

# Keeping It Up With The Smiths

Balancing a passion for adventure with kids and career doesn't come easy, but when it works, the rewards are lofty. Chic Scott reminisces on a Kootenay mountain family establishing its roots

BY CHIC SCOTT

ON A GREY DECEMBER DAY IN 1965, Dave Smith and I turned our collars to the wind and stuck our thumbs out at the cars racing out of New York City. We had just met on an Icelandic Airlines flight from Luxembourg. After six months travelling Europe, he was returning to his home in Spokane, Washington, and I was on my way back to Calgary after two months on the road. After a few hours of standing on the side of the New York freeway, we agreed it was hopeless, and Dave lent me eight dollars for a bus ticket so we could travel to Montreal. It was our first adventure together.

In Montreal we stayed with my aunt and uncle, then took the train west. As we crossed snow-covered Canada, we talked of future climbs and ski adventures. Sitting late at night in the dome car, watching the red and green signal lights slide by, it seemed that the future was ours and time was limitless. There was little talk of marriage, family and future responsibilities. After a few days together at my home in Calgary, we bade farewell at the southern limits of the city where Dave stuck out his thumb again, this time heading south of the border.

Although we kept in touch sporadically for the next few years, it wasn't until the spring of 1971 that we connected again, this time in Leysin, Switzerland, a beautiful little village high above the Rhone Valley. I was teaching chemistry at the

Leysin American School and Dave was a bartender at the Club Vagabond, a popular gathering place for young folks, and the home of the International School of Mountaineering (ISM). Before long we were roped together on the granite aiguilles above Chamonix, France, and were both guiding at ISM for Dougal Haston, at the time one of the greatest climbers in the world.

That autumn Dave decided to immigrate to Canada, and Molly Asche, a young woman from California whom he had met earlier that summer, chose to join him. In Calgary they lived at a communal pad on Memorial Drive called T-square, sharing a small space with climbers like George Homer and ski mountaineer Ron Robinson. They joined the ragged group at the Calgary Mountain Club, and Dave worked at The Hostel Shop selling skis and mountaineering gear.

In May 1973, Dave and I completed our first big ski trip together. Along with Don Gardner and Ron Robinson, we skied the Rogers Pass to Bugaboos Traverse, only the second time it had ever been done. The 15-day journey was one of the most

enjoyable adventures of my life. Caught in a storm on the shoulder of Mount Sugarloaf for five days, we waited patiently, listening to the wind drift snow high around our tent. By the purring stove, Dave and I talked of travel and adventure. Molly had wisely given Dave the freedom to follow his star. Arriving at the Bugaboos we were driven by Jim Stone (the owner of the original sawmill that Hans Gmoser used in the early years of heli-skiing) to Brisco, where we were treated to a well-deserved steak dinner and beer.

Two months later, Dave and I were again climbing together in Europe, this time in Switzerland. One of our more memorable adventures was climbing the north face of the Dent d'Hérens, a 1,400-metre ice

face near Zermatt. Starting at midnight by headlamp, we topped out at 10:00 pm, then sat through the night, watching the stars in the sky. Dave was always the perfect companion: strong, calm and skilled.

THAT AUTUMN in 1973 Dave and Molly moved to the West Kootenay of British Columbia, where Dave's heart had always been. As a boy, his father had often taken him camping, fishing and hunting in the area, and Dave had long dreamed of establishing a home there. Dave and Molly settled in Winlaw where Dave worked on the planer chain and drove a fork-lift at the local sawmill.

