
Reviews



The Matterhorn from Riffelalp. Gabriel Loppé. 1879. Oil. 96 x 73cm.
(Alpine Club Collection HE019P)

Reviews



One Day as a Tiger

Alex MacIntyre and the birth of light and fast alpinism

John Porter

Vertebrate Publishing, 2014, pp244, £20

The 1979 *American Alpine Journal* was an outstanding volume for mountaineering achievement: the previous year, Americans led by Jim Whittaker had completed a 40-year quest by reaching the summit of K2 and the American Women's Himalayan Expedition, led by Arlene Blum, had confirmed, in the words of the T-shirt, that 'a woman's place is

on top' with an ascent of Annapurna I.

Another big name in the contents list was that of Chris Bonington with an account of the ambitious British attempt on K2's unclimbed west ridge. Like the women's expedition, which saw the deaths of Alison Chadwick-Onyszkiewicz and Vera Watson, the Brits also suffered tragedy, Nick Estcourt being swept away in an avalanche. Bonington notes that the west ridge climbers 'numbered only eight.' He added: 'we had all had enough of big expeditions.'

Only eight? What then of two other expeditions recorded in the 1979 *AAJ* with just four Americans on the north ridge of Latok I, and four climbers (two Poles, one Brit and one American) on the south buttress of Changabang? Admittedly both peaks fall short of the debilitating 8000m contour, but the style in which these super-hard routes were tackled, indeed the whole aura around the expeditions, speaks of a different age of alpinism – different from heavy-duty *bundobusts* of the past, yet also qualitatively different from the age that would soon follow it, with top-flight alpinists incorporated into the entertainment industry, however pure in spirit the participants.

The Brit on Changabang in 1978 was Alex MacIntyre, the primary subject of this long-anticipated book; the American is its author John Porter, though after decades living in Cumbria, Porter is surely now best described as an Anglo-American and is, after all, a recent vice-president of the Alpine Club.

First, a couple of quotes from that 1979 *AAJ* which in the restrained language of the time give a flavour of what the young Turks of alpinism were up to. Michael Kennedy on Latok I: 'We had been on the climb so long that it seemed as if this was the only thing we had ever known. Memo-

ries faded into the distant past. Each day was routine: get up, put on a brew, eat, boots on, dress against cold, pack the gear, climb, haul loads, hack out a platform, eat, sleep – the details were all the same, the days alike, blurred into a simple ritual of the climb.¹

John Porter recalled day seven on Changabang, heading to the upper icefield they'd dubbed the 'Cyclops' Eye': The last pitch gave Alex an exercise in one-arm ice-axe pull-ups after the lower half of the icicle he was climbing collapsed under him.

'We traversed to the left side of the Cyclops' Eye and fixed a rope in an icy gully before returning to join the others at the spectacular bivouac nicked in a small ridge in the icefield. I was suffering on alternate nights from stomach pain and this was one of them. Sleep came only as a series of quick nightmares. Krzysztof's groans continually brought me back to the reality of our position. He had not eaten for four days and was losing coherence. I prayed for the summit next day and entertained myself with the glittering stars and the gradual dawn that gathered around the distant peaks of Nepal.²

And the world knew nothing of any of this at the time. Kennedy's 'simple ritual of the climb' went on for 26 days uninterrupted by satellite phone-calls and Porter could count the glittering stars without thoughts of updating his blog or obligations to sponsors. While the Changabang and Latok I climbs – and that of the NE face of Koh-i-Bandaka, Afghanistan, in 1977 by MacIntyre, Porter and Voytek Kurtyka – seem modern in concept and character, they took place, as Porter points out, at a time closer to the Second World War than to today.

The marketing men had yet to discover the selling power of mountaineering; expeditions of the sort that launched MacIntyre's star may have had a cobbled together feel – 'privateering' is how Porter describes it – but there was a freewheeling *joie de vivre* about them that seems absent from today's professional scene.

Yet the fun was fading from MacIntyre's climbing too. Porter contrasts the Alex with whom he sang 'Be kind to your web-footed friends!' – on a freezing Andean bivouac during the first ascent of Nevado III, in Peru's Cordillera Blanca – to the goal-focused professional and BMC national officer he became only a couple of years later, spurred on by an ascent of Dhaulagiri's east face. Four years and two weeks after standing on the summit of Changabang, Alex MacIntyre was dead. On 15 October 1982, a single hurtling stone struck his helmet, smashing it apart and extinguishing one of the leading lights in a generation of outstanding alpinists. He was just 28 years old.

Porter's penetrating biography of his friend and climbing partner suggests inevitability in MacIntyre's fate. A life once so seemingly carefree took on a more ominous trajectory. Maybe it wouldn't have necessarily ended there, that day on the south face of Annapurna, but ambition was driving him



Alex MacIntyre at base camp, Koh-i-Bandaka, Wakhan Corridor, 1977.
(John Porter)

1. *American Alpine Journal*, vol 22 (1979), 24-28. (The north ridge route remains uncompleted.)

2. *Ibid* 29-35



Descending the original route on Changabang after the first ascent of the south face. From *One Day as a Tiger*. (John Porter)

ever closer to the edge. And MacIntyre knew it. He had dark premonitions about Annapurna, confiding to Porter on the eve of the fateful attempt that he had been having 'scary dreams'.

MacIntyre's partner that day was René Ghilini, a French-Italian alpinist at least as aggressively ambitious as MacIntyre himself. Porter, suffering from diarrhoea and out-performed by his younger companions, had opted out of the summit bid and witnessed the accident through his camera lens from just above base camp.

