

photo: Matt Norrdin

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All in a Days Work

"For this article, I thought I'd give you a snapshot of what your Board of Director's actually does."

Single Pitch Instructor Certification Program

The AMGA would like to announce the implementation of the new Single Pitch Instructor (SPI) Program that will replace the Top Rope Site Manager Program in 2008.

Treasurer's Report

The Finance Committee and the board voted to approve using surplus budget funds to assist with the startup costs of the CGF.

Vol. XXIV No. 9 Winter 2007

The Ideal Quiver for the Ski Mountaineering Guide

By Rob Hess



Sitting here in Ouray, Colorado preparing for our January Board of Director's meeting, I have a chance to reflect upon the past year, the cost of our profession, and the toll it has taken on our community of climbers and skiers. Hopefully, this inevitable process will slow down, since I am tired of losing friends and members of our community. Such reflection only serves to reinforce my feeling that the new direction of the AMGA training and certification program is a positive one. The 2007 restructure is occurring and hopefully participants will begin to arrive more prepared for courses and exams as a result of the changes. The first set of courses, running under the new structure, is in the ski discipline. Ski guiding in the United States is primarily a function of our evolution of desire. Alpine touring has had a rich history in

the Alps, but has seen relatively slow growth in the United States. Our touring history has evolved mostly from a Nordic background; many of the active backcountry areas in this country have roots in free heeling.

As the sole organization in the United States that trains new guides, while at the same time working towards meeting the needs of the IFMGA and guiding abroad, it is the AMGA's responsibility to structure our programs accordingly. This is something that all countries do. For example, Canada follows a structure that is IFMGA compatible, but they also added mechanized components based on an extremely active mechanized industry. The United States is not far from this model, primarily because the desire to ski in this country is "gravity fed". To accommodate this desire guides must be able to competently ski a wide array of formats for a wide array of terrain.

Fixed heel skiing fits into three categories: the first category, ski touring /mountaineering, has some variation, but stems from the equipment being light and touring efficient, while incorporating all mountain skiing characteristics. The differences lie in the dimensions of the ski. Traditionally, touring skis were designed to travel well with some capability for down hill skiing--a ski with a waist size of 60-70 mm in width was common. In the United States, to have a ski that was light under foot but skied well then became desirable. With modern technology, skis offering similar characteristics range from 78 to 88mm in

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An Open Letter from the Certified Guides Federation

By Jeff Ward



Why should I get certified? Do the benefits of certification outweigh the costs? These are difficult questions for many guides when deciding whether or not to go through the certification process. One could argue that certification is more than worth the effort and money spent. However, even with the high quality of education now available, American guides are not yet seeing all the benefits they merit after becoming certified.

It is difficult to work as an independent guide in the United States. There are many certified guides, but most of them work for large guide services, or work outside the country. These two options are a good way to make a living as a guide. Traveling is one of the reasons many of us became an employee is great if you have the right employer. However, guides who want to work independently do not have that option in the United States. This not only limits the guides' ability to make a living, but also limits the experiences for his or her clients.

This is where the Certified Guides Federation (CGF) comes in. The CGF is a non-profit, sister organization to the AMGA whose goal is to provide AMGA certified guides the ability to work within their terrain specifications, at a reasonable membership fee, independently throughout the United States.

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Newsletter Deadline

The **Mountain Bulletin** is published in February, May, August, November. The next issue of the Mountain Bulletin will be published May 18th, 2007.

Deadline for all submissions, including advertising are **January 12th (winter issue) April 13th (spring issue) July 13th (summer issue) October 12th (fall issue)**.

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Margaret Wheeler is an IFMGA certified guide and AMGA Board of Directors member and Treasurer.

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All in a Days Work: A Snapshot of an AMGA Board Meeting

by John Bicknell



Hello Everyone:

For this article, I thought I'd give you a snapshot of what your Board of Director's actually does.

This year's winter Board of Director's Meeting was held in Ouray, Colorado the week of the Ice Festival and hosted by board member, Clint Cook, and by the Vic Hotel. God knows where they found the time. Ice climbing is one of my preferred styles of

climbing, and as I was not climbing due to recent shoulder surgery, the location was an ingenious form of torture, but I believe everyone else enjoyed it immensely.

