up from our sound sleep.

By Wednesday we were at the 18,000 foot level and for the first night in four days we were out of the danger route of possible avalanches. Here we

planned the ascent of the north peak for the next day and the south summit for the following day.

When morning arrived everyone was too sick or too weak to want to do anything, but Hans and I decided we had to go on to the summit that day and at 1:45 PM we reached the destination we had been striving for since May 22nd. I cried when I saw the summit, and all the exhaustion, anger and disappointment went out of me. At that moment I felt I could climb a hundred times more and go through it all again and even worse because God had given me renewed strength.

Only Hans [Gmoser] and I made it to the summit along with Gunti Prinz who went up a half an hour behind us although when he passed us we could no longer see the summit as we were on our way down and the fog was closing around us. Just after we returned to camp a real storm hit us and piled up eight feet of snow on the tents. One night - we tried to move the next day - only went about 100 yards. Couldn't see and had to stop again. Another night - men were so sick they couldn't even control themselves - Hans and I became nursemaids (although at times we were disgusted we were also grateful that we weren't feeling the same way and had the strength to keep us all alive).

The third day the storm lifted enough so that Hans and I each took a sick man and roped them up and belayed them down to 16,600 feet and then got stuck in another storm and had to dig ice caves to put the sick men in for the night. The next day we made a bigger igloo type cave and my first and only mishap of the whole trip turned out to be some very frozen fingertips. Meanwhile our tents and other members were stranded above and finally two showed up. Another member was too sick to come down so instead of the four coming down together and helping the sick one they came down to make us go all the way back up to retrieve the rest of the gear and the two others left behind.

At this point I was beginning to find my anger rather hard to manage for I felt

*that a strong man can only be pushed so far and Hans and I were being pushed to our limits. ... Finally, everyone was down to 16,600 where we had built our igloo. One was blinded, one had a mild stroke and the others were so weak from stomach illness that they couldn't even stand. So the 18th was a blessing for us when we managed to reach the west buttress and then down the south side to Windy Corner and on to the Kahillna Glacier. Here once again we lost a member of our party who was deserted by his companions. Fearing he had fallen in a crevasse, Hans and I put on our skins and for an hour went back up our trail until we saw him come out of the heavy fog. (He couldn't see and had sat down to wait for a while.) This had been a real long way to come but with the skis and the deep powder snow it was quite easy.*

*It was here at 10,000 feet that Don Sheldon dropped us some food and the next couple of days were spent resting. All the sick ones recovered fully and activity in the camp went back to normal. I was relieved of cooking duty because they were afraid I would burn my fingers having no feeling in them.*

*Later Don tried to fly us out from here but got caught before he could fly out and had to spend two days more with us while the snow fell. We decided to move camp to 7,000 feet where Don might have a better chance of landing on harder snow.*

*We arrived in Talkeetna on June 24th. From there I took the train to Fairbanks and at midnight on the 26th boarded a jet for Seattle. The Midnight Sun was greeting us as soon as we reached 30,000 feet and this was my farewell to Alaska.*

## **Rockies First Ascents**

**A** year after the epic on the Denali, Hans and Helen were blessed with their first child, Dale. In order to be home more, Hans took a winter job as a ski patroller for the national parks service at Whistlers Mountain near Jasper. Three years later, Marmot Basin began to be

developed. After the old lift on Whistlers was condemned, Hans was invited to become the head of the ski patrol at Marmot. It was a job Hans relished. He would go on to be the head of the ski patrol for eighteen years.

Though he stayed close to home for the most part, the years following the ascent of the Wickersham Wall were productive one for Hans. It was during this period that Hans made some important climbs in the Jasper area. On July 24th, 1964, Hans made the second ascent of the direct route on the southwest face of Mount Colin with Don Kronstedt. Two days later, Schwarz and Kronstedt made the first ascent of the southwest face of Mount Hawk.

Early in August, Robert Harlow made a first ascent and traverse of two unnamed peaks in the Colin Range with Hans. These later became known as Garonne Peaks. Later in August of 1964, Don Kronstedt proved unable to do a planned climb on Mount Throne. In the absence of his partner, Hans made the first ascent of the northeast face of Mount Throne solo.

