

Peter Amann:

A Remarkable Journey

By Bob Covey



Summit Series 2017

Peter Amann:

A Remarkable Journey



by Bob Covey

CANADIAN CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATIONS DATA

Covey, Bob

Peter Amann: A Remarkable Journey

Design by Zac Bolan

ISBN: 978-0-920330-70-8

© 2017, The Alpine Club of Canada

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be copied or reproduced without the permission of the author or the subject.

Printed in Canada



The Alpine Club of Canada
P.O. Box 8040
Canmore, Alberta
T1W 2T8
(403) 678-3200



Association of Canadian
Mountain Guides
P.O. Box 8341
Canmore, AB T1W 2V1
403.678.2885

Acknowledgements

The Alpine Club of Canada gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the 28th annual Mountain Guides Ball by these sponsors:



Cover photo: Peter ascending Mt. Athabasca in the late '90s
Title page: On the summit ridge of Edith Cavell
Back cover: On the summit ridge of Edith Cavell
All photos are from the Amann collection unless otherwise noted.

Standing on the shoulders of a friend

I first met Peter when I was working for Marmot Basin in 1992, and ever since, I have followed Peter around the industry. Early in my career, Peter taught me about snowpack and avalanches. Years later, my first taste of heli-ski guiding was with Peter up at Robson Helimagic. As colleagues, he has shown me the ropes while training the Canadian Military SARTechs in high-angle rescue. Peter also helped me get comfortable instructing on the Hiking Guide exams for the ACMG training and certification program.

Peter's long history with The Alpine Club of Canada has me following in his footsteps with the General Mountaineering Camp, and with his help and guidance, I have taken over his role as chair of our local Alpine Club section.

Twenty-five years later, I feel truly fortunate to be able to continue to work with him. Like so many people he has touched, I have already learned so much, and I know I will continue to learn from him for the rest of my career.

But as much as I've learned from Peter in guiding, I feel I've learned even more from Peter about being a good human being. In the small, tight mountaineering

community in Jasper, Peter has been one of my biggest role models. I can't help but see how hard he works, how much he volunteers his time and how much commitment he has to his wife, Leona, and his daughter, Hillary. Peter truly cares about everyone around him, and his ability to be genuine and candid while throwing in just the right amount of humour, at just the right moment, makes him truly special.

It's easy for most of us to lose sight of the bigger picture at times, but Peter has a way of presenting the obvious when everyone else's attention is captured by something in the moment. The more time I spend with Peter, the more I recognize how great he truly is.

With his candid nature, good humour, genuine honesty and ability to see the big picture—especially regarding safety—I am so fortunate to have followed someone like Peter around the guiding industry. He is a friend and a colleague whose shoulders I feel privileged to stand on.

— Matt Reynolds,
Jasper, Alberta



Peter and Matt in Tete Jaune, 2017.

Peter Amann never had a bucket list.

He didn't—and doesn't—keep a catalog of peaks to someday climb to feel successful in the mountains.

“I've never been a charger,” he has said.

Instead, his affinity has been a paced-out, gradual ascent. That systematic approach has been one reason why, after Amann's 35 years of quiet leadership in the mountains, the climbing world may not be aware of the 62-year-old's significant contributions to the Canadian Rockies' guiding community.

However, to those who've paid attention to Jasper rock in the past four decades, Amann's good-natured promenade to the coronet of local alpinism has been anything but a surprise.

Peter Amann's contemporaries recognize him as one of three icons in the Jasper guiding community, standing beside such mountain giants as Willi Pfisterer and Hans Schwarz.

He has been an ironman of the ACC's annual General Mountaineering Camp, having guided

groups up soaring peaks in the Alberta and B.C. Rockies, Purcells and Selkirks for more than 25 years. His contributions to the club's various committees have been unwavering, and for two decades he constantly volunteered his services, pushing—in his gentle way—the Jasper/Hinton Section to explore the North Rockies. The avalanche work he pioneered at Marmot Basin Ski Area in Jasper National Park has created a foundation on which professionals rely on to build forecast models today, and through a variety of roles he has opened the eyes of countless students of the mountains, impressing on them a considerate confidence that equally inspires respect and encouragement.

As Peter Amann has been selected as The Alpine Club of Canada's honorary patron of the 2017 Mountain Guides Ball, it is worth recognizing a man whose career has traversed a subtle line adjacent to the most famous Rocky Mountains. Jasper National Park is not quite the hinterland—it has always been secure in its peripheral position compared to Banff—but its relative isolation has meant those plying a mountain trade there have had, among the universal uncertainties of the industry (weather, objective hazards), an added inconsistency: a precarious client base. Despite the hard-scrabble shop keeping and lean living, the elevations gained and the views realized by Amann in more than 35 years of leading trips out of Jasper have been just as heady as those of his peers in less-isolated ranges. Moreover, for those who have the pleasure of walking with him over those secluded ridges, it has been a remarkable journey.



Summit of Mt. Olive, mid-to-late '90s on an Alpine Club Wapta Traverse trip.



Peter at Cadet Camp, Ipperwash, Ontario, where he earned enough money for materials to build a kayak.

