

Wally Drew 1926 – 2020

Wally Drew passed away on January 2020 at the age of 93 years. His obituary can be found at the end of this document, but it hardly describes the man as we knew him. This tribute will attempt to show the “real” Wally, based on comments by those who knew him.

Wally and the Rocky Mountain Ramblers

“Some highlights of his many contributions to the club (Bob St. John):

- Day trips became a regular part of Rambler life when Wally joined the club. He became Day Trip Chairman and soon became the Winter Program Chairman as well.
- The 'Pack Rat' newsletter made its first appearance in 1957 due to the efforts of Wally, who remained Editor through to May, 1960.
- The first recorded Ramblers party thrown by Bernie Taylor and Wally Drew was a ski season wind-up in April, 1958.
- The first Gold Pin was awarded to Wally Drew in 1960.
- Wally was RMRA Chairman (President) for 1963 and 1964.
- He was named Chair of the Centennial Trail Project in 1966. Work on the Centennial Trail continued through 1969.
- Wally wrote 'The First 27 Years', a history of the Ramblers from 1954 to 1981. “

“Wally was the Ramblers; always there, always working behind the scenes to lead trips, publish the Pack Rat, show slides of hikes, and encouraging people up the trail. He was the drive behind the building of the Centennial Trail, tirelessly maintaining it for many years on his own after its completion. His favorite place on a hike was being Tail-End-Charlie to make sure everyone got out of the woods safely.”(Sharron Brooks (Sandy Vair’s daughter))

“For many years, Wally would be asked to provide a weather forecast for the area for the coming weekend. He would sit on the front row in a seat that no one else would consider taking. Many trips were called or cancelled right after that forecast. As a former meteorologist, I learned firsthand that no amount of training could compete with a person who was both knowledgeable about the weather and the local conditions that would affect the weather.” (Brian Westcott)

Wally and Hiking

“Wally’s first trip was to Aylmer Lookout .He led many first trips - the Ramblers' first cross-country ski trip to Elbow Lake on Oct 28, 1956, the first ice skating trip in 1957 to Innis Lake southwest of Olds, the first swimming trip in August 1957 to Pine Lake southeast of Red Deer, and the first canoe trip on the Bow River and Vermillion Lakes near Banff in September 1958. Numerous moonlight hikes were led by Wally, usually to peaks on the eastern edge of the Rockies.” (Bob St. John)

“When I first met Wally he was already an old man of 63. In 1989 I joined Ramblers for one year and went on a trip led by Wally to Mount Wardle in Kootenay Park. We started on a “trail”, which was a road covered with thick alder bushes to the remnants of a long-abandoned fire lookout. Then we bushwacked

through thick forest. The going was rough, climbing over huge spiny logs and through thick bushes growing on the forest floor. The final pitch to the summit was a walk along a knife-edge ridge with big drop-offs on both sides. On the way down Wally found a good goat trail that took us directly to the highway.

I rejoined the Ramblers some years later when Wally was in his seventies and I used to come on his long trips. The last long trip was in 2006 when Wally was almost 80. We walked for 30 km (return) up Johnston Creek in Banff Park and to Mystic Pass at a brisk pace.”(Peter Minarik)

“Wally led a trip to Mt. Temple in 2006 to celebrate his 80th birthday. Upon arriving at the summit, he looked at his watch and noted that this ascent was 10 minutes slower than his previous ascent (7 years before)” (RMRA trip Report August 6, 2006)



“Wally was also an active member of Skrastins for at least 15 years”. (The Scratchin Post - October 1, 2020)

“ On the Skrastins bus, when the trip leader was announcing the trips at the front of the bus, Wally would always correct any error (like distance, height), especially when I was giving the introductions. In the end, I would phone Wally before the trip to make sure I had it right as far as he was concerned.” (Ann Moran)

“On a cold Late November in the mid-70s, on a Wally-led hike in the Foothills, I foolishly picked up what I and my girlfriend thought was a year’s old, dead, wasp nest. I put it into my day pack and at the end of the day it ended up with us in the back seat of the same car as Wally. Well, as we drove back to Calgary; the car warmed up, so did the previously 'non-existent' wasps, and then Wally's paratrooper tongue! We all ended up un-stung by the still drowsy wasps, but I did lose most of the content of my pack as they swiftly exited the speeding car window..... I will always be a great admirer of Wally's extensive vocabulary! :-) (Ian Richard (Rich) Mayers)

“I was on a climb with Wally to Mt. Temple. The trail was over scree and was braided in parts. Wally knew the best way up and we reached the summit. I wouldn't have tackled this by myself”. (Tom Flanagan)