During the following winter, Hans took a hard look at Mount Edith Cavell. After making 14 summer ascents of the mountain, Hans was intimately familiar with the mountain's east ridge. On March 9th, 1965, Hans and another Swiss guide who worked with the parks service, Hans Phillipp, skied into the mountain, climbed half way up the ridge and bivouacked in a snow cave. The next day they made the first winter ascent of the east ridge of Mount Edith Cavell.

In 1966, Hans and Helen became the proud parents of a second son, David. With two small children at home, Hans began to enter the next period of his career during which he became famous not only as a guide but as a teacher.

## **The Guide and Teacher**

**T**here are literally hundreds of people alive today who owe their pleasure in climbing mountains to what they learned from Hans Schwarz. Nowhere has his



Starting in 1964, Hans Schwarz taught rescue techniques in SAR-TECK courses for 26 years.

impact been greater than on the membership of the Alpine Club of Canada.

As soon as Hans became a guide in 1962, it was his ambition to work at one of the ACC's annual general mountaineering camps. As it happened, the ACC camp for 1963 was held in the Eremite Valley in Jasper, among peaks Hans knew well. In a letter to Helen from the Eremite Camp we are privy again to the special relationship Hans and Helen shared. We also learn that Hans is still dealing with the trauma he experienced earlier in the year on Mount McKinley:

*My Dear Helen,*

*I have had an easy day and want to write to you how things are going. I hope you are not too lonely. If it gets too much come to me. I have room in the tent and the food is also good. I must say there is not any girl here in the camp who could compete with you.*

*Everything is going well. On Monday we all stayed home on account of heavy rain. On Tuesday it was a little better and we had two people, the camp doctor and his wife, on Memorial and Outpost. On Wednesday we had the first rock school which worked out really good. Had 23 people take part in it.*

*On Thursday another nice climb on Alcove and in the evening by the campfire a 1 1/2 half hour talk about McKinley. Everybody was pleased with*

*my speech. So you see I finally got over the fear and I can now speak to a crowd of people without any butterflies in my stomach.*

*Today another nice climb on Mt. Anchorite, with 12 people in the party. The higher and more difficult peaks have still lots of new and wet snow on them so we had to keep them closed to the people, because the danger is too great, and the rock too slippery for the standard of Alpine Club climbers.*

*I read an article in the paper about the other party on the Wickersham Wall. Sheldon says that he could not find them and that the whole face was swept by avalanches after a bad storm. Well lets hope the best, that they dug a deep enough cave and stayed in there until the danger was over.*

*Well the weather is very unsettled and rather cool with not too much snow. So far I did not have to start early in the morning. Most of the peaks are close to camp and starting after breakfast is early enough. Usually we are back in camp by three. This will change when the higher peaks are ready to be climbed. This should give you an idea what's going on here and I am looking forward to seeing you after camp. I don't know if I get a Robson trip after camp, as there simply is too much snow on the mountains.*

*The trail from the viewpoint to here is a mess and the boots get soaking wet every day. I was quite nervous at the beginning but calmed down by now. I hope the same thing happened to you. Say hello to everybody and if possible have some brownies ready when I come home. Take care of yourself and write also.*

*All my love and kisses,  
Hans*

Hans Schwarz had a lifelong relationship with The Alpine Club of Canada and with a variety of other mountaineering organizations.

In 1964, Hans became involved in teaching mountaineering in the Department of National Defense SAR-TECK basic para rescue and rescue spe-

cialist program. Over the next 26 years during which Hans was involved in this program, he hired some of the best guides in Canada to assist him. Hans' guiding partners in the program included Rudi Gertsh, Rudi Kranabitter, Hans Peter Stettler, Ottmar Setzer, Bernie Schiesser, Eric Lomas, Mark Whelan and Buck Corrigan.

In 1966, Hans was at the ACC's General Mountaineering Camp at Mount Assiniboine, where he offered two snow and ice schools, two basic rock climbing schools, and advanced rock climbing instruction. During the two week-long camp, Hans also led parties up Mount Assiniboine and Mts. Tower, Sturdee, Wedgewood and Magog. That same summer Hans also guided for the Vancouver Section at their camp held at Mount Tantalus.

In 1967, Hans participated in The Yukon Alpine Centennial Expedition as a guide at the ACC General Mountaineering Camp held on the southeast side of the Steele Glacier.

In 1968, Hans went back to Tantalus with the Vancouver Section to offer a variety of rock and snow schools, and to lead two successful attempts on Mt. Tantalus as well.