Porter's candid admissions about his own doubts and fears, along with his charting of MacIntyre's change in character from climbing vagabond to professional alpinist with a tick list are two of the engrossing aspects of this book. For many readers, I suspect, it will also be a nostalgia trip, through the glory days of the Leeds University Union Climbing Club, the era of John Syrett, Alan Manson, Roger Baxter-Jones, Brian Hall and

'habitual student' Bernard Newman (how could I leave out of this abbreviated list of luminaries my erstwhile successor in the editor's chair?).

These were years when climbing was laced with sex, drugs and loud music. I hesitate over the usual third element of that trio; this was the 1970s, rock and roll was being overtaken by punk and 1960s radicalism by a sort of cheery nihilism. The hard edge of Thatcherism lurked around the corner. Porter is a natural social commentator; he captures the zeitgeist perfectly and doesn't, unlike others, make the mistake of attributing anarchic behaviour exclusively to climbers. He has a broader vision.

One Day is in several respects a unique eyewitness account of a scene hitherto

only sketchily recorded between the exhaustively chronicled exploits of climbing's elder statesmen (Bonington, Scott, Messner and their contemporaries) and the British rock climbing renaissance more recently detailed by, among others, Ron Fawcett, Ben Moon and Johnny Dawes. And only Porter could write with such first-hand authority on expeditioning with Polish teams, notably Andrzej Zawada and Voytek Kurtyka. Black-marketeering, being smuggled across the USSR by train and into Afghanistan en route for Koh-i-Bandaka: the tales coalesce into a unique portrait of Cold War climbing.

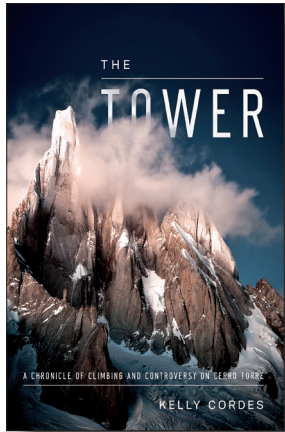
The idea of writing a biography formed in Porter's mind only a couple of years after the Annapurna accident. Much of the detail about MacIntyre's early years came from conversations with Alex's mother, Jean MacIntyre. Yet the book went on hold after Mrs MacIntyre was diagnosed with terminal cancer. 'If you have to finish the book do so when I'm gone,' she

had asked. And Porter complied. (The weakest parts of the book are to my mind two magazine articles by MacIntyre himself, inclusions useful as first-hand narrative perhaps, but rambling and juvenile in style.)

I hope John feels he has another book in him and that it won't be quite so long in gestation. He writes with an easy fluency and an insider's knowledge of the mountaineering scene stretching back five decades. Over that time he's watched climbing evolve into 'an established part of the entertainment industry', on which he offers thoughtful opinion. And then there's the matter of risk. As John notes, MacIntyre was one of a generation that 'all but climbed itself into extinction'. Was that down to bad luck? No one could have predicted the trajectory of that single stone. Was it poor judgement or obsessive ambition? He reflects on this briefly, concluding: 'Alex was unlucky, but his ambition pushed him to extremes.'

One Day deservedly scooped the Grand Prize at the 2014 Banff Mountain Book Festival and I would confidently expect that by the time this *AJ* appears Porter will be on the shortlist for the 2015 Boardman Tasker Prize, and a likely winner. And then? There is so much more I'd like to read from John Porter.

Stephen Goodwin



The Tower

A chronicle of climbing and controversy on Cerro Torre

Kelly Cordes

Patagonia, 2014, pp400, US\$27.95

'Calm around Cerro Torre never lasts,' Kelly Cordes writes early in his comprehensive and compelling history of this exceptional mountain. He's talking about the weather of course, but right from the start the controversy Cerro Torre engendered matched its reputation for sticking its elegant snout into some of the world's worst weather. 'A shriek turned to stone,' Reinhold Messner called it, but only when the wind blows. Under blue skies and high

pressure it's the closest you can imagine to mountaineering perfection, a kind of Platonic ideal of what a climbing challenge should be. It provokes something akin to lust. Lionel Terray put it neatly, looking over at Cerro Torre from the summit of FitzRoy in 1952: 'Now there's a mountain worth risking one's skin for!'

Seven years and a day after Terray's judgement, an Italian émigré called Cesarino Fava left a snow cave on the Torre Glacier for one final attempt to see something of his two companions. They had been gone for six days, the last three of them in a horrendous storm, the wind overhead howling like a jet engine. He was preparing himself to descend and tell the world that Cesare Maestri and Toni Egger were dead. Then he saw something in

the snow, and rushed uphill towards it. The shape turned out to be the half-dead form of Maestri who looked up at Fava and said: 'Toni, Toni, Toni.'

The story Maestri told the world of a brilliant, nervy dash up the frozen cliff of Cerro Torre to the summit, and the harrowing descent, ending with Egger being swept to his death in an avalanche, has been revealed to all but a cadre of committed believers in Italy to be a fraud. Anyone who had any lingering doubts about this would have had them sorely tested by Rolando Garibotti's 2004 seminal article in the *American Alpine Journal*, titled 'A Mountain Unveiled: A Revealing Analysis of Cerro Torre's Tallest Tale.' Despite the fact this important article was translated into Italian, it has never been challenged.

Why do we need anything more than Garibotti's exemplary essay? Much has happened in the intervening years. Patagonian climbing has, thanks to the arrival of excellent and timely weather forecasts, changed the game forever. Garibotti himself, together with Ermanno Salvaterra and Alessandro Beltrami, climbed, more or less, the route Maestri claimed and found no trace of the 1959 attempt above the already discovered fixed ropes that end a thousand feet from the ground and three thousand short of the summit. This despite Maestri claiming to have placed '60 or 70' bolts on his desperate retreat from the top.

