

John Richard Gow (August 13, 1946–October 8, 2024)

John was a man whose love for the mountains was a true passion. He shared his expertise with boundless enthusiasm and a generous spirit, leaving an indelible mark on Western Canada's ski industry.

John's father, Lieutenant Colonel Harry B. Gow, was posted in Banff as a young RCMP Constable, where he met Dorothy Vernon-Wood. Dorothy raised John on tales of her youth in the Rockies as the daughter of Tex Vernon-Wood, a guide and packer working around Assiniboine and the Spray Lakes in the 1920s and 30s. While military postings often took John and his three siblings to Ottawa, he always considered the family's Columbia Valley ranch to be home.

At the age of 17, John found his first job in the ski business as a lift operator at Lake Louise. He was hired shortly afterwards by Bev and Cliff White at Sunshine Village—at the time, a small log lodge with two T-bars. He became a certified ACMG mountain guide in 1967 and co-founded High Horizons Mountaineering, a guiding company running youth summer camps.

On April 10, 1969, John survived a plane crash in the Purcell Mountains, emerging on a logging road near Golden after five days and a 15-mile walk through waist-deep snow. Severe frostbite led to both his feet being amputated. Undeterred, he became a trailblazer in adaptive sports, winning multiple medals at the first-ever 1974 World Para Alpine Skiing Championships and Canada's first Paralympic alpine gold in slalom two years later.

John continued under Bev and Cliff's mentorship, eventually becoming General Manager and President of Sunshine. He oversaw a major expansion of the area, including the installation of the gondola. He was also President of the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides (1972–79), Chair of the National Advisory Council on Fitness and Amateur Sport (1980–1983), and active in the Banff community as Chair of the Hospital Board, a member of Town Council, and President of the Chamber of Commerce. From 1982–1997, John was owner and President of Silver Star Mountain Resort. He also served as Director of Tourism British Columbia (1997–1999), Chair of the Tourism Industry Association of Canada (1991–98), Chair of the Canada West Ski Areas Association, and Chair of the Canadian Ski Area Operators Association.

John married Heather Chapple in 1976. They went on to have six children: Sherrill, Christine, David, Michelle, Fraser and Matthew.

John's later consultant work as an expert witness for the defence of ski resorts and snow resort design took him across Canada, and as far as Australia and China. He travelled widely with longer stops in France and Thailand, where he became dedicated to long-distance cycling. Notable rides include cycling through Nepal, a 1,200 km journey across France with his then 11-year old twins, celebrating his 60th birthday with l'Etape du Tour from Gap to Alpe d'Huez with his son-in-law Ivor, and over 300 trips up the Mt Norquay road.

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John returned to his beloved Bow Valley for the final decade of his life. He continued to find joy in canoeing, cycling, walking his beautiful malamute Karhus, and, of course, skiing with friends and family—including his granddaughter Davey.

At his request there will be no memorial service, but his family would like for his many friends to remember him fondly the next time they are in the mountains on a bluebird day.