In 1969, Hans guided at the ACC camp in the Freshfields. The following year he was in the Tonquin Valley. In 1971, he was at the ACC General Mountaineering Camp up Farnham Creek. The next year he was back in his old stomping grounds in Jasper with the ACC camp at Fryatt Creek. Later camps allowed Hans to guide at Glacier Lake, at Mount Robson, the upper reaches of the Whirlpool River, and Mount Clemenceau. Hans also guided for many years with Iowa Mountaineers in Wyoming as well as in the Canadian Rockies. By the time he had done his last camp with the ACC in 1981, Hans had seen many of the most spectacular mountain regions in Canada.

While Hans Schwarz is well remembered for his mountaineering achievements and for his guiding, he should also be remembered for his significant contributions to the development of the guiding profession in Canada. Much of his contri-

bution was made through the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides.

## ***Hans and the A.C.M.G.***

**W**ith the decline of professional guiding at the railway hotels following World War II, Walter Perren was hired by Parks Canada to develop a Canadian licensing system for guides. Until that time, guides could be issued licenses on the basis of a one-page questionnaire. Perren immediately expanded the requirement to include a four-day comprehensive exam, consisting of one day of rock climbing, a two-day mixed climb, and a day of oral and written examinations. The first candidates to pass this examination were Bruno Engler and Hans Gmoser.

In 1957, Dave Brewer, Ken Baker, Frank Stark, Leo Grillmair and Heinz Kahl took the examination. During 1958, Perren was too busy with other work to conduct the exams, and requested that applicants seek a letter of recommendation from Hans Gmoser as the basis upon which their application would be approved. In discussion with Gmoser, Perren proposed the creation of a mountain guides' association which, under the combined auspices of The Alpine Club of Canada and Parks Canada, would formally undertake responsibilities for guide training and certification. The Association of Canadian Mountain Guides was formally created on May 23rd, 1963. The founding members were Hans Gmoser, Eric Lomas, Peter Fuhrmann, Brian Greenwood, Willi Pfisterer, Dick Lofthouse, Leo Grillmair, Heinz Kahl and Hans Schwarz.

Hans took an active interest in the future of guiding in Canada. He was part of guides courses in 1966, and 1967. During this same period, Hans was also offering instruction for Parks Canada and for Hans Gmoser, as he worked to develop the legend that we know today as Canadian Mountain Holidays.

In 1967, Hans assumed the role of Vice President of the A.C.M.G. under Peter Fuhrmann. In 1969, Hans assumed the Presidency. While it was difficult for Hans to hold and attend as many meetings as

he would have liked, the A.C.M.G. advanced rapidly in those years and is now one of the most reputable mountaineering organizations in the world.

## **Huascaran**

**I**n 1968, Hans, Peter Fuhrmann and Hugh Considine decided they would like to add a little adventure to their lives. They wanted to go somewhere foreign to climb. They looked at a map of South America, and it was hard not to notice that the Andes, the longest range of mountains in the world, ran for 8000 kilometres down the spine of the continent. The highest of these great mountains were in Peru; and the highest of these Peruvian mountains, at 6768 metres was Huascaran. The trio decided to climb it, regardless of the fact that this would be one of the first major Canadian mountaineering expeditions abroad. This mountain had a reputation. They were reported lost on the mountain. But the tale is best told by Hans Schwarz himself. He was there.

*One day a call came from Peter Fuhrmann asking if I would like to accompany a client of ours, Hugh Considine from Calgary, on a trip to climb in Peru. After talking it over with Helen we decided that since my brother was in Peru working for Nestles I could combine the climb with a visit to him and his family.*

*After eleven hours with the Princess of Buenos Aires of the Canadian Pacific Airlines, and a one-hour stop in Mexico City we arrived in Lima at 6 A.M. We were cleared through customs without any trouble and spent the morning shopping. Hugh rented a car and shortly after 1 P.M. the long drive to Huaraz began. The first 100 km went by smoothly on the Pan American Highway, but the last 300 km we ended up on a rough, winding road reaching an elevation of 13,000 feet at the pass. Our descent down to Huaraz was slow, and at midnight we finally arrived at the Hotel Monteray, our accommodation for the night.*

