

Cyril Shokoples



Learning on High

by Zac Robinson

Summit Series 2022

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Cover: On the summit of Mount Resplendent during the special ACC Mount Robson Camp in 2013. The camp was held in celebration of the centennial of Mount Robson's first ascent. Photo: Louise Foster

Title page: Cyril teaching on a Blue Lake Centre course, c. mid-1980s. Photo: Vic Marchiel

Back cover: Cyril during his last season with RK Heliski in the Purcells, 2019. Photo: RK Heliski

Introduction

The Mountain Guides Ball is not just an annual event: it's a celebration, jointly sponsored by the Alpine Club of Canada (ACC) and the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides (ACMG), designed to raise funds for worthy causes, to present new mountain guides with their hard-earned pins, and most importantly, to honour a Patron – someone who, over a lifetime, has made a significant contribution of time, energy, and skill to either the ACC or the ACMG. They are someone who has demonstrated a love for the mountains and has represented themselves, their sport and association with honour and dignity.

"Squirrel" – a childhood nickname that Cyril reacquired while working at RK Heliski – here at the ACC's 2013 Scotch Peaks General Mountaineering Camp. Photo Matt Reynolds

The task of selecting the Patron falls in alternating years to the ACC or the ACMG. But this year, in the wake of the event's 2020 and 2021 pandemic-related cancellation, the two sponsors felt it appropriate to select together an individual to

honour – that is, a Patron who has left an indelible mark on both kindred organizations.

That shared decision, say executive directors Carine Salvy (ACC) and Kevin Dumba (ACMG), came easy.

The ACC and the ACMG are immensely pleased to name Mountain Guide Cyril Shokoples as the Patron of the 31st Mountain Guides Ball.

There are few today active in the mountain community who haven't learned something from this extraordinary guide and teacher. Whether it's an ACC national mountain leadership course or a wilderness first aid course, a rope-rescue course or an avalanche course, a backcountry skiing course or a climbing course, Cyril teaches them all, and more. In this capacity, always with distinctive exuberance, he has helped and mentored along so many of us, amateurs and guides. Cyril's lifetime commitment to service, to safety, to education and learning in the mountains is unmatched. Himself an Honorary Member of the ACC and a Past ACMG President, Cyril is the kind of leader who makes "leadership" actually mean something. And he has transformed our community by putting aspiring climbers at the centre of who we are, and what we do.

Cyril has accepted this honour in typical Canadian fashion – with humility. His proposed title for this Summit Series biography, the 26th in the ACC's series, was "Fifty Years of Mediocrity." But we, of course, feel differently.

What follows is a tribute to this remarkable individual, his life and accomplishments. It has been written largely from a series of interviews conducted over the spring and summer of 2022. And because Cyril wouldn't have it any other way, it too contains a few lessons for the trail.

—Zac Robinson
Edmonton, Alberta



Early Bearings

Cyril John Shokoples was born on January 20, 1957, in the small prairie village of Myrnam, not far from the banks of the winding North Saskatchewan River, 180 kilometres northeast of Edmonton. The sleepy farming community took its name from the Ukrainian word meaning “peace be with us.” And perhaps for its small, largely immigrant populace – with roots mostly in central and eastern Europe – the rural life of postwar Alberta was just that: peaceful, quiet, even relatively prosperous.

Anne and Jean Bronowska in 1928, not long after arriving in Canada.



mother, Anne Bronowska. A year earlier, Anne's brother had been pulled from their house and shot by Russian soldiers. The Atlantic crossing put those horrors behind them, and gave Anne and Jean a new life in the prairie West, where Canadians boasted of the greatest farmland in the world. A well-established network of Ukrainian Canadian communities was there ready to assist in the adjustment. The Bronowskas had reason to feel hopeful about their future.

Optimism, however, was short-lived. The collapse of world grain markets that very year proved catastrophic to Canada's farming industry. Drought the following year devastated much of the prairie harvest, and not for another ten long years would weather or crop conditions give Alberta and Saskatchewan farmers a satisfactory yield. Nowhere was the crippling destitution of the Great Depression felt greater.

"My Baba never spoke to any of us kids about living through the Depression," Cyril says, reflecting back on his own youth. "It's hard to imagine what that must have been like." What is clear is the admiration and respect that Cyril holds for his grandmother: "She was tough as nails."

Cyril's parents met and married in the immediate postwar years. John Shokoples had come to western Canada among a wave of Ukrainian and Polish immigrants displaced by the Second World War. He found work in sales – farming implements and machinery, mostly – to which he applied his inventor's mindset and a technical hands-on aptitude. He would even go on to patent a design for a rotary bailer, made to roll large, round bales of hay or straw. "He was always fiddling with stuff," Cyril recalls, chuckling. It was a disposition – a curiosity to understand just how things technically work, how things fit together – that Cyril himself would inherit.



Once powered by five grain elevators along the Canadian Pacific rail line, Myrnam's economic base by the late 1950s had been reduced to largely mixed farming and cattle – and it was small. It meant John and Jean would have to relocate their young family for work several times within the region, living even for a few years in the town of Vegreville, now the famous “Home to the Vegreville Egg,” the world's second largest pysanka (Ukrainian Easter egg).

But even in the centre of the so-called “Ukrainian basket of Alberta,” Cyril never wholly embraced his ethnic background, at least not in the same way his childhood friends had. He was never especially excited for Ukrainian school, despite his parents' gentle encouragement. Whereas his older brother was happiest with friends at the hockey rink, Cyril would instead discover joy in the woods beyond town. “I had been given a little compass in Grade 3 or 4,” Cyril recalls. “It was a plain compass, with a black plastic housing. No declination. But I stomped around endlessly with it in the back bush, following bearings. Being outdoors – that's where I wanted to be.”

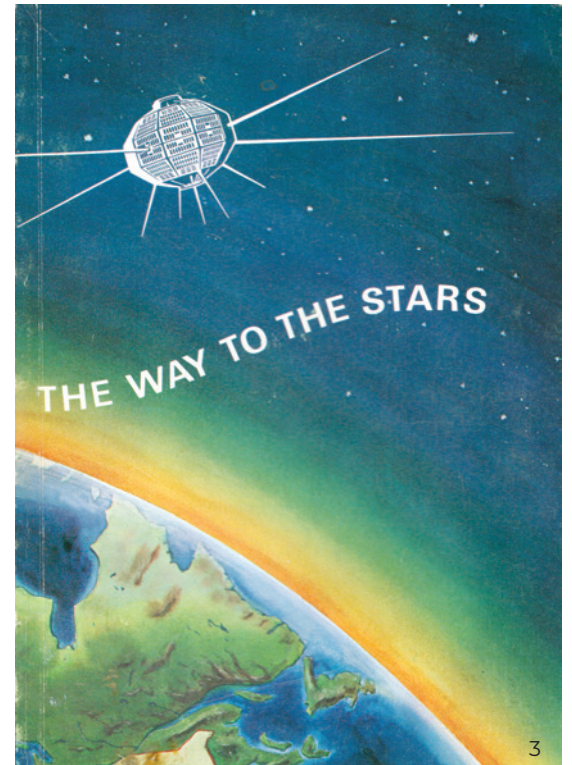
The family soon relocated again, this time to Edmonton, upstream on the North Saskatchewan, amid the flat green parkland expanse of central Alberta. But however horizontal the geography of his youth, Cyril's gaze was drawn increasingly upwards.

Above: Cyril (right) and his older brother Curtis, c. 1960.

Top right: Anne Bronowska (“Baba”) with Conroy (left), Cyril (centre), and Clint (right), c. 1970.

Right: Jean Shokoples, Cyril's mother, with his younger brothers Clint (left) and Conroy (right), c. 1970.

Sic itur ad astra ("This Way to the Stars")



All kids are born with the essential ingredients for wonder – with inquisitive minds, and a fascination for the world around them. For Cyril, like so many growing up in North America during the Sixties, that curiosity would take extreme flight ... with space.

"I was born in the year of Sputnik," Cyril explains, in reference to the first artificial satellite, launched into orbit by the Soviet Union and said to have kicked off the Space Age. "But I remember watching the moon landing on this little black-and-white TV, with everyone crowded around. It was so grainy, you couldn't really tell what was happening. But

- 1 Cyril celebrates his 6th birthday party, 1963.
- 2 Cyril, centre, with his older brother Clint (left) and a friend in their Boy Scouts uniforms, 1963.
- 3 Cyril's copy of the Wolf Cubs Manual, *The Way to the Stars* (1966 edition)
- 4 Cyril's Grade 10 high school yearbook photo. Note the Venturer Scout lapel pin!
- 5 High school friends, c. 1973, all of whom would accompany Cyril on various camping, skiing, or climbing trips. Left-to-right: Dave Steel, Ken Leffler (front), Tom Dryden (back), and Herb Engelke. Photo: Cyril Shokoples
- 6 The high school backpacking club's inaugural (and infamous) winter camping trip in 1973 – just before the authorities arrived.... Photo: Cyril Shokoples



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they were telling you what was happening. It was so exciting.” He then cheerfully rattles off, from memory, the various preceding Gemini missions, and the Mercury missions before them. “It went from one-person, to two-person, to three-person.... I had so many books on the subject. It was the dream.”