“Although Wally was a strong hiker he also led trips that were suitable for slower and less experienced hikers, frequently sweeping the trail on the way back without pressuring the slower hikers. Wally also helped Roger, a totally blind hiker, up the difficult chimney on Grotto, a trip that took him 13hours”
(Darlene Weger)

“We were on a ski trip to Elk Pass (the north one). On the way back it started to rain, and the trail up to the Mt. Norquay parking lot was becoming quite wet and slippery. Everyone was having traction problems, except Wally. When he passed us he said “my skis don’t slip”. (Tom Flanagan)

“We were just entering the forest on our way down from Grizzly Col and the person leading was talking about bear encounters. She looked around to tell us that there was one behind us. I thought she was just playing around but upon looking back realized that there really was a Grizzly bear and very close! Wally Drew was at the back of our group and closest to the bear. I imagine he was probably feeling somewhat vulnerable. I’m sure the rest of us were taking solace in the fact that someone else was closer. I thought we should get off the trail and made a beeline for a pile of rocks. I snapped a couple of quick pictures from the rocks which were to be my last line of defense. Wally was frantically digging in his pack for his bear spray. We were somewhat amused in spite of our dire circumstances. The bear was obviously a bit perturbed by all the commotion and turned off the trail, disappearing behind a small ridge. Someone suggested that we should continue quickly and not allow the bear to get past us. Not being one to get in the way of a Grizzly bear, I would have preferred to keep the bear in sight, whether it was behind or ahead of us. I had an uneasy feeling when the bear disappeared behind the ridge. Anyway, we continued as fast as we could with a view to putting some distance between it and us. My feelings were quickly justified when the bear popped out right behind us again. Maybe the bear was a bit disturbed to find us still ahead or maybe something else distracted it, but we kept going and looking back, never saw the bear again.” (Geoff Amos)



Wally and Eating

"Wally was a paratrooper in WWII, but he never said much about it. He did, however, still use rations from that time on his hikes. On one ski trip to Skoki, Wally and a few others decided not to stay in the lodge with us, but to camp nearby. The next day, this group was late in appearing. They said that Wally had become ill the previous evening, likely from eating WWII rations. I think that was the last time we ever heard about WWII rations.

One other souvenir from his paratrooper time was his mess tin. Although it had a smaller surface area than a dinner plate, it had high sides so that it could really be loaded up at potluck dinners. It was not unusual to see him make numerous trips to the dinner table, coming back with a full load each time." (Brian Westcott)

"I recall being at a potluck held in a picnic area after a hike. After the usual prodigious Ramblers potluck meal was complete, there was pie left over. Wally ate it." (Brian Westcott)

"At a skating party in 1967 at Albert Kaiser's cabin on Ghost Lake, Lesley Dickson had made a large pot of chili. When we had all taken enough there was still about a third of the pot left along with several buns. Wally said he could handle it and he did." (Darlene Weger)

Wally and Travel

"Wally liked to travel and I believe that he had visited over 90 countries. While in his 70's, he would go out with one of the adventure travel groups twice each year, once in spring and another time in the fall. When he turned 80, they told him that he couldn't come unless he had a companion to look after him (this was the year he climbed Mt. Temple!). I jokingly offered to be that companion, but we both knew that if we did go, just who would be looking after whom." (Brian Westcott)

"Wally's travels took him to many exotic places around the globe, and he would usually come back with a story of finding a real bargain on a haircut. He even did a cruise vacation (not his description) on a tramp freighter in the South Pacific." (Carl Potter)

Wally Being Wally

"I would have never joined Ramblers if it hadn't been for Wally. When I talked to a friend about cross-country skiing, he suggested I call Wally which I did. Wally invited me to go to a Rambler's Wednesday meeting and I never looked back. Ramblers changed my life." (Dorothy-Ann Reimer)

"I was very fond of Wally and find I miss him. I loved all the City walks from his home to buffet lunches that we did together in recent years, enjoying while he ate plateful after plateful of delicious food." (Ann Foltz)

"On a trip with Wally, this time a day hike to Twin Lakes, I saw another side of him. One of the participants complained after we were underway about blisters from the new boots she was breaking in. Wally hiked back to the cars, picked up her running shoes, and joined us again before we made the lunch spot." (Brian Westcott)

"Wally led my first trip with the Ramblers, up Goat's Eye Mountain. His advice on that trip holds true with many other times in life: "If you're moving when the rock hits you, it won't hurt as much." Wally was always moving, and he kept a lot of us on the move after him. A good friend who will be missed." (Marianne Flanagan)

“Wally was an institution in the hiking and skiing fraternity in the Foothills Nordic Ski Club and the Rocky Mountain Ramblers, and an inspiration to many. He was noted for leading some very l-o-n-g hikes on long weekends. He knew virtually every valley and mountain in the Calgary area and was always keen on finding even more places.” (Carl Potter)