This was one of the most productive board meetings in recent memory. What the board has learned over the years is to do most of the work before the meeting. Most of the work actually happens in smaller committees, such as the Finance Committee, Public Policy Committee, Technical Committee, etc. Committees present proposals to the board, which are then debated. If the board agrees with a proposal and believes it is in keeping with the mission and plan of the AMGA, then they approve it; the day-to-day task of implementing the proposal is left to the AMGA office. The week before a board meeting is usually frantically busy, with conference calls on a variety of topics. Special mention must be made of Jim Williams, who called in from Argentina via satellite phone to take part in a

Finance Committee call while guiding Aconcagua.

Although board meetings cover a wide array of topics, this meeting focused on three areas: the 2006 budget surplus, acceptance of new By-laws, and the modification of the Technical Director position. In 2006, the AMGA made a profit of approximately \$40,000. In Ouray, the board allocated those funds as follows:

1. \$15,000 to rebuild the reserve fund depleted by a \$40,000 loss in 2004—this is what keeps us in operation when we have a bad year.
2. \$10,000 for instructor bonuses for the AMGA Instructor Pool, as a gesture of our appreciation for their work on AMGA courses and exams.
3. \$15,000 to help the Certified Guide Federation (CGF) truly get off the ground. (For more specific information see the Treasurer's Report)

Some other worthy proposals were funded as well. Specifically, both the AMGA and the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides believe the Technical Manual is due for a review; a permanent fund for Instructor Pool training was established; and a proposal to revamp the AMGA website/database was accepted.

After a year's work, the Board approved a new set of By-Laws. The new version, largely authored by board member and lawyer Jim Pearson, can actually be read and is more consistent throughout. As part of the new By-Laws, the board approved a restructuring of the Technical Director (TD) position. Previously, the TD has been an AMGA employee as well as the Chairman of the Technical Committee, a board committee. The TD

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width at the waist. These skis, and their dimensions, allow for the use of ski crampons and have straight tails (straight tails are necessary for the making of all forms of ski anchors). Lighter three to four buckle boots are now the boots of choice for ski mountaineering. Binding choices are likely to be the lighter versions of the brands available. Such formats are what you will often see on Haute route tours, Sierra high tours, in and around the Tetons, the Wasatch, and of course the Cascades.

They are also recommended for the ski guide and ski mountaineering elements of the AMGA, since course and exam participants are typically expected to ascend, via skinning, 6-10,000 feet a day with plenty of energy to spare...light is right!

The second category is a free-ride/touring hybrid or what may be called "freetouring". This category encompasses a large area and may, in some cases, be suitable to the ski mountaineering aspects of the AMGA. The desire for performance is taken to the next level with this format, which is slanted towards steeper, more demanding descents. Performance, durability and ease of use are key factors. Touring is a useful element but may be less the focus. Skiing in La Grave or Chamonix, off piste at Jackson Hole Mountain Resort and descending the Grand Teton are examples of the type of terrain ideally suited for this format. In this case, a heavier, more powerful boot, along with bindings that are beefier and easily entered in tricky positions are needed. Skis used are wider format boards made for free riding. A straight



tail is still the preference, and most manufacturers make ski crampons to fit wide boards (88 to 98 mm). The advent of boots that have four capabilities but resemble an alpine boot, and the beefed up versions of AT bindings are common choices in this area.

The final category is what an early French extreme skier, Sylvan Sudan, once coined as "the regular gear", otherwise known as alpine gear. This type of gear is preferred where one is working in the mecha-

nized realm or pounding vertical on piste. Alpine equipment, specifically bindings, is better suited to withstand the day-to-day punishment of this type of skiing. Ski selection is a personal preference, depending on the area and type of terrain. Skiing at Jackson Hole mountain resort, for example, tends to push one to an all mountain ski that is both turny and capable of handling deep snow. Helicopter skiing in Alaska, on the other hand, tends to push one to a wider ski with much less side cut in order to avoid that "hooky" feel in wide-open terrain. With the advent of the beefy AT boot, many are simply adjusting their alpine bindings to fit those boots. In some cases, guides will have their alpine boots fitted with vibram soles.

Thus, to be a ski guide, offering all aspects of skiing, does require a certain investment in a variety of gear. Ultimately you as the guide must decide based on the terrain you tend to work and enjoy. I guess you all better get a bar tending job to pay for the extra gear you will now need.

