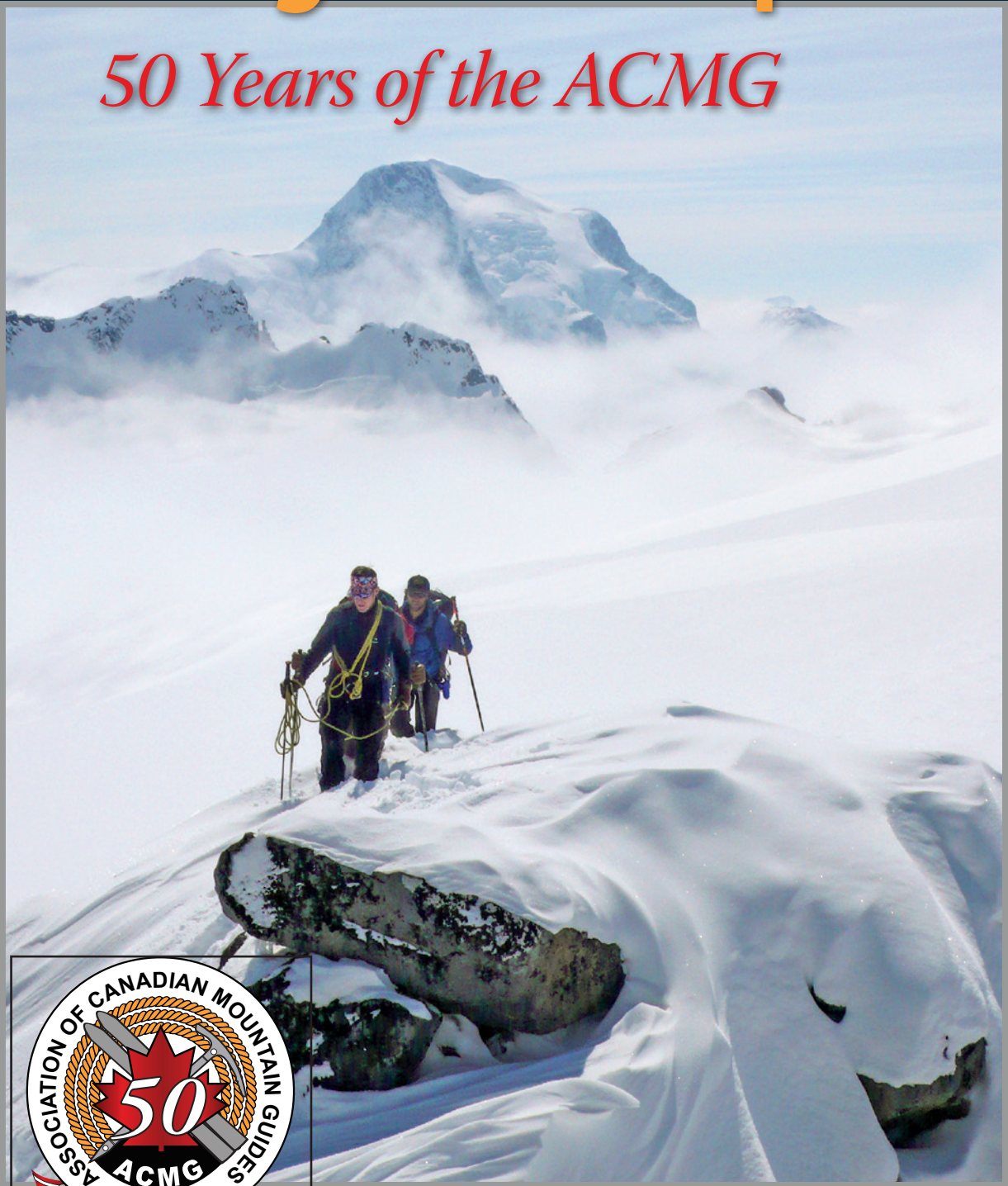


# Seizing the Sharp End

*50 Years of the ACMG*



by Lynn Martel



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Cover photo: Mountain Guides Tim Haggarty and Jonny Simms (hidden), and Ski Guide Ilya Storm go through the paces on the 2008 Ski Guide exam at Fairy Meadow, Selkirk Mountains. Photo by Mountain Guide Brad White

Title page photo: Mountain Guide Jen Olson leads clients along Mount Victoria's classic South East Ridge, Banff National Park. Photo by David Foster

Back cover: Mountain Guide Larry Stanier and Jerry Vanc soak in the view from a perfect vantage point while descending Mount Assiniboine, 1998. Photo by Pat Morrow

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# Introduction

It may sound cliché to say that similar to climbing mountains, founding an association or writing a book requires team effort, but it's absolutely true. The men who created the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides in 1963 were acutely aware of the teamwork required to establish a solid foundation from which future generations of Canadian mountain guides could effectively grow their profession.

Fifty years later, their vision and dedication has come to fruition; the ACMG is a highly respected world leader in the mountain guiding and climbing instruction professions, with nearly 850 members holding a range of certifications.

With that, I have a lot of people to thank for helping to grow this book into a the well-developed publication you're now reading.

First, many thanks to the numerous ACMG members who replied to my questions by email, phone, Skype and even coming to my door to provide me with every nugget of information necessary to compile this account of the ACMG story. In addition to their contributions, I have also incorporated quotes and anecdotes I've collected over more than a decade of interviewing ACMG members for books, magazine and newspaper articles, and video recordings.

Next, I owe enormous thanks to all those ACMG and Alpine Club of Canada members who answered the call for photographs. The sixty images that brighten these pages were culled from more than 200 fabulous photos of members in the act of guiding and instructing.

Many thanks also go to Chic Scott and Ruthie Oltmann for their sharp proof-reading skills, and again to Chic and Pat Morrow for providing input on Hans Gmoser and Conrad Kain.

Thanks are also due to Bob Sandford for his brilliant foresight in launching the Summit Series, "biographies of people who have made a difference in Canadian mountaineering." This is the seventeenth in what has evolved into a significant collection of Canadian mountain history, and it was Bob who encouraged me to write my first such booklet (of now eight), for the ACMG's 40th anniversary, ten years ago.

Thanks also to Linda Heywood for manning the ACMG office so admirably; to Colin Zacharias for providing input far and above the call; and to Peter Tucker for his invaluable feedback and dependable decision-making skills during the course of writing this book.

As well, a huge thanks go to designer Suzan Chamney for being a joy to work with, and for making this book look simply beautiful.

And lastly, many, many thanks go to Lloyd "Kiwi" Gallagher for providing the seeds and the dedication to initiate the growth of this project in the first place.

—Lynn Martel

An association is only as great as the people of which it is comprised—and what a bunch of characters make up the ACMG! Athletes, teachers, mentors, risk-takers, photographers, story tellers, philosophers, aspiring astral travellers, yodelers—they are all here. So what better way to tell the ACMG story than through its relationships—relationships to history, industry, government, partners and one another.

But above all, the story of the ACMG is about its relationship with the public and the unrelenting commitment of its members to keeping clients safe while providing them with the adventure of their lives, a commitment that is carried out with an impossible-to-describe balance of bravura, humility and wisdom. A promise that is, indeed, the keystone thread throughout the tapestry of this organization.

We are honoured beyond words at being selected by the ACC as Patron of the Mountain Guide Ball in this, our 50th year. We trust you'll enjoy Lynn's portrait of just a fraction of the multitude of characters that form our past, present and future out on the sharp end.

—Peter Tucker  
ACMG Executive Director

# The Pioneer Spirit

## A foundation built on grit

*“All the guides developed the adventurous side of their characters during their climbing in the Canadian Rockies. Nearly all the first ascents required one or more scouting trips to discover practical routes. The Swiss guides found the work very interesting and gave much credit to the CPR.”*

—Edward Feuz Jr.  
*The Golden Memories*

It was the Canadian Pacific railroad (CPR), of course, that opened Canada’s West to climbers eager to claim untouched summits. And it was the death of American Phillip Stanley Abbot in 1896 on Mount Lefroy that resulted in the first Swiss Mountain Guide, Peter Sarbach, coming to Canada the following year to safely lead Abbot’s comrade, American Alpine Club founder Charles Fay, to that summit. Sarbach’s

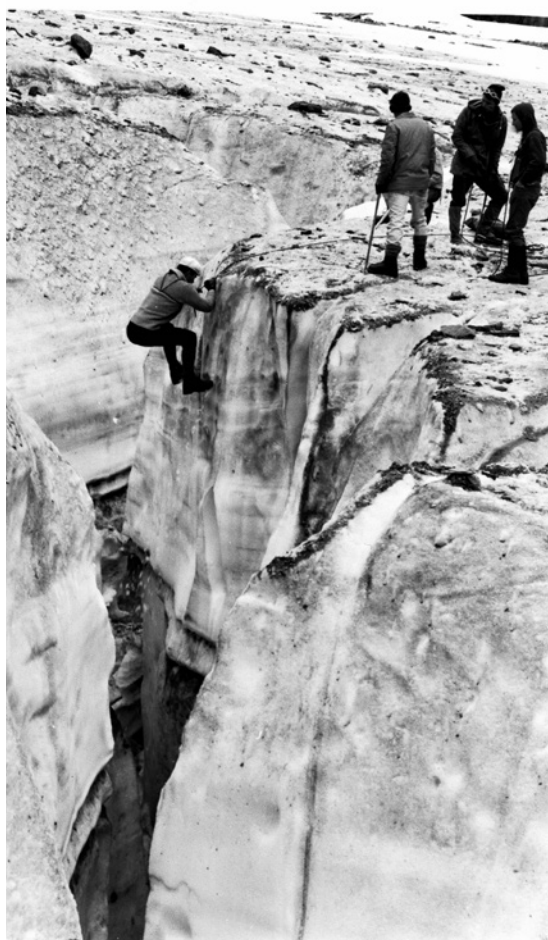
success helped spur the CPR’s decision to employ Swiss guides based from its hotels, beginning in 1899 with Christian Häsler and Edouard Feuz at Glacier House in Rogers Pass, the very bosom of the Selkirk Mountains.

While after a few seasons the senior Feuz and Häsler returned to Switzerland, their sons, Christian Jr. and Edward Jr. worked for the CPR seasonally, until in 1912 they accepted their invitation to permanently settle in the frontier town of Golden, British Columbia.

Guiding clients on remote mountains in BC and in Alberta’s Rockies proved endlessly interesting and challenging in the early decades of the 20th century. The Swiss guides’ mountain skills included riding horses, hunting and bushwhacking through valley bottom forest and brush, often without maps. Not only did the first generation of Canadian guides set an example of technical excellence and outstanding client care that has served as a definitive benchmark ever since, but the pioneer spirit that energized and inspired Canada’s first generation of guides has also endured.

By the time two young ambitious Austrians, Hans Gmoser and Leo Grillmair, arrived in the Rockies in 1951, the CPR had long abandoned Glacier House. By 1954, the last of the Swiss guides hired by CP, Walter Perren, was let go as its guiding program was discontinued. As increasing popularity of the automobile enticed growing numbers of visitors to the Mountain Parks, the sense of adventure born of independent travel expanded to that of climbing without guides. At the same time, the emerging middle class who comprised the majority of those visitors could not afford the CPR’s lavish services.

Fortunately, Perren remained in the Rockies and in response to the demand generated by



With fellow Mountain Guide Murray Toft (centre) looking on, Ferdl Taxbock demonstrates state-of-the-art crevasse self-rescue techniques on the lower Victoria Glacier, circa 1968. Photo by Mountain Guide Pierre Lemire

so many inexperienced amateurs, created the foundation for Parks Canada's world-class public safety and mountain rescue program. As part of his responsibilities, in 1956 Perren awarded Gmoser and fellow Swiss, Bruno Engler, their professional guide's certificates.

For Gmoser, Grillmair and other young European climbers who migrated to western Canada, their newly adopted mountains represented an immense playground of fresh peaks and potential new routes. Starting with his and Grillmair's landmark first ascent of Grillmair Chimneys with Isabel Spreat in 1952, Gmoser set the example of forging new routes in every direction he explored—on rock, on big mountains in Alaska and the Yukon, and as the pioneer of an entirely new industry, heli-skiing. As the need for skilled guides grew with his business, more Europeans were drawn to western Canada's land of plenty—and opportunity.

Naturally, it made sense that men who were accustomed to forging their own paths should establish their own guiding association in their adopted country. When Gmoser, at the suggestion of Perren, led the meeting in 1963 that would establish the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides (ACMG), he did so with the same highly developed pioneer sensibilities with which he and the other founding members approached everything in their lives and profession.

Like many who answered the call to guide for Canadian Mountain Holidays (CMH) during heli-skiing's explosive growth in the 1970s and '80s, Rudi Kranabitter knew little of Canada when he arrived at Bugaboo Lodge in 1973.

"The mountains were vast, remote, unexplored and wild," Kranabitter recalled four decades later. "Guiding was a whole different ball game—no huts with food, no communication, very few established trails. As the guide, you had to have many more skills than just guiding; you also had to be a bush man and it was physically more demanding. Along with many other hazards, it was a challenge."

Like many of the Europeans, not speaking English presented an additional challenge.

"I think that was the hardest aspect of the



Mountain Guides Lloyd Gallagher and Hans Gmoser share memories at Cariboo Lodge during CMH's 40th anniversary gathering, 2005.  
Photo by Pat Morrow

whole thing—trying to get enough vocabulary so you could communicate a little bit."

As Kranabitter and dozens of other European guides helped grow the ACMG in their roles as examiners for aspirant guides, their experiences in their adopted mountains shaped how they mentored succeeding generations of Canadian guides.

"The Canadian mountains shaped my vision in a way where I thought the ACMG needed to be equally strong, well-grounded and at the highest level of competence possible to meet the needs of these wild places and the changing industry," Kranabitter said. "I also felt, especially, that the winter component needed to be better than their European counterparts' mostly due to the fast pace in the industry, remoteness and lack of avalanche forecasting systems."

While the natural splendor and pristine ruggedness of Canada's mountains deeply captured the ACMG's European and British members during the Association's formative years, the freedom from the social rigours of the old country resonated.

