

Scott, Douglas Keith [Doug]

(1941–2020)

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Scott, Douglas Keith [Doug] (1941–2020), mountaineer, was born at The Firs maternity hospital in Mansfield Road, Nottingham, on 29 May 1941, the eldest of three sons of (Douglas) George Harold Scott (1915–1995), a policeman and amateur boxer, and his wife Edith Joyce, *née* Gregory (b. 1919), a cigarette factory supervisor. His father was the Amateur Boxing Association heavyweight champion in 1945, competing on behalf of Nottingham City Police and the Army Physical Training Corps.

Doug Scott was a versatile athlete, captained the rugby team at Cottesmore Secondary Modern School, and was a founder of the Nottingham Moderns Rugby Football Club. Scouts introduced camping and the Black Rocks of Derbyshire in 1955. He first tried climbing by biking to the rocks with his mother's washing line as a rope. He learned proper techniques on school trips to White Hall, near Buxton, Britain's first outdoor centre for state-educated students. After transferring to Mundella Grammar School, he spent a month at the Eskdale Outward Bound School. In Scotland, a long day climbing Munros with friends 'was a turning point in my life' (*Up and About*, 59). Hitchhiking to the Alps soon followed. He entered Loughborough Teachers' Training College in 1959, received a teaching certificate in 1961, and began teaching physical education and geography at Cottesmore Secondary Modern. On 28 April 1962, at Wollaton parish church, he married Janice Elaine (Jan) Brook (1943–2003), a nurse who later became a teacher; they had a son, Michael, and two daughters, Martha and Rosie.

Scott founded the Nottingham Climbers' Club in 1961 to organize climbing trips and he took a leave of absence from teaching to climb in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco in 1962. In the 1960s he devoted weekends to rock climbing and rugby and holidays to classic climbs in north Wales, the Lake District, Scotland, and the Alps and Dolomites. In 1965 he led an expedition across the Sahara to the Tibesti Mountains in Chad with funds raised from climbers' lectures in Nottingham and a Mount Everest Foundation grant. He led Nottingham Climbers' Club outings with schoolboys to Kurdistan in Turkey in 1966 and with friends to the Hindu Kush in Afghanistan in 1967.

Scott became one of the world's leading big-wall rock climbers. In 1969 he led a first ascent of Sròn Ulladail (Strone Ulladale), an overhanging cliff on the Isle of Harris, Outer Hebrides, which the *Sunday Times* (15 June 1969) heralded as 'Britain's toughest climb'. An advance on a big-wall book paid for flights to California in 1970 to climb in Yosemite with Royal Robbins, one of North America's best rock climbers. He made the first non-American ascent of Salathé Wall on El Capitan with the Austrian Peter Habeler shortly after a stranger spiked his drink for his first and only LSD trip. The Salathé ascent was more satisfying than the drug. Scott's 1971 essay 'On the Profundity Trail' described his joy and peace from letting go of doubts about climbing for money and fame, the ascent having induced 'a truly visionary, if not mystical, state of being'. In Europe he climbed from the Troll Wall in Norway to cliffs in the Pyrenees. Grants from a

Nottingham cigarette maker funded a trip to film big-wall ascents on Baffin Island in Canada. After a request for leave was denied in 1971, he resigned as a teacher to make his career as a climber with occasional work as a builder with his brother.

Don Whillans first invited Scott to join an international expedition to Everest's south-west face in the spring of 1972. Despite acrimony on the team, Scott acclimatized well and felt recurring tensions: 'at home I yearned to be out with the boys again on some distant mountain; after a few weeks abroad, I would be longing to be back home again' (*Up and About*, 293). After summer climbing on Baffin Island, including an ascent of Mount Asgard, Scott was back on Everest with Chris Bonington in the autumn of 1972. Scott returned to Yosemite and Baffin Island the next year. In 1974 he climbed Changabang in a British and Indian expedition with Sherpa support in the Garhwal Himalaya. Later in 1974 his group of Nottingham climbers changed their plans from Baffin Island to Peak Lenin in the Pamirs after they were invited to represent British mountaineers at an international climbing camp in the Soviet Union. Scott's *Big Wall Climbing* (1974) was a remarkably cosmopolitan guide to the history, ethics, and techniques of wall climbing.