For more info contact: rob@jhmg.com



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(continued from page 3) - All in a Days Work

was thus simultaneously the boss (responsible for board level direction) and employee of the ED, a situation both found awkward on occasion. With the revised By-Laws, the TD is a permanent Board Member, who chairs the Technical Committee, which is responsible for maintaining IFMGA standards and the standard of all AMGA programs. The TD will receive a \$10,000 stipend in recognition of the scope of his duties and an additional \$10,000 for the work of the Technical Committee, including Instructor Pool training. Most of the day-to-day operational duties fall to Program Director Betsy Novak. This is essentially the model of the ACMG, and it has worked well there.

Furthermore, as a result of the by-law revisions, we were able to add another Board Member, Peter Gould. Peter, a Denver based attorney, has already contributed greatly to the AMGA by investigating how foreign IFMGA guides may be able to obtain visas in the United States. Having him on the Board will be a tremendous addition, and I thank him for his willingness to serve.

These were the high lights of a long Board Meeting. Speaking just for myself, I am far

more tired after a Board Meeting than I am after guiding an alpine route. I have been on the board for more than four years, and I am proud of the board you have chosen. It's been a long time since a Board member challenged another to a fist fight at a meeting. AMGA Board members come prepared to work, they take their responsibilities seriously, they take divergent viewpoints and interests, and they try hard to find common ground. They are an impressive, diverse group and it is a pleasure to work with them.



Post Board Meeting Freshies!

Guide's Gear

We were lucky enough to test two of the newer leashless ice tools on the market in a variety of terrain around Ouray, Colorado and Salt Lake City, Utah. The test group was made up of AMGA Board Members, Certified Guides, and general public taking clinics at the Ouray Ice Fest. Please read the following synopsis and let us know what you think, or if you have a different point of view.

Black Diamond Reactor:

The Reactor is a leashless version of the popular Black Diamond Viper and is designed specifically for ice climbing. This tool comes with a large grip for thicker gloves and a small light weight

hammer in case you wish to bang a pin or two. While this tool excelled on steep ice it still climbed mixed terrain well. The testers with smaller hands found the grip to be a bit large, but still manageable. The Reactor is worth looking into if you like climbing ice leashless and venturing onto occasional mixed ground.

Contact: Tel: (801) 278-5552
E-mail: bdmo@bdel.com
Web: www.bdel.com

Petzl Nomic:

The Nomic is a specialized leashless tool created to climb steep mixed terrain and ice. The Nomic is at home on steep mixed and rock terrain; some testers found it to be not as user friendly on pure steep ice. This ice tool is light, has a good feel to it, and has three hand positions available. If you are looking for a tool to pound pins with or use as a walker, this is not the tool for you, as it has no hammer or spike. One of the nicest features was the adjustable bottom grip (Sm, Md, Lg) on the tool for different hand sizes. If you are looking for a great, specialized mixed tool, this is worth a look.

Contact: Tel: (801) 926-1500
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Mike Alkaitis

Marmot Super Hero Jacket:

Marmot's most recent version of the Super Hero Jacket continues to stand up to its' reputation as a high-end, versatile garment. I have used an older model of this jacket for a number of years as a go-to jacket for four-season active use. The newest jacket has all the great features of the old model: reinforced fabric and micro-fleece in the hardest wearing places such as shoulders and hips, breathable fabric in the armpits and back, and a perfect combination of multi-use pockets. My favorite new feature of the latest model is the integrated, removable