“I was lucky enough to grow up in a time and place where any direction seemed possible.”

Home, for much of Cyril’s youth, was Edmonton’s northeastern suburb of Beverly, a diverse working-class community dotted with fifties-style bungalows and low-rise apartments. School, sports, and friends (and a whole lot of street hockey) kept the children busy, but for Cyril – who by Grade 6 had completely worn through his copy of *The Boys’ Book of Electricity* – it was junior-high math class and physics thereafter that would soon propel an endearingly “nerdy” proclivity and an excitement for learning.

At Eastglen Composite High School, while his interest in team sports somewhat waned, Cyril’s academic aptitude soared – and it was noticed. The accolades rolled in: the electronics award three years in a row, the drafting award three years in a



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Cyril, age 17 in 1974, in the caboose of a Northern Alberta Railroads train en route to the Skeleton Lake Boy Scout camp. Photo: Dave Skrastins

row, the honour roll. But if there was a single spark that would ignite Cyril's passion, and set a course for the future, it wasn't found formally at school. It wasn't found in his many dog-eared how-to books. It didn't even stem so much from home-life. What launched Cyril towards a life in the outdoors, with a commitment to teaching and leadership, was the Boy Scouts of Canada, specifically its Venturers program, designed for mid-teens ages 14 to 17.

"Venturers was foundational," Cyril acknowledges. "It was a step up from Scouts. In Scouts, you had a Scout Leader, someone who created the program for you, someone who organized the events, and someone who took you camping, and so on. The adults really did all the work. But when you

got to Venturers, it was up to you. We no longer had an adult leader; instead, we had an advisor, and we now got to call the shots, run the meetings, organize the trips."

Leadership by leading. That acquisition of outdoors skills and governance practice gave Cyril and others in his Venturers "company" – a motley crew of neighbourhood friends – the confidence and know-how to organize and run a high-school backpacking club. "We had to twist the arm of one of the younger teachers to be a chaperone for the club," he recalls. "I remember him having really long straight hair. He taught law, and so everybody in the school thought he was a narc – you know, an undercover law enforcement officer. But," Cyril adds, leaning in and laughing, "I can tell you with some certainty: *he wasn't!*"

The club's inaugural winter camping trip didn't proceed exactly as planned. The Crown land on which they pitched their tents turned out to be private property.

An encounter with an angry farmer ensued. The police were called in. And unsurprisingly, as Cyril tells it, "only those of us with long hair got hauled into court." A sympathetic judge quickly tossed out the trespassing charges. The experience did little to subdue the group's youthful enthusiasm.

If Venturers was the spark that propelled Cyril towards a lifelong interest in outdoor leadership, his metaphoric moon landing – Cyril's "I have arrived" moment – occurred in 1973, when the newly-mustachioed 16-year-old took an introductory rock-climbing course at Morro Slabs in Jasper National Park. And to teach that course, the Edmonton Scouts office had hired one of North America's most prominent mountain guides, a towering figure in the Jasper climbing scene, the Swiss-born, Swiss-army-trained rescue-specialist Hans Schwarz.

"This," says Cyril, beaming, "is when my life goes completely sideways."

Higher Learning

Cyril had, in fact, already climbed a mountain just prior to his 1973 rock-climbing introduction: Mount Shuey, a short but steep scramble not far from Miette Hot Springs. It was his first summit. The experience, as Cyril puts it, made him highly receptive to the training Hans Schwarz was soon to impart.

"A friend and I were on this hitchhiking adventure, and found ourselves camped under Mount Shuey. It's an obscure little bump-in-the-wall, really, but off we went, rambling our way up the thing. It was unplanned, off-the-cuff; we just decided to go for it. Halfway up, after a few scrambly-type moves, we realized that there's no turning back. We had no gear. No rope. It was loose. And there was no way we could down-climb what we had just come up. We managed to get to the top, and we're standing there, scratching our heads, thinking how the hell are we going to get off this thing. And all of the sudden this group of hikers shows up. 'Erm, which way did you all come up?' we asked. 'Oh,' they cheerily replied, 'we just came up the hiking trail and branched off to the ridge.' 'Ah yeah, yeah – that's how we're going down!'"

"We had NO CLUE!" Cyril admits, laughing.

Rising up from the rushing waters of the wide Athabasca River, Morro Slabs is a low-angle

single-pitch practice area near the Yellowhead Highway, just east of the Jasper townsite. It's been a popular Rockies "classroom" for entry-level rock instruction for nearly a half-century, and it's here where Hans Schwarz took Cyril and his friends through the basics: knots, belaying (mostly body belays), rappel techniques (the Dülfersitz), some piton use, anchors, prusiking, etc. For Cyril, however, it wasn't just the technical skills that left an impression. "Hans Schwarz just radiated this... mountain culture, the likes of which I had never really been exposed to before. He had more stories than you could shake a stick at. Mount Robson. Denali's Wickersham Wall. It was all so infectious. And I wanted in."

The week's success prompted the Edmonton Scouts office to contract Schwarz for a follow-up course the next summer. This time, though, it was felt that a pre-course instructional session, in Edmonton, over an evening or two, would benefit the students – and to teach this primer, they asked

Left: Hans Schwarz, 1974.
Photo: Cyril Shokoples

Right: Fashionably attired high school buddies on a ski trip at Hilda Creek Hostel, c. 1974. Cyril (far left) wiped out in some breakable crust at Parker Ridge, and his borrowed skis snapped in half.





the previous summer's students for a volunteer. Cyril distinctly remembers the call. "What? Teach knots? Easy. I knew hundreds. Do a bit of organizing? No problem. Get a second course with Hans Schwarz for free? *Oh, pick me, please.*"

Cyril has Super 8mm film footage from that second week at Morro Slabs.

Gritty and unrefined, with that care-free nostalgic feel of so many home movies of the era, the footage captures his first lead climb. And the gear! Webbing chest harnesses, no helmets, full-shank leather boots, and pitons for protection. Cyril's since overlaid the footage with music. The track? It's "Don't Look Down," from Fleetwood Mac's Lindsey Buckingham, and his solo album, *Out of the Cradle*.

Left: Hamming it up in his psychedelic basement sanctum, c. 1975.

Above: Front page of *The Edmonton Journal* for April 13, 1975.



Having covered basic rock-climbing skills, Schwarz introduced the group to rescue systems – “and this really caught my attention,” Cyril says. “He had all these stories about teaching the Canadian Armed Force’s Search and Rescue Technicians – in those days, they were simply known as ‘Para Rescue.’ I don’t think I had quite yet figured out that it was a potential direction for me.” But Cyril was paying attention. And those rescue skills he learned? They would soon be put to use, for real.

The Edmonton Journal for April 13, 1975, called it a “Terror ride on ice.” A 14-year-old local boy had been playing on the iced-up banks of the North Saskatchewan, when a small portion of thin ice – little more than 1.5m by 1.5m – detached under his feet, and was swept out into the main channel, swirling round and round with the youth aboard. A rescue attempt by fire fighters from a bridge two kilometres downstream failed. A bit farther still, Cyril and his friend Stuart Taylor just happened to be practicing aid climbing on a concrete piling of another bridge when they noticed the commotion.

The Journal reported what happened next: “Cyril and Stuart ran ... to the middle of the vehicle bridge followed by onlookers. They quickly put a loop in

one end of their rope, threw it over the side, and began to fasten an anchoring device to the rail of the bridge.” The moment the anchor was secured, “tension came on the rope,” as the boy grabbed the life-line and slipped free from the ice. Aided by onlookers, Cyril and Taylor raised the boy out of the water, and then worked him over to where police officials were waiting on the bank. Amid a throng of reporters, the boy expressed gratitude to his rescuers: “If it wasn’t for you,” he said, “I could be floating down to Hudson Bay by now.”

That same year, Cyril was presented with the Queen’s Venturers Award, the highest Scouting proficiency award for youth members in Scouts Canada. Today, Cyril still smiles broadly when talking about the honour – and playfully mentions that “the US metric equivalent would be the Eagle Scout award. Astronaut Neil Armstrong was an Eagle Scout. Every space nerd knows that.” But Cyril’s real accomplishment with Scouts Canada, he says, came later, when for years he himself served as a Scout Leader, a Venturer Advisor, and an Area Commissioner.

“It was nice to give back to that organization that gave me that early direction.”

Lt. Gov. Ralph Steinhauer (centre-left) presents Cyril with the Queen’s Venturers Award, alongside Venturer Advisors Phil Cysow (left) and Dick King (right). Appointed by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, Steinhauer was the tenth lieutenant governor of Alberta, and the first Indigenous person to hold that post.

Roping Up

The Edmonton climbing scene in mid-1970s was largely supported by two organizations: the Edmonton Section of the Alpine Club of Canada (ACC) and the NorthWest Mountaineering Club, a branch of the Canadian Youth Hostel Association. The ACC was oriented more towards older, classic mountaineering-types with an emphasis on education, while the NWMC was known for a more youthful spirit, and a stronger focus on technical climbing.

