

CHARLES HAROLD WILTS
1920-1991

Charles (Chuck) Harold Wilts, a 26-year member of the American Alpine Club, died of a heart attack on March 12 while hiking on Echo Mountain in the San Gabriel Mountains, north of Pasadena, California. He was born on January 30, 1920 in Los Angeles, the son of Charles H. and Rose Goldberg Wilts. At the time of his death, he was Professor Emeritus of Electrical Engineering and Applied Physics at the California Institute of Technology. He is survived by me, his wife, his son Charles and daughters Gail and Janet.

Chuck received his B.S. (1940), M.S. (1941) and Ph.D (1948) at the California Institute of Technology. He joined the faculty in 1947. During World War II, he was appointed assistant supervisor in Aircraft Ballistics on the Rocket Project for both the Army and Navy. He worked on retrorockets and on fuses for igniting solid propellant.

Early in Chuck's career at Caltech, his work focused on the development and application of large-scale analog computers. In 1960, he began research in ferromagnetism in metal alloys and garnets, with emphasis on the use of thin films as research medium. He studied structure and surface properties, spin wave resonance and magnetization dynamics. He was a member of the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineering, the American Association for Advancement of Science and Sigma Xi. He wrote numerous scientific papers and authored *Principles of Feedback Control*. After retirement, he continued his research projects in magnetism.

Chuck began his relationship with the mountain world early in his life. From the age of six months until his mid twenties, he spent his summers with his family in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California, camping in the Tuolumne Meadows and Yosemite Valley. With his father, he hiked, backpacked and fished, gaining his first experience in mountaineering. That early life endowed him with his lifelong love of wild places, rugged terrain, silent mountain splendor, beautiful landscape, the thrill of high-country exposure and challenges.

We met in June of 1941 in Tuolumne Meadows. In the fall of 1941, on a Sierra Club outing, Les Grossman introduced Chuck to the greatest love of his outdoor adventures, rock climbing. I was an initiate at the same time. Chuck became a Sierra Club member in 1942. Soon after joining the Sierra Club Rock Climbing Section, he discovered another lifetime outdoor activity, skiing, and he joined the Sierra Club Ski Mountaineering Section. He served as chairman of both sections. In 1945, he was a founding member of a skiers folk-dance group, "The Mountain Dancers," which is still active today. After the war, we mountaineered, rock climbed, skied and folk danced together and then married in 1947.

During the war years, he and climbing buddies made trips to local climbing areas. After the war, he spent much time in Yosemite Valley and at Tahquitz Rock, making many first ascents and attempts. He and Spencer Austin competed with Salathé and Nelson to make the first ascent of the Lost Arrow Chimney in

1946 and 1947. They bivouacked on the climb several times and, although they lost the competition, they helped make big-face climbs popular in Yosemite. Other Yosemite climbs included the first free ascent of the Higher Cathedral Spire, first ascents on the classic east face of Cathedral Peak in Tuolumne Meadows, the north ridge of Half Dome, the Leaning Tower Traverse and the south face of Rixon's Pinnacle. First ascents in the Sierra Nevada included three minarets: the east face of Starr, the south ridge of Ken and Jensen Minaret. Other ascents were the southeast face of Banner Peak, the northeast ridge of Mount Darwin, the northeast wall of Mount Morrison and the south arête of Matthes Crest. In the Canadian Rockies, first ascents included Mounts Symthe, Gec and Nelson. Some of the other climbing areas he enjoyed were the Needles in South Dakota, the Tetons, the Pinnacles and Joshua Tree National Monument.

At Tahquitz Rock, Chuck made too many first ascents to list. He also published in the 1956 second edition of the *Guide to Tahquitz Rock* the first official "decimal system" used for classifying and comparing climbing routes. Climbers originally called it the "Sierra-Wilts Decimal System." Chuck objected to the original name and finally it came to be known as the "Yosemite Decimal System." Throughout the years, he updated and published the guide five times. In 1964, he became a member of the American Alpine Club, which published the fourth, fifth and sixth edition of the *Guide to Tahquitz and Suicide Rocks*. He donated the book's proceeds to the Club. During Chuck's many years of climbing, he wrote articles for climbing magazines, Sierra Club publications and journals on safety concerns, rope durability and climbing hardware. He invented the knife-blade piton. He also built a device to test the strength of climbing ropes.