Like many kids from the Canadian Shield, Peter Amann came to the Rockies not with mountains on his mind but having fun with his high-school friends. The former Oakville, Ontario, cadet had entertained the idea of a future as park ranger, however, a job washing dishes at the Jasper Park Lodge was to be where he alighted. Many young people were flocking west to the mountain parks in 1974 to take advantage of the national “free camp” project initiated by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. This was a program to encourage appreciation of Canada’s national sites, including the largest mountain park, Jasper. Although Peter never was a Jasper “freecamper” himself, the friends with whom he found a common interest were a freedom-seeking motley crew indeed.



Peter holding a snake with his brother in the background, tenting on an island near Tweed, Ontario.



Peter scaling Aqueduct Peak during the 2003 GMC with Mt. Tsar in the background. Photo: Lorraine Harrison



On the summit of Lectern Peak - L to R: Chris Dunlop (Z.O.), Peter Amann, Pam Hardy, Pat Sheehan,

Chris Dunlop was living in a geodesic dome in the middle of a sea of tents near the Miette River when he and Peter Amann got to know each other. A former military kid, Dunlop was the freecamp librarian, on account of his waterproof accommodations. Z.O. (short for Zinc Oxide), as Dunlop continues to be known in Jasper, remembers meeting a talented rock climber and skier in Amann.

*“Peter could always climb hard,”
Dunlop remembers. “He surprised you.”*

Peter would continue to surprise his peers with his technical proficiency throughout his career. He would also surprise his fellow climbers, clients and co-workers with his acerbic wit, delivered in his renowned, reserved style, usually in a memorable location.

“You wouldn’t want to fall and plummet to your death here,” a long-time friend and mountain

peer, Brad Harrison, recalls Amann saying in a dead-pan tone while negotiating an airy ledge.

Amann and Dunlop, along with a handful of counter-culture climbers who didn’t quite fit in with the Jasper locals, the railroaders or the hotel staff recruited from across the country, found a toe-hold in Jasper’s nascent mountain culture. They liked to get up high. Although sport climbing was developing in Jasper—and Amann and his peers would go on to put up several classic routes at various Jasper crags—mountaineering was what most interested the group.

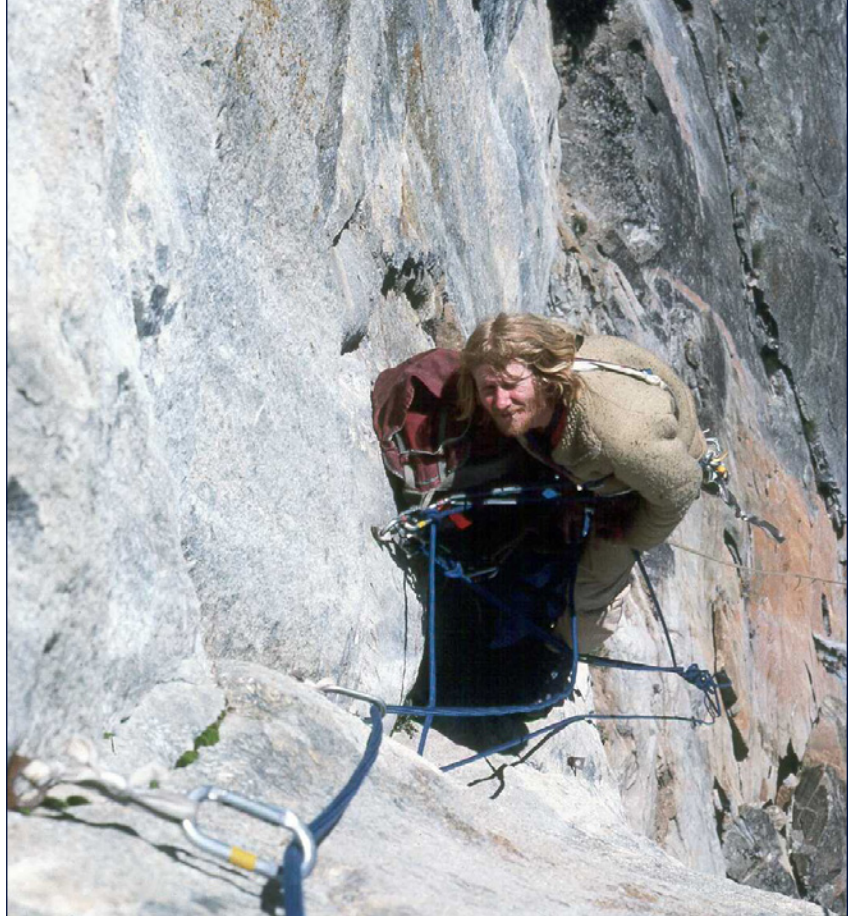
“We liked exploring valleys and ridges as opposed to crags,” Amann recalled.

A club was born. It was exclusive only because of the small number who shared the members’ convictions. Its namesake was their mantra and an open rally cry to all: Support Your Local Glaciers. Born of semi-ironic earnestness but rooted in their love for the alpine environs, the SYLG club’s members would fly their flag at the top of Jasper National Park’s various summits. They weren’t mountaineering for accolades. They weren’t climbing to check things off a list.

The “Smitty’s Mountaineers,” as Willi Pfisterer called them, were lifting themselves out of the freecamp haze and into the invigorating vapour stream above the clouds, crystallizing memories that would last a lifetime.

