

# Getting Dave to the Summit:

## An Unconventional Photo Essay of an Unconventional Adventure

By Ed Hergott



### Origin of the idea

When it was clear that the AWA could no longer do a tower climb as a key fundraiser, I was elated that Adventures for Wilderness was born. I immediately confirmed with Christyann that I'd take responsibility for one of the \$2,000 (minimum) places. We spend a lot of time 'adventuring in the wilderness' so there had to be lots of potential.

Some notions came together in my thinking. Ever since I've been volunteering for the annual Tower Climb (1997), I've involved my Mountain Manics companions. For the last one at the Bow Tower, we had a team of 34 volunteers...many of them Manics. And in addition to volunteering, we selected one of our own as a standard bearer, Dave Wodelet. Dave came second in fundraising, losing out to the incomparable Richard Guy. A bit more thought and I was ready to go for coffee with Dave and make him an offer.

### Dave Wodelet

I first met Dave in 2011 when Don Cockerton, a good friend of his, brought him out to a Manic bike trip. Dave had to take early work retirement due to a worsening of glaucoma. For several good years Dave's eye condition allowed him to do all of our activities.

Dave enjoyed the Manics and the Manics enjoyed him. He has a wicked sense of humour that I personally thoroughly enjoyed. Later his wife Kathy retired and also joined us. They were the youngest in our group and we called them 'The Teenagers.' Unfortunately, his glaucoma worsened and he could no longer safely bike ride or scramble with us. I tried to stay in touch with him by going for coffee, at a place both he and I could easily reach by walking.

So on a cold January day I invited him to come for a coffee and dropped a bombshell on him. I suggested that for the AWA fundraiser, we would guide him to the summit of Ha Ling Peak. In a recent note to Christyann, Dave explains:

*When Ed first proposed the idea to me, I thought he was crazy. When I accepted, I knew we were both crazy. What could go wrong, taking a guy who's legally blind up a steep mountain slope with many stumble hazards and pointy tree branches ready to skewer*



Dave on Heart Mountain without a guide PHOTO: © E. HERGOTT

*you if someone didn't yell "duck!" And that's not even mentioning the precipitous drops along the ridge as one approached the summit. Ed is the only one that I would trust to pull off this adventure. During the time that I was an active member of the Manics I grew to trust and appreciate his exceptional mountaineering and organizational skills.*

And the rest, as they say, is now history.

### Organizing the climb

When COVID-19 hit, the Manics adjusted and we're proud to say we haven't missed a single Tuesday. We drove out to trailheads alone in our cars and socially distanced on the trail. When the public lands were closed, we biked or hiked in the city.

Our date for Ha Ling was May 12. The parks opened a few days before that and we thought we could pull it off. But no...Ha Ling was closed to the public for environmental reasons. What to do? Most of our scrambles are not suited for a blind hiker, even with a guide. I remembered that in 2018 we had found an easy approach on an old exploration road to the ridge top of Junction Hill. The upper part of the mountain is tougher but we could make good time on the lower stretch. I discussed it with Dave and Kathy and set the date for Tuesday, May 26.

Twelve other Manics volunteered to help with the climb. We had



an Advance Team: Gerry Fijal, Peter Ermann, Gord Daw, Al Sosiak and Susan Miller. Their job was to secure the route, remove obstacles, and pack down residual snow. And we had the First Aid/Support Team: Sue Verbeek, Janet Grenier, Anne Hergott, Fred Goldsmith, and Jim Dunne. They would deal with any emergencies or unforeseen difficulties. Finally, we had the Climbing Team: Don Cockerton, Ed Hergott, Kathy Wodelet and Dave.

And we had radios for easy contact between the groups.

### The Climb

We started the day promptly at 10:00 am with a group shot.



PHOTO: © E. HERGOTT

The first part of the hike climbed up easy grass slopes. Without any difficulty we

reached the ridge top and enjoyed its spectacular views of the Continental Divide.



PHOTO: © K. McKEOWN



PHOTO: © K. McKEOWN



PHOTO: © E. HERGOTT

Kathy stayed immediately in front of Dave and warned him of obstacles. She did a great job and was a key player in our success. As usual, Dave was in good spirits and going strong. He helped fuel our optimism.



PHOTO: © E. HERGOTT



Once we got higher on the ridge, the views expanded and the difficulty of the hike increased.



PHOTO: © E. HERGOTT

Don's sharp eye caught sight of a blue grouse. It patiently let me take a close up photo.



PHOTO: © E. HERGOTT

Near the summit ridge we hit some snow. We feared it would be more extensive. Just the week before we were up to our hips at a lower elevation. Today we could miss most of it and the Advance Team pounded out a good trail through what was unavoidable. An enormous snow drift welcomed us to the summit ridget



Anne and Janet about to give us a lesson in tamping down snow. PHOTO: © G. FIJAL

After the snow drift, the Climbing Team took the lead. The rest of the team was ready to help with any exigencies. The route got steeper with loose rock:



PHOTO: © K. McKEOWN



PHOTO: © E. HERGOTT



Peter, Al, Susan, and the snow drift PHOTO: © G. DAW

A small rock band blocked us from the summit; Dave handled it well..



PHOTO: © E. HERGOTT



PHOTO: © E. HERGOTT



PHOTO: © E. HERGOTT



PHOTO: © K. McKEOWN

Only the summit bump was left to scramble. A few steps later Dave reached the summit cairn.



Dave offers a well-earned, jubilant shout., joined by Kathy, his excellent guide in life and in the mountains.



PHOTO: © E. HERGOTT



PHOTO: © E. HERGOTT

We had cell reception at the summit and we made several calls. Here's Dave receiving congratulations from AWA's Christyann Olson.



PHOTO: © K. McKEOWN

As the coordinator of our Getting Dave to the Summit project, I'm proud of this entire group who worked hard to pull this off.



PHOTO: © E. HERGOTT

## Conclusion

Dave's adventure is in the number two fundraising position having raised just over \$6,000 (if you feel inspired to support our Adventure and get us well over the \$6,000 mark please visit and donate at <https://www.adventuresforwilderness.ca>).

Dave, like the Monty Python cast in their skit about attempting to climb the twin summits of Kilimanjaro, also had dual objectives: Make the summit of Junction Hill and be #1 in fundraising. The first one was under his control and he accomplished it with grace and wit. The second one is for the benefit of the Alberta Wilderness Association. If he loses it, it's for the good of the cause.

And he knows, in his heart, that he did the best that he could. We are privileged to be his friends and assist him in his efforts. 🌲