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In Memoriam: Prof Dr Jack D. Ives

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The mountain geography world is mourning the passing of one of its most significant exponents, the architect of the monumental scientific world of mountain research and development. Jack D. Ives died on 15 September, at almost 93 years of age, after a fall at his home in Ottawa, Canada. As his son Anthony recounts, “He was fiercely opposed to leaving his home, with his memories wrapped up in all of the things around him.”

As academicians Vladimir Kotlyakov and Yuri Badenkov stated in 2021, Jack Ives was a “legend of mountain geography in the second half of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century.” His name is well known not only among scientists, politicians, and public figures, but—and this is the most important—among the inhabitants of many mountain settlements of the world, from the Himalayas and Pamirs to the Andes and European Alps, from Scotland and the Caucasus to Iceland and China” (see publisher’s note in Ives 2021). The most important reason for this is that, as Bruno Messerli wrote, “He devoted his life not only to mountain research, but also to mountain development, on behalf of the people and communities living in mountain areas” (Messerli 2015). Indeed, he drew attention to the plight of indigenous peoples living in mountainous regions and advocated for their inclusion in policymaking processes concerning their lands and resources. His work went beyond academia, influencing international policy on the livelihoods and rights of mountain people.

Jack Ives’ long-term work at the International Geographical Union (IGU) has played an important role in shaping the global discourse on mountain environments. In 1972, he took over the chairmanship of the Commission on High Altitude Geocology from Carl Troll (IGU president from 1960 to 1964), who had established the Commission during the 1968 International Geographical Conference (New Delhi). Jack alternated with his colleague Bruno Messerli until 1996 (González-Trueba and García-Ruiz 2012). This role drew him increasingly into mountain

studies. He leaves an indelible mark in promoting geographical research on mountains and sustainable development within the IGU. Under his leadership, the Commission focused on interdisciplinary research and worked to improve global understanding of the importance of mountain ecosystems. He developed Project 6 (Mountains) of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s Man and the Biosphere project on “Human impacts on mountain ecosystems” with Bruno Messerli. In this context, in the 1970s, Jack became particularly interested in environmental issues in the Himalayas. The increasing international focus on environmental degradation in mountainous regions, such as deforestation, soil erosion, and the impact on local communities, led him to advocate for sustainable mountain development. His 1989 book *The Himalayan Dilemma: Reconciling Development and Conservation*, coauthored with his colleague Bruno Messerli (Ives and Messerli 1989), challenged the prevailing understanding of environmental degradation in the Himalayas and changed the trajectory of conservation policy in the region. This work marked an additional turning point in mountain research and policy, and further established Jack as a leading figure in the advocacy of mountain sustainability.

Indeed, his name is linked to the creation of the International Mountain Society and the leading journals of the discipline: *Mountain Research and Development* and *Artic, Antarctic, and Alpine Research*. He, together with Bruno Messerli, was key in catalyzing a group of mountain geographers into what he amicably called “the Mountain Mafia” as the movers-and-shakers for the advocacy that culminated in incorporating Chapter 13 (Mountains) into the United Nations’ agenda for sustainable development (Agenda 21), the outcome the UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, in Rio de Janeiro. Chapter 13 called for greater attention to be given to mountain ecosystems and their importance for biodiversity, water resources, and human livelihoods. His efforts helped to establish the concept of “sustainable mountain development,” which remains a guiding principle in the field today. Since then, his leadership brought mountain issues to the forefront of the global environmental agenda, including the declaration of the “International Year of Mountains 2002” of the UN and, thereafter, 11 November as “International Mountain Day.”

Jack Ives and Bruno Messerli also coedited a book considered by most mountain geographers as the “bible” for mountain studies at the global level in 1997. *Mountains of the World: A Global Priority* (Messerli and Ives 1997) became the guiding framework for conservation programs, academic projects, and international organizations focusing on mountains. The book was translated into many languages and expanded with corresponding regional perspectives (eg Sarmiento 2003).

Jack’s numerous studies and pioneering initiatives with the United Nations Environment Programme and the group

FIGURE 1 Sir Edmund Hillary Mountain Legacy Medal presentation ceremony in Ottawa on 29 October 2015. From left to right: Pauline Ives; Jack D. Ives; His Excellency Simon David Lambert Tucker, High Commissioner of New Zealand; His Excellency Kali Prasad Pokhrel, Ambassador of Nepal to Canada. (Photo by Seth Sicroff)



known as “Mountain Agenda,” which included the International Union for Conservation of Nature, ICIMOD, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, have been instrumental in shaping international policy on mountain conservation. And his work within the IGU has helped to raise awareness of the importance of mountains in global development agendas, drawing attention to the unique challenges facing mountain ecosystems and communities worldwide.

Jack’s contributions have been honored with many awards, including the King Albert I Gold Medal (2002), the Royal Geographical Society Patron’s Medal (2006), the Icelandic Knight’s Cross of the Order of the Falcon (2007), and 2 separate Distinguished Career Awards from the Association of American Geographers. The inaugural Sir Edmund Hillary Mountain Heritage Medal Lifetime Achievement Award (2015) was presented to him to recognize lifetime achievement in mountain research and development (Figure 1; Messerli 2015). For the Commission of Mountain Studies (CMS) of the IGU, it was a significant coincidence that he received Honorary Membership in the CMS with a diploma conferred in August 2024 at the 35th International Geographical Congress in Dublin, Ireland, recognizing his productive and tireless work in mountain research and studies. The diploma is adorned with a portrait of Alexander von Humboldt, Jack’s inspiration. Indeed, it was on Jack’s suggestion that a bronze plaque honoring Humboldt as the “Father of Montology” was erected on a cairn at the snowline of Mt Chimborazo in Ecuador, in December 1998, after the III International Symposium of the Andean Mountain Association. At the site, indigenous community members, along with Christoph Stadel, Larry Hamilton, Maximina Monasterio, Robert Rhoades, Fausto Sarmiento, the Reserve administrators, and

others, shared, with Jack’s encouragement, what could well be the corollary of his monumental and passionate life-long advocacy: “FOR A BETTER BALANCE BETWEEN MOUNTAIN ENVIRONMENT, DEVELOPMENT OF RESOURCES, AND THE WELL-BEING OF MOUNTAIN PEOPLES.”

Colleagues and those who worked closely with him often emphasized his generosity, both in terms of his time and his willingness to mentor and support young scholars. They also admired his ability to blend scientific research with activism, as he sought to bring practical, policy-oriented solutions to the environmental problems he studied. It is comforting to know that many of his students, following the exemplary work of this giant, helped to cement transdisciplinary mountain research and study, themselves becoming champions of mountain geography work. Many are already retired from teaching, but proudly continue Jack’s model, inspiring mountain lore and enriching montology with their wisdom. After Jack’s retirement, as scholarly recognition of a brilliant academic mentor, a *Festschrift* was published in his honor (Mainali and Sicroff 2016) with the apropos title: *Montologist*.

Now that the discipline of montology has been firmly positioned as transdisciplinary mountain research and study (Ives 2022), the image of Jack D. Ives will be forever reflected in the deep understanding of mountains as socioecological systems, where consilience and convergence favor decolonized scholarship of mountains, integrating local knowledge and making real the critical biogeography and political ecology of the many dilemmas that still pervade militarized, marginalized, and exploited mountain communities in the world’s mountainscapes (Sarmiento 2020). It is with a heavy heart that the Commission of Mountain Studies of the International Geographical Union received the news of his passing, but it is with a hopeful spirit that we will strive toward Jack’s ambitious goals to keep the world’s mountains alive and well!

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