*The next morning for the first good look at the mountain we drove to Yungay*

*where we turned off the main road on to a narrow, winding, steep, modified donkey trail up through a deep, spectacular gorge with sheer walls on either side. What I remembered most was the enormous hanging glaciers on the North Face of Huascaran high above us. The road ended at a beautiful lake called Llanganuco where we left our car. We took our gear and went to explore the east side of the mountain where the first ascent had been made. We camped over night at 15,000 feet in this area and inspected the glacier, which had melted back so much that it would have been dangerous to attempt this route. We then decided that we would have to climb it from the west side.*

*The next morning we returned to Yungay where we made arrangements to hire porters with donkeys to meet us at a village called Musho where we would start our climb. That night we spent at the Hotel, and early the next morning we left for the village. Everything moves slowly in Peru, and we waited a whole day for the porters to come. When they didn't, we set up our tents in the schoolyard and spent a restless night wishing we were on our way. The next morning, the porters finally arrived and we set off to establish our base camp on the moraine by Raimundi Glacier. After helping us set up camp, the porters left for Musho and we spent the evening getting ready for the climb.*

*The following day we started up the glacier toward the saddle where we had planned to set up our 2nd camp. Unfortunately it was a long ascent and we ran out of daylight just below the Garganta. We were forced to camp in a very uncomfortable spot at 19,000 feet. The next day we reached the saddle, left our camping gear, and headed for the South Peak, but just below the summit the fog started to roll in, and since we would not be able to get a good view, and we had not marked our ascent, we decided to return to the saddle where we put up our tent at our third camp at 19,500 feet and just below the North Peak.*

*The next day we woke up to a heavy snowfall so we spent the day resting and*

waiting for it to clear. During the night because of the low pressure from the storm, we all began to feel the altitude and had severe headaches. The next morning we had poor visibility but Hugh and Peter decided to climb the North Peak, which was just above us, while I chose to wait in camp and prepare for the next day's second attempt on the South Peak.

When they returned to camp they were exhausted, but I had food prepared which helped a bit. Now, since they had climbed the North Peak, the pressure was off and we decided that we had climbed the mountain enough, and that we had lost two days with the storm and would get short on food if we spent another two days. The next morning we packed up our tent and headed down to our base camp, only to discover that the tents and equipment we had left there were gone.

At this time we didn't know what had happened so although it was late afternoon, we decided to continue on down to the village where we had left our car and to see if we could locate our gear. By this time it was dark, and when we entered the village we spotted our tents set up in the schoolyard. After checking our gear we seemed to have everything intact, except for my spare red knee socks that had gone missing.

Nobody seemed to be around, but as we went through the village we heard a lot of noise coming from one of the larger buildings so we entered, and to our astonishment the villagers were having a fiesta, which we later learned was a wake for us.

That was the first indication that all was not well, and that somehow the villagers, because of the snowfall, had decided we were lost on the mountain and presumed us dead. What could we do but have a drink with villagers who were so happy to see us alive?

When we went to load our car, we discovered that the villagers in attempting to pry open the trunk, had ruined the lock. Interested villagers came to watch our efforts trying to open the trunk and saw one man wearing some very red knee socks. Oh well, what could I do but



say goodbye to my socks, knowing that the villager would cherish them for a long time. A futile effort left the trunk still jammed, so we decided to load the car with the gear in the back seat. By that time it was pitch dark, and when we tried to go down the narrow road, the villagers refused to let us. Apparently, many villagers traveled the road at night, and they were afraid we would hit them in the dark. Luckily, there was a policeman from Yungay celebrating at our funeral (this apparently was the custom) so we invited him to come with us to make sure we didn't hit anyone. He gladly accepted, and they let us go. How we managed, I don't know. It was an extremely narrow, steep road, and we were loaded to the ceiling with gear and me scrunched in the back seat.

Although we wanted to go on to the Hotel Monteray, we were told that we would have to spend the night in Yungay because the bridge was washed out from the storm. The next morning there was Clem, manager of the Hotel Monteray, who had come looking for us. He had with him a newspaper, which told us the whole story about the report to the papers that we were missing on the mountain because of the storm. Clem

*In May of 1968, Hans climbed Huascarán in Peru with Hugh Considine and Peter Fuhrmann.*

*They were reported lost in a storm.*

said he was glad that the stories were false, and headed back to his hotel which was short staffed at the time.

We were repairing the trunk when Clem had found us, so we finished the job before following him. We were looking forward to a hot shower and running water which the other establishments lacked.

