

he founded—rebuilding inner city areas of Seattle and expanding ski resorts in the Cascades.

He strongly believed in helping rectify social and racial injustices and contributed most of his considerable wealth to such causes, often as an anonymous donor. He co-founded the Bullitt Foundation, which is still addressing the conservation needs of America's wilderness and mountain areas. True to his principles, he made sure that he was broke (or nearly so) when he died, sitting in his house in view of the mountains he loved.

ALEX BERTULIS

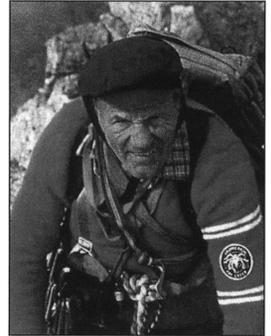
RICCARDO CASSIN 1909–2009

In 2009 the (British) Alpine Club accorded its honorary membership to Riccardo Cassin, one of the legends of Italian mountaineering. Cassin had celebrated his 100th birthday just three and a half months before. Though he could not travel to Chamonix to receive the certificate, he was still in good health. Four months later, however, he died at his home at Piani Resinelli, facing the spectacular crags of his Grigna.

Cassin was born in Friuli, an eastern region in northern Italy, which then was one of the poorest in the country. His father had emigrated to the United States, hoping to have his family rejoin him, but was killed in an accident at work. Little Riccardo, bound to help his mother and younger sister, moved to Lecco (in northernmost Italy just below the Swiss border) with an uncle and worked as an apprentice at a blacksmith's shop. Cassin loved to recount his amazement arriving at Lecco—a wonderland to him, with a beautiful lake and astonishing hills a few minutes from anywhere in town. He worked hard at the smith's shop, yet he had time in summer daily to swim, run, and scramble uphill, all without spending a cent. He loved sports and was fit for many. He ran on foot because he had no bike and he borrowed one to win bicycle races. Those were the years when the Italian Government, created free gyms for working people, where Cassin practiced boxing. He was very good at it, but his coach told him that he had to choose between boxing and rock climbing. He opted for rock.

For climbers, Lecco was, and is, a paradise, with steep walls rising all around the town and, higher, the Grigna unfolding a countless number of even steeper towers and spires. The Grigna has been the first playground for generations of climbers. An extraordinary woman alpinist, Mary Varale, also came to the Grigna. She was from the Mediterranean Liguria region and was rich enough to climb all over the Alps. At Piani Resinelli, the departing point for ascents of the south face of the Grigna, she met Cassin. They climbed together, appreciated each other's ability, and Mary returned with Emilio Comici, a famous climber from Trieste who knew the sophisticated techniques being practiced by Austrians. He taught those techniques and skills to Riccardo and his friends, transforming them from rough amateurs into formidable alpinists.

The deeds and achievements of Riccardo Cassin are well known and recorded in numerous anthologies and histories of mountaineering. What made Cassin and his partners so different from almost all other climbers in the 1930s was their talent on both rock and ice. What distinguished Cassin from his partners, though they were as skilled and tough as he, was his



Riccardo Cassin in 1987.

strength of character and his determination. He was a born leader, and he prided himself on accomplishing his ascents during his first push. So it was in 1935 at Torre Trieste and on the north face of the Cima Ovest di Lavaredo in the Dolomites, in 1937 on the northeast face of the Piz Badile, and in 1938 on the Walker Spur of the Grandes Jorasses. Those are only the most famous of his long list of first ascents.

After World War II, during which he led a squad of partisans, Cassin resumed climbing and fully displayed his talent as a leader. This also caused him grief, when after a reconnaissance up the Baltoro Glacier with Ardito Desio in 1953, Desio was named leader of the Italian expedition to K2 the following year and excluded Cassin from the team. It was clear that Desio, a dictatorial boss, could not bear another leader in his group.

Cassin's revenge was the Gasherbrum IV expedition in 1958. Under his leadership, the summit of the extremely difficult 7,925-meter mountain was reached by Walter Bonatti (another victim of Desio's authoritarian intolerance—see the K2 book review earlier in this *AAJ*) and Carlo Mauri. But Cassin's masterpiece was what is now called the Cassin Ridge on the south face of Mt. McKinley, where in 1961, he led his entire team of Ragni di Lecco (Lecco Spiders) to the summit and down. Other expeditions followed: to the Caucasus (1966), Jirishanca in the Andes (1969), and Lhotse in the Himalaya (1975). In 1987, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of his first ascent on the northeast face of Piz Badile, he climbed it at the age of 78. After the ascent Fulvio Mariani, a filmmaker and friend of his, complained about not having been informed.

"We could have filmed you," Mariani said.

"Why not?" said Cassin. "Let's do it again."

So he climbed the Badile once more. But he scolded journalists who wrote that he had repeated his own route twice. "The second ascent was not valid," he said, "because there was not the descent: a helicopter came to the top to fetch me!"

That was Riccardo Cassin.

MIRELLA TENDERINI

JONATHAN COPP 1974–2009

Of all my friends who *live* their lives, I never thought that he would die. And even if he did, I thought he would surely rise like a Phoenix and keep on living.

We last climbed together in the summer of 2008—life gets busy, I guess—and not much had changed with our usual late-start junk-show reminiscences of airport and travel fiascos. By mid-morning we stood in the Chasm Lake Cirque.

"What should we climb?"

"Maybe something up there?" came Jonny's characteristic reply. "We'll figure it out."

Strong as hell. Good at everything. Wild eyes that burned with life. A mystic who embraced the unknown and unknowable. The best hugs. Huge, toothy grin. Without a doubt the partner you wanted if—and when—the shit hit the fan. He'd just laugh. The greatest laugh. He had an unrelenting optimism.

"Nah, I think it'll work out!" seemed the most common phrase when we climbed.



Jonny Copp on the summit of Fitz Roy in 2005. *Self portrait*