For Conrad Kain, the first professional guide to work for the Alpine Club of Canada at the Club's 1909 annual General Mountaineering Camp at Lake O'Hara in Yoho National Park, culture shock was not limited to learning a new language, breaking trail through thick forest or carrying a heavy pack to approach unclimbed mountains. As a Mountain Guide in Austria in the early 1900s, whether he liked it or not, Kain knew his place. His clients were to be addressed as Frau, Herr, Herr Doctor and so on.





Mountain Guide Sepp Renner begins descending Mount Assiniboine's North Ridge in 1984. The summit register included the entry "Natalie Renner age 9." Photo by Don Peterson

Kain wasn't alone in appreciating Canada's freedoms. Although Canadians fought and died in the Second World War, and even experienced food rationing on their side of the Atlantic, the experience for Europeans during those five years was inescapably brutal. While Hans Gmoser escaped the ranks, Leo Grillmair, like the vast majority of young Austrian boys of the era, was a grateful member of the Hitler Youth, from which he received his first pair of ski boots, plenty of food to fill his rumbling belly and the chance to participate in camping trips in the mountains. The reality of watching friends die beside him was something he avoided thinking of for the rest of his life.

Growing up during the war in Lauf, Germany not far from Nuremberg, Bob Geber remembered his father coming home on leave from the German service only three times in five years. Twice he'd been wounded, the third time his feet were frostbitten.

"There were always stray bombs, and a few hit our village," Geber recalled. "But the biggest thing I can remember is how we were always hungry."

Like most Mountain Guides of his day, guiding was more a dream than a practical career choice for Geber, who came to Canada to join Heinz Kahl, his climbing partner from home. Gmoser was an electrician, Grillmair a plumber. Kahl, who hosted the inaugural ACMG meeting in his cabin in Lac des Arcs, worked with fellow

After succeeding as the first people to stand on the summit of the Rockies' highest peak, Mount Robson, at the ACC's celebrated 1913 camp, Kain wrote of the warm character of his two clients, Albert MacCarthy, a retired US Navy captain and prominent member of the American Alpine Club and the ACC, and Major-General William Wasborough Foster, the BC Deputy Minister of Public Works.

*In this country people are much more democratic than with us in Europe, and have less regard for titles and high officials; but still it was a great satisfaction to me to have the pleasure of climbing with a Canadian statesman.*

—Conrad Kain

*Where the Clouds Can Go*

draftsman and now legendary Rockies' climber Glen Boles for the City of Calgary. Geber learned the house painting craft from his father, who ran a small business. He worked for six years as a surveyor for the Department of Public Works, living at Eisenhower Camp at Castle Mountain in Banff National Park during construction of the TransCanada Highway. Peter Fuhrmann, whose exceptional organizational talents and vision would be invaluable to the ACMG he helped found, to the ACC, and to Parks Canada's mountain rescue program, was first a draughtsman for the Department of Public Works. In the years following the Second World War, the Canadian government actively recruited young tradesmen from Europe, even loaning them money for the journey. Until air travel became more accessible in the 1960s they spent a seasick week crossing the ocean by ship, then endured an interminably long (compared to Europe) train ride across several provinces to disembark in Edmonton or Winnipeg. Some bade their families goodbye forever.

Hardship was a matter of course. In later decades, when the fast-growing heli-ski industry demanded that guides shovel dirt to build lodges or work for weeks on end without days off for entire seasons—much to the detriment of their home lives—the pioneers of the ACMG who'd grown up knowing hardship, hunger and war-time horrors never flinched. They were grateful to be working; more so to be working as guides.



# Brothers in Adventure

## The enduring ACMG/ACC partnership

Beginning with the Alpine Club of Canada's first camp in 1906, where Edward Feuz Jr. and Gottfried Feuz, on loan from their employer, the CPR, led dozens of amateur climbers safely up the summits surrounding Yoho Pass near Emerald Lake, professional guides and the ACC have enjoyed a symbiotic relationship.

*"No more exhilarating or healthful day's sport could be imagined. We cannot speak too highly of the skill and care shown by our two young guides. Without them the expedition would have been impossible. Owing to them it was an unqualified success."*

—Rev. A.M. Gordon  
1907 *Canadian Alpine Journal*

For twenty-three consecutive years, CPR guides worked at ACC camps, no doubt helping to grow their popularity. At the 1909 camp, the ACC hired its first independent Mountain Guide, Austrian Conrad Kain, who, wrote ACC Camps Committee chair and club co-founder A.O. Wheeler in the 1910 *Canadian*

*Alpine Journal*, "Before the season was over, proved himself to be a first class man and became a great favourite."

Decades later, when Hans Gmoser was new to Canada and his main climbing partner, Leo Grillmair was nursing a broken leg, Hans joined ACC trips through which he met climbing partners who would become close friends. With ACC partners, he first visited Mount Assiniboine and the Little Yoho Valley, places that would be significant to his guiding career.

When the ACMG was formed in 1963, several of its founding members, including Peter Fuhrmann, belonged to the ACC. Having climbed extensively in the Alps and the Dolomites before arriving in Canada in 1955, Fuhrmann understood the mutually beneficial relationship between alpine clubs and professional guides. As soon as he gained



Mountain Guide Don Vockeroth, rear, guides Richard Guy on Robson Glacier at the ACC's 1988 Mount Robson/Berg Lake General Mountaineering Camp. Richard and Louise Guy collection



Mountain Guide Hans Schwarz (upper left in red toque) supervises snow and ice practice at the ACC's Farnham Creek General Mountaineering Camp in 1975. Photo by Leon Kubbernus

his Mountain Guide's certification from Swiss trained Walter Perren in 1961, Fuhrmann joined the ACC. Through his own experiences and his association with Perren, Fuhrmann saw the ACC, the ACMG and Parks Canada as a triumvirate, each gaining strength and credibility through that connection.

To that end, when Brian Greenwood ran the first guides exam with four candidates in 1966, Jim Tarrant represented the ACC as an observer. In the following years, the ACC worked with the fledgling ACMG to establish the optimum methods of qualifying and examining applicants for their guiding licenses.

Now, more than a century on, a healthy number of ACMG guides hold ACC membership, while ACC members continue to comprise plenty of guides' clients. Many aspiring guides gain valuable experience they need to qualify for their first ACMG exams by serving as volunteer ACC trip leaders. The ACC and ACMG coordinate efforts to recognize new Mountain Guides at the annual Mountain Guides Ball, while the Guides Ball patrons alternate each year between ACMG and ACC members. ACMG guides regularly use ACC huts for their trips and courses.

Mountain Guide Conrad Janzen repairs a tent fly damaged by raucous ravens on an ACC Clemenceau to Columbia ski traverse.  
Photo by Zac Robinson



Mountain Guide Helen Sovdat relaxes at the ACC's Sir Sandford General Mountaineering Camp, Selkirk Mountains, 2012. Photo by Thierry Levenq

But the relationship, explains ACC Executive Director Lawrence White, runs deeper than that. While ACC members count on ACMG guides to lead them on climbing and skiing adventures in Canada and on international expeditions, they also look to the ACMG to set the example for technical and professional standards, and to help the ACC's amateur leaders gain and maintain a level of competency. In 2000/01, Cyril Shokoples created a formal curriculum for the winter and summer The North Face – ACC leadership courses, which provide advanced training for the ACC's active volunteer trip leaders and camp managers.

“We look to the ACMG to set the bar in practices, safety and technique as well as the soft skills, such as group management,” White said. “We recognize the importance of the ACMG not just to the ACC, but to Canadian mountain enthusiasts and alpine adventurers. The ACMG sets the standard for alpine adventurers, and the ACC recognizes and supports what the ACMG brings to Canada on a broader scale.”

The partnership that has endured and flourished between the two organizations stands as a prime example of the synergies that can exist between two such groups. Upholding and deepening that partnership is important to both organizations.



“The ACC is a well-respected organization with many well-known members who are talented outdoorspeople,” said ACMG Executive Director Peter Tucker. “The partnership with the ACC lends some cachet to the ACMG, while the ACC garners a somewhat improved reputation for professionalism.”

For Helen Sovdat, who has been guiding ACC camps since 1994, the personal bond that has developed is a meaningful one.

“One of the highlights of my year is working at the General Mountaineering Camp,” Sovdat said. “Steeped in history and tradition, the camp has brought climbers together for over 100 years. The return rate is high, and it is a pleasure to reunite with participants who have become friends over time. Many of my best-ever guiding days have been on these remote camps in our local mountains. One of the most memorable was when I had the privilege of guiding some long-time, iconic members to the top of Mons Peak. Everyone in the group was over the age of seventy-five, and there were five of them!”

Guiding ACC members has also provided Sovdat with the opportunity to “be creative and explore the mountains with adventurous people who share my passion,” she continued. “With the Club I feel like I am part of a community and I am inspired by the dedication and support of the members. The bonds are strong and I thrive on the energy that I get from everyone on my trips.”

The partnership though, extends beyond the act of guiding clients. From 2005 to 2011, ACMG Mountain Guide Roger Laurilla served as the ACC’s Vice President of Activities.

Canadians have the early Swiss guides to thank for introducing their long-established tradition of alpine huts to their adopted mountains beginning with a small hut a few kilometres from Glacier House in 1902. As employees of the CPR, the Swiss guides oversaw planning and construction of the original Wiwaxy Cabin at Lake O’Hara in 1912, and the iconic Abbot Pass Hut in 1922/23.

Then in the 1960s, it was ACMG guides who carried on the tradition with the planning, fundraising and building of a series of huts to



Mountain Guide Karl Nagy, for whom an ACC memorial award was established after he died in 2000, leads an ACC group in the Battle Range in 1999. Photo by Leon Kubbernus

facilitate skiing on the Rockies’ Wapta Icefield. Beginning with a fibreglass igloo at Balfour Pass in 1965, Peter Fuhrmann also organized construction of Peyto (now called Peter and Catharine Whyte Hut) and Bow huts. ACMG Honorary Members Eric Lomas and Bernie Schiesser built subsequent versions of the Wapta huts, as well as huts at Mount Alberta and the Valley of the Ten Peaks above Moraine Lake.

In later years, as ACC President, Fuhrmann negotiated for the ACC to take over operation and maintenance of several huts from Parks Canada. The result of this is the ACC’s first rate backcountry hut system, the components of which are well-appreciated by ACMG guides, who, with their clients, enjoy the huts’ comforts frequently en route to climbing some of the region’s most popular peaks.

*“Mountain huts are not only a place to hide when the weather is foul; they are not only a place where one dries out clothes or cooks a meal, or finds safety when exhausted or injured. Mountain huts also create a magic environment. From a hut a youth can be introduced to the mountain world safely and creatively. Here we experience precious moments.”*

—Peter Fuhrmann  
*Alpine Huts in the Rockies, Selkirks and Purcells*

# The International Guiding Fraternity

## The ACMG on the world stage

Despite having been established in western Canada's mountains for more than half a century, at the time the founding members formally created the ACMG in 1963, the guiding profession, which was so culturally entrenched in Europe, was not widely known or recognized in Canada. Second- and third-generation Swiss guides had been involved in nurturing the profession for the benefit of both clients and fellow guides for decades. The CPR guides had also certified Ken Jones as the first native Canadian guide in the mid-1930s. In the course of developing Canada's first-class mountain rescue service, Walter Perren relied on his own Swiss guide's training to also certify aspiring guides.

With such a foundation, the ACMG was a natural to be admitted into the International Federation of Mountain Guides Associations (UIAGM/IFMGA) as its first non-European member. None of the ACMG's founding members, however, were actually IFMGA members—that organization was not formed for another two years, in 1965, by France, Austria,

Switzerland and Italy with Valle d'Aosta.

The first of the ACMG's members to hold IFMGA certification was Rudi Gertsch, who joined the Association in 1968. A second-generation Swiss guide from Wengen, Gertsch first arrived in Canada in 1966 and soon found work guiding in the Rockies and Purcells for Hans Gmoser. Gertsch returned to Switzerland the following year to gain his guide's badge. Respected as a guide with strong skills, in 1969 he followed Gmoser as the ACMG's second Technical Director. The Gertsch family name held some stature among the members of the IFMGA, including Herman Steuri, who had been Gertsch's examiner. Steuri had also mentored Hans Peter Stettler from the age of thirteen, when he began working as a porter. Stettler's family ran the hotel that employed Steuri as resident guide and ski instructor. Stettler, who had served in the Swiss Army with Gertsch, immigrated to Canada in 1968 and soon also found work at Gmoser's Bugaboos Lodge. He earned his guide's badge in 1974 in Switzerland.

As an IFMGA founding member, Steuri was instrumental in helping the Canadians to be welcomed into the federation. Though decades younger than the IFMGA directors, Gertsch and Stettler laid much of the groundwork for the Canadians, attending an IFMGA meeting in Liechtenstein in the fall of 1973. When ACMG president John Gow met with IFMGA president Steuri in Grindelwald in the fall of 1974, acceptance was official.

"Canada was always very well accepted," Stettler said. "We had something to offer that nobody else had, which was heli-skiing. It was a lot of work, but I always felt Canada was important enough of a mountain country with a mountain guiding fraternity to be part of that."

During that period, Stettler attended meetings for fifteen years, once or twice a year. While attending the meetings was a requisite of IFMGA membership, the young association could not afford to send anyone, so Stettler often combined attending the meetings with guiding work in Europe.

"For me to do that work for the ACMG was a great privilege, I learned a lot," Stettler said.

Mountain Guide Herb Bleuer, left and Sir Edmund Hillary practice their not-quite-expert-level snowmobile repair skills at Ball Hut, Mount Cook National Park, New Zealand, 1967. Herb Bleuer collection





The big bonus, he added, was the opportunity to rub shoulders with the really big names, including Anderl Heckmair and Walter Bonatti, and to make a lot of valuable connections. In 1978 Stettler helped engineer an informal visit to western Canada's mountains for senior IFMGA members, including Steuri and Heckmair, during which they tried heli-skiing.

Nowadays, Canada is represented at meetings by the President, the Technical Director or the Executive Director.

From early on, the demand for qualified guides with strong skiing skills became apparent to the Canadians as the heli-skiing industry boomed. In the winter of 1975/76 alone, some forty European guides were drawn to work for CMH's Radium operation; some bringing their clients from Europe. An increasing number of guides on the slopes propelled Canadian guides to the forefront of snow craft science. A high demand for qualified ski guides also led the ACMG to create an innovative certification program.