My brother also read something in a local paper and came looking for me. Traveling 700 km from Chiclayo on the coast. The only bridge across the river into Huaraz from that direction was torn out by a group of student militants. He left his car and paid someone to watch it, promising to give him more on his return if the car was all right. Then he found someone else to guide him across on a footbridge to the police station in Huaraz. When he approached the station a policeman stopped him with an automatic weapon, interrogated him, and said he couldn't help him. Luckily Fritz was by this time fluent in Spanish and accustomed to their ways. He decided not to make the fellow any more nervous than he already was with the student unrest, and went off to find a hotel for the night as he had lost sight of his guide.

The next morning he went back across the same route he had come the night before. He drove to the bridge and watched while a loaded truck passed over safely, and so he gingerly drove onto the (as he describes it) two planks spanning the river. They held and he was across. Then wasting no time he drove to Hotel Monteray, only to find no one there to give him any information. He decided to go on to Yungay. On the road he passed a truck that said Hotel Monteray on it, and he quickly jumped out and waved for it to stop. Clem luckily saw him and that was when my brother found out that I was all right and would be up shortly. When we arrived at the hotel after repairing the trunk, there was my brother with his shocking tale of his adventures to find his lost brother.

We had a great reunion. Relief for my brother and utter disbelief on our part as he elaborated on the stories in the paper. When we realized the seriousness of the false news, Hugh immediate-

ly went on the one and only telephone line out to Lima, and spent a good part of the day trying to get the news out to Canada that we were all right. The Canadian Ambassador promised to have our families notified at once.

The next day Fritz helped us with an interview with the reporters who heard that we were alive and well at the Hotel Monteray. We wondered where the reporter was that had tried to interview us before the climb and decided that he must have reported the story because he was waiting for us to return after our climb and was hoping for an exclusive. It was also very difficult to talk to him because he didn't speak any English. When we didn't show up, and there was the storm on the mountain he must have decided that we were lost and there he had his story.

At this interview the reporters asked about food and were surprised when we showed them our freeze-dried food and they tasted a dehydrated strawberry brought back to life with water.

We really didn't realize the state of affairs in Canada until we arrived home and read all the newspaper clippings. The following articles are really shocking as they were completely without foundation. For Canadian mountain climbers a little snowfall on a climb is not unusual but for the Peruvians it meant certain death. As for the story about us going to find a body, it was incredible, as we had never even heard of him.

Helen had gone through a terrible time. It started with a phone call very late one evening from a reporter who had picked up the news on Reuters. Not knowing a thing about what was happening, Helen bravely told the reporter that she hadn't heard anything about my being lost on the mountain, and that when I had written, I had said that the weather was great. However, after she got off the phone, panic set in, and for the next three days she was literally in shock. Her friends got on the wires and tried to find out what was going on, but no one could get any news out of Peru. Helen called her sister-in-law in Peru, who told her that Fritz went to look for

him, and that it probably wasn't true, as the Peruvians always embellished the news. That was a little comfort for Helen, but she lived those days not knowing if I was alive or not. Finally, a wire came from Ottawa saying that we were alive and safe.

In 1968 not many mountaineers were climbing in Peru, and we had a hard time finding information about Huascaran. We knew that several years before, 5,000 people had been killed in the valley by an avalanche off the mountains. Yungay was protected at that time by a high ridge, which lies between the city and the mountain.

Approximately two years after our climb, the horrifying news came from Peru that another avalanche had come down and this time was so large that it swept up and over the ridge and destroyed Yungay and 15,000 people. Yungay has never been rebuilt, and is no longer on the map.

## **The Joy of Climbing**

**I**t can be hard to make a living and support a family as a guide. During the early years of his climbing career, Hans Schwarz claims that he did few first ascents because he was more interested in finding good routes on good rock for future climbs with clients.

In the mid-1970s, Hans noticed that more and more people were cross-country skiing in the backcountry. In order to give these travellers the skills they needed to stay alive in the winter mountains, Hans began to offer avalanche safety courses. After leaving Marmot Basin in 1981, he concentrated more and more on teaching these courses. He would offer lectures in his home where Helen would offer tea to the participants. The practical parts of the course were taught at Marmot Basin and Whistlers Creek. Helen made an avalanche dummy and Hans would bury it and have the students probe for it. Even today Helen laments that no one ever got a picture of Hans travelling on the chair lift at Marmot with his charming but lifeless companion. Hans continued offering his

famous "Ski Avalanche School" until 1986.