“We were friends who enjoyed it,” Amann remembers. “We just liked being in the mountains.”

Soon they were planning longer trips. They had bad weather on a multi-day traverse of the Cariboo Mountains. For back-to-back summers, in 1979 and 1980, Jasperite Bruce Robinson and Amann travelled to Yosemite to train. They climbed the Harding route on the Leaning Tower, among other free climbs. Although the SYLG club had a few close calls, Amann quickly earned a reputation as a partner who could put many miles in his boots and do so safely and efficiently.



Peter during a 2-day ascent of Grade 5, A3 climb of Leaning Tower in 1980.
Photo: Bruce Robinson



On the summit of Simon Peak in the Tonquin.



On the summit of Mt. Colin with Norm Brown in 1978. Photo: Chuck Hospedale



Peter leading the first pitch of Washington Column in Yosemite, 1980. Photo: Sue Brown



Z.O. (Chris Dunlop), Richard Langlais and Miche Ball on Mt. Edith Cavell, 1978.

he and Robinson displayed in setting off on such a mission.

“That seems like a big trip in just two days, looking back,” he said.

Robinson remembers terrible rock rappels, rubble-filled belay positions and an all-day march to get to the col. They’d scrounged what little information was available on the route and, as Peter says, “took a rope and a rack, and just went.”

It was a time of exploration

“I always knew his decisions were thoughtfully made and would be safely executed,” Robinson said. “He was an endurance machine on the steep uphill approaches and hard descents, and I always knew that a long day in the mountains was never going to be an obstacle to chasing a peak.”

Robinson and Amann enjoyed exploring together, finding themselves engaging traverses of little-travelled Jasper National Park cirques and sub-ranges. Standing atop the formidable towers of Brussels and Christie constituted one such adventure. Catching those lofty views still resonates with Amann all these years later, if only for the nonchalance

By 1980, although Hans Schwarz and Willi Pfisterer had carved out a niche for taking tourists up peaks, and they, along with a handful of visiting alpinists, had put up some impressive, aesthetic routes that still test mountaineers to this day, Jasper National Park’s skylines were largely unexplored. The SYLG buttons were worn on the lapels and woollen hats of only a handful of bearded Jasperites. In the U.S., Royal Robbins, Yvon Chouinard and other now-famous rock pioneers were establishing a climbing culture that drifted to the Bow Valley by way of magazine cut-outs and hitchhiker lore, but there was

Peter traversing under a bergshroud en route to Scarp Pass from Icefall Lake during Tonquin Ramparts circumnavigation.





Leading up to the col above Icefall Lake, with Jim Kehl, Sage Dalton and Richard Parsloe. They named this trip “Mantown”, as it was a tough six days of moving round the Ramparts.

scarcely a scene in the North Rockies. There was no climbing shop in Jasper, no guidebook and no way to know what was out there, other than to go look. Those requisite reconnaissances, it turned out, were exactly what Amann and his group of friends were after. An ambitious circumnavigation of the Ramparts—those fissured walls which erupt out of Amethyst Lake deep in the remote Tonquin Valley, which includes 3,270-metre Mount Geikie—was an early waypoint on Amann’s mountain path that helped set the tone for how he would approach his guiding career.

“It was all unknown, based on old stories,” Amann recalled about the Tonquin trip. “It linked together nicely, a classic mountaineering traverse.”

In the meantime, members of the SYLG club were fertilizing the seeds of a nascent alpine culture in Jasper. While Amann and his friends—which, along with Robinson, included Jasper locals Richard Parsloe, Norm Brown, Ed Laporte, Mich Ball as well as the late Pat Sheehan and George Korwan—were discovering Jasper’s vast



A great, early June trip to climb the unnamed peak (rarely climbed), south of Cavell. L-R Chris Kilroy, Leona Amann, Chris Dunlop

valleys and far-flung sierras, there were also days which involved less wandering, winding explorations and more vertical ambitions. Cadot Crack, above magical Medicine Lake, was a project requiring a long day for Peter and partner to sort out. Today, the classic test piece encapsulates the characteristics of Jasper National Park's under-rated climbing scene: an early crux gets shrugged off until 15 exposed pitches later, when those who engage the route are usually left gasping for air.

“Jasper has never been much of a climbing destination,” suggests Bruce Robinson. “The places most people knew about had really terrible rock. But Peter helped find some superb rock that once they got on it, would always surprise people.”

Amann wasn't doing it alone, of course. Besides Robinson and long-time friend Cyril Shokoples—who struggled with Amann through early ACMG exams and who took the lead in developing Hidden Valley, now a generous crag with dozens of multi-pitch routes in the east part of Jasper park—one of Amann's early climbing mentors was Alain Hénault. Hénault hasn't lived in the Rockies for nearly 40 years, but his accomplishments from the late '70s and early '80s stand tall. With American Tobin Sorenson, Hénault put up the first winter ascent of Mount Robson's Kain Face, and in a few short seasons in Jasper, secured a reputation as a talented, creative climber. Hénault and Amann helped re-establish several Jasper routes that had been all but forgotten—an elegant line up Ashlar Ridge, which Willi Pfisterer downplayed 20 years earlier, for example.