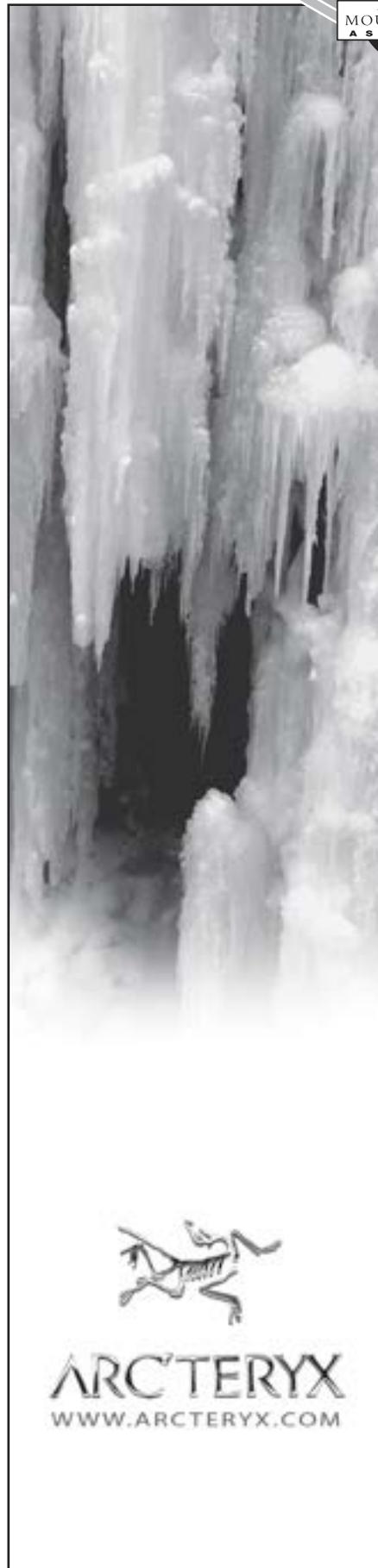
hood. While stowed away in the collar the hood adds increased insulation and provides coverage from the elements. When the weather gets ugly the hood offers waterproof protection and fits great over climbing and skiing helmets. The only challenge that I've found with the jacket is the occasional upward opening of the zipper from the bottom.

I received a size medium Super Hero jacket in Ionic/ Indigo Blue. I used this jacket in a variety of activities such as; fall rock climbing, waterfall ice and alpine climbing, on-area downhill skiing, backcountry skiing and winter paragliding. Depending on the activity I adjusted my base layers to maintain comfort in all but the windiest conditions. Despite the excellent breathability of the Super Hero Jacket, I found myself overheating during late night salsa dancing sessions with my wife.

In the over saturated world of technical soft shell jackets, the Super Hero Jacket proves itself to be the jacket of Super Senders.

Contact: Tel: (888)-357-3262 Web: www.marmot.com

Amos Whiting



Marmot Super Hero Jacket



Petzel Nomic



Black Diamond Reactor





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The full development of the CGF could become one of the greatest benefits of AMGA certification. It will enable AMGA certified guides to further their profession in a country where, at present, there are no opportunities for independent guiding. As of January 2007, the AMGA has literally hundreds of certified guides. As the demand for independent guides increases, establishing a co-op based permit and insurance system is essential to facilitate that growth.

Another important role of the CGF is to provide reciprocal access to foreign IFMGA guides. As a member of the IFMGA, the AMGA is required to work towards access for foreign IFMGA guides. The inability to provide access to said guides could jeopardize AMGA credibility as well as membership in the IFMGA, which in turn would mean loss of access to other member countries. Gaining access for foreign guides is a difficult process in which the formation of a working CGF is the first step.

At present, there are two main issues facing the CGF: funding and support. One of the main reasons for the lack of support, is the fear of alienating a large portion of the guiding community. Some see the CGF as being in direct competition with current guide service operators, all of whom have worked hard to build their businesses. This is a valid concern. However, consensus is growing within the guiding community that the CGF will not adversely affect existing guide services; rather, it will benefit the American guiding community as a whole. The benefits of the CGF will encourage guides to become certified, and certification will in turn raise the standard of guiding in the United States. The higher standard will

grow the whole industry, attracting new clients to both independent certified guides and traditional guide services employing certified guides.

The idea of having a co-op based system for sharing expenses is not new. The alpine countries in Europe typically have a guide's bureau that helps local guides share marketing and insurance costs. This system has grown the profession to the extent that the supply of guides cannot keep up with the demand of clients. In Canada, guides face similar problems as guides in the United States. Canadian land managers require permits and regulate user-days in the heavily used and fragile areas. The majority of the guiding is done by "traditional" guide services that hold their own permits. At the same time, the ACMG holds permits and a liability insurance policy that Canadian and Foreign certified guides can buy into each year.

