

Newsletter
of the
Grand Canyon
Pioneers Society



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Longtime Canyon Explorer Honored

By Brad Fuqua, Grand Canyon News editor

For years, George Steck had to listen to people he met ask, "Are you the brother of Allen Steck?" Yes, he was the noted mountaineer's brother. But after Saturday afternoon, there was no doubt that this was his day in the limelight.

Steck was honored with the Grand Canyon Pioneer Society's Pioneer Award for his significant contribution to the advancement of knowledge of the Grand Canyon. Steck is a longtime backcountry hiker who is widely published and has authored two books.

"It's humbling in a way to know there are enough people out there who care enough for me to accomplish this," Steck said after receiving an impressive looking plaque in a ceremony at Shoshone Point. "I know how much work it is. I was very touched by all the effort."

Steck's background at the Grand Canyon is an even bigger effort. Steck went on several hiking trips through the Canyon, his biggest trip being an 82-day excursion from Lees Ferry to Pearce Ferry. That trip was one of two trips which covered the entire Grand Canyon. The other was a trip from Lees Ferry to Lava Falls.

Although Steck doesn't recall the exact years, he believes his first Grand Canyon hike came in 1957 or 1958, "The year of the big flood," as he remembers. "I took this trip with Georgie White from Lee's Ferry to Phantom Ranch," Steck said. "It was really a magical place. I was probably 35 when I saw the Grand Canyon for the first time."

The 74 year old still hikes, although for not as far or for as long, he said. An Albuquerque, N.M., resident since 1955, Steck was born in Berkeley, Calif. His love affair with the outdoors began there with frequent trips into the Sierras. After his Phantom Ranch hike in the late '50s, Steck spent about six years at Glen Canyon, saying "I was so enamored with it, I bought a boat."

But it was his years and accomplishments at Grand Canyon that led to the Pioneer Award. Steck spent many nights in the Grand Canyon and many days exploring it. In all that time, the only injury he ever suffered was a sprained ankle. "The wind got caught in my windbreaker at Tuckup," Steck said about the fall. "I took aspirin and kept on with the trip. After four days; the sprained ankle was the one that was blue."

Steck said there were remarkably few injuries on the trips he led. "There were minor falls and even a scorpion sting once, but nothing too serious," he said.

The worst injury occurred when a German friend fell 20 feet and landed on his back to crack his pelvis. After the doctor said he should exercise to help heal the injury, the German got right back on the trail and continued the trip.

Lee Albertson, a society member, gave Saturday's onlookers a background on the award winner. Albertson said the award was being presented to Steck for the following reasons:

- for the significant contributions made as a Volunteer-in-Park (VIP) at Grand Canyon National Park;
- for cataloging permanent springs and indexing place names;
- for being an unselfish mentor to numerous backcountry enthusiasts who sought his help and advice on doing off-trail loop hikes and routes to seldom visited areas that harbor some of the most beautiful parts of the Canyon;
- for his detailed work in documenting the "unknown and unfamiliar" for an enhanced understanding of the Canyon;
- for informative and humorous lectures, publications and "how-to" articles on handling adversity in the backcountry;
- and for supporting Grand Canyon restoration projects.

Tom Carmony, Grand Canyon Pioneers Society President, presented the award to Steck. He is the third recipient of the award. Previous winners were Harvey Butchart and Gale Burak.

Steck's literary efforts include a feature story entitled "Dances With Mice," which appeared in the February 1994 issue of Arizona Highways magazine. He wrote a pair of books, "Grand Canyon Loop Hikes" and "Grand Canyon Loop Hikes II." Steck has also made several lectures and slide presentations on the Grand Canyon, Glen Canyon and Marble Canyon.