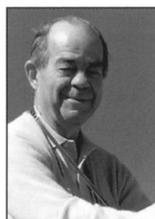


# IN MEMORIAM

---

## MORGAN HARRIS 1916-2005

The last of the great Yosemite climbing pioneers of the 1930s has died. Morgan Harris, during his 88 years, lived an astonishingly rich life, serious climbing being only a small part of it. This obituary will necessarily emphasize his climbs over a short career—some eight years. But I must unfortunately (for this is a journal of exploits done in the mountains) gloss over his greater triumphs: his professional life as a scientist, his excellent family, his fabulous birding career. Climbing is not everything. Morgan was truly a Renaissance man.



Morgan Harris

Born in Idaho, he soon ended up in the San Francisco Bay area, a good move, for he fell in with the Sierra Club Rock Climbing Section, a group of Young Turks formed in the early 1930s to climb in untouched Yosemite Valley. A week after his 19th birthday, in 1935, he teamed up with Dick Leonard and Jack Riegelhuth to make the first ascent of the towering Washington Column. This was a pretty bold achievement, in my opinion, for even today there is no obvious route up this 1,300-foot, seemingly vertical wall. (Their route, called the Piton Traverse, remains to this day a mystery. Where did they actually go? A later route, more direct and popular, meant that the 1935 climb was soon destined to fade from memory.)

A climb that a vast number of AAC members have done, or at least heard about, is the Royal Arches. Here again is a Yosemite route without an obvious line. Harris, by 1936 a junior at the University of California at Berkeley, had studied the cliff with binoculars. He knew the giant curving arches couldn't be climbed, but off to the left lay non-overhanging terrain, studded with trees and blessed with cracks. One attempt, in torrid weather, failed, and he spent a week in the hospital recovering from sunstroke. After yet another attempt, Harris and two others succeeded in October 1936. The climbing on the route was not too tough, but the routefinding and rope techniques proved daunting. One new procedure, called by Harris a "swinging rope traverse," overcame a blank section. This was likely the first "pendulum" done in California.

Later the trio reached what Harris later described as "an old tree-trunk," a feature soon to become famous as the Rotten Log. This 25-foot-long, foot-thick dead log bridged a chasm, affording a unique method of reaching the other side. Harris had spotted this golden trunk from the Valley floor and hoped it would be strong enough to hold his weight. It was, though it vibrated crazily as he led across it. Many thousands of climbers shuffled along this shaky pole in the decades to come; it finally parted company with the rock in the spring of 1984.

Harris was on a roll. On the following day he and two others tried to reach the top of Sentinel Rock from the north, but failed. The next day, beginning a long and fruitful climbing partnership, he teamed up with David Brower to make the first ascent of Cathedral Chimney, the huge gash separating the Higher and Middle Cathedral rocks. The following day the pair were first up Panorama Cliff, the somber wall rising above Vernal Fall. Thus, in the space of four days, Harris made first ascents of three major Valley features and attempted one more.

Harris and Brower utterly dominated Yosemite climbing in the mid- and late 1930s, establishing nine more routes together, including long and involved climbs such as Yosemite

Point Couloir and the Circular Staircase on Sentinel Rock. Harris ended up with 14 Valley first ascents.

Of one ascent together, Brower wrote about Harris climbing upward in “wet tennis shoes.” He went on to say, “I couldn’t discover how he led the pitch and still don’t know. While I prefer to think it was because we were hurried and I was carrying the pack, I nevertheless had to use that forbidden handhold—the rope.”

After World War II Harris remained an active backpacker and wilderness skier. On New Year’s Day 1955 he was cross-country skiing near Lake Tahoe when he came upon a fresh avalanche track with three trapped skiers yelling for help. One man, they yelled, is over there and completely under. Harris quickly dug out Allen Steck, blue and near death.

Of his non-climbing life, the challenges and kudos were just beginning. By 1945 he was teaching in the zoology department at UC Berkeley, remaining there for more than 40 years, and as chair for 11. He specialized in cell biology, making significant contributions to the biological mechanisms of drug resistance.

I once wanted to ask him a question about the old days and so called his home. His wife, Lola, replied, “He’s at work; try him there.” He was 77 that year, working at the Berkeley campus, still fascinated with his research. We shall miss his dedication, his gentleness, his humanity. If our last years were as calm and as productive as Morgan’s, we should count ourselves blessed.

STEVE ROPER, AAC

#### ROBERT F. KAMPS 1931-2005

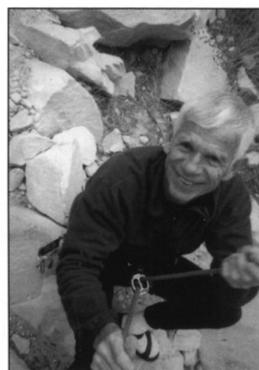
Having lived this long, I’ve found the most important measure of our climbing days is not what grades or climbs we achieve, but what we get from it all down deep, especially our times with others. On these counts, my friend and longtime climbing partner Bob Kamps got full measure. He loved moving well and precisely on rock. His footwork, finesse, intensity, devotion to good style, and winning smile told you joy was his. As well, he made scores of lasting friends across three generations, influencing both their climbing and their lives. Twenty-four spoke from the heart at his memorial at Stoney Point in L.A. and numerous others did the same at [www.BobKamps.com](http://www.BobKamps.com). Listen to a few of those he met along the way (quotes edited to fit space):

“The climbing/bouldering ethos we had was primarily due to Mr. Kamps. Over the years I’ve by now seen various big names climb—at Camp 4, Stoney, Smith, but of all, two people stand out in terms of the control and precision of their climbing and presence on the rock: Bob Kamps and ....”—John Reed

“In the course of 25 years of doing outdoor sports, I have only met a handful of beings that have had Bob’s blend of humility, core, and accomplishments. He set the high bar.”—Brett Valle

“His true legacy is his effect on other people and his ability to help them grow through his gentle encouragement and acceptance ... that is his true legacy.”—Chris Wegener

“I found Bob did most of his talking about climbing through the act of climbing.



Bob Kamps *Carrie Sundra*