These models are a great starting point for the CGF. However, we must create a system that works in the United States - one that works for the independent guide as well as the guide service owner. The board of directors of the CGF will need input from certified guides and the AMGA membership to help shape the direction of the CGF. Over the next several months the board of the CGF will contact the membership with a survey asking for your thoughts, ideas, and feedback. We look forward to hearing from you.

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The Hart in training for the AMGA alpine guide exam. Mt. Fay, Alberta, Canada.
Photo: Andrew Quinlan. © 2007 Patagonia, Inc.



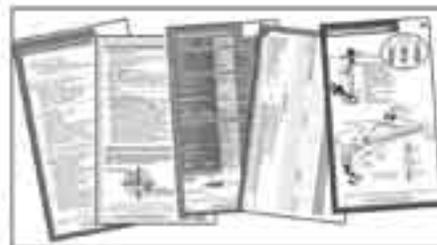


*Curt Love Climbing at El Salto Mexico Photos By Alain Denis
Curt Love is a Certified Rock Guide and has been an AMGA Member since 2003*

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Ski Guide Course 2006

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Mike Bromberg



Ergo.



nx02 Tour

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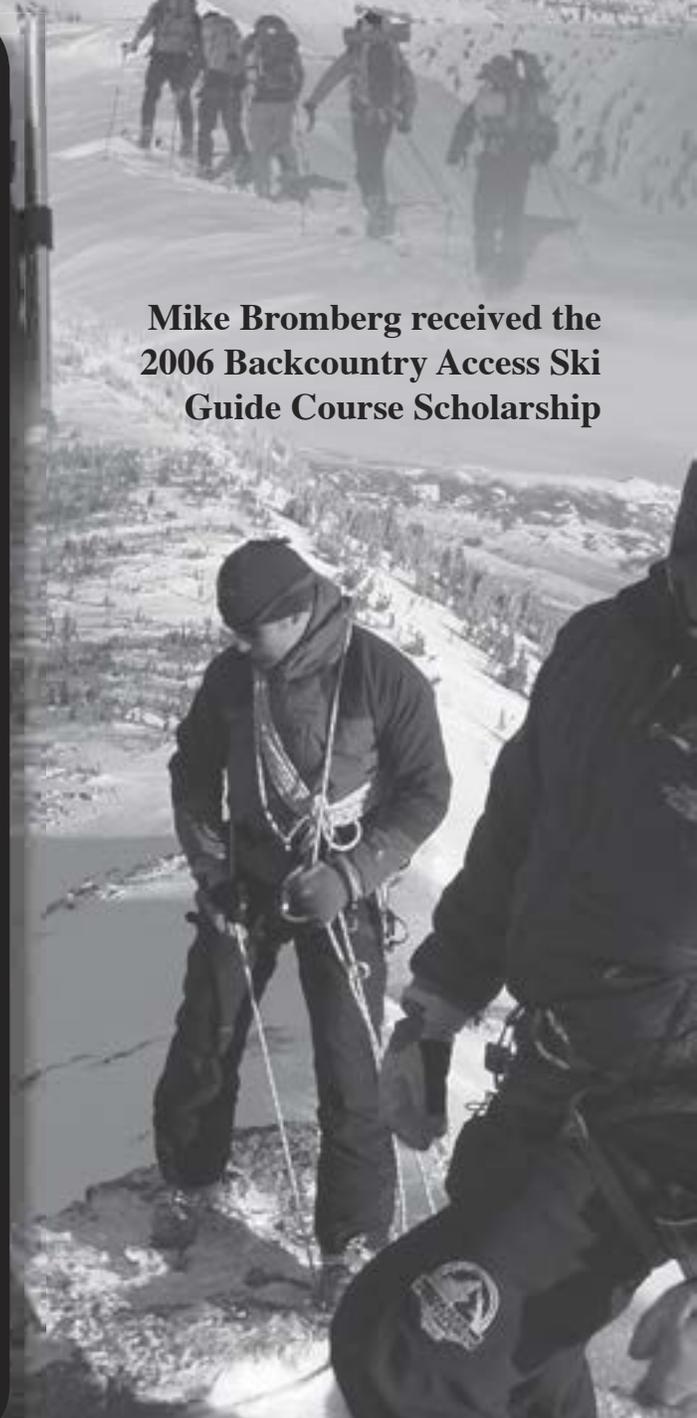
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Mike Bromberg received the
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Kyle Lefkoff ripping it up!