But Cordes does much more than simply bring the story up to date. He does several other important things, beyond telling a fascinating and important story with verve and energy. There is, for instance, a useful chapter where he considers the likelihood that it was technically possible for Egger to have climbed the freakish sheet of ice that Maestri said covered the mountain and allowed them to succeed. Given the ice tools available, and what the very best ice climbers were doing elsewhere, including Egger himself on Jirishanca, it's inconceivable.

Cordes successfully brings together the past and the present, particularly the free ascent of Maestri's 1970 abomination dubbed the Compressor Route and the removal of its bolts. In doing so he touches on quite profound ideas to do with sovereignty and how the mythology of the past becomes some kind of intellectual property, to be fought over and owned. (These issues are very current, and extend to how commercial climbing is practised now in the Himalaya, with fixed ropes expanding a lucrative market.)

Maestri's second route on Cerro Torre took a line up the south-east ridge, a route tried in 1968 by a British team that included Dougal Haston, Martin Boysen, Mick Burke and Pete Crew. The British came close to success. Had Haston not dropped their bolt kit, a few studs would have seen them past the crux and perhaps to the summit. When they came home, they expressed doubts about Maestri's 1959 claim to a route that looked even harder than the one they'd tried. Maestri was enraged and set out for Patagonia with a petrol-driven drill and hundreds of bolts: 'I return and attack their routes, the routes they were not able to climb. I will humiliate them, and they will feel ashamed of having doubted me.' Despite creating something akin to a *via ferrata*, he still didn't quite reach the summit.

When Hayden Kennedy from the US and Jason Kruk from Canada did the first 'fair means' ascent of the south-east ridge in 2013, after scores of repeats of the Compressor Route, they decided, standing on the summit, to remove Maestri's bolts, particularly from the headwall, chopping around 120 as they descended. Their actions were bitterly resented in the town of Chaltén – a place that simply didn't exist in 1968 and has been built literally on the back of mountain tourism – where locals attempted to threaten and intimidate Kruk and Kennedy, seemingly for the crime of destroying their livelihood.

As it happens, interest in the Compressor Route was already waning before the bolts were chopped and many climbers around the world, certainly those with a clear view of what alpinism should be, hailed their actions as a bold step in the right direction. This was a restatement of what Mummery had argued back in the nineteenth century – that you can climb anything given enough technology, but that doesn't mean you should.

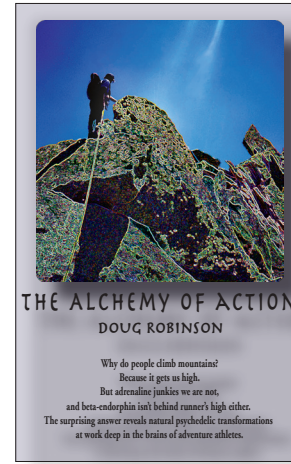
Cordes skilfully weaves together the long decades of the Maestri controversy with these modern developments, and in doing so reveals how the legend of Maestri and Egger – and also of the third team member from 1959, Cesarino Fava – has become a legend that draws people in, along with the beauty of Patagonia and the quality of the climbing. Undermine the legend, and people feel threatened, as though it were some religious myth that deserves defending.

He opens and closes the book with Fava, interviewing his son about the 'ascent' in 1959, and then revealing at the end that Fava lied, not just about Cerro Torre, but about other events in his life, in particular the circumstances of a rescue attempt on Aconcagua. Rolo Garibotti and Reinhold Messner both seem to agree that Fava wasn't just an accomplice but more of a driving force in the concoction of Maestri's claim, making critical interventions in support of Maestri, even when the Spider of the Dolomites seemed close to revealing the truth. Cordes reveals how this charming man kept secrets.

There are one or two small omissions. I would, for example, like to know much more about the early history of both Cesare Maestri and Toni Egger; these men were born in the same country, but the vagaries of history drove Egger to a new home in Austria. What was Maestri's early life really like? I would have liked also a little more on the significant contribution of Eastern European climbers like Silvo Karo. But these are minor points.

For those who argue that this story must be left in the past, this strong and highly readable contribution to climbing history should make them think again. Not only does it show how the past impinges on the present, it makes an urgent case for those most affected – Toni Egger's family – to be told what really happened. It asks searching questions about what kind of world we want mountaineering to be – one where honesty and compassion are paramount, or one where the comforting lies of the past are allowed to infect the future.

Ed Douglas



The Alchemy of Action

Doug Robinson

Moving Over Stone, 2013, pp210, US\$24

There's a passage you may know from Yvon Chouinard. He's on the seventh and penultimate day on El Cap's Muir Wall, forging a new route with T M Herbert. The unremitting effort has left them pretty spaced out.

'With the more receptive senses we now appreciated everything around us,' Chouinard wrote. 'Each individual crystal in the granite stood out in bold relief. The varied shapes of the clouds never ceased to attract our attention. For the first time we noticed tiny bugs that were all over the walls, so tiny

they were barely noticeable... This unity with our joyous surroundings, this ultra penetrating perception gave us a feeling of contentment that we had not had for years.'³

I hope you've experienced such moments of clarity and calm in the mountains yourself. It's a big part of why we go there; well, it is for me, even if I push myself nowhere near so hard as Chouinard and Herbert.

But what's going on here? What brings about this enhanced state of awareness, of being, even? Doug Robinson has been turning over this question for most of a long and active mountain life. He had a strong hunch back in the 1960s when the sub-cultures of Haight-Ashbury and climbing coalesced in Yosemite. LSD was the catalyst as climbers at Camp 4 enacted Timothy Leary's memorable dictum: 'Turn on, tune in, drop out.'