Scott and Dougal Haston climbed Mount Everest's south-west face on 24 September 1975 in a large expedition led by Bonington and funded by Barclays Bank. Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay, a New Zealander and Sherpa, had made the first ascent in a British expedition in 1953, but Scott and Haston were considered the first 'Britons' on the summit, according to press coverage in 1975. Scott took iconic photographs, including Haston on the Hillary Step, and they walked side by side onto the summit. Scott gave his camera to Haston and told him in his flat Nottingham accent: 'Here you are, youth. Take a snap for my mother' (Bonington, 168). They watched the sunset over the curvature of the earth and descended in darkness to a snow hole on the south summit, then the world's highest bivouac. Without bottled oxygen or their warmest gear, Scott pummelled his bare feet and warmed them on Haston's body. They survived without frostbite and descended fixed ropes the next day to acclaim. They carried no flags because they climbed for themselves, Scott told the *Sunday Times* (19 Oct 1975): 'Reaching a summit was purely for you. It's the most selfish thing you can do.' Scott later wrote that Everest changes everyone who reaches its summit, and he felt 'fulfilled, confident, on top of the game—I was not humbled, exactly, but aware of something much bigger than myself, of which I was merely a part' (*Up and About*, 363).

In July 1977 Scott's strength and endurance were evident in the first ascent with Bonington of the Ogre, also known as Baintha Brakk (7285 metres high), in the Karakoram. Rappelling from the summit, Scott slipped and swung like a pendulum into a rock wall, breaking both his legs at the ankles. For a week, he crawled on his knees down the mountain assisted by Mo Anthoine and Clive Rowland. He was then carried by porters on a makeshift stretcher, evacuated by a helicopter that crash-landed, and flown to Nottingham General Hospital. After surgery on his legs, he resumed pull-ups in the hospital and was climbing by October and playing rugby with the Nottingham Moderns by November (*The Ogre*, 167).

After Everest, Scott climbed mostly in smaller teams without bottled oxygen. The first ascent of the north ridge of Kanchenjunga from Nepal in 1979 with Peter Boardman, Joe Tasker, and Georges Bettembourg (who descended below the summit) was in this lightweight, 'alpine' style with reduced Sherpa support. The first ascent of the south face of Shishapangma in Tibet in 1982 with Alexander MacIntyre and Roger Baxter-Jones was told in a jointly authored book with MacIntyre in 1984 that shared the first Boardman

Tasker prize. Scott learned of Boardman's and Tasker's deaths on Everest while returning from Shishapangma, and MacIntyre was killed climbing later in 1982, Bettembourg in 1983, and Baxter-Jones in 1985. Scott also had been a pall-bearer at Haston's funeral a year after the Everest ascent. The deaths of so many climbing friends cast a shadow that heightened a sense of humility and tempered a zeal for 'commitment' while climbing. He attributed his survival to listening to an inner voice or sixth sense, to fate more than luck.

Scott was a spiritual seeker who read eastern philosophies, Buddhist texts, western mystics, and New Age authors while climbing. He became interested in Tibetan Buddhism after reading *The Third Eye* by Lobsang Rampa (Cyril Hoskin) in 1959 while climbing in Chamonix. His Shishapangma book included chapters on Buddhism, Tibet, and eastern medicine, describing Milarepa's asceticism, solitude, and visionary or mystical experiences as inspirational examples for mountaineering and life that were not selfish. When he let go of his ambition on Everest, Kanchenjunga, and Shishapangma, he found confidence and humility. 'One of the few times when I did not let go but pushed hard throughout to reach my goal, I ended up with two broken legs!' (Scott and MacIntyre, 228).