Cyril back from a day of “big wall” climbing with friend Dave Skrastins. “Dave was a Venturer that attended the first course I was on with Hans. He was my regular climbing partner through high school and into university.”
Photo: Dave Skrastins

Cyril, unsurprisingly, found his way to both. “I was learning from everybody about everything back then. And discovering there’s a technique for this, and a technique for that.”

Much of that early learning Cyril credits to an ACC Edmonton “Summer in the Mountains” course, taught in 1975 by one of the section’s principal members, Rick Checkland. The course would become a mainstay on the section’s annual

calendar of events; in fact, it’s still taught today, nearly fifty years on, with the indomitable Checkland at the helm.

The course comprised a series of evening lectures and three weekend outings to the Rockies, where participants received mountaineering instruction on snow, rock, and ice. Cyril recalls a formative, if-impromptu, lesson from the snow clinic, which involved an early-season ascent of Wilcox Peak, just east of the Columbia Icefield.

“Wilcox is typically not much more than a scramble, but it was completely out-of-shape – total winter conditions,” he says, chuckling. “Bill McIntosh, a longtime section leader, had gotten us up to within fifty feet of the top, and then decided that it was too sketchy to carry on. And me being this super eager kid – I looked at him and said, ‘I think I can make this work. It shouldn’t be too bad if we can set up a belay and rope-up.’ Bill turned to me, looked me up and down, and calmly said, ‘Okay, go for it.’ What? Seriously? You’re actually going to let me try this? And so, I set up a belay, kicked in some really good bucket steps, was just super careful, and led everyone to the summit. The fact that he had confidence in me, it really stuck with me. He just trusted me.”

“To use today’s parlance,” reflects Cyril, “it was empowering.”

The stepping-off point for most the group’s outings was the ACC’s Pocahontas/Disaster Point Hut, a quaint, green road-side hostel, not far from the Jasper townsite, just west of the junction of Highway 16 and the Miette Hotsprings Road. While now, only remnants of a stone foundation remain, before its 1985 removal by Parks Canada the “Poco Hut” had served the ACC, and specifically the Edmonton Section, for decades. But whatever charm the “little clubhouse of the north” held, in 1975, its interior left much to be desired. Most visitors chose to stay in tents on the leasehold grounds (or on the veranda, if there was room) in



preference to bunking-in with the well-established resident packrats.

Rodents be damned. Cyril would find a reason to come back, again and again, and even to assume custodial responsibilities, briefly, himself. An entry in the hut register from the 1960s made mention of a nearby “hidden valley,” a box canyon, tucked in beneath the high limestone walls of Roche Miette, Jasper’s great eastern sentinel. Cyril and his friends sought out the mystery canyon, they recognized its climbing potential, and they set to work. Soon, Hidden Valley would be their go-to “practice” crag for larger adventures to come. “We spent a lot of time there,” Cyril admits. “It still remains a special place for me.” Today, Hidden Valley is Jasper’s oldest and most diverse rock-climbing area. Cyril, fittingly, would write the guidebook.

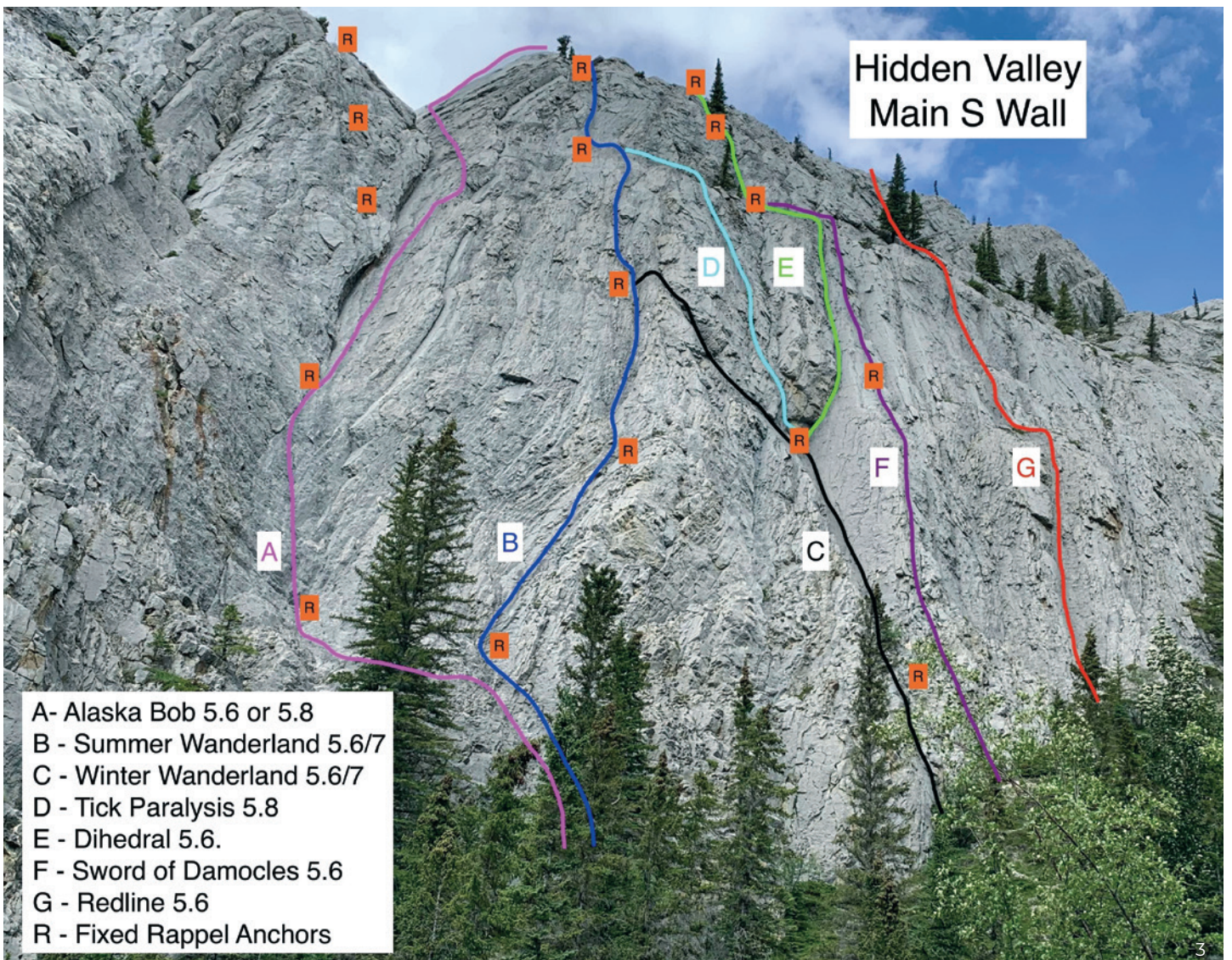
Cyril’s climbing networks expanded further in 1976 when he enrolled in the Forest Recreation program at the University of Alberta.

He took a job near campus with the Youth Hostel Association’s Hostel Shop. The affiliated Mountain Shop was the only place in Edmonton to buy climbing gear. And with his peers, he increasingly found his way to the NorthWest Mountaineers. “We were all climbing as much as we could in those days,” Cyril says. “Every weekend was a trip to the mountains. It was our whole world. And when we couldn’t climb, we were reading about climbing. It’s why we loved staying at the ACC’s Clubhouse in the Bow Valley. Free books!”

A “must read” in those days was the still relatively new *Mountaineering: Freedom of the Hills*,



- 1 A motley crew of NorthWest Mountaineers in the Little Yoho Valley, c. 1978. Cyril (second from the right) stands between his regular climbing partners Tom Saunders (centre) and Orvel Miskiw (right).
- 2 Nailing his way up the “Black Tower Hangover” in the Bow Valley with Steve Otto and Dave Pors from the NWMC. Photo Dave Pors
- 3 Cyril on Roche a Perdrix. Photo Dave Skrastins
- 4 The ACC’s Disaster Point / Pocahontas Hut in Jasper National Park, c. 1976. Photo: Cyril Shokoples



third edition. But even more influential to Cyril's full-blown entry into that new and exciting mountain world was a single short article found in early pages of the 1975 *Canadian Alpine Journal*. Penned by a Scottish ex-pat from the spirited Calgary Mountain Club, Bugs McKeith's "Winter Ice Climbing in the Canadian Rockies" pointed readers to what its author called "the most exciting thing to happen in the Rockies since the big peaks were first climbed." The article described the "Ice Climbing Grading System," Grades 1 through 6, and outlined (with beta) the "Ice Climbs to April 1974," ... all twenty of them. "I read that," Cyril says, "and I was completely blown away. And we knew where to find REAMS of ice."

Cyril embraced the new era with gusto, if not quite panache: a 70-centimetre ("weighed-a-ton") ice axe in one hand and a tiny Salewa blue alpine hammer in the other, strap-on crampons and summer boots.

"The gear was horrendous," he admits smiling, and then launches into a diatribe about old Salewa ice screws: "You had to pound them, and turn them; pound them, and turn them; pound them..., and then the ice would shatter, and you'd have to start again. It was always kind of desperate. But it's what you had. We were teaching ourselves."