Dave and Molly married in 1975 and relocated to Rossland, British Columbia, a town similar to the beautiful alpine villages they had known in Switzerland. Their daughter Sarah was born in 1976 and the die was cast—Dave was committed to serious responsibility. He was the first of our group

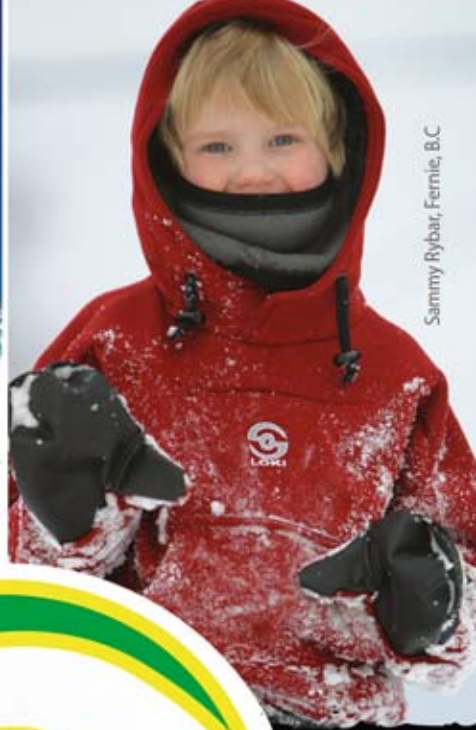
Ron Robinson, Dave Smith, Don Gardner and Chic Scott in the Glacier Circle Cabin, during the second recorded completion of the Rogers Pass to Bugaboos ski traverse, May 1973. Photo: Chic Scott

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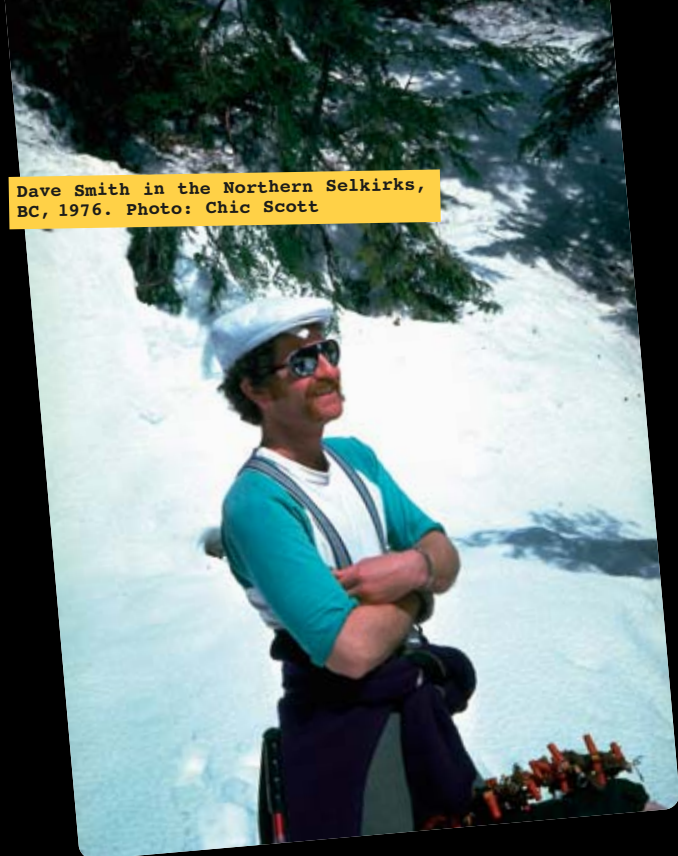
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Dave Smith in the Northern Selkirks, BC, 1976. Photo: Chic Scott



to do so. With a wife and family, his carefree days in the mountains seemed over, but he resolved not to lose his spirit of adventure. Molly supported him in this decision.

That same year, Dave and I shared our second great ski adventure. In April, once again with Don and Ron, we traversed the Northern Selkirks from Mica Creek to Rogers Pass, the first time the tour had been done on skis. Halfway along the journey, at the Great Cairn Hut, we lounged on the rocks beside the hut, soaking up the sunshine. From his pack, Dave pulled a special treat—a small bottle of Drambuie liqueur and a packet of cigarettes, sinful but delicious pleasures.