Scott made more than forty expeditions to the high mountains of Asia, which he listed in *Who's Who* and summarized in *Himalayan Climber* (1992), an autobiographical book of photographs. In the 1980s he occasionally took his family trekking to base camp and around this time women joined his climbing teams. In 1982 he invited the traveller Elaine Brook to Shishapangma because women 'soften the atmosphere' for men and 'develop the other side of your nature', though Brook contested these gender stereotypes (Scott and MacIntyre, 33, 210, 295; Brook, 35, 71–88). In 1985 Scott met the Indian climber Sharavati Ramchandra (Sharu) Prabhu (b. 1959), a Tata marketing officer in Bombay, at a trekking conference in Darjeeling. They frequently climbed together in India, Jordan, Tibet, Bhutan, and then Argentina, Antarctica, and beyond in pursuit of the 'seven summits' (the highest peak on each continent, which Scott completed in 1995), and he left his first marriage. 'No mountain ever has humbled me as much as going through a year of separation and divorce in 1989' (*Himalayan Climber*, 191). He married Sharu Prabhu at Carlisle register office on 17 September 1993, and they had two sons, Arran and Euan, before divorcing in 2003. He married Patricia Borland (Trish) Lang (b. 1944), a wine broker, on 8 December 2007 at Carlisle.

In the 1990s Scott hoped to reduce the unnecessary suffering of porters on Himalayan expeditions. After funding a clean-water project in Pakistan, he established the charity Community Action Nepal (CAN) in 1994 to improve the standard of living in rural areas by building schools, health posts, porter shelters, and other community-based projects. He also founded a trekking company to pay porters a fair wage, benefit CAN, and model responsible tourism. The trekking company also led journeys to Mount Kailash and other sacred sites as fund-raisers for the Samye Ling Victory Stupa. Scott lived for a time in the early 2000s at Craighaugh, Eskdalemuir, Scotland, near the Kagyu Samye Ling monastery, where he had an affair with his female guru. Scott's tempestuous love-life before his stable third marriage was aired in his memoir and a biography by Catherine Moorehead, who collaborated on his final books on the Ogre and Kanchenjunga. Scott's earlier memoir, *Up and About: The Hard Road to Everest* (2015), was one of the best autobiographies by a mountaineer and received the Kekoo Naoroji award for mountain literature.

Scott's honours included the freedom of Nottingham in 1976, appointment as a CBE in 1994, the Royal Geographical Society's patron's gold medal in 1999, the John Muir lifetime achievement award in 2006, and honorary degrees from Loughborough, Nottingham, Nottingham Trent, and Derby universities. In 2011 he was only the third recipient of a lifetime achievement 'Piolet d'Or', the Groupe de Haute Montagne, the awarding body, describing him as a pioneer of alpine style climbing who embodied the spirit of modern alpinism.

Scott served as president of the Alpine Club, vice president of the British Mountaineering Council, and a member of the management committee of the UIAA (the International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation). At the UIAA he aimed to rein in the proliferation of bolts drilled into rocks for sport climbing and wrote a 2014 report on the preservation of rock for adventure climbing. The UIAA recognized CAN with an award in 2018 and named Scott its first honorary member from the UK in 2020.

Doug Scott cut a dashing figure and had a dry wit. When he was in his prime, his shoulder-length hair with headband, beard, and wire-rimmed glasses often prompted comparisons to John Lennon, though he was a 'healthy hippie', big, burly, and built 'like a brick shit-house' (Hankinson, 13). By 1999 his balding pate and unkempt white hair swept back to his collar evoked 'the original Dr Who—albeit a rugged, outdoor version, in jeans, trainers and sweatshirt' (*The Guardian*, 3 April 1999). After retiring to Cumbria to tend his organic garden 'in moleskins and tweed jacket, he looked more like the country squire' (UK Climbing, 10 Dec 2020). In later years Scott enjoyed retelling his reply on the summit of Denali in 1976 to a climber who asked, why do you climb? 'Well, I get grumpy when I don't' ('Doug Scott—Climbing and Mental Health', Mountain Heritage Trust).

During the coronavirus lockdown in August 2020, Scott donned his blue climbing gear from Everest for a charity ascent of the flight of stairs in his home to benefit Community Action Nepal. He died of cerebral lymphoma on 7 December 2020 at his home, Stewart Hill Cottage, Hesket Newmarket, Wigton, Cumbria, survived by his wife, Trish, and the five children of his earlier marriages.

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