The Books of the Year

The Mont Blanc Massif: The Hundred Finest Routes Gaston Rébuffat; translated from the French by Jane and Colin Taylor. (Kaye & Ward, 1974, pp 239, 265 photographs (89 coloured), £5.95)

Near the end of the War, Gaston Rébuffat published a book called 'L'apprenti montagnard: les cinquante plus belles courses du Massif du Mont Blanc', which was soon out of print. The present book is its successor and, although the title does not say so, it is conceived on the same plan: that of taking a hypothetical beginner, who wishes to 'become an alpinist', through a progression of increasingly serious routes in the Mont Blanc region—'each route the most interesting and most rewarding of its standard'. Thus the 100 routes of Rébuffat's choice are not all of extreme difficulty; this in itself makes the book refreshing. We begin with short climbs in the Aiguilles Rouges, and even with a day spent learning ice technique on the Glacier des Bossons; we end up, among the ED's, on the N face of Les Droites and on the Central Pillar of Frêney. But the classic snow and ice routes are not underestimated: the ordinary route on Mont Blanc is no. 24 in Rébuffat's sequence, the Frontier ridge of Mont Maudit no. 50, the Old Brenva route no. 56, Route Major no. 90 and the Peuterey ridge no. 95. It is a book which has the great climbs on Mont Blanc in correct proportion.

The 20 or so pages of introductory matter reveal something of Rébuffat's enormous experience and deep feeling for mountains, both of which are evident all through the book. This section also includes brief geological and historical notes, as well as 8 pages of advice and information—inevitably highly compressed—on more practical matters. But the great bulk of the book is provided by descriptions of the 100 routes themselves. Each is introduced with a few paragraphs of personal appreciation, followed by essential details (first ascent; vertical height of route; grade; time; equipment; starting point) and by both a general and a technical description of the route itself; and every climb is illustrated by a clear line drawing and by photographs, coloured or black and white. A remarkable amount of information is conveyed without the book becoming dry or impersonal.

The photographs deserve special mention. Many of them are Rébuffat's own, but numerous other climbers have contributed. Some, but not very many, are mediocre; most, especially some of the coloured ones, are splendid. Simply as a pictorial record of climbing in the Mont Blanc range, this would be a fine book. Text and pictures together put it higher than that.

David Cox

Mountains John Cleare (Macmillan, 1975, pp 256, £4.95)

The author is in the forefront of Alpine photographers, and his high technical standards both with still and cine cameras are matched by his eye for a picture and mountaineering skills in the modern manner. He has visited many important areas: Everest, Yosemite, E Africa, as well as the more accessible great routes of the Alps, the Dolomites, Scotland in winter and what is perhaps the latest development at home: sea stacks and cliffs. It is a consider-

able tour de force to compress into a single volume of 250 pages, a general account of most of the world's ranges, something of the history of mountaineering, and several chapters of personal adventure. Inevitably there are gaps, but the book is well produced and eminently readable.

It is profusely illustrated, mainly by the author, and 2 double pages in colour are particularly splendid . . . the action shot of Ian Clough on the N face of the Matterhorn, and a fine landscape of the Colorado river. Among others are the trio of Peter Crew leading the crux of MPP on Dinas Mot, any one of which would have justified a full page, and a wide angle shot of Anthoine on Spigolo Giallo emphasising the true verticality of the big Dolomite walls. The historical review of mountaineering is sound and balanced and the author is generous in his appreciation of the older generations.

But of much more interest to superannuated mediocrities like the present reviewer are the accounts of personal adventures, whether in running a BBC spectacular, or bashing around here and there with his wild Highland buddies, of whom the principal was his great friend Tom Patey, to whose memory the book is dedicated. Occasionally one or two Yorkshiremen are added, presumably to 'lend a touch of style'.

Even so, to present a review of unqualified approval to this Club would suggest either that the reviewer is merely naïve, or that he has received a backhander from the author. Whilst the former is possible, the latter, unfortunately has not been offered. Accordingly, having had the good news, now for the bad. Firstly, not as regards the author, but the printers and the so-called 'designer'. The book is printed by the same firm as the 'Book of Modern Mountaineering' and to some extent they have improved on that performance. The colour printing is very good, and the monochromes are adequate. Yet those who know the quality of John Cleare's originals will realise how much has been lost.