“When we did Ashlar, it was after talking to Willi,” Amann said. “For the time, it was a high



Peter leading Stilgar's Corner on the Dune Wall, a steep quartzite climb considered to be one of the gems of the Jasper region.



Peter leading '1/4 inch' overhang at the Rock Gardens. According to Peter, the name came from the fact all the hangers were 1/4 inch bolts—scary old school aid climbing.



Peter on the second ascent of Cadot Crack in the early '80s. Photo: Chris Dunlop



Alain Hénault on curtain call in 1979. Peter won first prize in the ACC photo contest that year with this dramatic shot.



Peter working on a trail crew in the Valley of 5.



Peter leading one of the "sketchy pitches" on Ashlar Ridge in 1978. Peter, Alain, Miche Hayes, and Alan Dibbs completed the climb in an eight-hour round trip.



Another bold lead by Alain on the 2nd ascent of the N ridge of Hardisty photographed by Peter Amann. “I remember being approached by a black bear near treeline, where we had to let of a bear banger,” Peter recalled. “We hightailed it after that.”

end climb—no bolts, a few old loose pins, no beta—a true old school ‘hard rock climb.’”

Both Hénault and Amann were never far away as premiere Jasper crags such as the Rock Gardens and Dune Wall began to see further development. As for his own development, Amann didn’t exactly have an “Aha!” moment on his path to becoming a guide. Obliquely, however, the time he was spending in the mountains was beginning to influence the direction of his life. By 1987, he had spent ten years devoting his summers building trails for Parks Canada; however, sensing that trajectory plateau, he started piecing together a patchwork of guiding gigs. Peter’s earlier experience working with Otmar Setzer at the Canadian School of Mountaineering and Yamnuska Mountain School led to more connections within the alpine community. In the following summer, 1988, he guided ACC members around the supernatural terrain of Mount Robson, embarking on what would be his first of 25 consecutive years of working in the General Mountaineering Camps. Rather suddenly, yet at the same time unnoticeably—like a starry night turning to dawn while

the camp coffee percolates—Amann realized he wanted to guide for a living.

*“Climbing was the only thing
I never got tired of,”
said the man who’s been up
Mount Athabasca 95 times
(and counting).*

Getting fully certified as an ACMG professional was still a decade off, however. In the meantime, he became more of a fixture with the ACC. Besides the GMCs, he led dozens of camps in the Fryatt and Tonquin Valleys in Jasper, as well as at Lake O’Hara. In the winter, he introduced ski mountaineers to the Wapta Icefields and other Rockies classics. Around this time, he embarked on an extended tour with the SARTech community. Shokoples, who Amann met in the late 1970s on a rock course at Blue Lake Centre, near Brule,



Peter on another early morning ascent of Lefroy in the '90s.



Peter with a long time friend and client Charlie James at Fairy Meadows en route up Pioneer Peak. In the background is East Peak of the Gothics.

Peter at the Stanley Mitchell hut during the Centennial Camp in 2006. (photographer unknown)



Alberta, had secured a contract to train Canadian military professionals in high mountain rescue. Amann would become Shokoples' second on the annual assignment. For the former cadet, working with the Canadian Armed Forces was a dream come true. As a result of those connections, many years later, Amann had the opportunity to sit passenger in a Hawk fighter trainer jet aircraft and buzz the skies in a 214 Griffon rescue helicopter, memories he cherishes to this day.

During the summer, Amann had to be opportunistic to ensure his calendar stayed full. In the winter, things were more predictable.

Amann had first landed a job with Marmot Basin Ski Patrol in 1984, and three years later, he transitioned into the avalanche office. That move would foreshadow two decades of overseeing avalanche safety. In 22 years, Peter would mentor a generation of Jasper avalanche professionals, perhaps his most extant legacy. Additionally, he was the lead designer of the expert glade skiing that now constitutes the Eagle East area of the mountain and his skill with the avalauncher—that oversized potato gun, which fires a two-pound stick of dynamite using compressed nitrogen gas

Peter at the largest and most fun ACC Jasper/Hinton section trip at Fairy Meadows.





Peter with a high mountain rescue crew in Cold Lake. “In the morning I was lucky to fly in the 214 Griffon with Lance, Paul and Kevin,” Peter recounted. “We did some aerial work, rescue training and got dunked into the lake on a cable.”

into snow-laden avalanche terrain—was heroic, according to former colleagues.

“He never missed,” recalled Canadian Avalanche Rescue Dog Association instructor and current captain with the Calgary Fire Department, Jay Pugh. “Peter could put that shot right on top of a cornice.”

Even defter, however, was Amann’s touch with his fellow co-workers. While he could ski with anyone, and his avalanche safety standards set the bar in an evolving industry, where Peter Amann’s skill set was most remarkable was in the arenas of kinship and kindness.

“People felt comfortable around him,” Pugh said. “The guiding industry has a reputation of strong egos, but there’s none of that in Peter at all.”



Peter and friends on top of Cambrai Mountain in the Lyells during the 1996 GMC.





Peter starting off on the lower climbing section of the Arch, a Jasper classic.



Peter in an early Marmot Basin ski patrol shot in 1984. L-R Peter Amann, Wendy Rockafella, Karl Klassen, Joan Burns, Ian Johnson, Peter Clarkson, Nicki Code, Rick Wedgewood, (in front) Russell Ruddy.

