Gunnar Ramsli 1920–2006

Tormod Klemsdal & Børre Aas

To cite this article: Tormod Klemsdal & Børre Aas (2006) Gunnar Ramsli 1920–2006, , 60:4, 319-320, DOI: 10.1080/00291950601040326

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/00291950601040326

Published online: 18 Feb 2007.
established fellow workers. He continued with his extensive polar interests after his retirement in 1983, including an important effort to upgrade the Fram Museum in Oslo, of which he was board chairman in the period 1985–1996.

Tore’s impressive career is reasonably well documented, and it is certain that his wartime and polar efforts will not be forgotten.

Gunnar Ramsli 1920–2006

TORMOD KLEMSDAL & BØRRE AAS

Gunnar Ramsli grew up at Tåsen in Oslo. After an interruption during World War II, he finished his university studies during Spring 1948, graduating with a Cand. real. thesis in glacial geomorphology titled Isavsmeltingen i Nordre Gudbrandsdalen (The Deglaciation of Northern Gudbrandsdal). Part of the thesis was published in the Norwegian Journal of Geography (1947) as the article ‘Siste istid i Gudbrandsdalsfjellene’ (The last ice age in the mountains of Gudbrandsdal).

After the war, responsibility for paying out compensation to people who had suffered from snow avalanches was given to the Norwegian Ministry of Agriculture. The Ministry engaged Gunnar Ramsli in a temporary position to work on snow avalanches and avalanche protection. He made several short visits to the Swiss Federal Institute for Snow and Avalanche Research in Davos, and also obtained a one-year scholarship to fund his stay at the University of Zürich in 1959–1960. The temporary engagement turned into a permanent one, and from 1 November 1951 Ramsli was employed as a consultant in avalanche protection at the Ministry of Agriculture. His work encompassed snow and snow avalanche investigations, avalanche mapping and registration, avalanche hazard assessment, and planning of protection measures against snow avalanches and debris flows. He had a number of assignments for the Norwegian Natural Perils Pool (Norsk Naturskadepool), the Directorate of Public Roads (Statens vegvesen), Statkraft (power producer), and some large industrial enterprises. Through this work Ramsli became well known in Norway, and he participated in the preparation of safety measures for many of the locations that today have snow avalanche protection in place.

His position gave him the opportunity to attend international conferences and excursions where snow avalanches and debris flows were discussed. From 1954 to 1962 Gunnar Ramsli served as a Norwegian representative in the FAO’s working group for debris flow control and avalanche protection. In 1975–1976 he was a member of a UNESCO committee that discussed and tested methods for snow avalanche hazard classification.

In the period 1963–1972 Ramsli was a member of the Norwegian Government’s Committee for Snow Avalanche Research (Utvalget for snøskredforskning), which aimed at the organization of snow- and snow avalanche research in Norway. In June 1972, the Norwegian Parliament agreed to locate snow avalanche research at the Norwegian Geotechnical Institute (NGI). Gunnar Ramsli was asked to lead the work in the start-up phase. However, he was of the opinion that a younger person should take on this assignment, and recommended Cand. real. Karstein Lie for the post. Lie was one of Gunnar Ramsli’s many master’s students at the Department of Geography, University of Oslo, and became head of the snow avalanche section at the NGI.

In the beginning of the 1950s, Gunnar Ramsli, together with Kaare Ferdinand Skalstad and the Alsation dog Heidi, visited numerous Red Cross emergency service centres in Norway to demonstrate the use of dogs trained in searching for persons trapped in snow avalanches. This led to the foundation of the association Norske Lavinehunder (Norwegian Rescue Dogs) in February 1956.

From 1948 Gunnar Ramsli held the post of secretary of the Norwegian Geographical Society for a number of years. Together with Finn Jarstad and Odd Skau, he co-edited Gylendals atlas for folkeskolen (1955). With Kristian Gleditsch and Øyvind Limseth, he co-edited Det Bestes store verdensatlas (1963), and he also updated entries from the first edition of Gylendals Leksikon (Gylendal’s Encyclopedia).

In 1951 he wrote Sno og snoskred (Snow and snow avalanches) as one of the Ministry of Agriculture’s tracts. This was the start of a series of papers on snow, snow avalanches and snow avalanche protection. ‘Snoskred og sne-skred-problem’ was part of the compendium Naturressursforståning...
(Management of Natural Resources) published by the Department of Geography, University of Oslo, while Avalanche and Avalanche Problems in Norway was published by the International Geographical Union in Calgary in 1972. In 1974, Ramsli’s article ‘Avalanche problems in Norway’ was published in the book Natural Hazards, edited by G.F. White, and in 1980 an extended and updated issue of Sno and snøskred (Snow and Avalanches) was published by Universitetsforlaget. Later, ‘Snø og breer’ (Snow and glaciers) by Gunnar Ramsli and Olav Liestøl formed part of Volume 1 of Cappelen’s Norge from 1984. Sno and snøskred still forms part of the curriculum for the master’s course in snow and snow hydrology at the Department of Geosciences at the University of Oslo.

From 1 February 1961, Gunnar Ramsli was employed as a lecturer (Universitetslektor) at the Department of Geography, University of Oslo, a position he held until his retirement in 1987. He was Student Supervisor (studieveileder) during most of his time at the Department, and put much effort into the study programme, both with respect to administration and guidance of students. The introduction of credit points for university courses in the late 1950s led to many complicated adjustments during the early years, Ramsli responded in a reliable way. Other administrative tasks Gunnar Ramsli had included chairmanship of the section of the Department of Geography under the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences and he also was for a period Head of the Department.

Teaching became Gunnar Ramsli’s main task at the Department of Geography. His main interest and focus of attention was leading courses and excursions for undergraduate courses and also giving lectures on snow, snow cover development, snow avalanches, and avalanche protection at master’s level. Many students have come to us, his colleagues, and recounted Gunnar Ramsli’s excellent manner of communicating with them, as well as his educational and professional standards and strengths. These strengths made him a good and reputed lecturer and course and excursion leader. We, his colleagues for well over 20 years, shared the same sentiments, and from being together with him at the Department of Geography, his loyalty towards the subject, the Department and his colleagues was clearly visible. This led to close friendships. Gunnar Ramsli was one among the big army of ‘foot soldiers’ at the University of Oslo, and one who made the Department of Geography a good place to be for colleagues and students. We look back with gratitude to the time we shared with Gunnar Ramsli at the Department of Geography.