Initially, the ACMG implemented a two-level ski guide program in which ski-touring guides needed only earn the lower level, while heli-ski guides could lead both heli-skiing and ski touring. The process proved unwieldy though, as heli-ski operators didn't always look at a guide's certification closely enough, only to realize later their qualifications were lacking. As a result, the ACMG established the Ski Guide program that exists today.

The Technical Director (TD) at the time was Rudi Kranabitter, an Austrian from the Stubai Valley who climbed the Eiger's North Face in 1966 at the age of sixteen, earned his guide's certification two years later and immigrated to Canada to guide heli-skiers in 1973. As he recalled, the IFMGA was not concerned with the program deviation as long as the ACMG maintained its full Mountain Guide certification.

"What we accomplished at that time, I think was a milestone," Kranabitter said. "The different countries [in Europe] now struggle with this specializing of guiding—ferrata guides, ice climbing guides, for example—Canada has all this already in place."



From left, Mountain Guides Phil Hein, Rudi Kranabitter, Ferdl Taxbock and Bernie Schiesser debrief after completing the Cariboo Traverse on the spring Ski Guide exam, circa 1980. Photo Rudi Kranabitter collection



From left, Syd Feuz, whose father, Walter, emigrated from Switzerland in 1912 to guide for the Canadian Pacific Railway, shares the stage with Mountain Guides Rudi Gertsch and Lloyd Gallagher at the 2011 Mount Guides Ball in Banff. Photo by Mountain Guide Marc Piché

In the early 1990s, the ACMG further established itself as a leader in speciality programs by amending its constitution so guides could pursue the Ski Guide and Alpine Guide programs separately; only those who completed both would gain IFMGA Mountain Guide certification. Around 1992 a separate Rock Guide certification was added under

the Mountain program umbrella. The hiking program, launched in the mid-1990s and which also included a backpacking certification, evolved to include the Assistant Hiking Guide and Hiking Guide certifications. Launched in 1995, the Climbing Instructor program now includes the Climbing Gym Instructor and Top Rope Climbing Instructor streams.

## *Mentoring is mutually beneficial*

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then testimony to the success of the ACMG's speciality programs was first marked in 1981, when New Zealand, having adopted a similar model, gained admittance in the IFMGA. In 1995, Canada began a three-year mentoring process with the American Mountain Guides Association (AMGA) as one of three member countries to send key instructors and Technical Committee members to observe the Americans' techniques and programs as they worked through the five-year process of gaining IFMGA acceptance.

"The exchange between Canada and the US

was a natural fit," said Colin Zacharias, ACMG Technical Director at the time. "The AMGA application was high profile (within the IFMGA) and it was an honour to be asked to mentor the US through their acceptance process."

Then ACMG President, Karl Klassen took the leadership task seriously yet in an easy, welcoming way, Zacharias said, acting as key mentor to the US group, and was instrumental in ensuring the process was thorough and beyond reproach. During the process, Klassen and Zacharias observed an early ski guide exam in the Sierras and submitted a report to the AMGA; Klassen would return several times to observe and provide support and advice, while AMGA instructors visited Canada to observe ski, alpine and rock courses. As part of the mutually beneficial arrangement, the AMGA purchased the ACMG technical manual and shared input into the second edition. In 1996 the AMGA applied to the IFMGA for formal review, and over the next few months Bruce Howatt (ACMG) observed the AMGA Alpine Guide exam; James Blench (ACMG) and Marty Bier (NZ) observed the Rock Guide exam; and Earnest Konzett (Austria), John MacNamee (NZ) and Zacharias observed the Ski Mountaineering Guide exam. The AMGA was admitted to the IFMGA in 1997.

Also that year, with Hans Gmoser, Stettler and other senior guides playing key roles as the consummate hosts, Canada hosted the IFMGA general assembly in Banff. With the 1997 year coinciding with the centennial anniversary of the first professional guiding in Canada, most of the IFMGA technical delegates attended, enjoying climbing, ski touring and heli-skiing outings

Ski Guide/Apprentice Alpine Guide Erica Roles short ropes a client while descending Mount Little, Banff National Park. Photo by Alpine Guide/Apprentice Ski Guide Mike Trehearne/Cloud Nine Guides





courtesy of CMH. A talented organizational team that included Klassen and Greg Yavorsky helped cement Canada's place as a leading member of the international federation.

Then in 2001 the ACMG achieved another first as it hosted the IFMGA Technical Commission workshop outside of Europe for the first time. Seventeen delegates from twelve countries—Switzerland, Germany, France, Slovenia, Japan, Austria, the US, Scotland, Canada and three regions of Italy—based themselves in Canmore, Alberta, spending ten days ski touring in Rogers Pass, and ice climbing in several favourite Rockies venues, including the iconic Weeping Wall. President Klassen welcomed the group, speaking alternately in English and German. Overall, the gathering provided a good opportunity for Canada to showcase its expertise as part of an international dialogue.

Most recently, in 2011 the ACMG began the process of mentoring the Russian Mountain Guide Association toward gaining acceptance in the IFMGA. In June, 2013, ACMG Technical Director Marc Piché left his home in Canmore for his sixth trip to work with the Russians; already his third trip that year. The process was initiated by the Russians after one of its chief proponents attended Canadian Mountain and Ski Guide Program courses at Thompson Rivers University (known as University College of the Cariboo until 2004). From the start, the Russians knew that Canada's system of specialty programs would best suit its guiding industry, since many of Russia's highly qualified alpine guides are not skiers, and vice versa. The mentoring process, Piché pointed out, is a valuable two-way exchange.

"It's a real challenge to run courses in new locations with new people and different languages," Piché said. "But it's more of a sharing of ideas than teacher and student."

Then in 2012, Piché achieved a new milestone for a Canadian guide as he was named Chair of the IFMGA Accident and Risk Management Commission. With several European countries evolving toward the adoption of specialty guide certifications, Piché (who previously served as a committee member), suggested



Ken Jones, Canada's first native-born Mountain Guide who died in 2004 at the age of 91, shares stories of working with Conrad Kain as a young lad with Mountain Guide Larry Stanier in BC's Mount Assiniboine Provincial Park, 1998. Photo by Pat Morrow

a Canadian chair might offer a more neutral position. As chair, Piché said he hoped to push for more discussion of how and why accidents happen, worldwide. The matter is particularly challenging in this era, he pointed out, with information sharing between both media and public happening instantly in a boundless realm of social media where every accident is highly publicized and scrutinized.

"We're highly trained, we're professional, we're good at what we do," Piché said. "We need to figure out why accidents are happening, and how. It's time to take a hard look at how we're doing things and make changes."

Proposed actions include creating a database so accidents can be easily studied with an aim to learn as much from them as possible. As well, efforts are underway to attempt to learn from other associations and professions, such as aviation. The entire process involves a long road ahead, with answers and solutions evolving over time.

In 2013, in celebration of the ACMG's 50th anniversary, Canada hosted representatives from seventeen of twenty-four member countries at the IFMGA Spring Conference in Whistler, BC in May. For the first time, the ACMG opened up the Technical Committee field day to the public, sharing presentations and case studies designed to encourage IFMGA members to look more closely at the lessons learned from accidents.

The dialogue had begun.

# Communication and Cooperation

## The relationship with government and regulators

At the time of the ACMG's founding, there were few groups, organizations or even individual recreationists requesting permits for access to public lands. Such concerns simply weren't of much relevance.

"During my time, it didn't exist," Peter Fuhrmann recalled. "We just went wherever you wanted to go."

The biggest challenge Fuhrmann remembers facing was "freelancers" offering their services as guides. Top on the list of the ACMG's priorities at the time of its founding was to gain formal recognition by provincial and federal governments, beginning with registering the Association's name. At that time, horse outfitters

while the horse guides would be known as guides and outfitters, which, in the end, Fuhrmann said, "settled the matter quite nicely."

While there were few restrictions to public lands, national parks had land-use guidelines to define specific recreation zones. Hans Gmoser's initial desire to access the powder slopes of Rogers Pass in BC's Glacier National Park using a helicopter was refused. Thus, he turned his attention to BC's Bugaboos, and his destiny.

As Gmoser's CMH expanded from one lodge to two to four and eight, others launched their own businesses; Roger Madsen (RK Heliski) in 1970, Rudi Gertsch (Purcell Heli-Skiing) in 1974, and Peter Schlunegger (Selkirk Tangiers Heli Skiing) in 1978. With others soon to follow, that year a group of heli-skiing operators, many of them ACMG members, formed what is now known as HeliCat Canada.

"The main thing was that we got organized," Gertsch said. "We went to the government and told them we needed a tenured area that each of us could operate in. Then we would have exclusive right, and lease it like a hunting territory. But it's getting more and more complicated now. When I look back when I started, I didn't ask anybody. I just asked the pilot, can you take me up there?"

Thankfully, those early steps helped build a foundation for the many dozens of helicopter, cat and ski touring operations that have employed hundreds of ACMG guides in the decades since. But as the numbers of operators and guides working in the mountains of western Canada has increased over the decades, so has use by amateur recreationists. The backcountry and highway-accessed crags alike are much busier places than they were in the 1980s and '90s. In addition to those pursuing self-propelled climbing, mountaineering and skiing adventures, the numbers of mountain recreationists travelling deeper and higher into the alpine backcountry aboard motorized vehicles—especially snowmobiles—has also ballooned. Naturally, interests overlap, with operators' interests represented by Heli-Cat Canada's Government Relations Committee.

With increases in backcountry use, concerns



A helicopter takes off beside skiers at CMH Monashees. Photo by Mountain Guide Roger Laurilla

had long called themselves guides, often with the word mountain attached. A meeting was convened in Calgary, with representatives from Parks Canada, the ACMG, horse outfitters and others.

"It was a huge problem, Alberta Tourism got involved," Fuhrmann said. "It wasn't easy to convince those guys [horse outfitters] you couldn't go up Eisenhower Tower on a horse."

The ACMG was permitted to keep its name,





Mountain Guide Jeremy Mackenzie lowers a guest at the ACC Purity Range General Mountaineering Camp in the Selkirks Mountains, 2010. Photo by Thierry Levenq

for wildlife and their wilderness habitat have also increased. Efforts such as BC's Mountain Caribou Recovery Implementation Plan, or seasonal closures designed to protect nesting owls at Grassi Lakes above Canmore, woodland caribou

in Jasper and wildlife during the critical birthing and early development months on the 1A highway in Banff, all require up-to-date awareness and cooperation by guides working independently or by the operators employing them.

## *Tragedy inspires innovation*

It's never a happy thing when the catalyst for change or improvements to an established protocol or system is spurred by tragedy. That, however, is exactly what happened in the wake of the naturally-triggered Connaught Creek avalanche that killed seven Calgary high school students on an unguided ski touring trip in Rogers Pass in February 2003—along with twenty-two other avalanche deaths that season.

After the snow cloud settled, reports compiled by BC's Solicitor General, Parks Canada and Calgary's Strathcona-Tweedsmuir School suggested more than seventy recommendations toward improving public avalanche education and risk assessment procedures. The result motivated Parks and the Canadian Avalanche Association (CAA) to implement some fundamental changes.

One important outcome was the hiring of ACMG Mountain Guide Grant Statham as Parks Canada's Avalanche Risk Specialist. Key among Statham's priorities was to improve avalanche education and communication with the public

and media. All three reports had said the same thing—the Canadian avalanche industry was very good and highly respected internationally for its professional activities, research and rescue capabilities, but its public education, warnings and risk communication components needed work.

Over the next few years, Statham drove the creation of several programs and initiatives, including the You Are in Avalanche Country public outreach program, complete with large roadside billboards posted at all the Mountain Parks' entry points. Other steps included the creation of the Avalanche Terrain Exposure Scale (ATES) and redesign of the North American Public Avalanche Danger Scale. The ATES was the first of its type to classify more than 250 backcountry tours and climbs in the national parks, and the danger scale project brought clarity and standards around risk theory, forecasting methods and public communication of avalanche danger.

The ATES was groundbreaking and has since

been applied all over the world, and Statham credits the experience of mountain guides for making it happen.

“The idea of the ATES comes from the terrain analysis work that guides do every day, so the concept was not new; articulating our methods by way of a formal system was the breakthrough. The ATES was built by harnessing the collective knowledge of a number of ACMG guides,” Statham said. “I got my job based on the idea of creating an avalanche terrain system. I wasn’t sure how to do it at the time; I just knew that if we could create a method that highlighted the importance of avalanche terrain, we could really make a difference. Mountain guides rely on terrain—that’s what we do, that’s how guides think. Terrain is the most important piece. The public warning systems that had evolved to that point had been based on snow science, and to make a shift towards more emphasis on terrain analysis is where the mountain guiding background made a huge difference.”

Many parts of the NA Public Avalanche Danger Scale model (the graphics, risk theory and the conceptual model of avalanche hazard) have also been adopted around the world. To create these systems, Statham led an international group through a creative process of

deconstructing avalanche risk into its individual elements, writing clear definitions for each element, then reassembling the pieces back into an understandable method. The result was a model that better represented how mountain guides and avalanche forecasters intuitively measured avalanche risk.

“When we began working on it, nobody could agree what avalanche danger meant, so we really had to start from the beginning and create the underpinnings of the danger scale,” Statham said.

For his innovative efforts (ultimately spanning five years), Statham was awarded the 2005 Public Service Award of Excellence. For a public servant, Statham said, the award was “a huge honour, and rewarding to have been able to make this contribution to Canada.”

“I feel like I’ve had the opportunity in my career to have large scale influence on an entire industry, and I am very fortunate for that,” Statham said. “I was lucky to work with the right group of peers—especially a lot of ACMG guides—and a really great team at Parks Canada. I’m really proud of it; this work has had an impact all over the world.”

Another significant outcome of the 2003 tragedy was the clear definition of regulations for travel with custodial groups in avalanche terrain in national parks.

“There were lots of questions after that accident,” Statham said. “One really big thing that came from it was that our understanding of society’s risk tolerance for children became very clear. Today it’s understood among guides that there is a substantial difference in the standard of care required between minors and consenting adults.”