Their boss had a compassionate nature, but the esteem in which Amann was held by the free-wheeling contingent of 1980s snow rascals never suffered. Longtime friend Jeff Andrews—successor to Amann’s head of avalanche control position at Marmot Basin, and now fellow forecaster for CN Rail—attributes that reverence in large part to Amann’s experience and ability to read terrain, but also to his sense of humour.

“He’s soft spoken, but his words pack a punch,” Andrews said.

Andrews remembers Amann’s dry quips helping keep spirits high during interminable cold snaps and reconnaissance missions gone awry.

“We’d be pushing at the end of a long day, and

A cold day up on the glaciers above Mistaya Hut in 2005.



Peter would say something like ‘Jeff, I think we’ll call this one I’ll Pass Pass,’” Andrews laughed.

Sylvia Forest met Amann when he was the assistant avalanche director at Marmot Basin, working with avalanche forecasters Ken Hammil and Karl Klassen early in their respected careers. Forest has since gone on to break ground in the mountain guiding and public safety communities; back then, she was a rookie ski patroller looking for a mentor. Amann taught Forest much about snow science, explosives and skiing with a toboggan. However, what Forest valued most back then was Amann’s open heartedness and patience.

“Through mentorship, compassion, encouragement and friendship, Peter paved a path for me towards guiding and rescue, at a pivotal time in my life and career,” Sylvia Forest said.



Peter and the gang out front styling in “North shore Underground” clothes at Marmot.

Their lives and careers would pivot towards one another many more times over the coming years. Forest and Amann shared many General Mountaineering Camps together, as well as many other small camps in Jasper. They partnered



The whole gang near the Alberta hut posing with the famed Silver Ice axe and Mt. Alberta in the background.

on a women's mountaineering school—one of the first of its kind in the Canadian Rockies—and in 2000, Amann, Cam Roe and Forest, along with Dave Dornian and Greg Horne, were picked as teammates, along with three Japanese climbers, to attempt a joint ascent of Mount Alberta in celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Japanese first ascent. It wasn't the right summer for that peak, and the team did not reach the summit; however, the trip itself was an amazing success in terms of friendships made and the celebration of mountain culture between countries.

“Peter, being a critical thinker, with a solid measure of common sense, was reliable, and was a person you could trust in any situation,” Forest said.

In the course of his career in the mountains, Peter was indeed afforded trust by the professionals and pupils who surrounded him.

Demonstrated by, for example, his induction as an Honorary Member of the ParaRescue Association of Canada or the Gold Distinguished Service Award he was presented with after seven years of working on the ACMG's board, Amann's quiet confidence and steadfast track record have produced



One of hundreds of days Peter spent teaching crevasse rescue on the Columbia Icefields.

Peter on Mt. Edith Cavell.



an abundance of faith in the Jasper guide's leadership.

But although trust may have been a natural corollary from his years of experience and generous wisdom, to find out where Amann's poise stemmed from in the first place, one might hearken back to stories of Amann's early efforts at carving out a mountain lifestyle.

For it was early in his tutelage, when the next ledge was obscured by the fog of the future, when the belay stations were awkward and untested, when the topographical maps were vaguely defined and the couloirs were potentially cliffed-out, that Amann decided to persevere. And because he was able to eventually find purchase in the Jasper rock, his self-assuredness, it seems, followed.

His mountain exploits were rarely solo adventures, but it wasn't necessarily his climbing partners who were inspiring his way-finding when it came to his career.

There was another person traversing a parallel precipice of passion; there was another trailblazer following a dream, with the belief that a life in the remote mountains was possible if the journey was one of the heart. That person, of course, is Leona Amann, Peter's spouse. It was she who was willing to sacrifice, to scrimp and save if it meant staying in Jasper. It was she who, like Peter, didn't give up on her dream. Because of their partnership and commitment to that simple mantra—enjoy what you do and who you do it with—for more than 30 years, they have been able to pursue their own creative mountain paths.

One hundred kilometres west of Jasper, in a ruggedly beautiful log cabin, with views of the west-slopes of the Rockies and the northeast aspects of the Cariboos, Leona Amann was in the middle of unpacking her studio in its new location. It was early September, 2017, and so she



"The Mt. Alberta crew climbed Mt. Wooley and Diadem on a long day," recalled Peter. "We also came down a new rappel route on the west side of Mt. Wooley." Photo: Sylvia Forest



Peter on the east ridge of Mt. Edith Cavell. Photo: Chuck Lummer



Peter with his family—Leona, and Hillary (along with dog Sarah)—doing a trip over campus pass, to unnamed valley, then over to Tonquin.



Peter and Leona on the summit of South Bald Hills in 2008.

was alone in the cozy abode, Peter still making the most of the guiding season. As Leona walked to the nearby barn, where the former hayloft was now home to a growing treasury of original acrylic paintings, she pointed across the adjacent pasture and the aspen cove beyond. Gesturing to a long ridge that rose gradually out of the timber and towards Mica Mountain, which from her vantage point represented the height of land, she explained that her husband had designs on beating a trail through the dense bush.

“Peter’s really looking forward to exploring the area around here,” she smiled.

Leona and Peter’s first meeting wouldn’t have happened were it not for a few critical factors.