Robinson soon realized that the chemically induced state of mind he derived from LSD and marijuana was eerily like the one that arose spontaneously out of the intensity of his life on the Valley's granite walls. As he put in a seminal essay, 'The Climber as Visionary', published in 1969 in *Ascent*, climbing and its attendant fear 'produces a chemical climate in the body that is conducive to visionary experience'.

The idea sounded plausible – not dissimilar to the visionary states induced by mystics through fasting or other extreme austerities – but at the time might best have been described as well-founded speculation. With *The Alchemy of Action*, Robinson brings us up to date. Neuroscience has moved on dramatically in recent years and the old 'metabolic voyager' thinks his case is now all but proved. So do I.

Actually Robinson is only just ahead of the curve with *Alchemy*. After suffering under decades of repressive legislation, research into psychedelic drugs is enjoying a productive renaissance. You can hardly open a weekend supplement these days without reading of the wonders of ayahuasca or the potential of LSD to treat obsessive-compulsive disorder or alleviate the

3. 'Muir Wall – El Capitan', Yvon Chouinard, *American Alpine Journal* 1966, pp46-51

anxiety of the dying. Professor David Nutt, the government's former drugs tsar, told *The Independent*⁴ that people on a psychedelic trip often experience being at one with the world, or even with the universe. The fear of dying subsides as the sense of self breaks down. They exist beyond their body. That experience can give them a sense of perpetuity, of being permanent, of being part of the cycle of life, which of course we all are.

How can such a sane and humane person have been selected by ministers as their chief policy advisor of drugs? Unsurprisingly, Prof Nutt was sacked in 2009 after saying ecstasy, cannabis and LSD were less dangerous than alcohol and tobacco.

What has all this science got to do with climbing? Well, Robinson sees it as an answer to the 'why?' question. Why climb mountains? Simple! Because it gets us high.

Answering the 'how?' question is more complicated. In fact it becomes so complicated that well into *Alchemy* Robinson suggests that less engaged readers skip the 'dense' chapters on brain chemistry and jump straight to his wrap-up. But I advise you to stick with it. It's your brain after all. And if as you gulp at the sketchy nature of that barely-in-reach hold your life is going to depend upon, it's fascinating to know that your brain is at that moment releasing a mix of chemicals, including a tiny shot of DMT (dimethyltryptamine), one of the most fiercely potent psychedelics known to man. Thus fortified, you will cruise the move. And you will feel great! (Let's hope so anyway.) Another good reason to stick with it through every page of *Alchemy* is that however many authoritative tracts you might read on this subject, nobody will tell it in such a zany, folksy way as Doug Robinson.

Alchemy is a joyous trip, guided by a knowing roshi who blends the insight of Aldous Huxley (much referenced) and the romance of John Muir with the vernacular of The Dude in *The Big Lebowski*. Take the following breakdown of the brain juices that flow when we're out on the edge. (Climbing, ski-mountaineering, running: Robinson loves them all.)

'Start with noradrenaline. Alert, alive. It's what your Starbucks or your Red Bull turns into inside your head...

Now add dopamine, pleasure itself. Mr Feelgood. And of course sultry Ms Feelgood too. The dopamine molecule is a close relative of noradrenaline. They are essentially sisters, trading outfit and maybe flirting with the same boys...

Another relative, serotonin, joins the mix. This cousin is pretty familiar too, and runs with a lot of the same brain enzymes...'

And so it jives on. The three hormones above are well studied and acknowledged. But then Robinson adds two more ingredients to the cocktail... 'the fizzy stuff that goes in with a flourish at the end, just before the wedge of lime and, of course, a tiny umbrella.'

The first is anandamide, the human hormone that mimics marijuana, but stronger. Anandamide is now the researchers' hormone of choice for

explaining 'runner's high', superceding beta-endorphin which in retrospect seems to have been way over-hyped as a candidate. Anandamide by itself could easily account for climber's euphoria, indeed for the remarkable enriching of consciousness attending all our edgier games. (Before you slip into your trainers and dash round the block to generate a shot of this stuff, bear in mind that to achieve an anandamide high you'll have to run hard for at least 50 minutes.)

Finally comes DMT, made not in the lab or ingested as ayahuasca, cooked up from the caapi vine and other plants, but generated naturally in the brain. Robinson is running a bit ahead of scientific agreement here, but that's part of the book's excitement. He contends that in the right circumstances – 'heady times where a dash of fear blends into high human function – a drop of this wickedly strong, but entirely organic, substance gets released into the brain, 'adding a jolt of Technicolor to the rewards of playing on the edge'.

So that's the hormone cocktail that Robinson believes hooks us in. There is plenty about LSD and other mind-bending chemicals in *Alchemy*; indeed the book might as well be Paisley-patterned so rich is its portrait of the 1960s – cue walk-on parts for *The Grateful Dead*, Gary Snyder, Joni Mitchell and more, and of course a bigger part for the Haight alchemist himself, Owsley Stanley. When customers complained to Owsley that his acid had dished them a nightmare, his standard reply was: 'Aww, man, you shoulda taken half!'

Robinson, however, is not advocating we trip out on LSD all over again. He's mellowed and gone organic. Far better the naturally occurring psychedelics like DMT cooked up in our brains on steep rock or as skis turn towards the fall line. No more overdose, instead a more subtle, threshold dose.