In Chuck's lifetime, he saw a revolutionary change in the sport of rock climbing. He began climbing with manila rope and heavy, bulky European climbing hardware. His footwear included tennis shoes, hiking boots and even, on occasion, nailed boots. His clothing consisted of army-surplus full-cut climbing pants, a pullover parka and a brimmed shade hat. Climbing was confined to weekends or vacations.

For several years, Chuck enthusiastically shared his interest by teaching a rock-climbing class to Caltech students. He also encouraged and joined the students in ascending campus buildings at night when they could not be seen by campus security. Needless to say, the Administration frowned on such "dangerous shenanigans." A Caltech climbers' guide for routes on the campus buildings was written by the students and dedicated to Chuck.

During the winter months, Chuck took to his skis. He earned the special "Big Badge" membership in the Ski Mountaineering Section of the Sierra Club for outstanding knowledge in mountaineering and snow craft. The Sierra Club honored him with the "Leadership Award" in 1980. He was on the Mount Waterman Ski Patrol for many years. He enjoyed downhill skiing, but ski mountaineering was a top priority. He went on many winter trips to the Sierra Nevada. Just a year before his death, he was in the Selkirks in Canada for the fourth time, snowcat skiing for a week in beautiful powder snow.

Chuck had many interests. He loved classical music and played the piano with great skill. He traveled for business and pleasure to Russia, Japan, many European countries and Mexico. His projects at home included the skills of carpenter, mason, plumber, cabinet maker, tool designer. He became a family genealogist and had just completed his book on his maternal line three days before his death. He researched and recorded information on the computer on the Mayan and Hebrew calendars. He was concerned about environmental and social problems facing the country and the world. He had a joy of living, a ready smile, a contagious laugh and displayed great enthusiasm for all the activities he undertook. Chuck leaves a record of many achievements and interests, but the one that remained to the end was a lifelong love affair with the wilderness of mountains.

ELLEN BEAUMONT WILTS

KENT ALAN JAMESON
1958-1991

Kent Alan Jameson of Oxnard, California, was killed on July 7 in a rappelling accident while descending Thunderbird Peak in the Sierra Nevada. Kent's loss will be deeply felt by many. He left behind a substantial climbing record, excelling equally at rock, ice and mountaineering. His love for the high peaks took him to the tops of Denali, Alpamayo and the Mexican volcanoes. His list of climbs in the Tetons was formidable and included ascents of the north face and north ridge of the Grand Teton, the south buttress of Moran, the Snaz and a winter ascent of the Black Ice Couloir. He was a leading figure of the climbing scene around Salt Lake City in the early 1980s as a part of a small group of climbers responsible for repeating hard routes and pioneering new ones.

Kent was a truly unique and outstanding character. Blessed as he was with a combination of intense drive, a volatile temper and a flare for the unusual, he gave color and texture to otherwise mundane climbing experiences. There were many times when I belayed him long after dark as he refused to give up on a lead, even several hundred feet up a frozen waterfall. Yes, he was a driven dude for sure. One of my last memories of Kent is of a changed person. With a different perspective derived from an enforced layoff from climbing and a change of jobs, it was a mellower Kent that met me at Joshua Tree. A small group of us listened as Kent spoke eloquently about problems of the world while we passed a long, cold New Year's Eve stuffed in the back of a van. What a simple pleasure good friends, good conversation, good music and a fine Joshua Tree night added up to. Kent was one of us. Though he had been removed by distance for some years, his presence was felt. Our early years of climbing together were magical. Propelled by his drive, we pushed our personal limits and felt as if we were making our mark, however tiny it may have been. Much like John Long and the Stonemasters of the 1970s, we felt important, courageous and vital. Kent will be missed.

KEN GYGI