For one, Leona had to fall in with a group of sports-savvy friends who knew Peter; for another, the ice pillars at Maligne Canyon had to form adequately so that they would support the weight



Peter and daughter Hillary.

of a climber. Luckily it was late December, and the winter of 1979 had a cold start, so the ice quality wasn't a surprise. What was a surprise—to Peter, at least—was that Leona was carrying her own ice tools. This impressed him. If he thought his heart was full from his adoration of the rock and snow of Jasper National Park, he was wrong. When he met Leona, and discovered not only was she funny and attractive, but that she was a person who, like him, wanted to be outdoors all the time, he was enamoured. He still went to Yosemite a few short weeks later, but he climbed with thoughts of the girl he'd met in Jasper.



Peter and family in front of the Cold Fire Creek warming hut up the Small River.

*“Our dates were always hiking or climbing,”
Leona recalled.*

They were good together. Their marriage three years later would be another foothold in making a mountain life for themselves. They moved into a tiny loft in an original Jasper log home. They helped each other's budding businesses. After taking a bachelor of Fine Arts in Edmonton, Leona—whose works today adorn homes and art galleries all over the world—painted until her fingers bled, establishing herself as a premiere Rocky Mountain landscapist. To make the space for her workshop, the young couple slept in the tiny common space, allowing Leona to create her art in the slightly more sunlit apartment bedroom.

Peter no longer “climbed for the government”—his joke about his Employment Income subsidiary when he first met Leona—but the family budget was most definitely lean. It was at this time he was getting established with the Alpine Club, hitching together guiding work after the last snow fences at Marmot Basin had been rolled up.

Although it was important to his fledgling career, and he loved being in the hills, Amann's summer work took him away from home. When Hillary (named for Sir Edmund) was born in 1989, Amann made an effort to taper his long-distance work so that he could be a bigger part of his daughter's life. The job at the ski hill didn't pay as well as mechanized skiing or guiding out



Peter and Hillary dogsledding in 2010.



Peter and crew on Olive Peak—another one of many Canada Day trips on the Wapta.

of Rogers Pass, for example, but the opportunity to come home every night was an important enough factor that Amann would stay the course at Marmot Basin for 22 years. In the meantime, he mentored a vast array of emerging avalanche professionals, many of whom have now gone on to their own careers in snow safety.

That “scene”—as former staff of commercial ski hills know intimately—creates its own litany of local legends, and Amann was among many good people who came of age amid the cowboy culture of ski patrol and the sober professionalism of avalanche safety. As much as Amann could mix it up with the reprobates, he always landed on the side of sound decision-making and dependability. When Jeff Andrews took over as head of public safety in the 2000s, he would often call Peter, whose jacket had been retired at Marmot’s avalanche office for years, to ask for advice. Topics ranged from historical avalanche run-out paths to staff-discipline matters to working harmoniously

with management. Amann’s “less-is-more,” common-sense approach almost always left Andrews satisfied to head back up the mountain.

“He was wise and even keeled,” Andrews said. “He made working with a whole range of people and personalities look effortless.”

If Amann was in the office, his door was always open. That attitude extended beyond his official duties, however. Over the years since he helped establish the Jasper/Hinton Section of the ACC, and even as he took on higher level volunteer work with the club and juggled all the other balls which

come with the territory of being a small business owner and mountain guide—not to mention a father and husband—Amann could be relied on throughout his tenure in the mountain community to make himself available. He was (and is) always happy to dole out information, to flag routes, to string up hand lines, to lend advice. He encouraged exploration by making information available to anyone who asked. He was steadfast on answering email inquiries, patient with his eager students' questions and thorough in following up with fellow explorers, so that the Rockies register in his mind could be as up-to-date as possible.

It is again here—in the context of compassionate tutoring, and his remarkable ability to make people comfortable—where Peter Amann arguably shines brightest.

Because of his exceptional personal skills in the mountain environment, Amann gave the mountain community the gift of progression.

Ryan Titchener earned his assistant alpine ACMG certification and was well on his way to challenging the full guide's exam when an accident in July, 2016, left him paralyzed. A year later, he is now recovering, but before that astonishing journey began, he was another Ontario transplant who felt connected to Amann's path. They had, after all, both travelled west with no rock-climbing experience and both found their passion in the mountains around Jasper. As with Amann's story, Titchener had Marmot Basin as a basecamp for development in the winter months, and also like the man three decades his senior, Titchener's passion made it possible for him to imagine making a living carrying a rope. What prodded Titchener along wasn't much different than what galvanized Amann's energy a generation earlier, but Titchener had the benefit of his mentor's knowledge-sharing.



Peter belaying one of the stations on the ARCH. "Hans Schwarz and I worked quite hard during the Heritage program at JPL to fix this route for guiding," explained Peter.



Like Peter Amann, Ryan Titchener is an Ontario transplant who fell in love with the mountains. Titchener, who broke his spine in a climbing accident in July 2016, is pictured here at Marmot Basin. Photo: Bob Covey



"Another day of doing a lap on super crack, west of Jasper," recalled Peter. "This hard short route was first led by Alain Hénault. I remember his dropping on of the 2 pieces he had to put in, and went to the top 'very run-out.'"

