



Dhaulagiri NE Ridge ©G.Lowe

Piolets d'Or 2023



An International
Celebration
of Grand
Alpinism

We are delighted to announce that at the 2023 Piolets d'Or in Briançon, the North American alpinist George Lowe will step on stage to be presented with the 15th Walter Bonatti – Piolets d'Or Lifetime Achievement Award.

PROGRAMME

TUESDAY, 14 NOVEMBER

- Piolets d'Or opening night
- Film screening and discussion evening

WEDNESDAY, 15 NOVEMBER

- 11 am to 4 pm: Abseil descent from the Pont d'Asfeld bridge with mountain guides from the Briançon Bureau des Guides.
- 2 pm to 4 pm: Book fair and signing sessions.
- 4 pm: Presentation of the ascents and press conference.
- 6:30 pm: Drinks and hors d'oeuvres.
- 8 pm: Gala evening.
- 10 pm: Concert and drinks.

THURSDAY, 16 NOVEMBER

- Introduction to climbing with the winners.

> 2023 LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD - GEORGE LOWE

Often cited as one of the greatest living North American alpinists, George Lowe began climbing at an early age when he joined his uncle Ralph Lowe, who was teaching his sons, Mike, Greg and Jeff, how to rock climb. Lowe would eventually author many major new climbs in the Tetons, Canadian Rockies, Alaska, and the Himalaya, and perhaps the following four ascents – or near ascents – exemplify his climbing career.

In 1974, with ex-British climber Chris Jones, Lowe made the first ascent, alpine style, of the north face of North Twin in the Canadian Rockies. Canadian Barry Blanchard, no mean alpinist himself, described this face as a sheer black wall of north-facing limestone, steeper than the Eiger, one and half times the height of El Capitan, and the hardest in the Rockies. It is also a full day of arduous mountain travel from the nearest road. Blanchard argues that the seven-day, 1974 ascent, with “a rope, a rack, and two packs” was harder than anything that had been done in the European Alps, if not beyond, at that time.

Over seven days of alpine style climbing in 1977, Lowe and Michael Kennedy made the first ascent of the Infinite Spur on the huge south face of Foraker, Alaska, a route that would become one of the great test pieces of the range. In 1983 he made the first ascent of the Kangshung Face of Everest. Forcing the lower ca 1,100m rock buttress, which now bears his name and is the technical crux of the route, was largely down to the persistence of Lowe. The first attempt, in 1981, reached around 7,000m, but a return two years later finished the job.

But for many alpinists perhaps even more impressive than these ascents is the 1978 attempt on the north ridge of Latok I, dubbed the Walker Spur of the Karakoram. Jim Donini, Michael Kennedy, George and his cousin Jeff Lowe spent 21 days climbing over 100 pitches above the Choktoi Glacier to reach a point around 150m below the unclimbed summit. They may have surmounted all the difficulties when a combination of wind, cold and Jeff Lowe's rapidly deteriorating condition due to altitude sickness forced a retreat. It remains one of the finest and most notable near misses in the history of alpinism, and despite literally dozens of subsequent attempts, no one has yet completed the route to the summit.

Michael Kennedy writes: “*there are few climbers who deserve to be described as titans. George Lowe is one of them. In a career that spans more than five decades and*

multiple generations, he has excelled in every form of the art, nowhere more so than in its most demanding and consequential genre: alpine climbing in the vast wilderness of North America and the Himalaya. From bold winter ascents during the late 1960s in the Tetons of Wyoming, and ground-breaking new routes in the early 1970s on Mount Alberta and North Twin in the Canadian Rockies, through a new route on Everest in 1983, and a solo ascent of Dhaulagiri in 1990, George has always exhibited a commitment to technical difficulty, small teams, and excellent style, as well as a fine-tuned sense of the great risks – and immense rewards – fundamental to operating in the alpine environment. In 1977, I joined him on the Infinite Spur of Mount Foraker, a climb that forever transformed my understanding of what is possible for a team of two in the great mountains of the world.

A year later, with Jim Donini and Jeff Lowe, we came close to making the first ascent of Latok I in Pakistan. Although we failed to reach the summit, we came home with something far more important: lifelong friendships that exemplify the brotherhood of the rope. George continues to climb with an energy, ability, and enthusiasm that exceeds partners fifty years his junior – witness his 26-hour ascent of The Nose on El Capitan in 2014 and a rapid ascent of Mount Huntington in Alaska in 2015. However, it is his personal attributes that endear him to so many. He remains humble and grounded, despite a life of noteworthy achievement, and is among the warmest, kindest, and most thoughtful people I know".

In the early 1970s Lowe gained a doctorate in physics, and this led to a long and successful career in systems engineering. He is an Honorary member of both the American Alpine Club and (British) Alpine Club, and in 2014 was president of the Piolets d'Or Jury.

A summary of some of his many fine ascents follows: :

1965

It is fitting, given the full title of the career award, that George made the first American ascent of the Bonatti Pillar on the Aiguille du Dru (roped to the British climber, Chris Jones, with whom he would later make significant first ascents). In the same year he would also make the first winter ascent of Mount Owen (3,942m) in the Tetons.

1966

First winter ascent of Mount Moran in the Tetons.

1968

First winter ascent of the north face Grand Teton.

1969

Climbed the Salathe Wall on El Capitan with his 18-year-old cousin Jeff Lowe. The same year he made the first ascent of the north face of Enclosure, at the time the most difficult route on the Grand Teton.

1971

First ascent of the north face of Huandoy Norte, Cordillera Blanca, Peru.

1972

First winter ascent of the west face of Grand Teton, and the first ascent of the north face of Mount Alberta in the Canadian Rockies.

1973

First ascent of the south face of Devils Thumb in the coast mountains of Alaska.

1974

First one-day winter ascent of the Grand Teton, and the first ascent of the north face of North Twin.

1975

An expedition to the Baltoro, Karakoram, shortly after it re-opened to mountaineers.

1976

A new route on the north face of Free Korea Peak, Ala Archa, in what is now Kyrgyzstan.

1977

First ascent of the north face of Mount Hunter, Alaska Range, with Michael Kennedy, after an initial attempt with cousin Jeff Lowe resulted in a difficult retreat from two-thirds height when the latter broke his ankle in a fall. Kennedy and Lowe then moved to Foraker for the first ascent of the Infinite Spur.

1978

Attempt on the north ridge of Latok I, Karakoram.

1980

First ascent of the north face of Mount Geikie, Canadian Rockies. In the same year he also created something of a record by climbing the Grand Teton as a rope of three with his father and his son (both also named George).

1983

First ascent of the Kangshung Face of Everest.

1986

Reached 7,950m on the north ridge of K2.

1990

Northeast Ridge of Dhaulagiri I, Nepal. From a tent at 6,400m, and with other team members incapacitated at the time, Lowe climbed alone up the Normal Route, bivouacking at 7,280m on his way to the summit. He bivouacked again at 7,280m on the descent.

1991

One day ascent of the Nose on El Captain with Alex Lowe (no relation).

Lowe continues to climb, and as noted by Micheal Kennedy, summited Mount Huntington via the West Face Couloir when he was 70.



NIVALES

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