

Thinking of Jim Wilcox

Chuck Boyd

I first met Jim in 1985, a period in Connecticut climbing when new route development was at its peak. I heard through the community that there was a new kid in town out climbing all the time, and since I was out of work at the time I should meet this guy! Well through that meeting a friendship developed that led us through some of the greatest adventures of our lives. Jim was involved in many of the first ascents in CT during this time, either climbing the route, belaying, or placing in the protection. Obsession and Scylla were two of the major ascents Jim was involved in. His crowning achievement, however, was his first ascent of Maxine's Wall at the Grand Cliff, a necky lead of steep desperate traprock face climbing. He named the route after his Mom.

Another contribution to CT climbing was that Jim wrote the first guidebook to Chatfield Hollow, with Rick Murnane contributing the line drawings. Jim's leads of Anticipation and Mother's Lament set him way ahead of other CT climbers. His leads of Thor's Hammer, and The Last Unicorn (NH) encouraged all of us to be Jim's partner, because he would lead the hard and scary pitches!

During the 80's, Jim's house was climbing central for CT climbing. He was involved with all of our access and protection issues, including commando tactics at the Winter Wall. Jim served for a time on the Board of the RMF, but is most remembered in CT for his upgrading and replacement of fixed protection, when we had some.

For a while, Jim got into soloing and on-sighted Maria Redirect (5.11a) and other Gunks classics like Ken's Crack and Sliding Board on Whitehorse Ledge up in NH. Ice climbing was another area where Jim shined. He spent a lot of time up at Lake Willoughby, VT climbing Crazy Diamond, Plug and Chug, Mindbender, Renormalization, and Twenty Below Zero Gully.

Jim's biggest alpine ascent was a 3000 foot rock climb up the Piz Badile in Switzerland with Bob Clark and Chad Hussey. But what Jim is remembered most for was his love of big wall climbing. When he got the urge to aid climb, he went up to the Adirondacks and climbed Sailor's Dive, which we later went back and free climbed. Jim made several trips to Yosemite Valley; a place to him that defined what climbing is all about. He climbed The Prow on Washington's Column, the Chouinard-Herbert on Sentinel Rock, and Crest Jewel on North Dome, Royal Arches, Middle Cathedral, Mr. Natural, Midterm, and Free Blast. The highlight of all this climbing was Jim's ascent of the Salathe Wall on El Capitan, a defining moment in his life and mine.

As Jim now watches down on us from his last bivy in the sky, we would like to honor his achievements by creating the Jim Wilcox Award, a living memorial to Jim's adventurous spirit and a catalyst for the future adventures of others on big walls throughout the world.

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