Group Photo: Left to Right Eric Long, Dick Jackson, Margaret Wheeler, Kyle Lefkoff, John Winsor, Tom Hackett, Mike Alkaitis, Keith Garvey, Angela Hawse

2nd Annual PowderCat Ski Day Vail Pass, CO

The American Mountain Guides Association completed its Second Annual Powdercat skiing fundraiser. On January 12th, 2007 our intrepid group met on Vail Pass for a much anticipated day of backcountry powder skiing without skins: we all had a blast! The AMGA would like to thank Kyle Lefkoff and Vail Snowcats for sponsoring the event, and to all the participants for supporting the AMGA, while having a great time in the process.



A splitter day on Vail Pass!

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News From the Office

Since October 2006 the AMGA office has been notifying all potential program participants of the **\$100 Non-Refundable application fee** that is deducted from the tuition deposit for all 2007 AMGA Programs. Please remember that to be considered for enrollment in any course or exam, the AMGA office must receive all required application materials (i.e., completed course/exam application form, signed liability waiver, copies of current medical or avalanche certification if required, updated personal and mock guided/guided resumes, and course deposit. Submit resumes electronically to betsy@amga.com.

If you are unable to take the course or exam you are enrolled in, you must notify the AMGA office 6 weeks prior to the start date of the course in order to receive a refund, minus the \$100 application fee. If you contact the office after the 6-week deadline you will lose your deposit (25% of tuition) and full tuition.

Trip cancellation insurance is recommended to recover fees lost due to injury or other factors.

Please allow at least 2 weeks from the time the application is received by the AMGA office to be notified of your status in the course or exam applied for. Notification will be via email and mail. If for some reason your application is incomplete you will receive a phone call directly.

The Advanced Alpine Guide Course and Alpine Guide Exam scheduled for Bugaboos Provincial Park have been relocated to the North Cascades. The dates remain the same: A5: AAGC/AE-North Cascades (8/20-31) and A6: AGE-North Cascades (8/20-29).

The 2007 Program Catalog is now available for purchase. The revised program catalog offers a comprehensive review of all AMGA Programs. Price: \$8.00.



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Single Pitch Instructor Certification Program to Replace TRSM Certification Program in 2008

by Adam Fox



Over the last few years the AMGA has been looking at ways to improve the Top Rope Site Manager (TRSM) Program. We have solicited input from representatives of national organizations, guide services and current guides in the field. Last fall AMGA President, John Bicknell and myself met over three days with Steve Long, head of the United Kingdom's Mountain Leader

Training Board's Single Pitch Program and Chairman of the UIAA

Training Standards Working Group. Steve provided a wealth of information on similar programs he has been involved with around the world and I would like to thank him for his help and ongoing support. With that in mind, the AMGA would like to announce the implementation of the new Single Pitch Instructor (SPI) Program that will replace the Top Rope Site Manager Program in 2008. The reasons for the advancement of the program are:

1. To keep the program current and up to date with the evolving trends in single pitch instruction, while taking into consideration the needs and views of instructors, employers and end clients.
2. To increase the standard of our program so as to meet the international UIAA standard and gain UIAA Endorsement.
3. To strive to maintain the highest standard of instruction while implementing a 'user friendly' training and assessment format, taking into consideration length of training and assessment courses as well as overall cost.

The AMGA Single Pitch Instructor will "Facilitate and instruct rock climbing in a single pitch setting". An SPI course will be 3 days long. A totally separate assessment exam will be 2 days long and include participants teaching major lesson components as well as traditional leading at a minimum of 5.6 grade.

What happens to Current Top Rope Site Managers (TRSM's)?

Nothing will happen to current TRSM's; their certification will remain valid until the expiration date on the certification (three years from the exam date). Current TRSM's who wish to become SPI certified immediately may take the 2 day SPI Assessment Course any-time after January 1st, 2008; or they may wait until their TRSM certification expires before taking a SPI Assessment Course. *There will be no TRSM Recertification courses after January 1st 2008.*

What about Candidates who have completed a TRSM Course, but have not completed a TRSM Exam?

Until December 31st 2007 candidates may take the TRSM Exam. After January 1st 2008 candidates may take the SPI Assessment if they meet the prerequisites.