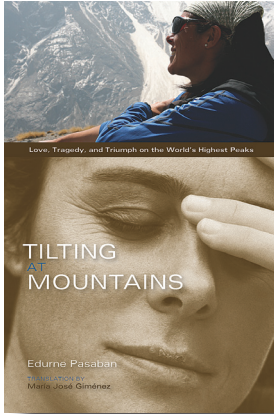
Climbing is a physical meditation, Robinson believes. If your brain delivers an organic high with freshly altered perceptions, then revel in them. 'What could be better than to be awash in the beauty of life rather than tripping out beyond it?'

Owsley Stanley is history. With this stimulating and original book it is now Doug Robinson who is the alchemist, turning wit, words and dedicated personal research to wisdom. And as he says of the hormonal cocktail served up on the edge: How could you resist?

Stephen Goodwin

• *The Alchemy of Action can be bought via the website movingoverstone.com*

4. 'Why I think the terminally ill should take LSD', *The Independent*, 7 March 2015



Tilting at Mountains

Edurne Pasaban

Mountaineers Books, 2014, pp218, £14.95

Mountains in my Heart

Gerlinde Kaltenbrunner

Mountaineers Books, 2014, pp304, £14.25

These two books relive the journeys of the only women in the world, so far, to have undisputedly climbed all fourteen 8000-metre summits. Clearly, with such a unified goal, the books share many similar experiences, but Pasaban and Kaltenbrunner have sufficiently different life stories to tell that the books complement rather than compete with each other.

Neither woman claims to have had all fourteen peaks as an initial goal. By 2007, however, when Pasaban had successfully climbed nine and Kaltenbrunner ten summits, the possibility of achieving a 'full house' became an incentive but never, each claims, a competition between them. The alleged rivalry was left for the media to enjoy. The two women were, and remain, firm friends; they stood on the summits of Broad Peak and Dhaulagiri together in 2007 and 2008.

Both books, although translated, are easy and engaging reads and follow a chronological order from the first to the last 8000-metre peak. *Tilting*

at Mountains would have benefited from a timeline of Pasaban's expeditions and a few photographs would have lightened the text, but these are minor criticisms. The book charts how, as a misfit at school, discovering her ability as a rock climber and, in particular, as a mountaineer unlocked a new identity for Pasaban. It provided 'a sort of escape, a lifeline, a way of living that was in line with my way of being in the world.'

For Pasaban, arguably more than for Kaltenbrunner, determining who she was, particularly after a suicide attempt in 2006, was critical to her unprecedented success as a mountaineer. In a curious paradox, high-altitude climbing both questioned and created her identity. For someone who became the first woman to climb all fourteen 8000-metre summits – with the dedication, pain, concentration, suffering and composure that entails – it is enlightening to observe how fragile that same person's self-confidence could be.

Such self-doubt emanated, to some extent, from an overprotective family, but undoubtedly was also a symptom of being a successful woman in the predominantly male world of Himalayan climbing. Pasaban wres-

tled in 2006 with whether she should give up mountaineering and become a 'normal' woman with husband, home and children – an issue many women, in different walks of life, often experience but, unlike Pasaban, often do not discuss so frankly. As she perceptively notes, 'the awareness of who you are isn't always easy to elucidate.' Kaltenbrunner was more assured of her place in the world and promptly ditched a boyfriend who clearly expected her to stop climbing once they married.

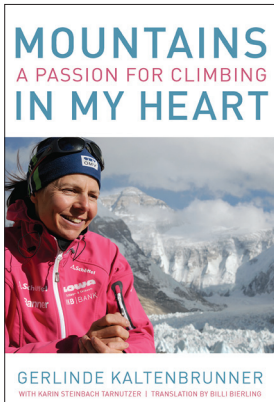
Kaltenbrunner, however, had the luxury of being 'protected by my family so I can be myself.' As a result she had fewer personal demons to vanquish than Pasaban. She also had more natural self-confidence and the advantage of meeting her future husband, the mountaineer Ralf Dujmovits, in 2003, who provided Kaltenbrunner with stability and constant support during much of her climbing career. Unlike accounts of most male climbers, personal relationships form an important part of both women's narratives, which, rather than being a distraction, provides a more holistic vision of how the mountains fit into their lives.

Because of their inevitable feminine perspective both books have an important message to convey, not only about women mountaineers but also by highlighting the oppressed position of women in Pakistan compared to those in Nepal, and of course to those in western societies. Both climbers encountered gender prejudice or worse. While Kaltenbrunner relates faintly amusing tales of Kazakh men having difficulty confronting her greater strength and all-round ability, (to say nothing of them being unwittingly subjected to expeditious use of tampons – a great story!), Pasaban recounts a more serious attempted rape. These two women's outstanding mountaineering achievements, often enacted in a society hostile to female freedom, makes the contrast to the lives of the indigenous women all the greater.

From 2003 Kaltenbrunner elected to climb in alpine style whenever possible rather than in a larger expedition group. This reflected growing self-confidence in her mountaineering ability and overall fitness. The developing relationship with Dujmovits also encouraged such an approach. Her extraordinary mental and physical condition meant Kaltenbrunner was often found continuing a climb when others, including her husband, chose to retreat. Something of the loner and the individualist emanates from her accounts. She frequently reached summits alone but this proved a source of enjoyment rather than one of fear or concern.

For both women, of course, an accurate knowledge of how far they could push themselves, both mentally and physically, was crucial. Luck and weather conditions, inevitably, also played major roles in determining the success or failure of a climb. As for most Himalayan mountaineers, there were many aborted attempts before all fourteen summits succumbed and each woman had one mountain that constantly defied them; for Pasaban it was Shisha Pangma and for Kaltenbrunner, K2. Although Pasaban may have been more cautious in her approach, she climbed all fourteen summits in just nine years while Kaltenbrunner took thirteen.