The efforts of the designer are, however, little short of disastrous. He has evidently taken as his standard the double page, and it may well be that the author, seeing unbound proofs, did not notice what would happen when stitch binding was introduced. Far too many fine prints are set in the centre and thus divided by the binding. There is another and equally valid criticism of pages carrying 2 colour prints, each good in themselves. But when 2 such prints of very differing colour balance, and indeed differing size, are combined, the result is a discord, to the detriment of both illustrations. Examples are to be seen on pp 25 and 45.

So much for the illustrations. Now as to the work of the author himself. He will permit a few minor, indeed pedantic, criticisms. In common with most of his fellow 'hard men' his interest in the Dolomites seems to be confined to the Lavaredo and Civetta walls. Admittedly others are mentioned, but in that area the great S Walls are the feature, and that of the Marmolada (with several routes beyond the original), the Croz del Altissimo of the Brenta, Tofana de Roces and so on deserve attention. The Kalkalpen and the Julian Alps are mentioned only en passant. For me, a mere reader in Himalayan matters, an account which omits the names of Charles Evans and Dennis Davis cannot be complete. Lastly, in an ambitious book of this kind, the author would have been wise to have his proofs read by an Alpine his-

torian with at least a modest knowledge of languages. Tre *Cima* recurs frequently in the text, *Grande* Courses has been noticed, and there are really too many trivia of this kind. In other contexts, it is permissible to mention that Lord Francis Douglas was not 'a Peer of the Realm' (p 18) nor was Mark Beaufoy a Colonel 'in the Coldstream Guards' (p 16). In fact his colonelcy was in the Tower Hamlets Militia . . . a sort of Dad's Army of the day.

Enough of these diatribes . . . I repeat—a well produced and most readable book, at what must be accepted as a reasonable price . . . about equal to one bottle of the Glenfiddich, as his wild Highlanders will confirm.

C. Douglas Milner

Camera on the Crags Alan Hankinson (Heinemann, 1975, £8.00)

Who—even today when the history and traditions of mountaineering are often considered of little interest by modern climbers—is not familiar with George and Ashley Abraham, the 'Keswick Brothers'? Indeed, if I may be permitted to plagiarise a remark about Coolidge by a long departed editor of this very journal, I might truthfully say that any discussion of the early days of British rock-climbing without mention of the Abrahams would be as impossible as a discussion of the Bible without mentioning God!

Most of us are aware that besides being among the greatest and most productive of British rock-climbers, the Abraham Brothers were also fine professional photographers. For over 30 years they recorded in their pictures the sport of climbing in all the mountain areas of Britain, from the native Lake District, to North Wales and to the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. They were authors too, writing between them no fewer than 9 mountaineering books. Several have since become classics—notably 'Rock Climbing in North Wales' (1906), 'The Complete Mountaineer' (1907) and 'Rock Climbing in Skye' (1908)—in the literature of a sport which has, I understand, the biggest literature of any sport or pastime. One book, 'British Mountain Climbs', appeared as a new edition as late as 1945! The influence of the Keswick Brothers on British mountaineering was tremendous.

And now Alan Hankinson, himself a journalist and climber who lives in the Lakes, has produced a biography of the Brothers. In 28 pages he documents their mountain and photographic activities in a most readable style from their formative first climb with the great O. G. Jones—whose early and tragic death on the Dent Blanche in 1899 we can still mourn—to George's election to Honorary Membership of the Alpine Club in 1954—11 years prior to his death at the age of 93. It is an enthralling tale that needed telling.