In addition to those changes, following the recommendations of the BC Coroner’s report, the Canadian Avalanche Centre was created to provide avalanche-related information to the public. A non-governmental, not-for-profit organization, it took the collaboration of federal, provincial and private sector agencies involved in avalanche safety to accomplish. Through the efforts of the CAC, which, similar to the CAA, has many ACMG guides among its board and staff members, recreational skier deaths due to

Mountain Guide Grant Statham climbs Sentinel Slabs in the Mount Moloch area of the Selkirk Mountains, 2011. Photo by Mountain Guide Ruedi Beglinger





avalanches decreased in subsequent years. More recently, thanks to heightened education efforts by the CAC, avalanche-caused snowmobiler deaths have decreased too.

For all this to happen, communication and cooperation between government and various branches related to the guiding profession had to be open and receptive to the required changes. Ensuring good communication, however, requires ongoing commitment from all parties.

During Scott Davis' term as President, WorkSafe BC crafted regulations regarding avalanche safety for workers, including guides, but did so in the initial stages without any industry feedback or awareness.

"We had a very short time to react and provide a comment," Davis recalled. "I have to thank [ACMG Climbing Gym Instructor 3] Kimanda Jarzebiak for her guidance and expertise in managing the WorkSafe BC public process, and Peter Tucker for his moral and critical support. The interesting thing during this whole process was the fact that the work we had put into meeting the test of a self-regulating body put us in a good light when we presented ourselves to the powers that be."

Currently, the ACMG has group permits with the Mountain National Parks, Alberta Parks and Protected Areas, and BC Provincial Parks. Each is different from the other, but each allows the ACMG to purchase one permit and then manage the subscription of its members onto those permits. As of 2013, the ACMG did not have agreements with any other provinces or territories.

That year, the ACMG successfully secured access to BC Crown land working with changes that had been made to that province's Adventure Tourism Policy. Covering commercial tourism ventures such as river raft guiding, guide outfitting for hunters and fishers, wildlife viewing and mountain guiding, the policy was administered under auspices of the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations. Historically, the policy contained an incidental use clause for access to BC Crown land for up to fourteen days within a six-month period with no fees or reporting.



Mountain Guide Sylvia Forest prepares to descend North Star Peak, Starbird Range, Purcell Mountains.  
Photo by Thierry Levenq

In 2009, a policy revision removed the incidental use clause, effectively eliminating legal access for ACMG guides. The rationale behind the decision, explained Peter Tucker, was an attempt to require all Crown land users to obtain tenures (licenses of occupation or leases).

Naturally, this type of guideline could not work for ACMG guides whose required access is widespread and interspersed, not regular or focussed on just one area. Tucker worked diligently with department officials for several years without reaching any reasonable solution. Finally, in 2012, he succeeded in negotiating a special agreement that allowed the ACMG's members intermittent access, but with restrictions on access by aircraft to reach some of the areas—including, unfortunately, some key areas such as Mount Waddington.

In 2013, by working alongside other industry sectors, the ACMG was able to reinstate incidental use, with the fourteen-day and aircraft restrictions removed. Tucker also managed to persuade the Ministry to include a clause stipulating that anyone desiring to work in those areas be a member of a recognized association such as the ACMG in order to work as a mountain guide.

With that hurdle overcome, the ACMG focussed on its next task, to have BC Parks allow hiking on the ACMG's group permit. As of publication, the ACMG continues to lobby the BC government to require ACMG certification as the minimum qualification for mountain guiding in BC.

# Leaders Among Leaders

## The ACMG's Presidents

One of the world's most poorly kept secrets must be that Mountain Guides would much prefer to be out guiding clients in the mountains than sitting behind a desk sorting notes and writing documents. That the ACMG was formed and successfully nurtured through its fledgling years is due to the foresight and determination exhibited by the Association's first generations of members. While those guides were intrepidly taking on the challenges crucial to establishing a solid foundation for their association, they focussed

on the task at hand. As a result, not all the relevant dates, details and sequences of events were recorded with optimum diligence and accuracy—despite the many hours devoted by many individual guides, and in many cases, their hard-working wives to whom numerous tasks often fell.

With that knowledge, and with many thanks to the efforts of several guides' combined memories, the list of the ACMG's Presidents for its first fifty years follows below. The value of all their contributions is immeasurable.



Mountain Guide Peter Fuhrmann was the ACMG's first president. Peter Fuhrmann collection

The first President, Peter Fuhrmann, served from 1963 to 1969, after which he assumed the role of Secretary Treasurer. As President, one of Fuhrmann's actions was to sign the Guides Course diplomas of John Gow and Bernie Schiesser in 1967, who in time would also lend their valuable talents to leading the Association.

Fuhrmann's main goal, however, was to ensure the Association was recognized as a serious, competent group of professionals at a time when there were no government or legal restrictions stipulating who could offer guiding services. Overall, awareness of the guiding profession was, for the most part, limited to those with first-hand connections.

During his presidency, however, while on a visit to Switzerland with Hans Peter Stettler, Fuhrmann met with Xavier Kalt, the IFMGA Technical Commission President.

"He was a solid character," Fuhrmann recalled in 2013. "He had a clear impression of what a Mountain Guide should be. He should be a professional, governed by provincial and federally recognized government bodies, with full insurance and disability and pension."

With that, Fuhrmann determined to lead the young Canadian association in that direction. One main thing he recognized was that in Europe, national and regional alpine clubs worked hand-in-hand with those in the guiding profession. In Canada, he determined, the ACMG, the Alpine Club of Canada and Parks Canada would all need to work together in a mutually beneficial triumvirate to exude the essential authority and professionalism.

"With Canada, the country is so diverse—the East, Quebec, the Arctic, the West—I realized it would be difficult to form a nucleus and bring it under one umbrella," Fuhrmann said. "I realized it would take a lot of work and energy to make that happen here. Canada was a very demanding place to do that."

Following Fuhrmann, Hans Schwarz, who'd been named Vice President in 1967, served as President from 1969 to 1971. Having left Switzerland for Toronto in 1956, Schwarz earned his guide's certification in 1962 under Walter Perren. Based in Jasper, Schwarz participated in the ACMG guides courses in both 1966 and '67. Graduates included Ottmar Setzer, Bob Geber, Don Vockeroth, John Gow, Bernie Schiesser and Charlie Locke, many of whom became outstanding leaders in the mountain community.



Gow, who served as VP under Schwarz, became President in 1971, serving until 1977. Despite losing one leg below the knee and much of his other foot in the process of surviving a small plane crash that killed the pilot just one year after earning his guide's certification, Gow retained his passion for the alpine, climbing and skiing on prosthetics. Chief among the issues he tackled during those years was ensuring that all those who were already guiding clients in the national parks were certified ACMG guides. For the most part, the process was one of grandfathering them in, but some, including Mike Wiegele, University of Calgary outdoor education instructor Bill March and those who ran (then known as) Yamnuska Mountain School, resisted joining. While Gow, Schiesser and Locke, however, were Canadian-born, none of the ACMG's founding members were native-born Canadians. That reality, combined with the fact that a few unqualified candidates had been failed by European-born examiners during early exams, and that climbing was something of a renegade, free-spirit pursuit during that era, meant not all guides aspired to join a formal association, particularly one run by "foreigners." The situation caused friction for members too.

"It was not a happy situation for Mountain Guides who had training to see self-appointed guides running institutions and organizations," Gow recalled.

Over time, and especially after the ACMG gained IFMGA acceptance, the holdouts recognized the value of an ACMG badge and reluctance dissipated.

During his presidency, however, not all the challenges that came Gow's way were serious; Bruno Engler presented a unique conundrum. Engler, who had been certified, along with Hans Gmoser, by Walter Perren in 1956, had been grandfathered into the Association. A spectacularly talented photographer and skilled guide, Engler also gained legendary status as a perpetually broke bon-vivant who routinely failed to pay his ACMG membership dues. While some suggested he be relieved of his membership, another solution was embraced; Engler was made an Honorary Member in 1975.

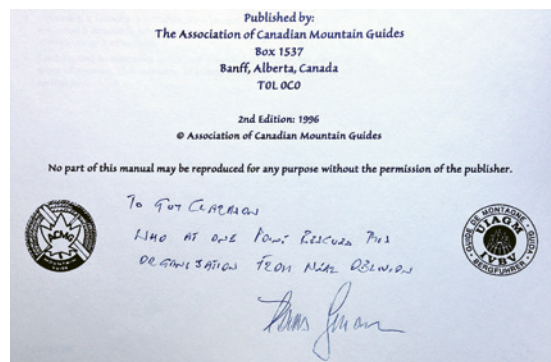
Serving as President from 1977 to 1983, Bernie Schiesser's priorities involved keeping pace with the demands of the growing membership, as the demand for guides was spurred by the explosive growth of the heli-skiing industry.

"Mostly, our priority was keeping the Association alive," Schiesser said. "A lot of credit goes to Hans [Gmoser]. In the early years, Hans was the glue that got things going, and kept them going."

Following Schiesser, Ian Campbell served as President for 1983-1984, during a period that marked the beginning of a changing of the guard, with the younger generation striving to lead the Association. With some disagreement among the membership as to whether assistant (now apprentice) guides should be allowed to vote—as they were when Campbell was elected—the 1984 election allowed only full Mountain Guides voting privileges. When the votes were counted, another young Canadian took the helm. The right man for the time, as President from 1984 thru 1989,



Hans Gmoser. CMH collection



Inside this 1996 edition of the ACMG technical manual Hans Gmoser expressed his sparsely extended praise with the words "To Guy Clarkson, who at one point rescued the organization from near oblivion." Mountain Guide Guy Clarkson collection

Guy Clarkson brought with him a keen business acumen he'd developed as Marketing Director for Canadian Mountain Holidays.

"I knew we had to get our finances in order, change the financial structure and run the Association more like a business," Clarkson said. "I wanted us to be a professional organization—a true member of the UIAGM."

Clarkson also recognized the importance of liability insurance, and worked to ensure those structures were in place, "to protect our members from themselves."

Another priority was the reworking of the exam process to make the system more transparent. Formalized interviews, marking sheets and structured debriefings were all introduced, with the candidates receiving a proper evaluation at the end.

"That way people knew what was expected, rather than looking up their names on a list posted on a wall at the Alpine Club," Clarkson said. "That was our weakness at the time. We were producing good guides, but the process was lacking. When you've got a high failure rate, something is wrong; you should be putting people in the position to achieve success."

To help prepare the next generation of guides, Clarkson secured grant money from the BC government to hire Karl Klassen to write the first

technical manual. Later, Hans Gmoser oversaw the publishing of the second edition in 1996.

Following Clarkson, Hans Peter Stettler stepped up for two years. The timing however, was not ideal for him in regards to his home life, so Stettler passed the torch to Hans Gmoser.

"He was the best man I could have asked for to become President," Stettler said.

Coming full-circle as he retired from the helm of CMH, which by then had grown to be one of the most successful multi-million dollar adventure tourism operators in the world, Gmoser embraced the role of President from 1991 to 1996. Bringing with him a massive wealth of industry experience, Gmoser solidified the foundation of the Association's liability insurance coverage. While raising the ACMG's credibility in the eyes of government, he also established the groundwork for Thompson Rivers University to take over running the ACMG's training and certification courses and become a recognized program, an idea that began germinating with Clarkson.

After Gmoser, Karl Klassen served as President from 1996 thru 2000. During his tenure, Klassen worked tirelessly on the Association's relationship with land managers and insurers, and also clarified member responsibilities and communication that helped the new groups (Hiking Guides and Climbing Gym Instructors) integrate into the ACMG.

On Klassen's heels, Dwayne Congdon was acting President from 2000 to 2002, until Cyril Shokoples assumed the position.

Although he only served as President for six months, that first half of the 2003 year presented Shokoples with one of the most significant challenges the ACMG would ever face. On January 20, 2003, an avalanche claimed the lives of seven guests at Durrand Glacier Chalet during a guided ski touring week. Then, just ten days later, a non-guided group of teenagers from Strathcona Tweedsmuir School was swallowed by an avalanche in BC's Glacier National Park. While the heroic actions of two ACMG guides skiing independently nearby, Rich Marshall and Abby Watkins, saved the lives of seven people, seven students died. The ACMG found itself

Mountain Guide Karl Klassen coaches his son, Aleks, on his first time taking the sharp end, in Kalymnos, Greece, 2011. Photo by Mary Clayton





under intense scrutiny.

A decade later, Shokoples shared his thoughts about those months.

“This [Strathcona Tweedsmuir avalanche] was a non-guided event but a watershed nonetheless, which resulted in the Avalanche Terrain Exposure Scale (ATES) and new rules for custodial groups in avalanche terrain in national parks in winter. This was also the winter of the Durrand Glacier avalanche accident. Dealing with the coroner’s office and public outcry about avalanche fatalities in recreational skiing was exceedingly challenging,” Shokoples said. “There were a lot of fires to put out and responses required to all kinds of concerns. In fact, one BC MLA suggested that the backcountry should be closed in light of the fatalities.”

Mountain Guide Cyril Shokoples shares descending instructions while teaching an alpine leadership course for ACC Calgary Section members on A2, Canadian Rockies, 2010. Photo by Sue Kuznik



Mountain Guide Diny Harrison guides clients on Osprey Peak in the Purcell Mountains. Photo by Mountain Guide Roger Laurilla

The challenging times continued as Shokoples was forced to unilaterally rescind a motion made by the general membership pertaining to guides’ wages.

“It turns out the motion was not legal and my only option was to rescind it,” Shokoples recalled. “I never imagined that I would ever do such a thing.”

Looking back, Shokoples expressed gratitude for the invaluable counsel of Klassen, who was Executive Director at that time, and the other ACMG Board members, saying, “I feel humbled to have worked with such an amazing group of people.”

On the positive side, the events of that winter initiated an overhauling of the ACMG in general, as the Association embarked on a path of heightened governance and self-determination.

After an exhausted Shokoples stepped down, Diny Harrison, who had become the first Canadian-born woman to earn full Mountain Guide accreditation in 1992, stepped in as Vice President, another female first. Soon afterward, she was elected President, serving until 2005.

Having recently stepped down after serving several years on the CAA Board, and with some encouragement from Scott Davis, Harrison felt she had some experience with implementing changes to a challenging group, and also that the ACMG needed “an energy boost and a new inspired direction.” During her term, she made it



a priority to try to determine (via questionnaire) how the membership viewed its own association.

“That helped us to understand who we were,” she said. “And also what kind of an organization we had metamorphosed into since the addition of so many membership categories and changes to the training program, which had many members feeling confused.”

