

2003 SUMMIT OF EXCELLENCE AWARD

WILLI PFISTERER

MOUNTAIN RESCUE INNOVATOR

Willi Pfisterer has made remarkable contributions to the mountain community since he arrived in the Canadian Rockies more than four decades years ago. The Austrian native, who first came to Canada and the Laurentian Mountains in 1955 to teach skiing, helped establish the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides, the Canadian Avalanche Association, and the rescue dog program in Canada.

Pfisterer's love of adventure, his passion for teaching, his sense of humour, and the pride that he takes in the accomplishments of his colleagues have made him a legend in mountain rescue circles all over Canada. He is a man of action who has climbed approximately 1,600 peaks and been involved in over 700 rescues.

After arriving in the West in 1956, Pfisterer opened a ski shop in Jasper, where he began guiding during the summers. In 1959, Hans Gmoser invited him on the first successful Canadian ascent of the East Ridge of Mountain Logan, Canada's highest mountain.

Pfisterer later became a snow and avalanche specialist in Glacier National Park, and then with the warden service in Jasper National Park. He quickly advanced warden service understanding of snow dynamics and avalanche rescue.

Next, Pfisterer turned his attention to mountain rescue. He examined European equipment and techniques and found ways to modify them for Canadian conditions. Through his insight and vision, park wardens became highly equipped and trained in mountain rescue; rescue response times were reduced from days to hours. Pfisterer is now retired and living west of Jasper.