Both women's accounts, unsurprisingly, are characterised by physical



and mental strength. Kaltenbrunner became the first woman to climb all 8000-metre summits without oxygen or high-altitude porters, something only fifteen people have achieved to date. Pasaban's recovery from the depths of depression to deal with the psychological rigours of Himalayan mountaineering is staggering. When she attempted K2 in 2004 there were no women still alive who had climbed it. Her mental resolve and recovery is an example for all who ponder the apparently insurmountable – mountains or otherwise. Kaltenbrunner's relationship with the mountains is informed and strengthened, to some degree, by a religious faith that she embraced at an early age. This merges into a mysticism embracing nature, mother earth and creativity that forms a crucial part of her connection with the mountains.

For such unprecedented success in the mountains both women paid a hefty price. Numerous climbing friends and colleagues died, often literally in front of their eyes; the women themselves frequently came close to experiencing similar fates. As Pasaban writes, mountaineering was 'a passion bordering on irrationality.'

These two books provide unique windows onto a world that is commonly satiated by visions of heroic masculinity. In demonstrating varying amounts of weakness, vulnerability and doubt counterpoised with iron determination, focus and athletic ability, the books are a welcome relief from such a commonly held trope. They provide, in their differing ways, what for some might present a new dimension to femininity. While Pasaban and Kaltenbrunner's Himalayan climbs cannot be anything other than inspiring, the overwhelming impression is that the mountains enabled a true sense of freedom, purpose and identity to occur to two different women from dissimilar backgrounds. Like women alpinists in the nineteenth century, who expressed similar feelings of liberty, I would suggest that women – in a world where their role in life is still much debated – experience such sensations in the mountains more profoundly than men. As Kaltenbrunner writes:

Up here, I am free; I can leave all responsibilities behind. I don't have to please anyone else... I can be at one with myself... I feel content, even-keeled and filled with joy... In the mountains, I feel very differently than I do down in the valley.

Clare Roche

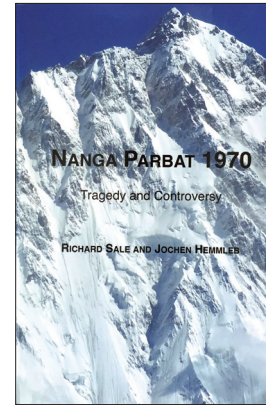
• *Neither of these books has a UK edition but both are available from amazon.co.uk.*

Nanga Parbat 1970

Richard Sale and Jochen Hemmleb

Carreg Limited, 2014, pp 206, £25

Few mountains have generated such triumph and tragedy as Nanga Parbat. Its history resonates in Germany as effectively as Everest resounds in Britain. The first ascent of the vast Rupal Face by the brothers Rein-



hold and Günther Messner in 1970 and their traversing descent by the Diamir flank, so thoroughly explored in this account, echoes the drama and unanswered questions that Mallory and Irvine left for Everest historians. But the similarities soon end. The Messners certainly reached the summit but during the descent Günther died in an avalanche and Reinhold was severely injured, narrowly escaping with his life.

The controversy that erupted through a series of misunderstandings, accusations and legal battles has no equivalent on Everest but this close examination of the tragedy and disputes following the 1970 expedition draws together the background and the repercussions that still reverberate. Messner has added to the literary history of Nanga Parbat with his own accounts of the expedition translated into English, but around ten books about the mountain and its turbulent history have not been translated from the German.

The account recalls earlier history when Nanga Parbat was strewn with tragedy. In 1934 three German climbers and six Sherpas died and three years later seven more Germans and nine Sherpas were lost in an avalanche. One victim was Willy Merkl, half-brother of Karl Herrligkoffer, who organised the 1970 expedition, insisting that significant points on the Rupal face were named after climbers who had died on the mountain. The 1970 expedition comprised German, Austrian and Italian mountaineers with Messner, chosen for his alpine record, the acknowledged star of the show with younger brother Günther a late addition to the team. For Herrligkoffer, who directed progress from base camp, it was his third expedition to the mountain since 1953 when Hermann Buhl reached the summit in a daring solo attempt, establishing himself as a hero in Messner's eyes. Seventeen years later Messner himself was poised in a high camp on the Rupal face awaiting a rocket signal from below that would indicate the latest weather forecast: blue for fair weather, allowing more time to secure the difficult final section, and red for approaching bad weather that could give Messner the chance for a swift solo bid. The forecast was fine but a red rocket was wrongly fired; Messner set off to be joined, much to his surprise, by his brother.

The two pressed on to the top and then returned after bivouacing above a steep section of the Rupal face where Felix Kuen and Peter Scholz were making their own attempt on the summit. When Messner was within shouting distance but separated by a wall of vertical rock, an exchange between Messner and Kuen left Kuen with an impression that all was well and Messner believing that help was on the way. Günther at this stage was suffering, possibly from altitude sickness, and the brothers urgently needed a rope to safeguard a descent 'where one wrong step and it would be all

over'. When no help came the Messners opted to descend by the Diamir face, which promised to be a less steep alternative. Again the brothers had to bivouac on the face. Günther died in an avalanche after Reinhold went ahead to find the best route. He was rescued by locals, severely frostbitten.

The accusations and writs soon began to fly: had the Messner brothers deliberately intended to make a traverse of the mountain, had Reinhold deliberately sacrificed his brother to achieve an historic first and who said what to whom in the shouted conversation between Reinhold and Felix Kuen? Other questions emerged: why, for example, was there no immediate effort to send a search party to the Diamir side of the mountain? The tangle of accusations and conflicting stories kept the lawyers busy and the battle lasted for years with Herrligkoffer among the most vociferous accusers. Messner's return to Nanga Parbat in search of his brother's body yielded a human fibula, which proved on DNA analysis to be most probably belonging to Günther Messner, and so the saga once more reignited.