What about a TRSM who has taken a higher level AMGA course? If they wished to gain SPI would they have to take the

SPI Assessment?

No. Any TRSM who has taken a higher level AMGA course such as the Rock Instructor Course would be granted SPI.

Please feel free to email me with questions regarding the TRSM and SPI Programs. adam@foxmountainguides.com





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Treasurer's Report: The AMGA and the CGF



Hello All,

The winter meeting of the Board of Directors took place on January 11th, in Ouray, Colorado. As a relatively new member on the board, I'd like to emphasize how much this meeting was a positive experience;

everyone worked extremely hard before and during the meeting to gain consensus on a number of issues, some of which have been difficult and divisive in the past. I would like to share some information about the meeting with respect to the AMGA and the Certified Guides Federation (CGF).

As part of the meeting the Finance Committee and the board voted to approve using surplus budget funds to assist with the startup costs of the CGF. For complete background and more information on the CGF, please see the open letter also in this issue of the bulletin. I will focus more on the budget surplus – what it is and why it exists – and the issues the board worked through in making the decision to fund the CGF.

The AMGA is a non-profit organization; each year the budget is a synthesis of assets (investments), revenue, and expenses. This balance is intended to end each year with growth in the long-term assets (endowments for course scholarships) and to end in the black for all operating expenses. Normally, any surplus – the amount the organization clears at years end – is allocated to a reserve account to be used for emergencies or to meet needs that may arise outside of the approved budget. This year ended well for the AMGA; fundraising was more successful than anticipated, and expenses were lower than projected. The majority of this year's surplus will be directed to the long-term financial well being of the AMGA. The remaining funds will be distributed to the CGF to help cover start-up costs.

The AMGA board approved \$15,000 to be distributed to the CGF in three phases over the next six months. In order to receive funds for each phase, the CGF must meet specific criteria set forth by the Finance Committee. The CGF business plan is designed to operate independently after the first year and does not include further funding from the AMGA. The goal is to provide enough of a boost so that the CGF can begin as a financially viable non-profit organization.

The basic question the Finance Committee and the board grappled with is, "Why should the AMGA support the Certified Guides Federation?" For those of you who have been involved with the AMGA throughout most of its history, this question—essentially, how should the AMGA work towards access for guides in the United

States—has been a controversial debate. For those who are newer to the organization, you may be more interested in what the AMGA is doing now to benefit its members. My hope is to speak to both perspectives.

The CGF was created by members of the board, with the support of the AMGA – including financing, creation of the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws, office time, pro bono legal work, and board approval. In doing so, the goal was to create a sister organization to the AMGA to work specifically to gain access for independent certified guides, and to create an umbrella organization to hold insurance and permits.

In creating the CGF, the board sought to resolve the conflict of interest problem with respect to access in this country. That issue is essentially this: the AMGA exists to represent all guides and guiding entities in the United States. This includes the independent guide as well as the guide service concessionaire or permit holder. By devoting resources (i.e. time and money) to one or the other, the AMGA risked working against the interests of part of its membership. By creating a third party (the CGF), the AMGA can continue to represent the whole guiding community while the CGF can work to improve access for independent guides.

The AMGA and the CGF have several very important goals in common. First, improve benefits for members of the AMGA - access is on the top of that list. Second, improve the availability and cost of insurance for the independent guide. Third, maintain the AMGA's commitment to the IFMGA by working towards access for foreign guides in the United States.

Finally, there is a growing perception on the board (and in the guiding community) that there is room in the industry for both independent guides and guide companies or schools. In fact, our Canadian friends believe the two not only can co-exist, they can even benefit one another. Working together in busy times and presenting a united voice when approaching land managers, policy makers, and the insurance industry are two examples of such cooperation. The issue of access for the independent guide will not go away, and the more united we are as a guiding community in dealing with it, the more we will all benefit in the long run.

It is difficult to fit so much discussion, debate, and decision-making into a few paragraphs; I hope I have been effective in explaining the issues the Finance Committee and the board considered in funding the CGF. Going forward, I welcome any questions or comments on this topic or any others.

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Please contact Mike Alkaitis if you would like to contribute to the AMGA at mike@amga.com or 303.271.0984

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