It was in this high fashion that Cyril, along with a cadre of NorthWest Mountaineers and university friends – Dave Skrastins, Stuart Taylor, and Brian Thompson, for example – began a long affair with waterfall ice climbing. First ascents followed.

1 Cyril on the second pitch of "Alaska Bob buys a Jug" in Hidden Valley, c. early 1980s. "Yep, it was the lycra era!"

2 Bivouac in an ice cave in Polar Circus, c. late 1970s. "We spent three days on the route. What's the saying? If you take bivouac gear, you will bivouac."
Photo Dave Pors

3 Some of Cyril's many routes in Hidden Valley.

4 Starting the upper tiers of Polar Circus in the late 1970s. Photo Dave Pors





Grotto Canyon. Ogre Canyon. The list goes on. Check out an early edition of Joe Josephson's *Waterfall Ice* and scan the names of first ascensionists listed in the back matter. There are few pages that don't credit a variation of "Cyril Shokoples and party" to something.

But climbing for Cyril wasn't about first ascents. It was never a contest, nor was it about pushing the limits.

"The Seventies for me," Cyril says, "was really all about climbing everything you possible could with whoever wanted to go. You know, 'Let's just go climbing!' And that's what we did. Sometimes we would knock off first ascents without even intending to do so. There were only so many waterfalls written up in the *CAJ*, and there was a lot more ice. We were just fortunate enough to be there at a time when, if you wanted to climb, you needed to explore. And I loved that so much."

By the decade's end, the former scout would tie that other knot – this one with his frequent climbing partner and longtime girlfriend, Sandra Melanson. A self-proclaimed "Air Force brat," from Manitoba originally, Sandy was part of an early coed Venturers company, and met Cyril at planning session for a Scout Camp. They married in Edmonton in 1979, bought a house in the south Edmonton community of Mill Woods, and have been together ever since.



Above: Sandy Shokoples and Tom Saunders after a first ascent of a rock route near the Columbia Icefields. Note Tom's woolen sweater, technical pants, and high-tech climbing shoes... Photo: Cyril Shokoples

Left: Sandy Shokoples exploring previously unclimbed terrain in the David Thompson corridor in the late 1970s. Photo: Cyril Shokoples

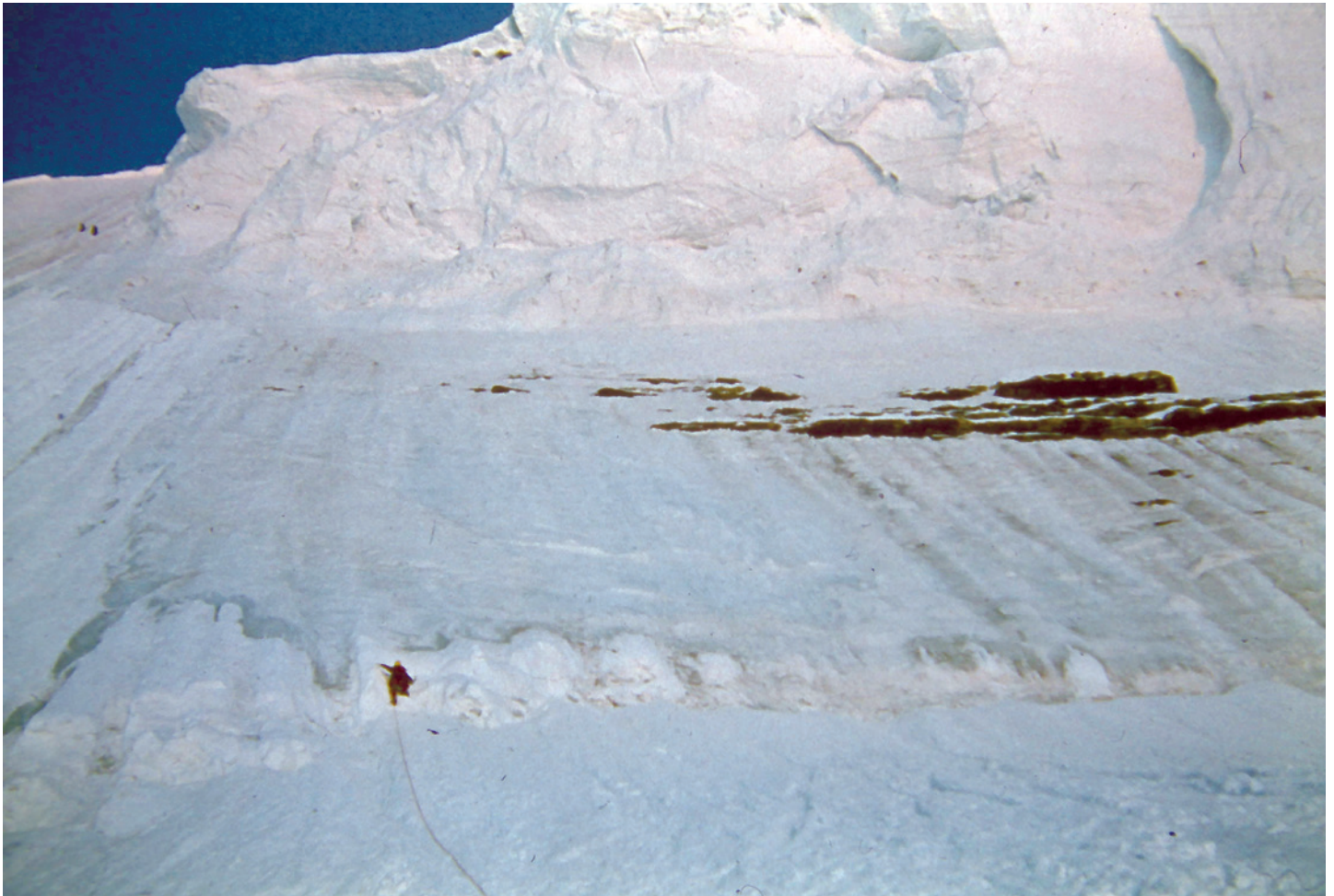
A Higher Calling

“Senior Membership” in the Alpine Club of Canada was an elite designation in 1979. It came with a pin. Applicants needed three sponsors (all Senior Members themselves), and they needed to have had ascended four peaks of “truly alpine character.” Cyril, of course, took it all very seriously. “I was from the Boy Scouts – it was a badge!” His sponsors comprised the Edmonton Section’s upper-brass: Chair Monique Robitaille, Jo Ann Creore, and Rick Checkland. And his qualifying climbs were some of the Rockies highest: mounts Robson, Columbia, North Twin, and Athabasca, all peaks Cyril had climbed on his own with friends.

It was a subtle but noteworthy distinction, and one that set Cyril apart. For many applicants, qualifying climbs were typically made during a week at the ACC’s General Mountaineering Camp (GMC), the club’s flagship operation, held every summer at a different backcountry location

throughout the Rocky and Columbia mountains. Cyril attended his first GMC in 1980. And that camp – held not far from Mount Clemenceau, just west of the Continental Divide in the heavily glaciated north-central Rockies – would serve as a catalyst for membership in an even higher calling.

Cyril crossing the 'schrund on Mount Robson's Kain Face, 1978. “Overhead hazard? What overhead hazard?” Photo: Orvel Miskiw





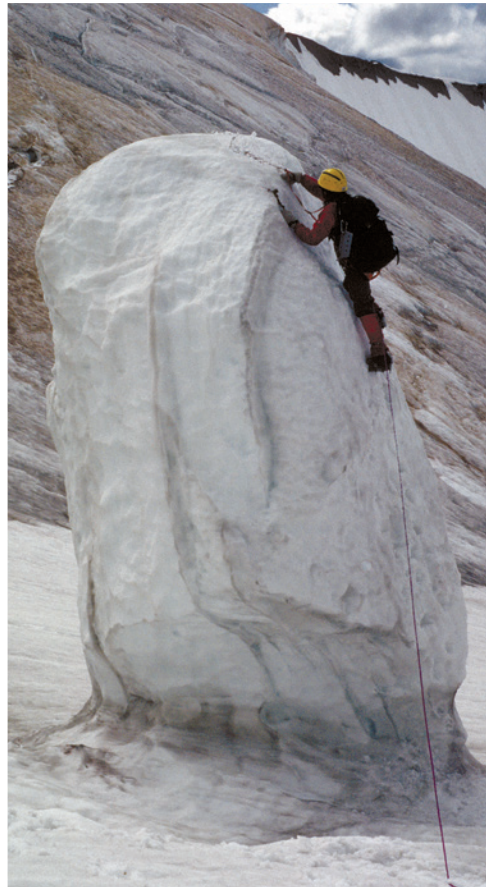
In an article he later wrote for the 1998 *Canadian Alpine Journal*, Cyril set the stage for the week: “Somewhere near Mica Dam, August 1980: ‘Bring your pack over here so we can weigh it.’ Did he say weigh it? I panic and begin stuffing things in my pockets to bring my pack weight under the limit. I think I have squeaked in under the wire with 20 pounds of gear bulging from under my Gore-tex and pile jackets. Finally my turn comes; I jump into the helicopter and fly into Clemenceau. My very first Alpine Club of Canada General Mountaineering Camp is underway, and I am going in as an amateur leader.”

