

Duane G. "Shorty" Lankford

August 5, 2025

As a Wall-Street Investment Banker, a global Adventure Travel Guide, a college athlete, a chef, and a longtime Rocky Mountain National Park Volunteer Ranger, Duane G. "Shorty" Lankford lived a life overflowing with adventures and accomplishments across more than eight decades on five continents.

The eldest son of two young college students, Duane was born near the Colorado State University campus in Fort Collins, Colorado in 1932. In 1927, his father, William Oliver Lankford, was a celebrated Colorado state-champion athlete who went on to work as both a professional baseball player and a college football and basketball coach at CSU Alamosa. He married another CSU student Irish-American girl, Mary Martha Lago, from the Colorado mining district of Cripple Creek, Colorado. The couple soon moved to the CSU Greeley campus to complete Mary's education degree. With two boys to raise, Duane and his younger brother Larry, the family finally settled in Longmont. Following his father's untimely death, Duane's mother Mary Martha moved with her two young sons to the outskirts of Lowry Airforce Base in Denver, where she worked as a WWII era Jeep driver for visiting military VIPs. After the war ended, she worked for the next four decades as a public school teacher in Jefferson County, Colorado — finally, passing away at the age of 102 under her son Duane's care in Estes Park in 2009.

As teenagers Duane and his younger brother Larry both attended Denver's East High School. Duane graduated as a senior in 1950. Both boys were award winning-athletes and distinguished scholars, and even worked side by side as professional cowboys during summers for the Geneva Glen Camp in Indian Hills high above Denver. With help from a scholarship at the University of Denver, Duane put himself through school by working nights as a cook at Denver's Stapleton Airport, and summers up at Central City's famous Teller House Hotel restaurant — where he was rigorously trained to prepare classical French cuisine by a celebrated European master chef.

In 1955, Duane married his East High School sweetheart Eleanor "Polly" Scott in her family's home in Denver. Their growing family soon included his eldest son Scott, born in 1957; his second son Kurt, born in 1959; and their youngest child Becky, born in 1963. Working for Bache and Company in downtown Denver, Duane soon built a nationwide reputation as an investment banker in the Municipal Bond industry — eventually earning senior positions in Beverly Hills, on Wall Street, and in San Francisco prior to founding his own firm here in Colorado, Duane G. Lankford and Company. Throughout his long career, he financed municipal and regional water infrastructure projects in dozens of large and small towns across the Intermountain West, including foundational infrastructure projects in both Aspen and Breckenridge.

Having mastered mountaineering and cross-country skiing, Duane co-founded an early adventure-travel company named The Wilderness Institute in 1972, both leading and participating in dozens of treks and expeditions from the Himalayas to Africa, from Europe to Alaska, and from Mexico to South America for the next twenty years.

After his first marriage ended, Duane met and married Jariyaporn "Kartoon" Lankford in 1991. Following their honeymoon in her native Thailand — and a trek to Mount Everest in Nepal! — the couple soon settled down in their

forever-home in Estes Park, proudly serving together as Volunteer Rangers in Rocky Mountain National Park for decades.

Hiking and skiing well into his 80s — often with an oxygen tank strapped to his belt! — Duane passed away peacefully from emphysema with his family by his side at the age of 93 inside the same Poudre Valley Hospital in Fort Collins where he was born in 1932 . He is survived by his wife Jariyaporn Lankford, his eldest son Scott Lankford, his daughter Becky Wayland, and his Thai step-son Kittisak Philachai. No memorial service date has been announced.

On his last full day on earth, he surprised us all by singing a few favorite songs (on key, and by heart!) for family members gathered at his bedside. The very last song he sang for us that day — an old cowboy ballad about a renegade stallion named “Skyball Paint”, harking back to his own teenage years as a Wrangler at Geneva Glen Camp — captures Shorty’s own adventurous and rebellious spirit perfectly:

Skyball Paint was a devil’s saint
And his eyes were fiery red.
Good men have tried that horse to ride
And all of them are dead.
Well I won’t brag, but I rode that nag
‘Till his blood began to boil.
When I hit the ground I ate three pounds
Of good old Texas soil.

Singin’ yippee ti-yo, whoopie ti-yo
Ride ‘em high and down you go.
Sons of the Western soil.

The next morning, listening to Luciano Pavarotti hit the high note in the final notes of his favorite opera aria, "Recondita armonia" from Puccini's "Tosca," Duane drew his own final breath in peace.

Tribute Wall

SL

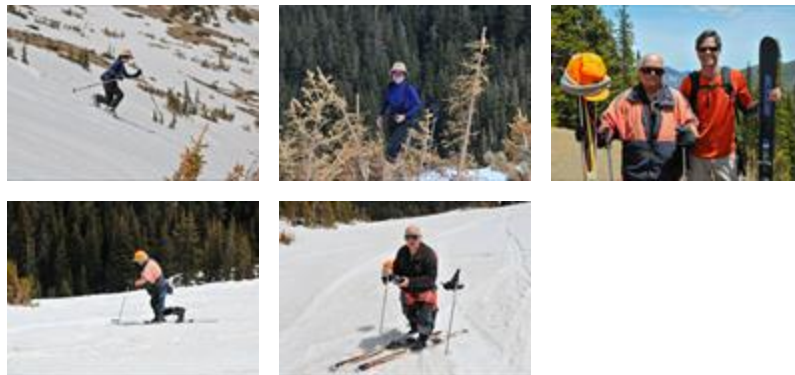
“ 2 files added to the album Memories Album



Scott Lankford - September 03, 2025 at 04:39 PM

BB

“ 7 files added to the tribute wall



Bill Benedict - August 25, 2025 at 10:21 PM

BB

“ I met Mr. Langford as a patient and ended up with Shorty as a friend. My most memorable time was backcountry skiing with Shorty and Toon in Rocky Mountain National Park.



Bill Benedict - August 25, 2025 at 10:21 PM

SL

I accompanied my father to many of his appointments with you over the years -- and always appreciated the lively conversations about cross country skiing! Kudos, also, for capturing my father's perfect form on Telemark Turns (which he managed to maintain well into his 80s). And Toon's perfect Telemarks too!

Scott Lankford - September 02, 2025 at 04:08 PM

BT

Hi Scott, I'm sorry to hear of your dad's passing. He was a nice, interesting person.

I went with you and your dad as a member of his wilderness organization, where we climbed the Mexican volcanoes, Popocatepetl and Orizaba, in late fall of 1978.

I also climbed Mt Elbert with you and your dad's and our friend, John Chunko (deceased in 2010), via Elbert's west side in 1979.

*Bob Trester
Centennial, CO*

Bob Trester - December 28, 2025 at 02:50 PM



“ 4 files added to the album Memories Album



Goes Funeral Care & Crematory - August 25, 2025 at 10:32 AM