Having served on the Board during the period when Congdon was acting President after Klassen completed his second consecutive term, Scott Davis a Revelstoke-based Mountain Guide known for his unbridled ski touring passion, decided to run for the position to avoid what he believed would be another potentially detrimental gap in leadership. Serving from 2005 to 2009, overall his goal was to continue the work begun by Gmoser, Klassen and Harrison—to help the ACMG meet the tests of a strong self-regulating professional association. Realizing such a goal would be “more of a distance run than a sprint,” Davis narrowed the focus toward strengthening the foundation with a well-defined Scope of Practice, Code of Conduct and conduct review process. Doing so involved overhauling the Association’s bylaws and objects, and even clarifying the status of the ACMG in both Alberta and BC’s Societies Acts—for a time two ACMGs existed, one registered in each of the provinces.

“Kudos go out to Jim Bishop, an ACMG Apprentice Ski Guide and lawyer living in Whitehorse who drafted numerous versions and offered much needed counsel in this daunting task all pro bono,” Davis said. “We dedicated the four years to see this task through with the Board and staff really rising to the occasion with feedback, legwork and commitment.”

On the lighter side, Davis said he felt he achieved another goal, that of re-engaging the membership and creating an association they were excited to belong to through efforts that included shortening meetings and improving informal communication among members. Working with then ACC President Cam Roe to create a Memorandum of Understanding regarding the Mountain Guides Ball, Davis also helped strengthen the relationship between the

ACMG and the ACC.

Looking back, however, Davis said he was most proud of his role in hiring Peter Tucker as the Association’s second Executive Director, as Tucker’s sharp expertise ensured the completion of transitioning the Board from a working to a strategizing group, with clear goals and a process to keep it current and relevant.

“The one other major change in the new bylaws that makes me most proud of this association was the inclusion of public members on both the Board and the Conduct Review Committee,” Davis added. “These selfless people have had a greatly positive impact on the Board and I can’t thank them enough for their perspective.”

At the time of publication, Whistler-based Keith Reid had been serving energetically as President since 2009, the demands of which precluded his ability to contribute to this publication.

Mountain Guides Luke Griffith and Matt Reynolds, and Alpine Guide Patrick Delaney (centre) negotiate Mount Victoria’s South Ridge on the 2009 Alpine Guide exam. Photo by Mountain Guide Marc Piché



# Shooting for the Stars

## The ACMG's Technical Directors

*"In my opinion, what guiding is all about—it's a game of options. You start out in the morning, you have a lot of options, and every time you blow one your scope gets narrowed down. When you're left with the last option you better not make another mistake."*

—Hans Gmoser, 2003

At the time of the ACMG's formation, Hans Gmoser had been guiding full-time professionally for a decade. Arguably the busiest guide in the Western Hemisphere, his highly developed leadership skills, and his exacting nature, made him an easy choice as the Association's first Technical Director.

The TD position included overseeing the training and certification program, including hiring of instructors, and also serving as chair of the ACMG Technical Committee. Via the committee, the courses, and interacting with industry, the TD was responsible for representing the membership on issues of course

currency, and international and local guiding standards and methods.

With little documentation existing, what's known about the first guide's course is that Brian Greenwood ran it with Hans Schwarz in June 1966. Of the four candidates, only Lloyd "Kiwi" Gallagher made guiding his full-time profession.

"Hans and Leo were going to teach the course, but other work came up and they were going to cancel it," Gallagher recalled. "So Brian stepped up and ran an amazing seven-day course, climbing every day with some amazing bivies in bad weather."

From left, back row: Brian Berry, Mountain Guides Pierre Lemire, Bruce Howatt, Kobi Wyss, Dan Griffith. Foreground: Marie (last name unknown), Mountain Guide Scott Flavelle, pose during the Summer Assistant Guide course, circa 1979.  
Photo by Mountain Guide Pierre Lemire



Displeased with the lack of formal documentation afterward, Gmoser, never known for his diplomatic talents, shared his thoughts with Greenwood, "in his usual subtle way," Gallagher recalled.

"So Brian decided not to work with Hans on any more ACMG courses, which was a pity as he had so much to pass onto future ACMG members," Gallagher said.

When it came to standards, from the beginning the ACMG was not content to simply meet current levels. Assuming the TD role in 1969, Rudi Gertsch aimed high. With the explosion of the heli-ski industry in BC, the demand for qualified guides—especially those who were good skiers—steadily increased.

Heli-skiing, however, was an entirely new activity. Skiers were not skinning up the slopes they planned to ski down. The pace was faster, guests paid high fees and the pressure was on. Indeed, the whole face of the profession was evolving from a guide with one or two clients on a rope to mountaineering with youth groups at High Horizons camps run by Bernie Schiesser and John Gow, to climbing wild rock,





Mountain Guide Marc Piché takes air at Battle Abbey, Selkirk Mountains. Photo by Honorary Member Chic Scott

Mountain Guide James Madden (red jacket) teaches anchor building skills during a multi-pitch ice climbing course at the top of Louise Falls, Canadian Rockies, 2012. Photo by Kendra Stritch



and gaining technical skills through Yamnuska Mountain School's adventure courses.

Technology too, was evolving, with sticky rock shoes, stronger ropes and the introduction of the Skadi avalanche transceiver high on the list. All these factors coalesced to push the quality and variety of a guide's competence.

Gertsch believed Canadian guides should be the best in the world, and fought for that vision. Having passed his exam in Switzerland in 1967, and spent time as an observer on Swiss exams, he was on top of the current European standards.

"Rudi has to get huge credit for laying the groundwork," Gow said. While some guides worried that a high bar might discourage people from wanting to be guides, Gertsch understood the opposite to be true: higher standards would result in better guides who would push the Association to continually reach higher.

Unlike Gertsch's hard-nosed, meticulously organized approach, as Standards Committee Chair, Drumheller, Alberta-born and farm-raised Don Vockeroth was famously laid back.

"He would write the agenda a week before a meeting on the back of a napkin in a coffee shop," Schiesser recalled. "But Don was incredibly competent. He was probably the best rock climber at the time."

Following Gertsch as TD and serving for a decade, Rudi Kranabitter was venerated as an all-mountain master who moved swiftly, efficiently and intuitively on snow, vertical ice or rock. During his twenty-eight years as an examiner beginning in 1976, which helped secure his place as an Honorary Member, Kranabitter became both revered and feared for his blunt and frequently intimidating examining style. One version of a favourite story relates how Kranabitter (nick-named "krampon biter"), while examining a hotshot sport climber hesitantly leading a 5.10 traditional rock climbing pitch at the Back of Lake Louise, soloed up beside the candidate and asked, "Are you afraid? Do you want me to call your mother? I'll give you a quarter."

For Kranabitter, Canada's mountains demanded that this country's guides be among the best.

“I felt especially,” Kranabitter said, “That the winter component needed to be better than their European counterparts’ mostly due to the fast pace in the industry, remoteness and lack of avalanche forecasting systems. If you can guide in Canada, you can guide anywhere.”

During this era, both the Ski and Alpine Assistant Guide courses were lengthened to three weeks, and the Ski Guide certification was refined, as Kranabitter worked to bring instructors to a level where there were fewer

discrepancies in the examination process.

“I wanted to make the course more continuous, more intense, wanted to raise the standards, raise the climbing skills, raise the skiing skills overall,” Kranabitter said. “It was important to me that I give people from my experience information, training, a positive outlook for the profession, and to motivate them in that way. I always told people, you want to be in this profession, there’s a lot of risk involved. The training demands more of you than if you were guiding.”

*Guiding is still guiding, you go out in the mountains. The mountains always give you the same problems. They don’t care what degree you have, the mountains are always the mountains.*

—Rudi Kranabitter

Next up was Ontario native Dan Griffith, who decades later remembered the TD position to be a volunteer effort slotted into available free time between guiding days. At a time when the concept of specialty guiding certificates was being introduced, Griffith was not a fan.

“I have always believed the best course for the ACMG is to train and certify full Mountain Guides, and have encouraged all the aspirants I have had contact with to pursue mountain guiding as a year-round career,” Griffith said. “I still believe the best guides are active in the mountains both summer and winter.”

In the late 1980s, Kobi Wyss took on the TD role for a few years. A Swiss “porter” (apprentice guide) who arrived in Canada in 1971, he earned his certification in the Bernese Oberland two years later. Based on reports from friends, Canada sounded like “a place where adventure could be had, a place of wilderness and possibilities.” Having had Oskar Gertsch, Rudi’s brother, as one of his examiners, word of his competence gained him work with CMH. Over time, Wyss discovered more mountains in Canada than he’d ever imagined—a number of them considerably higher than some peaks in the Alps.

“I found a lot of remote places that see few humans, something that is long gone in Europe,” Wyss said. “That still holds a big attraction for me today.”

Mountain Guide Mike Olsthoorn instructs a Yamnuska Mountain Adventures rock climbing course. Photo by Pat Morrow





In addition to trying to keep pace with an industry that remained in growth mode, and with steadily evolving techniques, Wyss also tried to improve the public's awareness of the guiding profession.

"I realized that Canada did not have the same recognized guiding traditions established, as you would find in the alpine countries," Wyss said. "Most people on the street did not know what a Mountain Guide was, and neither did provincial or federal government officials. We needed to work on that."

Serving as PR person during those years, Ferdl Taxbock sent out press releases about ACMG meetings and news to the *Calgary Herald*, even printing stickers that said, "Get High, Hire a Mountain Guide."

Looking back, Wyss felt overall his generation was on the right track.

"When I see what the Technical Directors of today have to offer and what they have achieved, I feel like we are right up there with standards and expertise—especially in ski-related guiding," Wyss said. "Our TD now goes overseas to bring our standards to them. How things have changed."

During the early 1990s, Karl Klassen served a term as Course Coordinator, a position similar

to the current TD role. Running all the training and certification programs, he worked with the Technical Committee to develop a training/coaching course structure and also the Rock Guide program, launched in 1992. Klassen wrote the goals and objectives for each training course as well as curriculum instructor notes. In 1991, he was hired to write the first technical handbook, from scratch, for guiding applications of the IFGMA countries. In 1996 the second edition was published, and in 1998, with contributions from Hias Ahrens, James Blench, Chris Miller, Dave Stark, two illustrators and a team of reviewers, Klassen updated the manual to its current form as the joint ACMG/AMGA *Technical Handbook for professional Mountain Guides*. By then the ACMG's membership had grown to 242 members, including 100 Mountain Guides, five of them female.

Following Wyss, James Blench served as TD through the first half of the 1990s. Under his watch, standards were more precisely defined, as published in the manual. An instructor field notebook was created so examiners could track a candidate's performance. A professional and terrain guidelines document was created, and the Code of Ethics revised. The training program was further developed and streamlined, particularly the Ski program, with George Field managing the administrative tasks. At that time, the guide training courses were administered by the TD and the ACMG Secretary (Executive position).

During that period, Blench recalled dealing with numerous issues pertaining to the BC heli/cat skiing association (now HeliCat Canada), and also with the Canadian Ski Guide Association. Another significant achievement of Blench's was the amalgamation of the Nordic Ski Guide's Association in 1994. The ACMG recognized their certification as equivalent to the Ski Guide certification, complete with upgrade course. Called a "limited ski guide," the recognition, stated Colin Zacharias, "served as a generous and accommodating compromise and recognized the individual's skills and years of leadership and contribution to the Canadian guiding industry."

Mountain Guide Jeff Bullock demonstrates crevasse rescue skills at Blanket Glacier Chalet, Monashee Mountains, 2011.  
Photo by Debbie Ritchie



“I feel this act went a long way toward building trust between the ACMG and other similar organizations,” Zacharias said.

With Hans Gmoser as President, and the TD workload increasingly demanding and time consuming, Blench became the first TD to be paid something for the significant amount of time the position demanded. The scope of the ever-expanding workload prompted the hiring of Linda Heywood to oversee the administrative tasks, a position she holds to this day.

“It was a busy time with lots of changes and lots of controversy,” Blench recalled. “Worth noting is the tremendous amount of work that Rudi Kranabitter put in through the 1980s and early ’90s. There would not have been any ACMG programs if it were not for him.”

In 1994, Colin Zacharias, who served as TD from ’95 to 2002, coordinated courses with Blench for a year. At that point, the training and certification program was moved to Thompson Rivers University on contract basis. In 2000, TRU took over the program completely. During Zacharias’ term, the TC altered the constitution so that guides could pursue the Ski and Alpine Guide speciality certificates independently. Continuing to expand the Association’s scope, the Rock Guide (1992), Hiking/Backpacking program and Climbing Gym Instructor (1995) certificates were also developed, moves which not only increased the size and range of the training program, but also membership.

For Zacharias, ensuring the certification process met current industry needs was a priority. He credits the efforts of Blench, Klassen and Chris Miller, “a well-connected course instructor,” for establishing lines of communication with industry and addressing how formal training and certificates would prepare guides for their daily activities. In particular, that involved an increased focus on mechanized guiding as part of the Ski Guide training, as well as improving the skiing standard to meet requests from (now) HeliCat Canada. Also, with increasing popularity of the sport, a waterfall ice course was added to the Alpine Guide training program.

In addition to increasing membership, the Hiking Guide and Climbing Gym Instructor certificates served as an enormous boost in terms of industry outreach, connecting the ACMG with numerous interest groups, a different and important group of skilled instructors, and enlarging the ACMG skill set overall.

“Both these groups provided a complement and strength to the Association and helped our credibility with Parks, lands and groups—that at that time preferred in-house training to a certification route—such as Outward Bound, COLT, NOLS etc.,” Zacharias said.



Mountain Guide Jeff Relp shows his best dry tooling moves on an ice climbing course at Haffner Creek, Kootenay National Park. Photo by Mountain Guide Roger Laurilla

**T**hen President, Klassen was instrumental in strengthening the ACMG’s relationship with land managers and insurers, and in clarifying member responsibilities and communication, which in turn helped these new groups integrate into the Association.

Looking back in 2013, Zacharias said he felt the most significant contribution made to the ACMG through group effort during his tenure as TD was the creation of a professionally administered guide training program in partnership with TRU.

“In addition to the already mentioned benefits, my motivation back then was a less obvious one,” Zacharias explained. “I felt the responsibility for the mentorship of apprentice guides. I wanted that process to be a positive one. I knew how stressful and challenging the certification program could be for the participants. My goal was, simply, to create a better course.”

