

LOUIS SAMUEL STUR

1924-1989

*Do not go gently into that good night,
Old Age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

—Dylan Thomas

Everyone has a Louis Stur story. There's the one about two old climbers resting on the trail listening patiently as two younger climbers raved on about the route they'd just climbed on Mount Heyburn, the Stur-Ball route. Wild-eyed, they spoke passionately of Stur's lead up the chimney in 1958, one of the many classic routes he put up in the Sawtooths of Idaho during a climbing career of nearly four decades in the area. The old men let the boys ramble on before introducing themselves. Unknowingly, the boys were recounting their adventure for the men who had put up the route years before, Stur and Ball. The timely, delayed introduction was not an attempt to embarrass the young men. Doubtless Louis was enjoying himself, delighted by the climbers' enthusiasm for a fine line. It was the same enthusiasm, excitement and appreciation he'd come to know, enjoy and maintain for an entire lifetime, a lifetime of mountaineering.

Louis Stur's rewards from climbing were derived less from expanding the technical horizons of the day than from the fulfillment he gained simply by being in the mountains. He found pleasure in working with the stone. He enjoyed landscapes and wildlife as much as summits. He wasn't a conqueror of mountains; his love for the mountains was too deep for that. Rather than tread upon them, he chose to climb among them. Setting his eyes on Mount Heyburn in the early days, he reflected in a 1975 *Off Belay* interview that "it's such an impressive, beautiful mountain that I thought it deserved some nice routes," as if seeking to give the mountain something in return for its beauty. He went on to say, "It's the fascination of pioneering the mountains. You look at some climb and . . . it might go, it might not. Once you describe it by a decimal, part of the fascination is lost." In 1959 he wrote in the *American Alpine Journal* about his beloved Sawtooths, saying, "Though the principal peaks have been climbed, we set ourselves the modest task of discovering the best and the most enjoyable routes." He and his climbing partners became responsible for the development in the Sawtooths following a period of relative dormancy in the previous decades.

Although he had traveled widely in his sixty-five years, including visits to Africa, Patagonia, New Zealand, China, Tibet, Nepal and the Alps, he found the great mountains and the great climbs right at home. He was content to grab a local partner, or to climb solo, and explore his own adopted backyard, the Sawtooths of Idaho, which caught his eye on a visit to Sun Valley in 1951. That visit lasted the thirty-eight remaining years of his life.

As the Russians invaded his homeland of Hungary, Louis left his family, friends and the nearby Alps where he had learned to climb, ski and appreciate the mountains' offerings. Prior to leaving, he had earned a two-year law degree and

was graduated summa cum laude with a degree in commerce. He continued his studies in Austria, following his exodus from Hungary, in diplomacy and international commerce and went on to study economics as well. His educational excellence earned him passage to the United States via a scholarship offered by the University of Nebraska, which became his springboard to Idaho, Sun Valley and most significantly, the Sawtooths.

While working on his doctorate in economics, he and a few friends journeyed out West in the winter of 1951. He intended to return to Nebraska the following summer but found himself working as a night clerk in a hotel and spending what came to be an endless summer in Sun Valley. He worked his way through the ranks and became director of the Sun Valley Hotels. He was considered by many as the ambassador of Sun Valley due to his endless charm, infectious generosity and genuine respect for manner and protocol.

His attraction to the Sawtooths was boundless and he went on to work out numerous new routes and winter ascents in a true pioneering spirit. His record of first ascents includes those found on Heyburn, Warbonnet, Rotten Monolith, Silicon Tower, Hyndman and Devil's Bedstead to name just a few. The mountains, indeed, were a source of inspiration to Louis, for even in the worst of times he went there for fulfillment. For example, following the tragic loss of his recently wed wife, he sought solace on Mount Heyburn where he mounted a plaque in her memory and then tossed the wedding ring into Redfish Lake never to marry again. He continued to visit the spot over the remaining twenty-six years, shedding light on the romance and passion of Louis Stur. This type of action lives in the minds of those close to him. A friend quoted in Ketchum's *Wood River Journal* said, "You've got a man who in 65 years of living had done more and touched more people than most could have done in 150 years."

In addition to mountaineering, he pursued interests in piano, accordion, French and traveling around the globe. He was fond of reading and writing poetry, but his true passion, other than mountaineering, was for flying gliders. He began to fly at the age of 14, introduced the sport to Sun Valley and enjoyed it worldwide, having once soared above the Great Rift Valley of Kenya.

Louis came to rest at the base of Mount Ebert in the heart of the Sawtooths. His camera film was developed after the fall and displayed a complete panorama; Louis had been to yet another summit that day. Louis was climbing alone so the details of his fall will remain a mystery.

Louis Stur will fade, as do all, into distant memory, but it is certain that he will never be forgotten. A movement is being initiated to name a local peak in his honor and plans for his annual birthday climb were carried out with the ascent of Mount Heyburn, just as Louis had done for years with his friends. A plaque was erected in his honor and the summit dusted with his ashes.

Louis Stur's mountaineering accomplishments were bold and monumental but difficult to trace as he chose not to exploit his endeavors other than a simple accounting offered periodically to the *American Alpine Journal*. It was his style that left the lasting impression. He loved life, which was evident in the manner he chose to play his out. We should all benefit from his example and strive to

keep pace throughout our own lives with his enthusiasm and love for the mountains and for mankind.

GREG WILSON

WILLIAM E. "SMOKE" BLANCHARD
1915-1989

It was a windy spring evening in the Owens Valley when James Wilson came striding toward me with that look, the "you never want to see" look, on his face. Smoke had been fatally injured in an automobile accident. Where? The Mojave Desert. When? Just coming home, via Los Angeles, from a holiday of rambling in the Italian Alps. It seemed that Smoke would always return from his far-flung travels to his little upstairs "treehouse" apartment on Willow Street in Bishop.

Smoke would return from one string of treks and expeditions only to prepare for yet another. During his hometown layovers, he would delight his many friends in the Eastern Sierra with truly wonderful tales of things he had seen and experienced on his travels through Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet, China, India, Siberia, Kenya, Mexico, Canada, Alaska, Japan, Japan, Japan. During the past few years, Smoke had taken to living about half the time in Japan, walking and scrambling through the Japanese Alps. His visits to Bishop became less frequent and time spent with him became precious.

Many of the best times with Smoke were "Buttermilking," scrambling often moderate fifth-class routes through the crags and boulder fields of the Buttermilk Country at the foot of the eastern escarpment of the Sierra Nevada. These outings were as intriguing as any wild overseas exploration because of Smoke's unique way of sharing his deep appreciation of nature, his practice of "Picnic and Pilgrimage." The stimulating combination of his intellectual observation and physical challenge, the enjoyment and pleasure of where you were, coupled with great respect and awe for the mountains and the wilderness, was tremendous.

Though Smoke was a best friend and frequent climbing partner of the late, legendary Norman Clyde and though he was a highly respected mountain guide, he steered clear of extreme alpinism or high-standard rock climbing, preferring what he termed "mild mountaineering." His standard of climbing was mild. The technical standard of the routes he tackled was never beyond moderate fifth class, what he call "3.9" with a smile. He applied a minimalist's equipment use and environmental impact ethic. During the early 1970s, while director of the Palisades School of Mountaineering, Smoke set a strong example and often gave stern lessons in respect for the wilderness, significantly influencing the climbing style and experience of hundreds of climbing students and dozens of mountain guides. His mild style by no means diminished the physical challenges he confronted. Rather than chase the numbers in the technical climbing game,