“Despite his very serious nature, he had one heck of a sense of humour. He came to a party at my house and we all ended up playing charades. Imagine my surprise when there was Wally, crouched down and hopping like a bunny to illustrate some title. Wow!” (Dorothy- Ann Reimer)

“Wally liked to drive, summer and winter, with the car windows open. After the first freezing time, you learned to dress very warmly if you went in his car to the trailhead.” (Brian Westcott)

“Wally and my mother for a time, really enjoyed each others company. When she was here he used to take her out for a very long hike, and she always did well, so he told me she was one of the best women hikers.” (Ann Moran)

“On July, 1988, I rejoined Ramblers and hiked with them up a mountain across from Peyto Lake on Highway 93. I managed to keep up until we were near the top and then I came across a steep, nearly straight up part of the trail I couldn't navigate. After several unsuccessful attempts to continue, I resigned myself to staying where I was to have lunch. Shortly thereafter, Wally appeared and said he'd help me. Well, we didn't go up the way the others did because Wally found an "alternate" route. This route turned out to be a narrow ledge with a steep drop-off. I hung onto Wally for dear life and tried not to look down as he fearlessly helped me cross the ledge and ascend the rest of the mountain. I never forgot that act of kindness”(Ann Foltz)

“Wally committed immeasurable time and attention to the children and community, coming to read at Sunnyside School. Our family feels lucky to have got to share in the positive ripple effects of his presence; especially including his steady, quiet model of giving himself to the growth of and connection with the children.” (Alison – obituary guestbook)

“I met Wally at Sunnyside Elementary when I went to Grade 2 there in 2016. Wally read to me many times. He was kind and friendly. I am sorry he died. We will miss him. He came to Sunnyside every Tuesday. Good Bye Wally.” (*Emmett Wolska-Chaney* – obituary guestbook)

DREW, Charles Wallace (Wally)

May 11, 1926 – Seattle, Washington

January 16, 2020 – Calgary, Alberta

Wally Drew of Calgary, AB, passed away on Wednesday, January 16, 2020 at the age of 93 years.

Wally was born in Seattle, Washington, United States of America on May 11, 1926.

Wally received a B.S. degree in Mathematics and Science with emphasis on Geology from Yale University in 1950. In 1951, he earned an M.S. degree from University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin.

He served in the United States Army from July 1944 to August 1946 as a combat-infantryman and paratrooper in the Asia-Pacific Theater.

In the 1950s, Wally worked as a photo-geologist and geologist for various American Petroleum research companies both in Denver, Colorado and Calgary, Alberta. He eventually settled in Calgary and was employed by Sproule Engineering until his retirement in 1991. He was proud of his work and sometimes spoke of the challenges of his time in the Arctic.

Wally's love of the mountains and hiking and skiing led him to found the Y'd Horizons hiking group at the YMCA in the early 1950s. Then, in 1956, he joined the Rocky Mountain Ramblers, remaining a member for the rest of his life. He led innumerable Rambler trips; hiking, backpacking, and skiing. He even led a swimming trip to Pine Lake. In 1966, in honour of Canada's 100th birthday, Wally chaired the committee that built the Centennial Trail on Mt. Allen.

As a senior, he joined the Skrastins Outdoor Club for many enjoyable outings including one where (judging by the photos) he appeared to outrun a bear in the Highwood area.

Wally had many interests; meteorology, square dancing, and travel to foreign countries. His twice-a-year vacations took him to more than 90 countries.

In the last 14 years of his life, Wally was a grandfather reader for children at Hillhurst and Sunnyside schools, Calgary, a role which he came to love very much.

Wally became well known for his ability to take friends and acquaintances on trips into the Foothills and the Rockies, exploring the hills and mountains. At the age of 80 he proudly summited Mt. Temple, a 3544 metre peak near Lake Louise, Alberta.

Wally is survived by his sister Marya Griffin, Bellingham, WA, nieces Erin Griffin Christie (Bob), Lisa Griffin Novich (Chadd), Karen Hege Pearson (Jamie), Kristen Hege Biddle (Gibb) and one nephew

Barton Hege (Kathleen) as well as 10 great nieces and nephews. He was pre-deceased by his parents Muriel Ahsenfeltter "Dot" Drew and Charles Wallace "Jack" Drew and his sister Joan Drew Hegge.

The Rocky Mountain Ramblers will hold a Celebration of Life for Wally Drew on Sunday February 23, 2020, 1:00 pm – 4:00 pm at Rosemont Community Hall, 2807-10th Street NW. All are welcome to come and share their memories.