To that end, the inspiration of a few key instructors, including Miller helped improve the program. For its first three decades the ACMG’s





From left: Dave Williamson, Herb Bluer (MG/examiner, white hat), Larry Stanier (then observer, red hat), Trudy Wagler, Bob Busch, Phil Hein (MG/examiner, black cap), Cyril Shokoples (then guide candidate, white cap), Greg Yavorsky (guide candidate, with pipe), Brad White (candidate) Daryl Kincaid, Pierre Lemire (MG/examiner), Dean Stanerton. Sitting: Murray Toft (candidate, white cap), unknown. Assistant Ski Guide exam, spring 1984, Meagre Creek, Pemberton Icecap. Herb Bleuer collection

examination process was dreaded by many.

“As a mentor Chris was instrumental providing insight and feedback at each stage of development,” Zacharias said. “What I learned from Chris was how to turn a hard-to-define guiding technique into an educational progression.”

Every skill was broken down; each small or significant improvement to course administration, participant communication, pre-course information, course leader and instructor training, lesson plans and the evaluation process was motivated by instructor and participant comment. Striving for transparency, Zacharias worked to improve student feedback and introduced a formal appeal process. He also tried to ensure, as a cornerstone of risk management, that each participant knew what to expect, and what was expected of them.

“An important motivation I took from Chris was, while we appreciated and implemented industry and instructor feedback, the bottom line was the instruction and assessment process had to be fair to the participant.

“I hoped, perhaps idealistically, that *all of this* would reduce the day-to-day stress to the student and instructor. And, create a worthwhile course experience that the participant would remember as a significant contribution to his or her apprenticeship. After all, what truly benefits the professional membership and its clientele is a better guide.”

On Zacharias’s heels, Dwayne Congdon became TD from 2002 to 2005, at which time the tasks associated with the position were split in two: Course Director, which Congdon assumed, and TD, taken on by Todd Guyn from 2005 thru 2009.

With the transfer of the training courses to TRU, Guyn was the first TD in a long time to be unpaid. Despite the division of tasks, the new TD position proved extremely demanding for a volunteer role. Nonetheless, Guyn worked to refine the professional aspects and programs set out before him for the betterment of the Association. He also helped create the new Top Rope Climbing Instructor certification.

Guyn admitted he took on the role not only because it interested him, but also knowing that serving in the TD role is a respected professional challenge for a guide. As well, his age led him to feel he might bridge the next generational gap.

“It’s a very technically-oriented role, and a fairly prestigious role,” Guyn said. “Within the ethos of guiding culture there’s a certain amount of input toward technical standards and standard operating procedure.”

In a national guiding association however, reaching agreement on issues among very individually-minded members can be extremely difficult.

“To form a consensus to move forward is very challenging,” Guyn said. “It’s not easy to get everyone on the same page. It’s not like a corporation, but it is necessary. Professional associations need to have consensus to get best practices.”

In the end, however, the TD role is that of a team player, and accomplishments are cumulative.

“Everybody is a player,” Guyn said. “And every once in a while you come across someone like Hans [Gmoser] who makes huge strides.”

Among the most successful team efforts Guyn is proud to have been a part of was the process that hired Peter Tucker as Executive Director.

“It was a good process, and a really good choice,” Guyn said. “Peter’s skill set benefits us, and he’s even had some influence on other organizations and associations outside of the ACMG.”

When Marc Piché accepted the TD position in 2009, once more there was wage attached. Having already sat on the Technical Committee for several years, Piché felt honoured to be involved, as several of his mentors had previously served in that role.

“It interests me, and I like the technical side of it,” Piché said. “And I like having the opportunity to work toward the evolution of our guides association, and work toward making decisions that make sense.”

In collaboration with work initiated during Guyn’s tenure, and with Congdon in his role as Course Director at TRU, the Ski Guide program expanded to include snowboard guides, and the Hiking Program to include a winter hiking course on snowshoes, a sport that exploded in the 2000 decade.

Among his goals as TD, Piché said he wanted to ensure the Association was consistent in applying its standards, and in particular how the training courses are taught, with an eye toward retaining currency at the international level. As TRU delivers the programs, Piché and Congdon work closely to ensure the material being taught

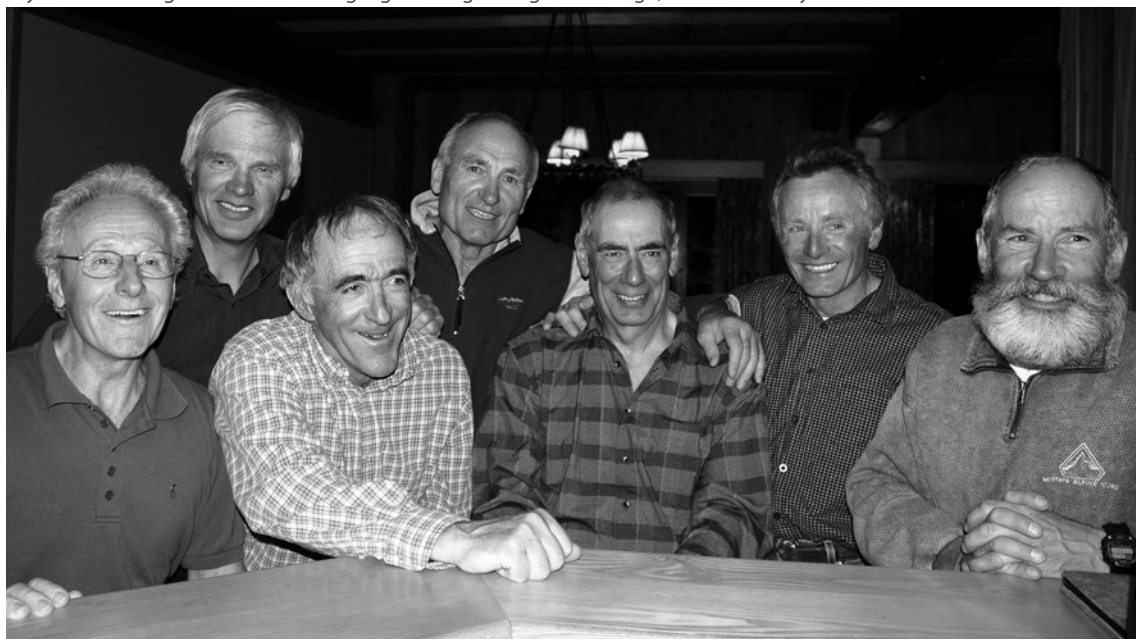
is exactly what the Association wants delivered.

“We need to make sure we’re making decisions based on firm principles, and not arbitrary lines in the sand,” Piché said.

Perhaps his greatest achievement, Piché collaborated with Tucker and the TC to develop a comprehensive Scope of Practice—the document that outlines the limits of professional activity for ACMG members. The heart of any true professional association, the Scope of Practice clearly defines where members may work, what they may do, whether they require supervision, who may supervise them and how their certifications interact with those of related organizations. Working together, occasionally as an unpopular duo, Tucker and Piché embrace the responsibility of holding members accountable to this document, thereby helping to ensure the protection of the public.

As part of an organization with a powerful technical focus, it is not surprising that the Technical Directors have, over the years, been among the members with the greatest influence in driving the ACMG to become what it is today.

Mountain Guides Herman Frank, Sepp Renner, Rudi Gertsch, Bob Geber, Peter Schlunegger, Ernst Buhler and Kobi Wyss share a laugh at a CMH nostalgia gathering at Bugaboo Lodge, 2005. Photo by Mountain Guide Brad White





# Training Synergy

## The partnership with Thompson Rivers University

Not long after it opened in 1990, while Colin Zacharias was at CMH's Adamant Lodge, Hans Gmoser approached him to discuss the future of the ACMG, and specifically how the guide training and certification program might be improved. Zacharias was an instructor, course program leader and Board member. As per his well-honed talent, Gmoser was thinking ahead, seeking out guides best qualified and capable to carry the Association forward.

"My guess is Hans was canvassing the Board and a few Association members for their opinion," Zacharias recalled. "He was watching the training program grow through a series of recent changes. He also was aware that the Austrian guide training program was administered through a national university. We speculated about pros and cons, and whether our local culture would accept such a significant change."

Beginning in 1990, the course structure underwent a significant overhaul in an effort to improve the instruction and coaching of guide applications and skills. The three-week assistant winter and summer courses Kranabitter had worked to establish were split into shorter courses. The program focussed on rock, alpine and ski disciplines, each with an

entry-level training course and instructor lesson plans, followed by an exam week, all of which was facilitated by the brand new Technical Handbook. Created by Klassen, the addition of concrete training courses for each discipline advanced skill sets, program continuity, and improved pass ratios.

As the program matured it also gained administrative girth and complexity.

With the Hiking Guide and Climbing Gym Instructor programs in place, by 1996 the need for a larger administrative capacity was apparent. Under Zacharias' lead as TD, the options were weighed—to rent an office, complete with equipment and a full-time secretary—or, the preferred option—contract out the service. With ACMG Board and general membership approval, the contract to oversee the administration services of the ACMG training and certification program was awarded to the University College of the Cariboo's (now Thompson Rivers University) Adventure Studies department.

As TD, Zacharias remained responsible for hiring instructors, screening and accepting applicants, ensuring the course quality, educational standards, instructor training, and presiding over appeals or complaints. The transfer of the administrative services was in place by the spring of 1996, in time for the summer courses.

"TRU was always supportive, and from my perspective, there was no negative side to the transfer," Zacharias said. "During those years the University administrator, Kathy Richardson, was the first point of contact for many candidates. Always polite, professional and helpful, the training and certification office had business hours, an informed person to answer questions, and a mail and email service to communicate to candidates in a timely manner."

On top of that, TRU had space to archive course files. The arrangement marked the beginning of a beautiful friendship. Within a few years, both the ACMG and TRU were ready to move the partnership to the next level, when the ACMG initiated the complete transfer of the training program, under the direction of President Karl Klassen.

Over the course of a year, Klassen, Iain

Alpine Guide Sean Isaac (left, orange jacket) teaches search and rescue technicians at Two O'Clock Falls, David Thompson area, Canadian Rockies, 2013. Photo by Alpine Guide Brent Peters





Alpine Guide Sarah Hueniken demonstrates t-slot building techniques at the ACC Marmot Women's Leadership Camp in the Bugaboos, circa mid-2000s. Photo by Mary Ann Rombach

Stewart Patterson (an ACMG guide and TRU employee), TRU Chair Ross Cloutier, and Zacharias deliberated over a Memorandum of Understanding. With Klassen ensuring the ACMG Board and the general membership were kept informed of the entire process, members had several opportunities to provide input, ending with approval by vote.

In 2000, TRU assumed full responsibility for the Canadian Mountain & Ski Guide training program. One key element of the partnership agreement requires the joint hiring of a University-employed Course Coordinator whose job is to efficiently separate the tasks related to running the course program from the responsibilities of the TD. For its part, the TD position has remained responsible for communicating technical standards to the University through the approval of instructor hiring, course progression and content, candidate prerequisites, instructor training and researching international guiding standards and best practices. Through this agreement, the ACMG fulfills its obligation to the Canadian guiding industry, to the IFMGA, and to the membership mentoring process.

In the fall of 2001, Zacharias passed the

TD torch to Dwayne Congdon, who had been apprenticing for the position for the previous year. Following Congdon's initiative, the Course Coordinator and TD positions were separated. In 2005 Todd Guyn was appointed as TD, while Congdon became the TRU Course Coordinator of the Canadian Mountain & Ski Guide Program, completing the transition, all under Klassen's leadership.

Overall, the partnership has been a win-win, Zacharias said.

"The bottom line, being a cog in the wheel of a large facility means you are sharing bulk items and expenses like staples, photocopies and phone lines," Zacharias said. "The guide candidates enter a program that has to uphold the University's standards for instructor skills, evaluation standards and student rights. Students get transfer credits in addition to the certificate.

"The benefit to the University has been added diversity—offering a quality guiding program (backed by a professional association with a large membership) with a solid international reputation. This has boosted their Adventure Studies program and attracted international and domestic students. I truly believe this transfer has been mutually beneficial to the Association, the University, and the students."

Apprentice Rock Guide  
Cian Brinker short  
ropes course instructor,  
Mountain Guide Mike  
Adolf on the Apprentice  
Alpine Guide exam  
on Silverhorn, Mount  
Athabasca, Canadian  
Rockies, 2013.  
Photo by Kendra Stritch





# The Evolving Job

## The ACMG's relationship with industry

If there ever was a profession that was the polar opposite of work that is tedious, monotonous, boring and repetitive, guiding is the perfect poster child.

During the course of his career, Barry Blanchard has tied in with Hollywood actors Scott Glenn and Anthony Hopkins and had his feet double for Sylvester Stallone's. He guided a New York City socialite climber on her unsuccessful attempt to climb Everest, retreated from an aggressive grizzly bear by climbing a tree—with his client—and (thankfully) with a lot less fanfare or scrutiny, has guided clients safely to the summit of the Canadian Rockies' classic, Mount Athabasca “oh, somewhere between 100 and 120 times”, a legacy he insists is “nothing to be proud of.”

But it is. While on one front, repeatedly climbing the same mountain may seem monotonous, the mountain is in a continuous state of change. And the clients are always different too. And for a man who, through the 1980s and '90s was admired by climbers around the world as not only one of Canada's, but one of climbing's top alpinists, to choose a profession which involves shelving personal ambitions to skilfully guide clients to a summit of their choice and ability level, is indeed a commendable accomplishment.

“A lot of guiding,” Blanchard said, “is teaching people how to crampon.”

While that's true, Blanchard also once guided a client up the Greenwood/Locke route on Mount Temple's north face, rappelling and jumaring the headwall pitches with the heavy bivy pack before belaying his client up. And despite the fact he did work for a short time as a pro ski patroller early on his journey toward earning his Mountain Guide certification, his career goal is a unique one.

“I want to retire as the only Mountain Guide of my generation to never have worked in the mechanized ski industry,” Blanchard said.

Without doubt, finding an ACMG Mountain Guide who has not worked in the heli or cat skiing industry is a tall order.

At the same time, successive generations of guides can thank western Canada's touring and mechanized ski industry for providing them a reliable income season after season. In the 21st century Canadian guides' options range far beyond leading a client to a summit or down an untracked backcountry powder run. Today, guiding options are widely varied, as are the options for a guide's course of training and certification.