“Little did I know at the time,” reflects Cyril, today, “that this would be the start of over forty years of adventures in some of western Canada’s wildest settings.” What was clear to him at the time was that he now aspired to become a Mountain Guide himself – and the GMC, he hoped, just might help him towards that goal.

Since its 1906 inception, the GMC has always relied on a unique combination of professional mountain guides and volunteer leaders to help camp participants climb the various peaks that rise up above its canvas-clad “city in the clouds.” Here, Cyril would rub elbows with “everyone from Everest summitters to total greenhorns,” but of all those in attendance at the 1980 camp, perhaps most crucial to Cyril’s immediate ambitions, were the week’s guides, Don Vockeroth and Dave Smith. “Seeing them at work,” Cyril says, “that’s when the learning really started.”

Over six feet tall, strong and lean, with a

Left: In the Robson icefall, 1978. Photo Orvel Miskiv
Opposite: “Serac bouldering” at the ACC’s 1980 Clemenceau GMC. Photos: Roger Wallis





notorious exploratory streak (he often didn't make it back on time to camp for dinner), Don Vockeroth was not only one of the first guides certified by the fledgling Association of Canadian Mountain Guides in 1967, but also one of the era's leading climbers.

Cyril remembers an early outing with Vockeroth on Tusk Peak. "He made the assumption that I knew how to short rope," says Cyril, in reference to a technique whereby a guide uses a short portion of rope to lead clients through exposed terrain in such a way as to safeguard a slip or fall. "There I was with my group, and I am learning short-roping by WATCHING what Vockeroth was doing! 'Ah, so it's not just walking with pile of rope in your hand. All right! Here we go!'"

Adept, capable, and keen, Cyril happily soaked it up. "I was a sponge," he says. The week's other guide – Dave Smith, a strong, steady mountaineer, who often smoked a pipe at the end of the day

Above: Mountain Guides Don Vockeroth (left) and Dave Smith (right) at the ACC's 1980 Clemenceau GMC. Photo: Gary Norton

Left: Approaching the summit of Mount Clemenceau at the ACC's 1980 GMC. Photo: Bill Mackenzie

– noticed. “What Cyril didn’t already know,” Smith recalls, “he quickly assimilated. But there was more. He had a rather exuberant personality. I knew he would be solid.”

To this day, Cyril remains grateful for Smith’s mentorship. “I was helping Dave teach a rock school, and he pulled me aside afterwards and showed me all this rock rescue stuff, the counter balance, this and that, all things that were well beyond what we were showing the guests. He was just really generous. All combined, it meant that when it came time for my first guide’s exam, I had this suit of armor. I had been mentored by the best: Smith and Vockeroth, and Hans Schwarz earlier. And remember, this is WAY before formal practicums, and all that good mentorship stuff that happens today. It was an amazing privilege.”

To become a fully certified ACMG Mountain Guide in the early 1980s, candidates had to pass four separate two-week-long exams: Assistant Summer, Full Summer, Assistant Winter, and Full Winter. Unlike today, there were no training weeks. “In those days, there was a saying,” Cyril recalls: “If you didn’t already know what you were doing, the exams were hard places to learn.”

If leading at GMC helped prepare Cyril for his summer guides exam, so too did the teaching experience he had begun to amass through contract work at the Blue Lake Centre, the Province of Alberta’s outdoor education leadership training centre, located in the foothills east of Jasper, just north of the town of Hinton. “At the

Cyril on Yamnuska (Red Shirt) in the 1980s.
Photo: Tom Saunders





time, the Blue Lake Centre had massive paddling and cross-country skiing programs. You could learn how to do either, and then progress through various accredited instructional levels. But there was nothing really for climbing. There was no official curriculum to follow. And so they asked me to put some courses together – Basic Rock, Intermediate Rock, Advanced Rock, Climbing Development and Snow and Ice. That teaching experience was key. It all just fell into my lap at this really important moment.”

Cyril breezed through his first ACMG summer exam in 1981, despite a fifty per cent fail rate.

That “exuberant personality,” coupled with his continued interest in technical systems, would make an impression. Cyril chuckles as he recounts the exam’s crevasse rescue component: “I whipped up this six-to-one drop-loop system for Pierre Lemire, one of the examiners. The trouble was, though, the ACMG was teaching it differently from the way I did it. Pierre looked it over, and said ‘That’s not the way we showed you.’ And I said, ‘Yeah, I know. But this is better. See?’ He didn’t know that I had written ALL these articles for the Edmonton Section’s newsletter and for the NorthWest Mountaineers’ publication that compared dozens of different configurations of pulley systems, as well as all the math behind them.”

“And you know what?” Cyril pauses, mischievously. “The very next year, the ACMG was teaching it my way!”

Throughout the 1980s, Cyril would continue to develop and teach climbing courses for the Blue Lake Centre. He would continue to lead rope-teams at the GMC. And he would continue with his own education – because he had to. Recall those two ACMG winter exams? For Cyril, they would involve multiple attempts and challenge him in ways the



Above: Cyril in the Blue Lake van, c. early 1980s.
Photo: Vic Marchiel

Left: (left-to-right) Dan Griffith, Rod Gibbons, Bruce Holloway (pilot), JR (John Roberts), and Cyril at RK Heliski, c. late 1990s.

summer exams hadn't. "I couldn't ski to save my soul," Cyril admits, laughing. "I was just nowhere near the standard."

Cyril had taken up skiing (on skinny, 205cm-long planks), but only really as a means to approach waterfall ice climbs. "It quickly became apparent that I had two major weaknesses: stability analysis and skiing ability. So, I had to come back, buckle down, and learn. Rudi Kranabitter, another one of my examiners, perhaps said it best: 'Skroopless' – he always called me that; I can still hear his voice – 'if you have to think about your skiing, you're not thinking about your guiding.'"

The critique resulted in almost a decade of learning, with the winters being especially "brutal" – but not because of his time spent training, or his increased professional involvement with the Canadian Avalanche Association. In 1985, Cyril also began work at the Alberta Vocational College (now Portage College) in Lac La Biche. Outside of the summers months, which were free for work and play in the mountains, the job entailed managing the college's new Emergency Medical Technician program, developing a provincial scope-of-practice for Emergency Medical Responders, and leading a team to develop the Parks Emergency Responder program for National Park Wardens. In addition to all this, Cyril was also figuring out the intricacies of running his own small business, through which he'd run much of his private guiding and courses – a company he called, fittingly, "Rescue Dynamics." "Oh yeah," Cyril says, nodding his head. "There was just SO much going on in those days. But looking back, it was all connected in different sorts of ways."

The decade culminated with Cyril heeding some further advice – this time from another mentor, mountain guide Dan Griffith. "Dan pulled me aside and said, 'You need downhill guiding experience, and you are not going to get it by ski touring.'" Mechanized skiing. It was the final piece of the puzzle, and would result in not only the beginning of a nearly thirty-year stint with Rod Gibbons at RK Heliski in the Purcell Mountains, but the successful completion of a guiding apprenticeship.

Cyril became a fully certified ACMG/IFMGA Mountain Guide in 1995. That membership, too, came with a pin.

Peter Amann (left) and Chuck Samuels on Cyril's first Assistant Winter Guides Exam, 1983.



The Shared Mission

In Canada, Search and Rescue (SAR) is a shared responsibility. The country's immense size, its wide range of terrain and climate, demands a "partnered response," which includes government, military, industry and volunteer groups. The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) is vested with the main responsibility for providing SAR from the air, especially in those remote, hard-to-get-to places where ground-based SAR isn't available. CAF SAR crews are on standby twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. They're required to be airborne in less than two hours from receiving a task (in some cases, less than thirty minutes). And they are staffed by the best of the best – highly-trained SAR Technicians (SAR Techs), proficient not only in advanced pre-hospital care, but in land and sea survival skills, and in rescue techniques, including Arctic rescue, parachuting, diving, mountain climbing, and helicopter rescue. They have literally saved thousands of lives.

Morgan Neff (back) and
Arnie MacAuley soloing
the approach to "S'N'M"
on the way to the
First Ascent.
Photo: Cyril Shokoples



And nearly all of the approximately 140 SAR Techs active today have received mountain rescue training led by a single civilian instructor – Cyril.

"It is NOT a job, or a contract," Cyril maintains, with conviction. "It's more like a mission. I really feel a close connection to this group of people, who for generations have risked their lives 'So That Others May Live.'"

Cyril's civilian involvement with the SAR Tech mountain program, now some thirty years on, didn't spring out of isolation, nor is it without precedent.

Rather, it's part of a long tradition, one that stretches back nearly three-quarters-of-a-century, and involves some of the country's most prestigious mountain guides. Coincidentally, many of those guides are those with close ties to the Jasper area, like European ex-pats Joe Weiss and Toni Meisner from the early years, or afterwards Willi Pfisterer, and then there was the "Hans Schwarz era" from 1969 to 1990. Cyril would receive further mentorship from Schwarz following his first rock-climbing forays in the 1970s, but it would be two Edmonton-based ice-climbing partners who,

instead, a decade later, nudged him into the SAR Tech orbit.