Amann, after all, had cataloged what the Pfisterers and the Schwarzs of the 1970s and '80s had passed on and was willing to download onto the next generation as much information as anyone asked for. Today, what binds all of Jasper's mountaineers through more than 60 years of climbing is the accumulation of one another's achievements. Because of his scrupulous documentation and passion for teaching, Amann has much to do with that long continuum.

"We learn best from sharing with each other. I think that's why so many people know Peter, and why he became such a successful guide," Titchener suggested.

Amann's meticulous record keeping, particularly as it referred to the avalanche control work at Marmot Basin, paired prudently with his penchant for spreading knowledge. Still today, the avalanche control office is home to a well-thumbed-through stack of Rite-in-the-Rain journals (outdoor notebooks, which are a staple in every guide's toolbox) left behind by Amann. A dip into any of them offers a treasure trove of information, tips and techniques, which each winter continue to help Jasper avalanche professionals.

His willingness to share was the same with the local Alpine Club section. Doug Scatchard, who took over from Peter's long incumbency as the section's Chair in 2007, says what amazed him about Amann were his generous contributions of time and experience to less-travelled students of the mountains. Amann was always keen to help younger people develop their climbing, skiing and mountaineering experience. The section ran workshops and clinics for section leaders—rock rescue, trad anchors, etc.—and Amann was always willing to instruct these, often while waiving his guiding fees.

"I always admired his patient and calm manner, and he always gave this context of why you used



Peter on the Columbia Icefield with his right arm in a cast in 1975.

a certain technique,” Scatchard said. “I still use several of his mnemonics when I’m out rock climbing.”

Peter Amann is known to many different people in many different ways. Whereas to some Peter has been a mentor, a friend and a teacher, to others he’s been a second-in-command, a fellow dharma bum and a joke-swapper. To fellow Jasper mountain guide Matt Reynolds, however, besides all of those things, Peter Amann has been somewhat of an oracle—if only because Amann’s career has uncannily portended that of Reynolds’. After a shaggy-haired Reynolds got a job on Amann’s ski patrol team in 1992, for the next 15 years (and counting), Reynolds would follow in Amann’s footsteps around the small ski and rock industry based out of Jasper.

In a somewhat uncanny succession, like Amann did two decades earlier, Reynolds would strike sober routes up unappreciated Jasper rock and ice, examine students for the ACMG’s Hiking Guide program, get his feet wet in mechanized skiing and train Canadian SARtechs in high-angle rescue. Reynolds has taken over the role as Chair of the Jasper/Hinton ACC section, and has pursued Peter’s path securing a reciprocally rewarding relationship at the club’s GMCs. Even their style is similar: strong yet subtle. When



Matt Reynolds (right) shares a laugh with clients not far from the summit of Mount Sir Sandford at the ACC’s 2012 GMC. Photo: Zac Robinson

Matt ascending the final section of snow on A2 at the Columbia Icefields.





Matt Reynolds skiing one of the runs at Caribou Cat Skiing on Mica Mountain.

Reynolds topped out on Bedson Ridge above the Athabasca River in 1997, calling his 5.10a slab climb “No Illusion,” he gave a nod to Amann’s (and Hénault’s) “Cadot Crack,” which fractures the Queen Elizabeth Range to the south.

That distance across the valley has seemed to separate the two ever since. Amann was an early mentor in Reynolds’ mountain studies, to be sure, but they have always been a generation apart, and therefore a side-step around one another on the trail instead of collaborators walking alongside. In many camps around the Rockies, the coals hadn’t completely cooled from Amann’s fire when Reynolds bivouacked there some time later.

“Everywhere I go, Peter has already been there,” Matt Reynolds says with genuine curiosity. “Sometimes, I feel like I can predict my own future by watching where Peter ends up.”

Their connection is indeed a surreal, small-town anomaly (their daughters shared the same

bedroom—but several years apart—because Reynolds and his wife, Tracy, bought their first house from Peter and Leona). However, a quarter century after they first met on the ski slope, after making important decisions together both in their hometown and in their home mountains, their connection is not only surreal, but vital.



Matt Reynolds



Peter on the summit of Rhonda Peak in the Wapta Icefields on a hot spring day in May 2014.

Matt Reynolds remembered one of his early close calls:

I can't help but hear his dry wit in my head when I made a mistake: "Lose and learn, Matt. Lose and learn."

We were a team of three out on a control run in the high pockets of Charlie's Bowl, a steep, cliffy place that sits above the main run. We spent some time gathering information above the start zones and working our way across when I recall Peter and Greg conversing about how to manage the last pocket of avalanche terrain. It's a tricky place, where explosives would normally be the tool of choice; however, when patrollers are deciding whether or not to open the area to the public, it's important that we feel comfortable skiing the terrain ourselves. This last pocket was isolated from the other start zones and was a good place to start the process of ski cutting, rather than use explosives. Greg was ready to start this process, although Peter was still hesitant. Still, he was willing to let Greg go and check it out.



Matt Reynolds on the ridge of Boundary Peak with Sartechs during an ascent day.



Another day of filming with Peter on Wilcox Peak.