But of course the book *is* the photographs . . . for this is primarily a collection of nearly 100 of the Abrahams' most representative pictures. All are well and carefully reproduced as full page plates. There are landscape and action pictures, some well known and others I have not seen before. Some are mediocre and have been used to illustrate points in the long and detailed captions, some have been made from unfortunately damaged negatives, but some are magnificent. These must still rank today among the greatest of climbing photographs. And to think that they were all taken with an old Underwood camera set up on a tripod. The camera was a wooden box, about a foot square, fitted with leather bellows and the inverted image focused on ground-glass

under a dark cloth. Its weight would daunt even a modern alpine hard-man. The exposures were made on to glass plates $8\frac{1}{2} \times 6\frac{1}{2}$ inches whose sensitivity was such that—on Dinas Mot—' . . . the lengthy exposure was but half completed when the "sitter" slipped off his holds . . .'. Ashley went on to remark that '. . . the plate was hopelessly ruined . . .'. And once in the Dolomites, emerging disoriented from beneath his dark cloth, Ashley stepped backwards off his ledge—only to be held by the rope. They were men in those days!

This book is far from cheap, but it is a beautiful one and one which I shall treasure. And whenever I get depressed about my own pictures I shall finger through it and find inspiration in the work of these, the first and greatest of British mountain photographers.

John Cleare

Mountain Medicine Michael Ward (Crosby Lockwood Staples, 1975, pp 376, illustrations and diagrams, £10)

This book is not easy reading. It is, however, a most important contribution to the scientific section of Alpine Literature. It is essentially a book for those with some training in physiology and medicine and for such readers, who are also mountaineers, it is almost compulsory reading. It is a book that is full of meat and packed with useful references. I can't imagine any expedition doctor who will not, from now onwards, feel bound to consult it. So much for the expert reader; but even for those who have had no scientific training it has something to offer and is worth looking at. Most people who are seriously interested in mountaineering will be able to get something out of it. For example, the first chapter, which is an historical review of the medical aspects of mountaineering, is of considerable general interest, and is extremely well done.

My only criticism of the book is that in trying to talk to a wide audience the author has rather fallen between two stools. In maintaining his scientific integrity for the benefit of trained readers he has been forced to use a scientific jargon which, though appreciated by them no doubt, must be almost incomprehensible to the ordinary reader. It should therefore be emphasised that this is really a book for the scientist. Perhaps that is a pity, because there really is much in it to interest such people as mountain rescue teams, expedition leaders, mountain guides, Outward Bound organisers and teachers who take pupils into the hills. But in tackling a subject like this, the author can be forgiven for not appealing equally to everyone. It was really impossible for him to do so without some sacrifice of scientific truth.

But, what sort of book is it? Well, it's a curious mixture. It is packed with valuable and interesting information and, as a medical man who has had a special interest in mountain medicine, I find it immensely interesting. Perhaps, for the general reader it does not quite come off. And yet, bearing in mind the modern interest in matters medical, I may be wrong in saying this. To give some idea of the subjects discussed these include not only the history of mountain medicine, but such practical subjects as: acute mountain sickness, cold injury, respiratory problems, circulatory problems, accidents, and a study of man in the mountain environment as a whole. This latter section is of considerable general interest. Let there be no doubt about my own opinion of this book. I consider it to be the most important contribution to moun-

taineering literature, in the scientific field, since the days of de Saussure and the great Victorian mountaineer scientists like John Tyndall, J. Forbes, F. F. Tuckett and others. It can also hold its own in the modern field of science on this subject.

To the general reader of mountain literature I would say, don't let this book pass you by. It is not one to be read from cover to cover except by the expert. None the less, it is packed with information of an unusual kind, much of which can't but be of interest to any mountaineer. A book perhaps to be dipped into by many but indulged in by the expert few.

Charles Warren

Peaks and Pioneers—The Story of Mountaineering Francis Keenlyside (Elek, 1975, pp 248, numerous illustrations—some in colour, £15.00)

The liberating force of an interest in natural science and the stirrings of Romanticism served to change mountains, in the mind of man, from being areas of ignorance and the home of superstition, to become objects of beauty and importance. With their spirit of enquiry, the first mountain travellers were scientists in the broadest sense but the history of mountaineering as a sport and recreation could be said to start with the attempts on Mont Blanc in 1760.

This passion that lured men from the plains may have been a gradual realisation that in a mountain day, the individual traversed a cauldron of emotions—doubt, despair, hope, fear, hunger, thirst and exultation, seldom realised in normal life. It was a microcosm of his whole existence. Within a gradually increasing circle of people, mountaineering became the physical extension of the questing mind, released by the Age of Reason from the deep recesses of the Dark Ages, and as the Alps were the most easily accessible to the densely populated centres of Europe, so the first steps were taken there.