“In the mid-1980s, I did a significant amount of climbing and ski mountaineering with a friend named Morgan Neff,” Cyril explains. “Morgan spent his younger days in the infantry and was then a reservist in the Air Force. He introduced me to Arnie MacAuley, at the time a sergeant posted to the Canadian Forces Survival Training School as a SAR Tech instructor. We did a few good ice climbs together in the David Thompson area, not far from where the Winter Mountain Ops ice climbing now often takes place. ‘S’N’M’ [Shokoples, Neff, MacAuley] was one of those climbs. Bob Verret, who was also posted to CFSTS, was with us for another: ‘SARs on Ice.’”

Both MacAuley and Cyril considered themselves then to be “disciples” of Arnör Larson, the Wilmer-based rope-rescue guru, who, through his company “Rigging for Rescue,” was carrying out state-of-the-art research into high-angle rope-rescue techniques for the mountains.

Larson was the inventor of prusik-minding pulleys and the Kootenay Carriage, an extra-large pulley for knot passing and multiple track line work. He was one of the early advocates for the use of tandem prusiks. And as part of the now disbanded B.C. Council on Technical Rescue, Larson also helped create a drop test method that still forms the foundation for how rope rescue systems are tested.

And so it wasn’t unusual that, after ice climbing, many weekend evenings at the Shunda Creek Hostel



Above: Cyril with Hans Schwarz at the Rock Gardens, 2000. Photo: Andy Morris

Right: Arnie MacAuley leading the first pitch of “S’N’M” on the FA. Photo: Cyril Shokoples



in Nordegg were spent in deep discussion (often enhanced by a glass of whisky or two) about mountain rescue, training and techniques. It was on just such an evening that MacAuley, in reference to the SAR Tech Mountain Operations, asked Cyril, hypothetically, "How would you do things differently?"

"It's funny how a bit of scotch will loosen your tongue," says Cyril, chuckling, "because I proceeded to lay out this WHOLE plan for how all the new techniques espoused by Arnör Larson and others could be integrated into the existing training." The curriculum that he outlined must have been well

Above: SAR Techs top out after ascending Meisner's Ridge in 1989. Photo: Cyril Shokoples

Left: Like Arnör Larson, his protégé, Mountain Guide Kirk Mauthner, is a longtime friend and mentor of Cyril's. Mauthner, here, is conducting a seminar at the 2018 Mountain Rescue Association Conference in Nordegg. Photo: Cyril Shokoples

received, for soon after, Cyril received an initial contract to teach the Advanced Mountain and Glacier Refresher in 1989.

“This,” states Cyril proudly, “was really the beginning of Rescue Dynamics.”

The site for the Refresher was Jasper National Park, of course, and as homage in part to a much earlier course instructor, Cyril boldly took the participants up the wildly exposed “Meisner’s Ridge,” on Peak CR2 in the Colin Range.

An 18-hour day ensued, with hours upon hours of technical climbing and several rappels – one of which committed the group to going over the summit, because the route cannot be retreated after a certain point.

“Our group of nine is still the largest group to ever summit that peak in a day,” Cyril figures. “The day after was the weekend off. I remember sitting outside my room drinking coffee at about 6am only to see one of the participants, Mike Maltais, heading off for a morning run. You’d think that after an 18-hour climb you could take a day off from running! That was part of my first exposure to the SAR Tech level of fitness.”

Needless to say, the participants were all very capable, even suspiciously so. Many were already the cream-of-the-crop. MacAuley himself had even signed-up as one of the military instructors. “You know, I’ve always wondered if Arnie and others weren’t quietly vetting me that first year,” Cyril muses. If so, Cyril passed the test. He would teach the refresher once more in 1990. And then, with the retirement of Hans Schwarz later that year, Rescue Dynamics would take over instruction for



Above: SAR Techs on Meisner’s Ridge in 1989.
Photo: Cyril Shokoples

Right: Left-to-right: Mountain Guide Peter Amann, Hans Schwarz, and Cyril in 2000 at the Rock Gardens in Jasper National Park. Photo: Andy Morris



the whole SAR Tech Mountain Operations. A new era of SAR Tech training was underway.

From the outset, Cyril wisely hired as his 2IC – that’s “second-in-command” in military-shorthand – his friend and contemporary Peter Amann, a local Jasper Mountain Guide and himself a close protégé of Schwarz.

Cyril and Amann had known each other for years, having taken several guides exam together. Their rapport was instant. “It was noted in the 1990s,” Cyril admits, smiling, “that I would bum smokes and Peter would tell jokes. I quit smoking a couple decades ago, but Peter is still the master of joke telling. This is a hallmark of his easy going style.” It was a partnership that would last decades.

Above left: Mountain Guide Jeremy Mackenzie (left) and Cyril during a Rescue Dynamics Continuing Professional Development seminar in Jasper, 2016. Mackenzie is the head of Kananaskis Country Public Safety for Alberta Parks. Photo: Vic Marchiel

Above: Jasper Mountain Guide Matt Reynolds, Cyril’s “current 2IC in rescue training and long-time friend,” 2020. Photo: Cyril Shokoples

Left: SAR Tech Tammy Nagraef rescue training in “high attendant position,” 2001. Nagraef was the first female SAR Tech in the modern era. Photo: Cyril Shokoples



Today, apart from Cyril, Amann has taught on more SAR Tech mountain courses than any other single person. He is truly, Cyril says, “an icon of the Jasper guiding community.”

Cyril’s approach to the SAR Tech Mountain Operations might be viewed, like the National Search and Rescue Program itself, as a “partnered response,” one where teamwork, tradition, and mentorship all really matter. Numerous younger guides have joined Cyril and Amann’s instructional team over the years. Some, like Jeremy Mackenzie, would go on to become respected leaders themselves in affiliated mountain-rescue agencies. Others, like Jasper local Matt Reynolds, have remained with the Rescue Dynamics team, and risen up to work alongside Cyril as an equal, or more.

Cyril’s care for his staff extends just as much to the program’s participants – the dedicated women and men who regularly put themselves in harm’s way in the service of others. For Cyril, that reality

carries weight. Seven SAR Techs have died on duty in the thirty years that he has been involved.

“I knew them well enough to genuinely grieve their loss,” Cyril says. “I’ve dedicated climbs to each of them in a newly established set of climbs in Hidden Valley on what is now called the ‘Memorial Wall.’”

It’s hard to explain why I care so much about the SAR Techs. Many have become good friends. But more than that, I just really appreciate what they do for others, much of which never gets publicized.”

2018 Rescue Dynamics Continuing Professional Development training at the Jarvis Lake Detachment rappel tower, 2018. Back row (left-to-right): Jesse Bouliane, Ian Welsted, Gord Irwin (guest presenter), Darek Glowacki, Matt Reynolds, Adam Burrell, and Peter Amann; Front row (left-to-right): Andrew Mackenzie (CFSSAR), Cyril, and Kurtis Schmidt (CFSSAR).

Learning Never Stops

There are few people working today in the outdoor recreation industries of the Rockies who haven't taken a course from Cyril – a skills course, a first-aid course, an avalanche course, a rope-rescue course, or a leadership course.

Cyril laughs and shrugs this fact off as “a slight exaggeration” (note the modifier, slight). But there are few mountain guides who teach as much, or as widely.

His teaching inspiration, he says, comes in part from watching others.

Cyril orients students to the view at the ACC's 2015 Stockdale Creek GMC.
Photo: Zac Robinson

“I have been so lucky to have learned from so many talented teachers – Schwarz, Vockeroth, and

Smith; Gibbons and Griffith; all my examiners; the list goes on and on. And that's just on the 'mountain' side of things. On the medical side, there was Allen Ausford, who was also my family physician, and John Nicklin, my old boss from the Portage College days. These were my mentors. And if you are being taught or mentored by someone you admire, I always tell people to pay extra close attention, because on top of all the other good stuff that's being imparted, there are also lessons to be learned about teaching itself. Watch them. What works for you? Borrow it. Make it your own.”

“I really don't have a 'me' style. It's a mosaic, from





all these other people. It's super freakin' cool."

Cyril's earliest teaching experiences at the Blue Lake Centre also set him up for success. "Every year before the summer season," recalls Cyril, "all of the instructors were made to take what we now call 'soft-skill' courses – you know, learning about different leadership styles for different situations; learning about effective communication, about group dynamics, conflict resolution, and so on. I initially baulked at it all – I was interested in techy stuff, not all this HUMAN stuff! But it was SO important, and in retrospect totally fortuitous."

Leadership training has always been core to the Alpine Club of Canada's mandate.

Hundreds of volunteers across the country give their time annually at the section and national levels to ensure other members can enjoy rewarding experiences in the mountains.

It's exactly this long-standing volunteer

Above: The Summer TNF instructional team at the ACC's 2006 Centennial GMC in the Premier Range of the Cariboo. Left-to-right: Cyril, Mountain Guide Kirsten Knecht, and volunteer leader Masten Brolsma. Photo: Laurie McMillan

Above right: Looking at buried surface hoar on the 2019 Winter TNF Course. Photo: Clement Tixier

Right: On the summit of Mount Chaba with Brad Harrison (right) from the ACC's 2003 Snowy Pass GMC.



tradition, recall – whether with the Edmonton Section of the 1970s or at the 1980 GMC – that shaped Cyril's own future.