During the next few years I often visited the Smith home, located above Rossland, behind the Pink Motel. The house was always happy, cultured and full of wonderful smells of baking and good coffee. Dave paid the bills by running High Country Touring, a ski shop based at the Ram's Head Motel. He had qualified as an assistant guide in 1974, a full mountain guide in 1975, and in the summer worked as a mountain guide for the Alpine Club of Canada.

Dave fell in love with cross-country skiing and spent many hours brushing and clearing old logging roads in the area known as Blackjack, so they could be used as ski trails. He also connected a route between Red Mountain and Rossland, via Monte Christo Peak, so he could ski to town.

Sons Chris and Ian were born in 1978 and 1982 respectively, and soon Dave found that the ski shop and guiding work couldn't pay the bills for his growing family. In the winter of 1982-83, he began working on the avalanche control team at Kootenay Pass, the highest highway-served pass in Canada. The job paid well and made use of his professional skills, but it took him away from home for several days at a time, which was hard on Molly and the family. Although he enjoyed the work, living at the pass was lonely. Finally, he got the break he was waiting for when, in 1988, he was offered the job of snow avalanche technician for British Columbia Highways. It was a new program and Dave would be in charge.

The Smiths moved to Nelson and bought a home on Third Street, a five-minute walk from Dave's work. The kids grew up in a free-spirited atmosphere, surrounded by Mozart and B.B. King, CBC radio and home cooking. On Friday nights the family gathered with a bowl of popcorn and watched outrageous movies, like the French classic *Delicatessen*. On Saturday mornings they were racing down the slopes of Nelson's Whitewater Winter Resort.

DAVE BECAME A KEY MEMBER in the local mountain community, often called out in ski and climbing emergencies, such as the tragic Silver Spray Cabin avalanche at Kokanee Creek Provincial Park in January 1998, where six skiers lost their lives. During the winter he was responsible for avalanche safety on local highways stretching from Trail to Golden. During one big cycle, he had to deal with eight road closures at once.

Over the years Dave enjoyed a rich and varied professional career. In the 1970s and 80s, he instructed alpine guide and ski guide courses for the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides, and more recently, he's led hiking guide courses. Since the late 1980s, Dave has also been teaching courses for the Canadian Avalanche Association, serving as its secretary-treasurer and also as chair of its education committee. Although there's no formal program to bring new blood into the British Columbia highways program, Dave often takes interested individuals along who are working on their avalanche credentials, so that they can get a feel for the job.

Through it all, Dave and Molly have managed to make the marriage and family succeed—a real achievement in the world of mountain guides. As a friend and outside observer, I've always admired their ability to find that fine balance of family, adventure, personal freedom and career. They are the quintessential Kootenay mountain family: a unique mix of international sophistication and local roots.

"I have no wisdom to offer about successful relationships other than I consider myself very lucky," Dave recently said to me. "I can say that Canada, the Kootenays and Nelson have provided a large measure of contentment in my life, especially if one is passionate about the mountains and the outdoors and enjoys arts and culture. That contentment certainly rubbed off on our marriage, our kids and family life."

The kids grew up skiing, hiking and climbing. At home they all studied violin and learned to appreciate good literature, art and music. Sarah received a degree in environmental studies from York University and also studied at George Brown Theatre School, both in Toronto. She now works in Calgary for Evergreen Theatre Company, delivering environmental education programs for school-aged children. Chris received a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Victoria in British Columbia and is currently studying law at the University of Saskatchewan. Ian is studying science at the University of Calgary, where he plays violin in the school orchestra. Molly went on to receive a Master of Education from Simon Fraser University in Vancouver. Now she works for the Ministry of Children and Family Development as a resource social worker.

Dave, after 26 years with British Columbia Highways, is looking forward to retirement. The kids are on their own, the house renovations are mostly done and Molly is enjoying her career; so I'm hoping Dave now has time to head out again with an old friend and have a few last ski adventures. The knees and hips still work. There might be several good years left in us yet. □

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