Seismic work in the 40-degree heat of Oman, safety work at mine sites on glaciers in BC's remote north, consulting for coroner's reports, rigging at Eco Challenge adventure races in Morocco's Atlas Mountains or on Patagonian glaciers, teaching basic mountain travel skills to British Army soldiers or teenage Army Cadets—as Pierre Lemire did splendidly for more than thirty years—the jobs that guides do are varied indeed. And while specialty disciplines have evolved to encompass indoor gym climbing, backcountry guiding on snowboards, and on snowshoes in winter for Hiking Guides, the amount of traditional guiding work has increased too.

“When I was going through my guide's courses back in the dark ages, there was not much [traditional guiding mentorship] available,” Blanchard said. “Unless you worked in the heli industry, you just didn't have much exposure to older guides, especially in the

Ski Guide/Hiking Guide Alison Dakin (left) and Ski Guide Russ Lybarger rip it up at sunset in the Esplanade Range. Photo by Honorary Member Chic Scott



summer. We were mentors to each other. It's really amazing to see how much there is out there now, the work for alpine guides has taken a huge bump up."

With that, through his position as a Yamnuska Mountain Adventures director, he's witnessed an increased number of postings for aspiring guides.

"There's quite a high number of postings for practicums, and that's great," Blanchard said. "On any mountain, having a practicum along allows more risk management. No disrespect to any of my clients, but catching a lead fall is something you learn over time. If I have an apprentice down there, I know they will be able to stop that fall."

"Practicums can also help with rope management, carry gear on multi-day trips and provide an informed set of ears for clients to talk to during long periods of time alone. And, I get a lot of personal satisfaction to see a number of the people I worked with as practicums blossom into accomplished guides taking the profession to the next level."

Another area that has seen a higher number of ACMG guides being employed is in the public safety profession with national and provincial parks. In particular, today, most of those involved with mountain rescue in Banff, Jasper and Kananaskis Country are ACMG guides.

Mountain Guide Barry Blanchard schmoozes with Sir Chris Bonnington at the base of Ha Ling Peak above Canmore during the filming of a British TV shoot, circa late 1900s. Photo by Pat Morrow



Mountain Guide Mark Hammerschmied guides guests on an exciting ferrata course over Conrad Creek at CMH  
Bobbie Burns, 2012.  
Photo by Pat Morrow

"It makes good sense to have ACMG guides doing mountain rescue," Grant Statham said.

"What's important in mountain rescue, you're not just using climbing skills, but guiding skills—you never know the experience level of the people you're rescuing," added Parks Canada Visitor Safety Specialist Aaron Beardmore. "More than climbing, rescue is caring for people in the mountains."

Hoping to lessen the number of recreationalists needing any sort of rescue in the first place, the Canadian Avalanche Centre also employs ACMG guides as avalanche forecasters who help compile public avalanche bulletins, as do highway avalanche protection teams. Guides also work as examiners and instructors training the next generation of guides.

The ACMG has done well adapting to the changing needs of industry. Predicting the evolution of the work is difficult, but they are never too far behind the curve.

While Helen Sovdat's Mongolian mountaineering expeditions guarantee memorable adventures, as do a ski touring week in the Selkirks, or an ice climbing clinic with Sean Isaac, in the end, the most interesting and the most unusual work, no contest, is the Hollywood gigs, said Blanchard, recalling the time he and Troy Kirwan were hired to toss two 12-kilogram, metre-tall dummies off Takakkaw Falls during the 1994 filming of *Last of the Dogmen*.

"There we were, throwing dummies off Takakkaw Falls," he said.

"How dumb is that?"



# Ties that Bind

## The ACMG's internal and external communities

It's a scene that plays out in pubs, around rock climbing campfires and in alpine huts again and again, in mountain ranges all over the world.

Gathered around the kitchen island at the ACC's Conrad Kain Hut in the Bugaboos, five ACMG guides swap stories. The good-natured one-up man/woman-ship is noticeable as shop talk features tales of close calls with lightning and avalanches, toes crushed by rocks on the first day of an Alpine Guide exam week (which was successfully completed, despite much pain and discomfort). Conspicuous habits and shared character traits of guides make for captivating and hilarious, if sometimes questionable, entertainment.

In a profession where a bad day can, and unfortunately sometimes does, mean the death of a client entrusted to a guide's responsibility, the ties that bind mountain guides are unshakable and intense. Nobody pursues the guiding profession for money, for fame or for public adulation. The common bond of unbound

passion for the mountain environment and for the highly developed skill/art of moving efficiently and safely in nature's unlikely places in a myriad of challenging weather conditions all the while assuming the responsibility of another person or group of people runs deep, thick and understood between guides.

Throughout the course of their careers however, guides develop strong relationships not only with other guides, but with their clients as well.

"Since most of my work involves backpacking, I spend a great deal of time with the people," said Hiking Guide Glenn Reisenhofer. "You get to know them quite well throughout a four- or five-day trip. Many clients, particularly young folks, show me the glorious wonders of the mountains again with fresh eyes. I try to incorporate feelings into trips. Some folks will have a degree of fear, and it is wonderful to help them work through these fears and emerge on the other side, beyond what they thought was possible."

"What I love about my relationship with my clients is the challenge of accomplishment shared with guests," said Todd Guyn, whose interest in the mountains grew from his family's friendship with Glen Boles. "It's great to be able to take pride; I like to be challenged to move forward, and to find guests who are interested in doing challenging things."

"I really like the fact that the clients I've known for a long time have become quite good friends," added Barry Blanchard. "I really appreciate the transition from camaraderie to friendship over time."

"I find that while spending days in the mountains with people, relationships are developed very quickly and on a deeper, less superficial level than in other walks of life," said Mountain Guide Lilla Molnar. "While guiding, clients often experience emotions at their deepest level, whether it's happiness, fear, sense of achievement and pride. Very few opportunities in life these days create an environment similar to climbing and skiing in the mountains, where people are challenged both physically and emotionally. As a guide, we facilitate people working

Mountain Guides Ferdi Taxbock (left) and Bernie Schiesser skin up in anticipation of another fine ski day at Campbell Icefields Chalet, Canadian Rockies, 2012.  
Photo by Lynn Martel





Mountain Guide Lilla Molnar leads a ski touring group at Burnie Glacier, Howson Mountains, Northern BC, 2013. Photo by Mountain Guide Marc Piché

through these challenges, and as a result, great relationships develop.

“I think the same goes for relationships/camaraderie within the guiding community,” Molnar continued. “Many of my closest friendships have developed through days spent climbing and skiing. Spending a big day in the mountains can be the equivalent of spending years and years getting to know someone. We share many highs and lows within the guiding community. We celebrate small triumphs as simple as redpointing a long-term sport climbing project. We also share deep sorrow and grieve together when an accident happens and we mourn the loss of a member of the guiding community like we have lost a brother or sister. I know that in times of highs and lows I have a strong community to support me.”

Blanchard shared similar sentiments. “I’ve had some tragic and hard situations in my guiding career, and it can be overwhelming,” Blanchard said. “The support comes out of the woodwork; people who were just acquaintances at the time offering their support. It’s amazing.”

“Guiding is a profession with a lot of risk, a lot of stressful situations,” Guyn added. “It’s hard physically; you’re gone from home and family a lot. It’s not an easy path by any means. Mountain Guides share lots of attributes, and camaraderie amongst guides is quite positive. We all have high standards; we try to improve as much as we can. It’s a pretty serious job; sooner or later

you will have a wreck, or you’ll go to a wreck, or you’ll know someone who’s been involved in a wreck. The camaraderie that develops—we go through intense experiences. They’re shared, and that bonds people. You can’t find that kind of intensity in many professions. The ACMG is one of the few associations I’m part of where members are really proud to be members.”

“It’s a strange occupation,” Blanchard said. “The environment presents a tremendous amount of risk, the clients pose an amount of risk, plus the guide himself poses risk. Like a firefighter, or a soldier, policemen, there’s a lot about the job that’s really hard to comprehend from the outside. People would have to have a hell of a lot of mountaineering experience to understand what guides deal with. Between guides—it’s nice to have an educated ear to talk to.”

“Sometimes a fellow guide is the only person who can truly understand what you are personally experiencing during a difficult trip,” Reisenhofer said. “Be it the trip, or the clients, this sharing can help to clean the slate, thus helping you to get on with the job. My friendship base has grown exponentially since I started guiding. Colleagues have become friends.”

“The mentors I had as a young guide in training were not only great role models but they became close friends,” Molnar said. “As a Mountain Guide I now see mentorship as an opportunity to give back to our guides’



association and to provide role modelling and support to up-and-coming guides, especially females.

“Females in the mountain guiding community are still the minority not only in Canada, but within the IFMGA,” she continued. “There is one key element male guides lack which prevent them from truly relating to their female counterparts and that is a second X chromosome. As a female, I never felt any chauvinism and always felt supported by my male guiding instructors, mentors and co-workers. But I feel that in order to truly relate to subtle yet significant nuances of being a female Mountain Guide, female mentorship is very important. Especially now as female Mountain Guide and a mother, I feel I have very unique perspectives to share and I am very grateful to have received mentorship from the few but very influential guiding mamas!”

As one of a handful of ACMG guide/parent couples, which include Alison Andrews and Rob Orvig, Lisa Paulsen and Joe McKay, and Olivia Sofer and Robson Gmoser, Molnar and Marc Piché have embraced the flexibility—and camaraderie—that allows for both guide/parents to continue working as they raise their children—a situation that was likely unimaginable forty or fifty years ago.

“As a Mountain Guide, I like the variety of work, I love the fact I can work in different mediums and different places, that I can work in several countries in a year in different mountain ranges, and even different towns in Canada,” Piché said. “It’s always challenging and interesting. Now with Ella [his and Molnar’s daughter], I can switch off with Lilla. Sometimes I’m being Daddy while Lilla’s guiding heli-skiers in the Bugaboos.



Mountain Guide Kirsten Knechtel enjoys the climbing on Mount Tupper, Glacier National Park, Selkirk Mountains. Photo by Mary Ann Rombach

Mountain Guide Larry Dolecki (centre right), entertains his Japanese clients over dinner at the ACC’s Peter and Catharine Whyte (Peyto) Hut on the Rockies’ Wapta Icefield while guiding for Yarnuska Mountain Adventures, circa mid-1990s. Photo by Pat Morrow



“As guides, I also think it’s interesting how small a world we live in. There’s a small number of people making a living in the mountains. It’s a tight community. We have friends all over the world—just two degrees of separation.”

“I would imagine that one major reason we go to the mountains to guide is that we want to ‘commune’ with nature,” said Reisenhofer, who with a strong mountaineering background didn’t take his first ACMG course until after he was forty. “Whatever that means to an individual, we have a strong desire to be outside in that mountain environment. This connection with nature connects us with each other.”

“It takes one to know one,” Diny Harrison said. “Guides are some of the most interesting, challenging, inspiring, occasionally frustrating people I love to be a part of. Our energy, our stories and experiences, the intensity of how we live life, our relationships and all that we do is pura vida.”

# The Prime Directive

## The ACMG's duty to public protection

*It was in the early days of my career as a guide that I learned that the leader on any climb must hold the confidence of the party. This is not always so simple. Having 30 climbing seasons to look back on, I could write columns on this subject. To mention a few of the points a guide should bear in mind will not be amiss. First, he should never show fear. Second, he should be courteous to all, and always give special attention to the weakest member in the party. Third, he should be witty, and able to make up a white lie if necessary, on short notice, and tell it in a convincing manner. Fourth, he should know when and how to show authority, and when the situation demands it, should be able to give a good scolding to whomsoever deserves it.*

—Conrad Kain  
*Where the Clouds Can Go*

The rules of guiding have always been simple, with client safety at the pinnacle of importance.

Guiding is about managing risks in order to balance the safety of the guest with his/her desires and expectations for the trip. Guides and instructors train thoroughly to operate at the height of proficiency to perform this multi-variate decision-making. Their abilities improve as their own experience, learning and wisdom mature.

Typically, associations are initially formed for the purpose of helping their own memberships. Quite sensibly, the ACMG's founding fathers believed that the guiding industry could benefit from having the larger, more cohesive voice that accompanies the grouping of individuals. Having an association of industry professionals helped make guiding a more recognized profession and gave members a place to turn for help, advice and, to some degree, protection if—or, perhaps more appropriately for a profession that exists to manage risk—when things went sideways.

As the profession matured and moved into the 21st century, however, governments began to more closely scrutinize the work of professionals operating in arenas where injury to the public is a real and ever-present possibility. From the perspective of the ACMG, it became clear that associations such as theirs needed to adopt the best practices of self-regulating professions or risk becoming regulated by the government—a situation that would severely curtail the ACMG's



Mountain Guide Kirk Mauthner leads a rope of teen climbers on Eastpost Spire at the Conrad Kain Centennial Society's annual Bugaboos Teens Climbing Camp, 2013. Photo by Pat Morrow



ability to determine its own future.

Under the leadership of President Scott Davis, Executive Director Peter Tucker and communications advisor/lobbyist Kimanda Jarzebiak (Climbing Gym Instructor 3) combined their expertise to forge some crucial changes.

First, the objects of the Association were changed to establish “protection of the public interest” as the ACMG’s Prime Directive. Previously, this fundamental purpose had not been mentioned at all.

Next, the Code of Conduct was re-developed to be more specific and clear, so that ACMG members could be held accountable should they breach that Code. The previous Code consisted of statements of well-meaning good intentions that fell short of ever providing any basis for professional or legal accountability. The 1998 *Technical Handbook* makes no mention at all of any code of conduct.

Included in the Code of Conduct is the commitment by ACMG guides to assist members of the public who find themselves in difficulty, suspending their guiding or instructional

activities at that moment to help, so long as doing so does not jeopardize the safety of their clients or themselves.

In tandem, a Conduct Review process was developed following the principles of natural justice. By this process, a member who breaches the Code is disciplined by a panel of trained members and non-members who have no personal interest in the outcome of the process. Reviews are conducted in a manner that provides both the accused and the complainant all the information and opportunity to be properly heard, so that the resulting decisions are fair and unbiased. Another point addressed involved establishing a clear complaint process whereby the public and ACMG members are able to bring conduct problems forward to the Association.