In time, he made sure to reciprocate.

During the late 1990s, to meet the training needs of a growing national volunteer body, the ACC, with support from the outdoor retailer The North Face, began running an annual, one-week summer Mountain Leadership Course, held at the GMC. An equivalent winter-based course, taught from

Left: Having fun on the 2017 Winter TNF Course.

Below: Future leaders learning about electronic communications at the ACC's 2019 Westfall Creek GMC. Photo: Zac Robinson





a BC backcountry ski lodge, was added not long after. And for the next decade or so, the “Summer TNF” and “Winter TNF,” as they were known, were delivered almost exclusively by Cyril, Peter Amann, and the wily, energetic-to-the-max GMC outfitter and manager, Brad Harrison.

Harrison brought much to the partnership. In camp, as one GMC participant recently put it, Harrison handily wore “the multiple hats of roast carver, dish-pit captain, plumber, solar-power technician, and transport logistician, while finding time to guide people up peaks.” During the winters, he brought that same near-frenetic energy, industriousness, and skill-set to his part-ownership of Golden Alpine Holidays, a series of ski-touring lodges in the Esplanade Range of the Columbia Mountains, just north of Golden, BC. Harrison’s close affiliation with both the GMC and GAH made the logistics of running the dual-season program a reality.

“The three amigos” would enjoy a long-lasting

teaching partnership, with a whole lot of laughs along the way. For the students, Harrison recalls, “one of the great things about the TNF courses was that you had three people with very different leadership styles and mindsets.”

Each would give you a
certain kind of day,
each always different
from the last.

Cyril’s going to give you everything, and go as technical as possible; Peter is the laid-back guy, lots of jokes, but always solid; and I’m going to take you on the longest trip that I can possibly get away with. I think we made it fun for the participants.”

“But Cyril was the brainiac,” Harrison maintains. “He was always the go-to person for questions like,

Graduates of the Summer TNF Course at the ACC’s 2012 Sir Sandford GMC. Left-to-right: Rebecca Haspel (ACC Calgary Section), Cyril, and Catarina Steele (Rocky Mountain Section).



One last high-point for the class! Cyril (far right) and students at the ACC's 2015 Stockdale Creek GMC. Photo: Zoltan Kenwell

Cyril's teaching style educated and amused. Photo: Zoltan Kenwell

'What's the solution for this?' He'd have an answer. I have learned more from Cyril than anybody, honestly.'

Cyril's commitment to mountain leadership, and to service, would extend well beyond the ACC throughout the 1990s and into the early 2000s. With the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides, for example, Cyril would serve multiple terms on the Board of Directors as Director-at-Large, he would serve as Vice President, and then, in the autumn of 2002, he would be elected ACMG

President. That volunteer experience, however, came with challenges few could have foreseen. As Cyril succinctly puts it, "my presidency included the worst nightmarish winter for avalanches."

On January 20, 2003, seven people tragically perished while ski-touring at a commercial lodge near the Durrand Glacier in the Selkirks. Eleven days later, seven others – this time students, from a Calgary area school – were killed in the Connaught Creek drainage, not far from Rogers Pass. The two incidents emerged out of vastly different scenarios, but they triggered immense public outcry, and the guides' association, unjustly, received a share of that fury. Pain met politics. A member of the BC legislature called for the whole backcountry to be shuttered, and the guides' association recoiled, imagining the wide-reaching ramifications of a closed backcountry and what it meant for winter guiding. Writer Lynn Martel called it "one of the most significant challenges the ACMG would ever face."





Innovations to public avalanche education and risk-assessment procedures would ultimately come-to-pass, but the winter left Cyril “mentally exhausted.” “It was just such a trying time, for so many people,” he says, now nearly twenty years on. “And I needed to step back and recharge.”

“Leadership can sometimes be hard. You have to take care of yourself.”

The ACC’s TNF Leadership Course has morphed in the years following its inception, as instructor roles have increasingly come to be shared with other mountain guides, such as Kirsten Knechtel or Helen Sovdat, both influential and celebrated leaders themselves. But Cyril, more than anyone, has remained an ever-constant presence in the program. Some forty classes later (that’s over 400 section leaders!), he is still today a TNF instructor, summer and winter.

The role, Cyril says, has been not only rewarding, but crucial to his own continued learning, even as he now considers retirement. “The learning never stops,” he says smiling. “Here’s the truth. The mentor learns as much from the pupil. Young leaders today, you know, they have all the new gadgets,

all the new techniques, the latest and greatest of EVERYTHING, and you are sharing information. It’s two ways. And you cannot help but learn from the students. Who’s getting the better deal? Both of us. All of us.”

Cyril hasn’t come off of a single course, he says, without learning something.

And sometimes that learning is fundamental. “Four or five years ago, for example,” he recalls, “a participant from the Vancouver Section said to all of us that, as leaders, we really needed to be talking more about equity, diversity, and inclusion. And we were all like, ‘Yeah, you are TOTALLY right. We need to go here on this course.’”

“It was an opportunity to grow, and to be better.”

For his tireless dedication to leadership and volunteerism, in 2012, Cyril was awarded a lifetime Honorary Membership in the Alpine Club of Canada.

Cyril teaching snow profiles at the Winter TNF, 2017.

One or Two [More] Things

Four-hundred kilometres of highway separates Edmonton from the mountains. To either the Upper Athabasca River Valley in Jasper or to Canmore in the Bow Valley, it's a four-hour drive (including a pit-stop or two) along a flat, almost dead-straight road. Edmonton-based climbers nod their heads. They know the stretch of asphalt better than most. And Cyril, in his white Chevy van – loaded full with climbing and rescue gear, first-aid supplies and teaching props – has today probably made that drive more than anyone.

Cyril mostly listens to music when on the road – The Beatles, J.J. Cale, or The Allman Brothers. To rummage around on his iTunes would reveal an eclectic smattering of podcasts: Stephen Hawking, quantum physics sort-of-stuff, “How to Speak German,” etc. “I really don’t mind the drive,” he admits.

features. His hair’s now grey, almost white. A well-worn plaid shirt and an old ACC ball cap are typical camp attire. The image is anything but imposing. Yet for anyone who has attended a camp with Cyril, for anyone in earshot of his joyful, attention-grabbing yodel that signals the beginning of the day’s after-dinner stories, for anyone who has

“But I’ll let you in on a little secret – I’m actually an introvert. Not a lot of people know that about me, but it’s true.”

It’s a confession few GMC participants would believe.

Standing five feet six inches, Cyril is not a large man. His moustache and glasses remain constant

Below: Cyril at the ACC’s Westfall Creek GMC, 2019.

Photo Zac Robinson

Right: “You’re on belay, Karl!” Cyril delights GMC participants with harrowing tales from the Eiger Nordwand at the ACC’s 2015 Stockdale Creek GMC.

Photo: Zoltan Kenwell





seen him stand-up and give the comedic rendition of his fictional Eiger ascent (a tribute to his old friend and colleague Karl Nagy, done with his best mock-Austrian Rudi Kranabitter accent), or his recitation of the “The Ballad of Idwal Slabs” (“I’ll tell you a tale of a climber...”), his endearing ever-dependable showmanship belies the truth. And that’s all before he breaks out the guitar! At the GMC, the sixty-five-year-old bounces around like a kid at Disneyland. Cyril’s presence casts the longest of shadows.

“The ACC has turned into an extended family for me,” he says. “I have had the privilege to teach and climb with hundreds of climbers and seen so many young climbers starting off like me: over-keen and under-educated! Seriously, I got to meet people from all over the country and was able to give them a foot up so that they can excel and pass those skills on to folks back at their own sections. How cool is that?”

Cyril has today worked 72 weeks at the club’s GMC – more weeks than just about anyone.

Between continued work for the Club, wilderness first-aid courses, and the SAR Tech program,

Cyril’s annual schedule remains full, although he says he’s now “scaling back to concentrate on other interests.”

He’s been retro-bolting many of the original climbing routes in Hidden Valley, all at his own expense.

And then there’s scuba diving – he and Sandy are both dive fanatics, and travel extensively in their free time to warm underwater destinations. “Oh, diving’s just another world, and I love it.” To ask him about it is to elicit a happy barrage of technical information on “peak performance buoyancy,” “enriched air,” or underwater videography. It’s quickly apparent that the old boy scout has nearly every certification offered by the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI). Go figure. The off-world learning continues.

Cyril yucking it up with participants at Brad Harrison’s Boutique Mountain Camp at Sugarplum-Hatteras in 2013. Cyril’s longtime friend and colleague Mountain Guide Helen Sovdat stands in the back. Photo: Bob Plummer.