Francis Keenlyside traces these developments in the first chapters of his book. He then deals with other ranges, the Caucasus, the mountains of the Americas, New Zealand and Africa. A whole chapter on the Himalaya until 1939 follows, whilst post World War II developments are dealt with geographically—Europe, America, Asia and the Himalaya. He ends with a Chapter 'The One and the Many', befittingly prefaced by the quotation from Gerard Manley Hopkins which starts 'O the mind, mind has mountains'.

His method of narration is to introduce accounts by a number of the many people who have written of their climbs. These are linked by passages in which he sets or changes the scene, or discusses trends, thus preparing the reader for an understanding of the next personal account. This method has the merit of informing the reader first hand; what is more the parts written by Francis Keenlyside are among the best in the book—they are terse, illuminating, knowledgeable and eminently readable.

Many men and women (for they have a section to themselves) of varying attitudes, proclivities, literary and mountaineering talent, spring from the paper; of Ricardo Cassin, Fosco Maraini writes 'There is something indestructible about this man, something palaeolothic and Neandertalish'. 'You may sense an inner force utterly alien to our complicated, modernised and intellectualised world'. Of Emilio Comici he writes, 'He considered mountaineering

as a sort of music—climbing for him was a sort of ballet', whilst Bonatti is 'an engineer, a magician'. Tilman's classic comment on the top of Nanda Devi 'I believe we (he and Odell) so far forgot ourselves as to shake hands on it', provides an Anglo-Saxon counter weight.

In his final Chapter, Francis Keenlyside gives a long quotation from Tejado-Flores's 'Games Climbers Play' as well as a sensible send off by Kevin Fitzgerald to some pseudo-scientific behavioural psychology. The author's own conclusion is that mountaineering, by its very 'uselessness' is an antidote to the intellectual strivings of everyday life. Yet, a knowledge of mountaineering has helped in an understanding of man's complicated yet subtle body mechanisms, as well as contributing to our appreciation of the earth's surface, and both these activities bring mountaineering into the main stream of man's desire to extend the limits of his knowledge. Perhaps in one context, the mountaineer is 'useful' and in the other 'useless', and it is a pleasure, I admit, to find that my own activities in both these spheres are recorded; on the one hand, treating cases of frostbite after the Eigerwand direct and taking part in the Himalayan Scientific Expedition 1960–1, and on the other, making the first ascent of what the author considers may have been the hardest voie normale to date in the Himalaya—Ama Dablam. In this context, it is surprising that he does not comment more on the S Face of Annapurna as being probably the hardest route (pace Everest SW Face) yet achieved in the Himalaya.

It is a difficult task to summarise elegantly and with both precision and knowledge, such a vast subject, covering activities over 150 years on every Continent, yet Francis Keenlyside has carried out this mammoth task with verve, understanding and lucidity. The illustrations are outstanding in both their relevance to the text and in the sheer beauty of composition and colour. They add an extra dimension to such a book, for part of the mountain passion is bound up with visual images. This book is simply the best book on the history of mountaineering so far published.

Michael Ward

Regional Notes 1975

T. M. Connor

As intimated in the Asia Notes for 1974, we have been taking stock and reconsidering what objective this Journal can best fulfil in its Notes sections. In the past, we have aimed to cover in brief in a reasonably comprehensive way as many details as possible of climbs done in the previous year, in 8 selected geographical areas. However, the current scale of effort is now so vast that this becomes an almost impossible task with the space and manpower available, particularly at a time when economic factors are limiting the size of the Journal. Also, since it is an annual, such brief details are no longer particularly newsworthy items, since in recent years a number of other publications have appeared which are better geared to function as news media by virtue of their more frequent appearance throughout the year. It thus seems better for us to restrict our Notes section and alter its function to some extent. As a result, we will in future in no sense attempt a comprehensive coverage of the previous year's activities. Rather, we will aim only to mention some of the most outstanding events of the year and will attempt to identify trends where these are apparent. We will continue to include reviews of guidebooks but