Nanga Parbat 1970 is a thorough analysis of all the evidence in a wealth of books, statements and film about a controversial expedition surrounding someone acknowledged to be a giant among mountaineers. Messner has always fought back, sensitive to criticism. But the authors declare: 'At first it is understandable that a young man feels a victim when losing a brother with whom he had just shared the greatest triumph, under traumatic and life-threatening circumstances – and subsequently becomes the subject of accusations from a doubtful expedition leader as well as of criticism from colleagues and the media. Survivor's guilt is also a known phenomenon. Four decades after the events, however, and with Reinhold Messner able to look back on a life of ideational and material success, and enjoying a widespread fan base among both the public and the media, the victim role appears to be an artificially maintained construct and is no longer as convincing.' In the end, they conclude, the truly tragic figure is Messner himself.

Ronald Faux

Messner: My life at the limit

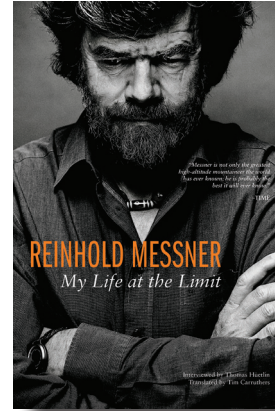
Interviews with Thomas Hüetlin

Translated by Tim Carruthers

Mountaineers Books, 2014, pp256, £13.34

This is the essential Messner, his life at the limit as the world's most renowned mountaineer. Being a series of well judged questions put to him by Thomas Hüetlin, *Der Spiegel* journalist and specialist interviewer of sporting personalities, the conversations brook no interruption yet reveal much about Messner's attitudes and the controversies that have dogged his life. The book extends previous interviews between the two and brings the Messner story up to date.

Why he has become so unassailably famous is worth a brief reminder: from rebellious boyhood Messner quickly became a bold and pioneering



alpinist, climbing the Eigerwand in record time and moving to the Himalaya where the traverse of Nanga Parbat with his brother in 1970 ended in Günther's death and a lifetime of controversy. Messner's first ascent of Everest with Peter Habeler without bottled oxygen in 1978 was followed by solo ascents of Nanga Parbat and Everest. He was first to climb all the world's 8000m peaks and the highest summits on each of the world's seven continents. He brought alpine-style techniques to the highest mountains, reaching three 8000m summits in one season. His trek record includes 2800km across Antarctica via the South Pole, 2200km across Greenland, across Bhutan from east to west and solo across the Gobi desert. His attempt to traverse the North Pole failed

when the ice he was on began to sink; he and his brother Hubert were rescued by Russian helicopter. His search for the elusive Yeti concluded by agreeing with the Dalai Lama that the creature was probably a Himalayan brown bear. As he assured Messner: 'We have got Yetis in the zoo in Lhasa.'

The 1970 expedition to Nanga Parbat was the first and most damaging clash with the mountaineering establishment and subject of a book reviewed elsewhere in this year's *Journal*. Because a wrong signal launched Messner on a solo attempt from high on the Rupal face, he was 'irritated' when his brother caught up with him. Together they reached the summit but they had no rope and without one Günther, already suffering from the altitude, refused to return down the Rupal face. Messner was asked whether he blamed himself for Günther's death: There is no one else to take the blame, only me. I bear full responsibility. That's why I don't understand why a few of the expedition members still keep trying to twist the story.'

After DNA analysis established that the bone found on Nanga Parbat originated from Günther, Reinhold was asked whether any of his former expedition members, who had accused him of sacrificing his brother to his own personal ambition, had apologised. 'No,' replies Messner. In the case of one stern critic whose wife moved in with Messner on a long-term relationship, this may have been easier to understand.

Hüetlin pulls no punches, suggesting that on Manaslu, his next eight-thousander, it all went wrong again. Why? 'It really did all go wrong again,' Messner acknowledges and vowed that from then on he would do it all on his own. 'Every time I went away with other people, something went wrong', he says. Messner reached the summit alone in terrible weather. Two other members of the expedition were lost. Once more the 'Herrligkoffer brigade' began recriminations, accusing Messner of being irresponsible, and in vigorously defending himself Messner created even more problems. A disagreement between Habeler and Messner following Habeler's account of their Everest climb was provoked by a ghost writer's

version the publisher refused to correct, but the two are now friends once more.

In 1986 with all challenges completed and running out of high mountains to climb, and much to his publisher's regret after some best-selling books, Messner turned to exploring the world's wilderness areas. Antarctica demanded a different level of stoicism and Messner's sled-sail via the South Pole was with Arved Fuchs, the German explorer. Once again the expedition produced two contrasting versions of the outcome with Fuchs insisting he was the strong member of the partnership and had pulled Messner along; Messner pointed out that he was usually ahead, covering in six hours what took Fuchs seven and a half. Fuchs, according to Messner, had wanted to stop at the South Pole but was coaxed on by Messner to reach their destination 'in a strong silence and a partnership that had served its purpose.'

With his family settled in Juval castle above Naturno in the South Tyrol from whose walls Messner spectacularly fell, severely injuring a heel, he turned to politics and in 1999 won a seat on the Green list in the European parliament. For five years he served on the networks of the commission, the council and the parliament. His particular interest was the well-being of the hill farmers and village communities in the South Tyrol that desperately needed help. As for the European parliament, he had little time for the 'pompous blowhards who pretended to represent the interests of their voters, the lobbyists, or even Europe but are really just opportunists, trading political offices for favours and the mad, egotistical scramble for list places for the next elections – I loathed all that.'