Above: Cyril eeehhh! Here teaching the Summer TNF course in 2020. Photo Cam Roe

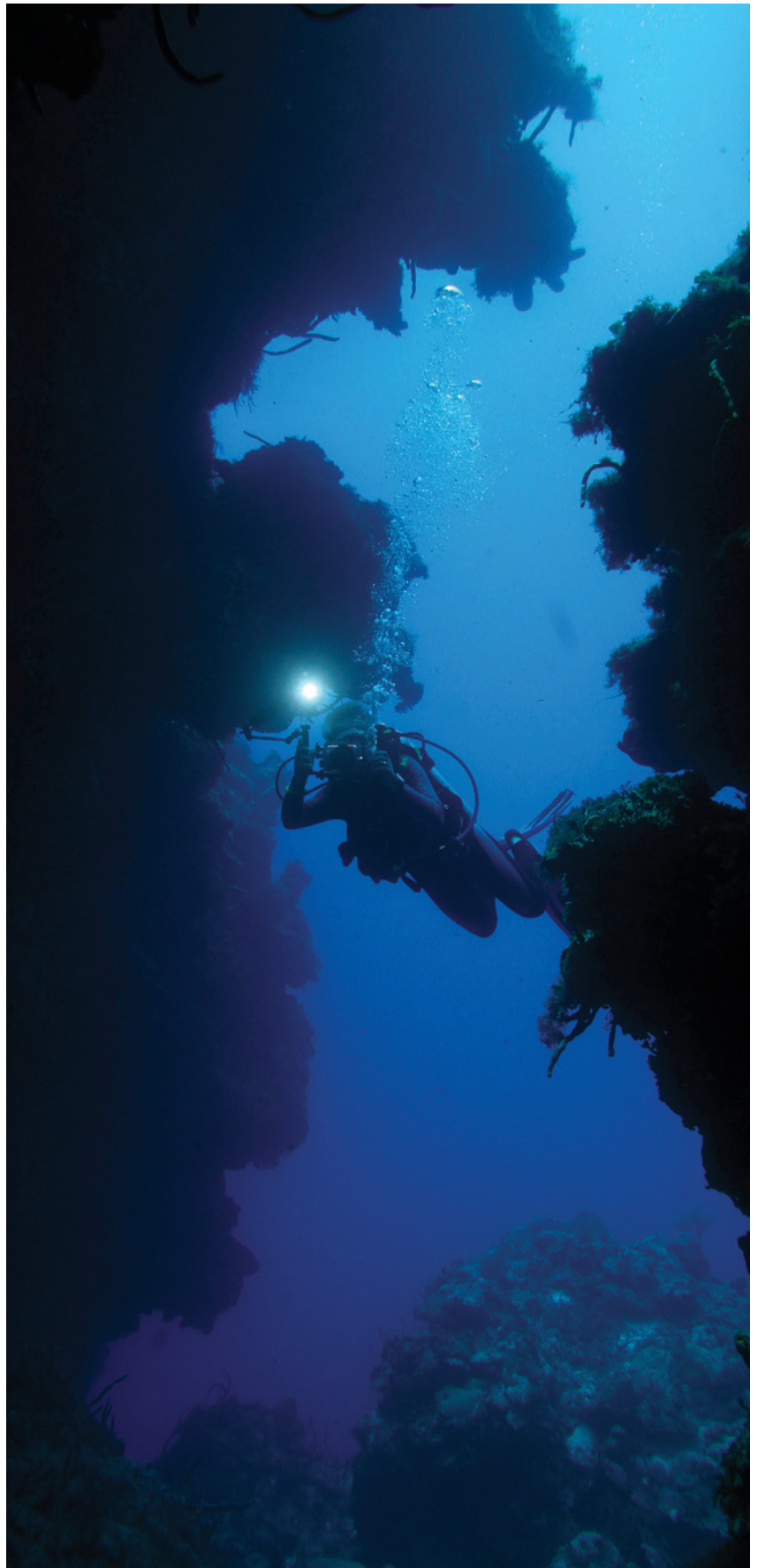
Above Left: The week's staff at the ACC's 2006 Centennial GMC in the Premier Range of the Cariboos. Left-to-right: Andrew Findlay, Kim Purdy, Val McLeod, Zac Robinson, Dianne Brolsma, Peter Findlay, and Cyril.

Below left: Cyril's "extended family." Staff and participants pose for the requisite camp picture at the ACC's 2018 Hallam Glacier GMC. Can you find Cyril? (Hint: Yellow jacket, on the left). Photo: Paul Zizka

Right: Cyril "videoing" while diving in the "Devil's Throat," 37-metres down, in Cozumel, Mexico.

Photo: Sandy Shokoples

Below: Singin' and strummin' at Brad Harrison's Boutique Mountain Camp at International Basin in 2012. Photo: Kirsten Knechtel.





Reflecting on his life in the mountains, Cyril is both proud and content. Of the current ACMG, he's especially pleased: "The ACMG is so much better than it was twenty-five years ago. We now have a person in the office and a whole committee dedicated to diversity and inclusion, and accident insurance, personal injury insurance, and help with critical incidents and mental health issues. We never had ANY of this back in the day! They are huge improvements. Real steps forward, all of them."

As for his own accomplishments, he's more modest. "I just really love seeing other people succeed," he says, "and if I can be a tiny cog in that wheel, then it's mission accomplished. And yes, you may say it's living vicariously through others, but I like to think that maybe I gave something to that person, just one or two little things, that got them a bit further, that helped them in some way reach their own goal or objective, whatever it may be."

"Giving a lot of people one or two things – that's what I am most proud of."

Above: A note of thanks from a fan. "Curt Brown piloted three shuttle missions and was commander of three more shuttle missions.

While heli-skiing and flying together at RK, I said to him, 'I have been thinking that you have the most amazing job.'

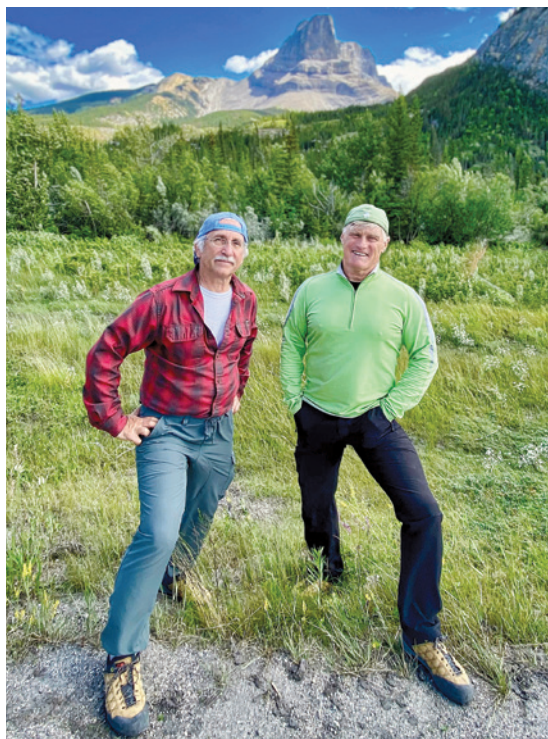
He looked back at me and said, 'you know, I was thinking the same thing about you!' Perspective is everything...."

Right: Cyril with his "best bud" Vic Marchiel in 2022.

"We worked together at Blue Lake Centre in the 1980s and crafted a number of routes together in Hidden Valley and elsewhere starting in the '80s, and continuing to this day."

Photo: James Flewelling

Inside cover: The Oct 1979 cover of *Off Belay*.



To aspiring climbers today, Cyril has one or two further things to offer:

"This comes from Alvin Toffler, who said that 'The illiterate of the twenty-first century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.' The vast majority of what I learned when I got my start back in the Seventies regarding climbing, technique, equipment, and training has been revised and updated, with new innovations coming almost daily. Gather knowledge from good courses, gather experiences from climbing itself, and gather wisdom from experienced mentors. You need to get out and climb to become a good climber. You need to stay fit, current, and educated to be an excellent climber. And you need to think of others more than you think of yourself to become a good leader."

"And then there's that excellent quotation from the old cover of *Off Belay* magazine sometime in the 1980s. It said: 'Time spend climbing will not be deducted from the rest of your life.'"

"That's a good thing to remember, after all is said and done."

TIME SPENT
CLIMBING MOUNTAINS
WILL NOT BE DEDUCTED
FROM YOUR LIFE.



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The Alpine Club of Canada and the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides are immensely pleased to honour Mountain Guide Cyril Shokoples as the Patron of the 31st annual Mountain Guides Ball.

There are few today active in the mountain community who haven't learned something from this extraordinary guide and teacher. Whether it's an ACC national mountain leadership course or a wilderness first aid course, a rope-rescue course or an avalanche course, a backcountry skiing course or a climbing course, Cyril teaches them all, and more. In this capacity, always with distinctive exuberance, he has helped and mentored along so many amateurs and guides alike. Cyril's lifetime commitment to service, to safety, to education and learning in the mountains is unmatched. An Honorary Member of the ACC and a past ACMG President, Cyril is the kind of leader who makes "leadership" actually mean something. And he has transformed our community by putting aspiring climbers at the centre of who we are, and what we do.

Cyril Shokoples: Learning on High honours the life and accomplishments of this remarkable individual, who, as an educator of the highest degree, has left an indelible mark on a whole generation of Canadian outdoor enthusiasts.



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