

BILL BRIGGS

Bill Briggs is regarded by most as the leading pioneer figure of big mountain skiing, in the United States. His achievements in both high traverse skiing and first descents were defining moments in the history of alpine skiing.

Briggs was born in Augusta, Maine on December 21, 1931, without a hip socket on his right side. He underwent surgeries as a child to create one so he could walk. His doctors believed that eventually he would be confined to a wheelchair in adult life.

He proved to be a natural athlete and was able to teach himself to ski. While attending Philips Exeter Academy he met Bob Bates a teacher and devoted mountaineer who served as his mentor. He attended Dartmouth College becoming a member of the famed Dartmouth Outing Club, which has produced some of America's finest skiers. However, he never graduated leaving early to pursue a life of "climbing, skiing and singing." The latter interest included a time in New York's famed Greenwich Village coffee houses.

In 1955 he was certified as a ski instructor, which began a key phase of his career that has continued for over a half century. Since 1967 he has been associated as an instructor and owner with the ski school at Snow King Mountain in Wyoming where he practices his Certainty Training Method and has published widely on ski instructional practices.

It was, however, as a big mountain skier making several important first descents and high mountain traverses that made Bill Briggs' name a legend. One might regard his achievements as that of a dare devil but as friend and colleague, Roberts French has observed, "Brigger was the most controlled precise skier I've ever observed." He brought to the mountain an aptitude for serious risk assessment, careful planning, training and a conservative yet athletic technique. He also could conceive of skiing places others could not even imagine would be possible.

In 1957 he completed, with three friends, a high traverse from British Columbia's Bugaboos to Rogers Pass that was the first high traverse on skis in the Canadian Rockies. In 1961 he completed the first modern style ski descent of Mount Rainier. Then he submitted himself to surgery that would fuse his defective hip socket. In 1967 he did a first descent of the Middle Teton and the next year skied down Mount Moran's Skillet Glacier. On June 15, 1971 he skied the 13,770 foot Grand Teton after hiking to the top. It was a seminal moment in big mountain skiing. He completed his career of first descents by skiing Mount Owen in the Tetons in 1974. Among many awards and tributes is his induction into the Intermountain Ski Hall of Fame in 2003.

