

## Freeskier Arne Backstrom Dies in Peruvian Cordillera

Contributed by Meghan Ward  
Tuesday, 15 June 2010

On June 3, 2010, the freeskiing world lost one of its finest up-and-coming athletes, Arne Backstrom, at the age of 29.

Click Image to Zoom{rokzoom album=|backstrom| title=|Arne Backstrom. On June 3, 2010, the Seattle native and competitive freeskier died on the south face of Nevado Pisco (5752m) in Cordillera Blanca, Peru after losing control on an icy patch on his descent from the summit. [Photo] Ian Coble }|images/stories/erik/news/backstrom-2.jpg{/rokzoom}

On June 3, 2010, the freeskiing world lost one of its finest up-and-coming athletes, Arne Backstrom, at the age of 29. Backstrom was in the Peruvian Cordillera Blanca with a team from Sweetgrass Productions to attempt a descent of the southeast face of Artesonraju (5999m). The big-mountain skier was on an acclimatization day on a smaller peak, Nevado Pisco (5752m), when the accident took place.

The morning of June 3, Backstrom, accompanied by experienced ski mountaineers, Kip Garre and Dave Rosenbarger, reached the summit of Nevado Pisco. On their descent, they stopped about 150 metres below the summit to look at a 40-degree ramp leading to the south face of the mountain. Arne decided to descend the ramp to look at snow conditions on the south face, where he encountered hard snow or ice. After attempting to traverse onto softer conditions on the south face, "Arne hit a patch of ice... pitching him off balance and into a fall too steep to arrest," Sweetgrass Productions reported on their website. Garre and Rosenbarger found him just over an hour later beneath the face. Backstrom had sustained head trauma even though he had been wearing a helmet and had neither a carotid nor radial pulse.

Click Image to Zoom{rokzoom album=|backstrom| title=|Arne Backstrom enjoying sunshine at Heavenly Mountain, Squaw Valley, California. [Photo] UnofficialSquaw.com }|images/stories/erik/news/backstrom-1.jpg{/rokzoom}

Backstrom leaves behind a family of athletes well-known to snow sport enthusiasts: his parents, Steve and Betsy, his sister, Ingrid and brother, Ralph. Arne, who had recently won the McConkey Cup and the Canadian Freeskiing Championships in Revelstoke, British Columbia, was born in Seattle, Washington and had been living in Squaw Valley, California, since 2006. He majored in Chemistry at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington, where he also competed with their ski team.

Though Arne was relatively new to the competitive freeski circuit, he had been ski racing competitively since age 11 and, according to his sister, was best at "whatever he touched." The skier quickly acquired a reputation as a gifted ski alpinist, particularly after a stint in Chamonix, where he descended the rarely skied Mallory Couloir under the Aiguille du Midi (3842m) and the 11,066' Himalayan Face off the west face of Mont Blanc. Arne wrote about these adventures and more on his blog, arnebackstrom.blogspot.com. He had been featured skiing in films by Matchstick Productions and Warren Miller Entertainment.

Click Image to Zoom{rokzoom album=|backstrom| title=|Arne Backstrom skis Crystal Mountain, Washington. [Photo] Ian Coble }|images/stories/erik/news/backstrom-3.jpg{/rokzoom}

Ian Coble, a friend of Backstrom, wrote about the skier on his blog shortly after his death: "Arne was an incredible person. Always stoked with whatever was happening around him, he always had a smile on his face. You could see his face light up when he was out in the mountains. He truly looked like he was at home."

Sources: [espn.go.com](http://espn.go.com), [thecleanestline.com](http://thecleanestline.com), [arnebackstrom.blogspot.com](http://arnebackstrom.blogspot.com), [iancoble.blogspot.com](http://iancoble.blogspot.com), [sweetgrass-productions.com](http://sweetgrass-productions.com)