In 1976, one of Hans' many friends recommended that he create a brochure to advertise his guiding service. As Hans was the only guide in Jasper at the time (now Peter Amann lives there), he decided that he should name his business *Jasper Climbing School and Guide Service*. The name was registered, a brochure printed and Hans Schwarz rose from the depths of word-of-mouth legend to become a businessman in his own right. Perhaps the business aspect of guiding was somehow repugnant to him — it is hard to say — but the same summer he incorporated his business, his back gave out. It fell out that Rudi Gertsh was able to teach the Sar Teck course to the airforce and Helen was able to cancel Hans' scheduled guiding days. The injury required a spinal fusion. Hans was not amused. Fortunately for Hans, and for Helen, the Montreal Olympics dominated television programming during the long weeks of his recovery.

After his back healed, Hans continued his demanding teaching and guiding schedule. He developed a course for the Alberta Department of Culture, Youth & Recreation at Blue Lake Centre. Hans later had to fight the provincial government to preserve A.C.M.G. guiding standards at the provincially funded centre.

Throughout this period, Hans continued to guide and teach mountaineering techniques to a variety of institutions. He taught and guided for the North West Mountaineering Club of Edmonton for eighteen years. He also worked with the Grant MacEwan Mountaineering Club for eight years. Other clients included the Canadian Wildlife Service, Syncrude, NAIT Paramedics, Canadian Ski Patrol Service (Edmonton), the AGT Whistler Mountain Cable Project, the Boy Scouts of Canada, Canadian Armed Forces Cadets, High Adventure Mountaineers and Grande Prairie Regional College.

In 1981 interest in waterfall ice climbing began to grow and so Hans added a new instruction unit to his brochure. Every December Hans would watch the ice form on waterfalls on the west highway. Sometimes he would help the formation of ideal conditions by



With George Andrew and Norm Mastalir on the Centennial Ascent of Mount Athabasca, 1998

diverting water to the centre of the freezing falls. One of the icefall routes was eventually named for him.

Much of the summer climbing instruction Hans offered took place on one of his favourite peaks, Mount Morro. Schwarz liked Mount Morro because it had good rock for climbing. It had just the right pitch to allow beginners to learn rappelling and climbing. For his schools he had three routes that climbers practiced on — each one a little harder than the first. At the end of a five-day climbing school, participants could graduate by climbing to the summit of Morro. On the peak, climbers found a cross Hans had dragged to the summit. He would take clients to Mount Morro until he could guide no more.

## **Alpenglow**

**E**ven as he advanced in years, Hans' passion for teaching climbing did not diminish. In 1988, he decided that he needed to introduce more people to the sport and conceived of a three hour program where he would rope people up and teach them how to rappel down a rock face. People loved it. When Hans retired from climbing he had offered this course 163 times.

In 1997, Hans Schwarz finally realized the dream of becoming a Swiss Guide

for Canadian Pacific Hotels when he became the official for Jasper Park Lodge. At the age of 68, Hans Schwarz guided his last climb on Mount Athabasca. It was the centennial of the mountain's first ascent and the discovery of the Columbia Icefield. As part of the celebration, Hans guided Norm Mastalir, the General Manager of Jasper Park Lodge and his friend George Andrew of Jasper to the summit. On the summit ridge, one of the other guides, Gord Irwin, approached Hans to remind him that it was exactly twenty years before that he had taken his guides course with Hans on this very mountain.

A year shy of his 70th birthday, doctors diagnosed the onset of macular degeneration of Hans's eyes. In April of 2000, Hans Schwarz had to give up guiding. Though he still walks every day, his wanderings are limited. Wherever he goes, however, he meets his friends and colleagues — the people he has taught to love our mountains.

Hans Schwarz's contribution to Canadian mountaineering will never be forgotten. He has already been made an Honorary Member of the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides. It is no wonder that, out of great respect, Hans was made the Patron of the 2001 Mountain Guides Ball at Chateau Lake Louise for which this publication was prepared.

### **Special Guide Book Entry**

Mt. Athabasca via the Silverhorn, descent via the back side. *Finally after two years of looking at Mt. Athabasca while working at the Icefield Centre, I was able to reach the summit, but only with the help of the greatest mountain guide in the world, my father. Thanks Dad for such a memorable experience — it was fantastic!*

David Schwarz  
July 25, 1988



# *King of the Spiral Road*

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Hans Schwarz*

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