Peter took me under his wing and guided me around the pocket to get below and off to the side. He brought me to a perfect little island of safety, where if we got surprised by the snow and needed to respond, we could. Greg was getting ready to ski into the pocket to test the snow, when Peter's voice and body language suddenly changed. I could feel a sense of tension suddenly rise, and couldn't quite understand why. I was thinking this was a pretty routine control run and Greg knew what he was doing. "Matt! Watch close!" scolded Peter. It shook me into attention a split second prior to the crack. Greg was suddenly moving crazy fast, with all the snow around him moving, too. His head went under, then resurfaced, then went under again. I saw a ski dislodged from Greg's foot and go careening down the rest of the avalanche bowl 300 metres beyond, swallowed up in a big cloud

of white. Greg had stopped partially buried, head above snow, not 30m from where Peter and I stood watching. Greg was lucky to have stopped on this bench and not followed his lost ski down the full run. Shocked and maybe a little stunned, I looked over at Peter, whose face told a story of genuine relief. Greg was going to be just fine, other than the lost ski. Lose and learn.

At first, I thought the avalanche was unexpected—it certainly was for Greg and I—but not for Peter. How else would he have known to tell me to watch closely at just the right moment? However, after time to reflect more on the incident, I think I now realize that Peter was probably pretty surprised, too. His scolding of me to pay attention was born from good habit, from never letting his guard down, and more importantly to showing genuine human concern to have our colleague's back. It's a lesson I keep close to me a lot in the mountains.

As a guide, Reynolds feels he has been learning from Amann for a lifetime. Yet the lessons transcend the industry and their careers.

"As much as I've learned from Peter in guiding, I feel I've learned even more from Peter about being a good human being," he said.

In a small, tight-knit mountaineering community, Amann's work ethic, his volunteer commitments and the family values he holds are what resonate for Reynolds. His thoughtfulness, his wit and his true heart inspires Reynolds to live simply and with as wide of a lens as possible.

"The more time I spend with Peter, the more I recognize how great of a man he truly is with his candid nature, good humour, genuine honesty and ability to see the big picture," Reynolds said.

Peter's ever-widening perspective has direct application to another aspect of his record-keeping in the mountains: his camera work. Hundreds of hours of video footage and untold spools of 35mm film documented some of the places where Amann and his contemporaries were

most at home. Even in the early 1980s, the Support Your Local Glacier club had regular slide screenings of their trip onto the Clemenceau Icefield, for example, and while Amann's YouTube channel likely won't catch fire with the attention-deficient masses, for those willing to watch and learn—just like on the side of a mountain—he has an ability to recognize beautiful, teachable moments.

Amann's wit is legendary and his sense of irony acute, yet he maintains a deferential delivery.

Operating at a measured clip, but never rushing, he can take the sharp edge, but has also been inspired to take the observer's view, operating the camera while his clients find their footing or hanging back on the approach trail while the pack-string sorts itself out.

His bosses—when he had them—appreciated his willingness to engage any task professionally. His co-adventurers appreciated his sound judgement. His clients felt empowered by him; his students were encouraged and his colleagues were impressed.

But if you didn't work or play with Amann, you may have missed him. Even before he made the move from Jasper to the quiet countryside of Tete Jaune, his career and lifestyle were always coiled neatly out of the sun. To fuel a multi-day adventure in the hills, he'd find his way to the grocery store via Jasper's alleys. When fellow hikers saw him out on the trail, they'd often only realize who they'd met long after his sure footsteps had loped by.

A trail-side anecdote—told by a contemporary of Amann's—neatly sums up a career, and a sense of humour, and a perspective:

(Two young bucks pass us on the trail)

*Peter: "You two go ahead,
we'll wait for you on top."*

—Willi Pfisterer





Peter on the summit of Mica Mountain, 2016. Photo: Brian Hunter

*The 2017 Patron of the
ACC/ACMG Mountain Guides Ball has been on top.*

The soft-spoken mountain traveler with a piquant wit and patient wisdom, the guide who is comfortable with the idea of exploring rather than charging has ascended to the crown of the Canadian alpine community. Amann has done so while supporting a family he raised in the small, isolated town of Jasper. For those who have climbed, camped, skied or studied alongside him, his advancement will not be a surprise. To those who have yet to beat a path to the height-of-land with him, Peter Amann's dreaming is never done.

Peter Amann:

A Remarkable Journey

To those who've looked up at Jasper National Park's rock and ice culture in the past four decades, Peter Amann's good-natured promenade to the coronet of Canadian Rockies alpinism has not been a surprise.

For more than 35 years, Amann has been a stalwart guide, teacher and mentor to hundreds of aspiring climbers, avalanche professionals and Alpine Club of Canada members.

This soft-spoken mountain traveller is known for his acerbic wit and patient wisdom. His affinity is exploration, rather than peak-bagging. For all of the summits on which he's stood, Amann's legacy is in the realm of relationships, rather than records.

The 2017 Patron of the ACC/ACMG Mountain Guides Ball has made a noble living and with his family, has carved out an admired lifestyle in the small, isolated town of Jasper.

For those who have climbed, camped, skied or studied alongside him, Amann's advancement will not be a surprise. As the 23rd edition of the ACC's Summit Series demonstrates, Amann's subtle traverse of the Rocky Mountains is more than worthy of a special tribute.



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

www.alpineclubofcanada.ca



Twenty-third in the SUMMIT SERIES
Biographies of people who have made a difference in Canadian mountaineering