“Before these changes, we didn’t have the paperwork to be consistent to manage complaints,” said Marc Piché. “There were loops and gaps in the Code of Ethics, which became the Code of Conduct. Terrain guidelines were firmly established. And now the Conduct Review Committee can base decisions on the policies of the ACMG. Prior, that would have been difficult to do consistently. Now it’s much easier to manage.”

And finally, the bylaws were changed such that two spots on the Board of Directors were made available to members of the public.

“All this was necessary to convince the government that we were able to effectively manage our internal affairs and that the Association was here to do its best to ensure that members of the public were well looked after,” Tucker said. “These changes basically said, ‘we don’t need the government to step in and tell us how to keep Canadians safe during risky activities. Our individual members are not only highly skilled, but our association also has the means to hold their feet to the fire when required.’”

As a result of these steps, the ACMG is now regarded as a model association that has adopted the best practices of self-regulating professions. The Association has consulted to other organizations such as the Canadian Avalanche Association and HeliCat Canada regarding how they, too, might follow this path. Organizations

Mountain Guides Brad White (rear) and Brian Webster (centre) prepare a skier injured in an avalanche for helicopter evacuation, Sheol Valley, Banff National Park, 2009. Photo by Mountain Guide Aaron Beardmore





Mountain Guides Brian Webster (left) and Brad White sling into Mount Victoria. Photo by Brad White

such as WorkSafeBC have been very cooperative when the ACMG has requested changes to regulation largely because the Association is viewed as one comprised of true professionals, not only at the individual level, but at the organizational level as well.

“Having the ACMG at the forefront of these changes will smooth the path for future negotiations with government and quasi-governmental organizations,” Tucker said. “It has put us ‘on the map’ as an association which can only bode well for the future of guiding and climbing instruction.

“Perhaps more than anything, it has moved us from being a ‘club’ of guides and instructors who tended to ‘look after their own’ to a true professional association that is extremely well regarded by government, industry, the public and our peers.”

While the ACMG was working at an organizational level to present itself as a professional association of the highest order, the actions of individual guides embracing new technology led to the creation of an enormously effective public information sharing initiative.

First, in 1994 Cyril Shokoples began sharing his Rescue Dynamics Current Conditions page, most likely the first and only mountain conditions information source available on the worldwide web. Then in 1998, in the course of marvelling at the capability of new cell phone technology, Mark Klassen (Karl’s younger

brother) and Grant Statham took their own beta sharing practice one step further by sending emails to a select group of fellow ACMG guides—thus giving birth to the Informalex. A victim of its own success, before long their email list expanded to unwieldy proportions.

Fortunately, a younger generation of guides was a few steps ahead in its tech savvy skills. In 2003, Mountain Guide Tom Wolfe redeveloped

Mountain Guide Rolf Regli leads clients on Mount Sir Sandford, Selkirk Mountains. Photo by Mountain Guide Roger Laurilla





the system giving the Informalex its own domain name, the ability to be sent out to multiple recipients and the creation of an online archive. In October 2005, the ACMG assumed ownership and control of the Informalex. Today, the Informalex remains a private, professional guide and instructor mailing list designed for the exchange of unrestricted/undiluted information and stimulation of dialogue on conditions, routes, and other relevant professional issues among ACMG and IFMGA members.

In July 2005, in the wake of several local climbing accidents that some ACMG members felt might have been avoided had the climbers had access to current route information, the Mountain Conditions Report was launched. Banff-based Alpine Guide Joe McKay, said Scott Davis, deserves credit for his role as one of the initiators of the discussion that led to its creation.

Maintained as a public service offered by the ACMG all year round, the MCR provides current mountain conditions information on

an unscheduled, yet frequent volunteer basis by professional guides and instructors. Submissions are reviewed by an editor who provides feedback to ACMG members who post their observations, ensuring that they remain within prescribed guidelines. A group of members also supplies a weekly summer season summary designed to fill in the gap left when the Canadian Avalanche Centre's bulletin season finishes.

Subscription and online access to archived reports is free and open to anyone.

Providing a service such as the MCR allows the ACMG to help fulfill its primary mandate to protect the public interest in a way that is wide-reaching and extremely helpful. More than 4,000 members of the public now subscribe to the postings, which provide them current, first-hand conditions reports produced by experts, which allow them to make more informed choices around where to climb, ski or hike. Public feedback on the service has been nearly unanimous—"Keep it coming!"



Ski Guide Jeff Bodnarchuk (right) and BC Park Ranger Tay Hanson take Katie Gibbs for a ridgewalk at the head of Chalice Creek, Purcell Mountains, Bugaboos in the background, 2011. Photo by Pat Morrow

# The Up and Comers

## On deck in the ACMG

*“I believe the younger generation will only push the standards higher; every generation has done this. I just hope there is still room for the mountain person and not just skill-oriented people. The Mountain Guide is a package; it also includes the human spirit, just like the spirit of the mountains. Guide and mountain work well together when they are in tune with each other.”*

—Rudi Kranabitter

A good number of the first Swiss Mountain Guides who came to work in Canada’s wild unexplored mountains came from guiding families—many of their fathers, grandfathers and uncles were also guides.

For most, guiding isn’t just a chosen profession, it’s a calling. And when a child decides to follow a parent’s path, the result infuses both lives with deeper meaning.

That’s how Dan Griffith felt when his son, Luke, earned his ACMG Mountain Guide certification in 2009.

“How do I feel about Luke being a Mountain Guide? First of all, very proud!” Dan said. “He’s an excellent guide with an enormous amount of worldwide experience for someone his age. Many guides mentored him both in heli-skiing and climbing and he benefited from an exam and training program far and above what they were in my time. I look forward to watching in the years to come as he expands his client base and perhaps leads the way for Canadian mountain guides working internationally on all types of guiding.”

For his part, Dan Griffith shares a story common to so many Canadians who fell in love with the mountains enough to commit the rest of their existence to a mountain life. As a student at York University in Toronto in 1973, Dan scored a summer job at Emerald Lake in Yoho National Park.

“My friends and I hired Rudi Gertsch to take us climbing on all our weekends,” he recalled. “We climbed Silverhorn on Athabasca, Lion’s Way on Crescent and the Kain route on Bugaboo, Edith, Cory and Grillmair on Yamnuska. In September we hiked the Great Divide Trail from Field to Canmore with the plan to meet Rudi and climb Assiniboine but the



Apprentice Ski Guide/Hiking Guide Olivia Sofer and Robson Gmoser (Ski Guide, Apprentice Rock Guide/Hiking Guide) explore the high alpine with their son, Max, Purcell Mountains, 2013. Sofer/Gmoser collection

weather crapped out. After a first summer like that, there was no lookin’ back—mountains and everything about them were my life!”

In addition to Gertsch, Dan lists Pierre Lemire and Bernard Faure as mentors on his journey toward earning his Mountain Guide certification in 1979.

“It’s difficult to express the depth of feeling I have for my chosen career,” Dan continued. “It has given me a living, but more importantly travel, adventure, and many special friends some of whom are long-time clients. It’s that kind of shared adventure and appreciation that makes guiding so rewarding. It’s a great life when you can blur the line between work and play!”

Perhaps the most impressive show of enthusiasm for his work environment came in 2006, when Dan set a Guinness World Record by completing the Seven Summits in just 187 days,





Mountain Guides Dan (left) and Luke Griffith share a proud moment at CMH Monashees. Photo by Mountain Guide Roger Laurilla

three of them (Kilimanjaro, Denali, Aconcagua) with Luke, then twenty-six. At fifty-five, Dan was the oldest Canadian to have summited Everest.

From Luke's perspective, his dad had guiding as a career path in mind for him from day one.

"He took me on trips with his guests all over the world," Luke said. "He's one of the most passionate mountain climbers and Mountain Guides I've ever had the pleasure of knowing. He helped me to get a job as a hiking guide in the Bugs for CMH knowing that this was a great first step. He's always been there for me in all of my steps through the program as well as helping me get into guiding overseas."

Climbing together also deepened the bond between father and son.

"We climbed the Lotus Flower Tower in the Cirque of the Unclimbables," Luke recalled. "This was great because we were totally alone for eight days and it was also over my birthday and Father's Day. I was also lucky enough to get to climb three of the Seven Summits with him when he did all seven in world record time."

And how does he feel about being the first second-generation Canadian Mountain Guide?

"I feel very lucky," Luke admitted. "I hope that there are lots more of us to come."

And there are too. Jeff Gertsch, Rudi's son, is a Ski Guide. Natalie, the daughter of Swiss-born Mountain Guide Sepp Renner who immigrated to Canada in 1967, is also a Ski Guide. Lloyd Gallagher's son, Ryan, is a Hiking Guide.

And in addition to Dan and Luke Griffith marking a milestone, many ACMG guides are setting records and accomplishing a range of firsts in the mountains.

In 2010, Helen Sovdat, with long-time climbing partner Val Pitkethly

became the first Canadians to summit Manaslu—both at the age of fifty. Sharon Wood, the ACMG's first female Alpine Guide, became the first North American woman to climb Everest in 1986. More recently, Alpine Guide Sarah Hueniken has raised the grade bar for women in mixed climbing, while Apprentice Rock Guide Sonnie Trotter maintains his spot as one of the world's top rock climbers. In 2010, Apprentice Ski Guide Greg Hill accomplished a world first, climbing and skiing an astonishing 2 million self-propelled vertical feet in one calendar year. From Mountain Guides Jonny Simms establishing test-piece mixed climbs on the Rockies' Stanley Headwall to Joshua Lavigne climbing new big wall routes in Baffin Island to Andrew Wexler establishing first traverses across remote glaciated Alaskan ranges, ACMG guides are at the leading edge of climbing and skiing accomplishments.

Apprentice Ski Guides Corin Lohmann (left) and Kate Devine study the snowpack while on practicum at Icefall Lodge, Canadian Rockies, 2009. Photo by Lynn Martel



As times progress and attitudes toward encouraging a healthy work-life balance improve, the ACMG boasts among its 174 Mountain Guides in 2013, eleven women, three of whom are working mothers, as well as a number of other moms working as Alpine and Ski Guides, Apprentice Guides, Hiking Guides and Climbing Gym Instructors.

After half a century, ACMG members continue to lead, inspire and share the mountains they love.

And perhaps most fittingly, Hans Gmoser's son, Robson, is among them.

A guiding career, he said, was always encouraged, with extensive time spent in the CMH environment and at backcountry lodges such as the historic Assiniboine, where Hans guided his first clients in Canada. In particular, Robson recalled a trip while a university student to Bolivia with his father, his brother, Conrad, and his uncle, Sepp Renner.

"This was a real mountain adventure. Everything from the driving to packing up to the alpine with llamas was new to me," Robson said. "We spent about three weeks in a high valley and climbed all the peaks around us. I had never climbed any high mountains before. It was great to do it with my father and to have that time together up in the mountains in a completely different place.

"It's a hell of a good introduction to say that you are the son of Hans Gmoser in the Canadian guiding industry," continued Robson, who is a Ski Guide and Apprentice Rock Guide. "The hard part is living up to the precedent he set!

It's great to see the interest and passion among the second-generation guides. I'm always hearing of new second-generation guides joining the ranks. It's good to see the continuity and it's great that the passion for the mountains is being passed on through the generations, especially with all of the distractions available to us these days.

"Having second-generation guides enter the vocation keeps the lore alive and provides a link back to the beginning of the ACMG for contemporary members. A lot of this may be intangible but even just knowing that there are members in



Mountain Guides Marc Piché and Lilla Molnar smile for the camera with their daughter, Ella, during training week at CMH Bugaboos Lodge, 2012. Molnar/Piché collection

your organization whose families trace back to the beginning gives the organization more of a sense of permanence.

"I would like to inspire the next generation of guides to continue working at a high standard in the mountains, to continue providing Canadian mountain hospitality, to keep on promoting the ACMG to the public, and, to keep on being as individualistic and quirky as the mountains they work in."

Mountain Guide Kirk Mauthner jokingly forms the highest point on Eastpost Spire for participants of the 2012 Bugaboos Teen Climbing Camp run by the Conrad Kain Centennial Society, with Mountain Guide Tim McAllister on the right (red jacket). Photo by Pat Morrow





# The Foundation Builders

## Founding Members

Peter Fuhrmann  
Hans Gmoser  
Brian Greenwood  
Leo Grillmair  
Heinz Kahl  
Dick Lofthouse  
Eric Lomas  
Willie Pfisterer  
Hans Schwarz  
Frank Stark

## Honorary Members

Herb Bleuer  
Bruno Engler  
Sydney W Feuz  
Peter Fuhrmann  
Lloyd Gallagher  
Robert Geber  
Rudi Gertsch  
Hans Gmoser  
John Gow  
Brian Greenwood  
Leo Grillmair  
Bruce Jamieson  
Ken Jones  
Heinz Kahl  
Rudi Kranabitter  
Pierre Lemire  
Dick Lofthouse  
Eric Lomas  
Lloyd MacKay  
Willi Pfisterer  
William L Putnam  
Robert W Sandford  
Peter Schaerer  
Bernhard H Schiesser  
Hans Schwarz  
Chic Scott  
Frank Stark  
Chris Stethem  
Hans-Peter Stettler  
Ferdl Taxbock  
Don Vockeroth



Without doubt, Canada's signature contribution to mountain guiding has been heli-skiing. Mountain Guide Luke Griffith leads a group down Belle de Jour in the Selkirk Mountains. Photo by Mountain Guide Roger Laurilla





# Seizing the Sharp End

*50 Years of the ACMG*



From an afternoon gathering in a dimly-lit one-room Rockies cabin in 1963 to an 800-plus-member, world-respected professional organization, the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides has played a rich and definitive role in the history of Canada's mountain community. Credited with first ascents of some of the most challenging peaks in western Canada to the very first days of heli-skiing to the creation of Canada's highly respected public safety services, professional guides have helped shape and nurture outdoor recreation experiences across the country.

As the first non-European member of the International Federation of Mountain Guides Associations, the ACMG has evolved and matured to be a leader in professional guiding standards and client care, serving as mentor to other countries' associations. This booklet is a celebration of a job exceptionally well done!

For further information regarding the Summit Series of mountaineering biographies, please contact the National Office of the Alpine Club of Canada.

[www.alpineclubofcanada.ca](http://www.alpineclubofcanada.ca)



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