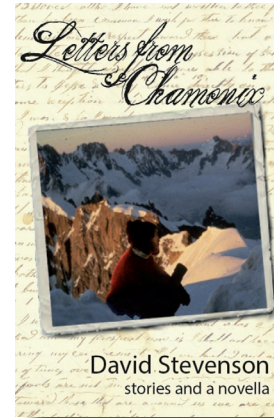
With such thunder echoing around his reputation, Messner now approaches his seventies, establishing a legacy of six museums, the Messner Mountain Museums, reflecting many aspects of mountaineering and the mountain environment, all superbly located in the South Tyrol. He reflects on a very changed mountaineering world with some climbers achieving sensational performances but with regimented crowds queuing to climb Everest and treated by guides who behaved like kindergarten teachers.

Did he ever feel gratitude? 'Of course. I've had a fantastic time. The generation of climbers before me got to go on one or two expeditions in their whole life. We could do virtually anything we wanted to do. It was a crazy time. And I was lucky to survive it; lucky that I didn't make that one big mistake; lucky that, from 1972 onward, I was able to follow my dreams.'

This is a grand and thoughtful inquisition of mountaineering's most internationally famous personality.

Ronald Faux

• *Messner: My life at the limit* is available through amazon.co.uk.



Letters from Chamonix: stories and a novella

David Stevenson

Imaginary Mountain Surveyors, 2014, pp232, US\$30/\$4 e-book

The Mantis

Philip Temple

Vertebrate Digital, 2014, e-book only, £4.99



'The mountaineer has learnt a language which is but partly revealed to ordinary men.' This sentiment, expressed in the title story of David Stevenson's award-winning collection of seven short stories and a novella 'Letters From Chamonix' serves to explain a transformation in vision, a shift in focus from the everyday to the sublime or the unexpected, which can occur when climbers are severed from their tenuous links with familiar routines and wholly committed to the testing environments in which they choose to immerse themselves. Indeed, it is these moments of transcendence which illuminate the stories in this collection and bring a generous measure of understanding to what is, for non-climbers, often an incomprehensible pursuit.

'At The Eigerletscher' has gothic resonances; Broyles meets the mysterious Enga and they drift into an agreement to climb the north face of the Eiger. Her 'fangs', the bloody-tasting soup they consume and the faintly menacing castle-like hotel they stay in all subvert the traditional idea of preparations for a climbing trip. After a large meal, Broyles falls into a feverish, hallucinatory stupor from which he is awakened by a giant of a man who leads him unroped and at break-neck speed almost as far as Death Bivouac and then disappears. Broyles completes the route, never feeling in control, beset by terrors and, after awakening in his hotel room in the care of a doctor, is assured that his perception of events is false. This genre manipulation strays into magical realism and the unaccustomed insights and excessively heightened state this affords takes the reader into the realms of intense and often inexplicable transformational emotional experiences typical of those felt high in the mountains.

In 'After The Expedición' Richards is a disillusioned mountain guide – tired of inexperienced clients' unreasonable demands and expectations, worn out with the loss of friends, stripped of the joy and optimism he once had in climbing the mountains whose ascents have become routine, whose secrets have become too widely known. The truth of a porter's words ring

hollowly: 'You go from peak to peak, from nothing to nothing to nothing.'

Richards' response is to strip himself, literally and metaphorically, of everything he possesses, leaving himself with no way back into the life he once knew. Only then and not in the euphoria he once felt in the high mountains does he really have the freedom to make the final choice as he shelters under a rock 'hoping dimly for one last night's sleep'. Those who climb would like to think of themselves as free, but the irony is that they are governed by an obsession so entrenched that it enslaves, leaving only the willingness to do its bidding.

The story 'The Orbit Of Celestial Bodies' is prefaced by a short extract from Wordsworth's 'Intimations of Immortality', in which he asserts that, pre-birth, we dwell in a purer realm, which children are able to remember and which suffuses their lives with magic until it withers with increasing age. Allan's extraordinary climbing ability – 'Allan acknowledged that he was well rehearsed for this, as if he had done it before, in a dream, perhaps?' – seems to emanate from such a source. It provides Ted, a climbing guide hired by Allan's father, with the opportunity to complete a route on the unclimbed Eleusinian Wall, a project first conceived of by Hans, his long-dead Austrian climbing partner and with which he is consumed.

Again, it is Stevenson's choice of form rather than descriptive detail, which best clarifies his purpose. He works with Ted's inexplicable, sudden and total disappearance from the climb – 'a sort of seam in the air that opened for a split second and inhaled him' – to explain those experiences which are beyond the reach of all but the few who inhabit the extremes.

Allan completes the climb after two days in 'a state of trance-like mystification, feeling privy to some large and unintelligible secret' knowing finally that it should have been he who disappeared, not Ted, but knowing also that his ability to climb like 'water in human form, flowing uphill' had deserted him and, far from regretting this loss, he knew with quiet certainty that he could at last return to himself.

In *Letters From Chamonix* it seems that Stevenson offers a seismic refocusing of vision, a series of sharply delineated encounters in which protagonists and readers are able to clarify their responses to extreme environments and situations, to motives and outcomes. His writing leaves space for readers to pursue their own lines of enquiry, his characters carry the emotional freight of each story but are never overwhelmed by it – and the need to read on is compelling.

The Mantis by Philip Temple is a fictional account of a first attempt on Puthemojar in the Karakoram – the mountain which eats its prey. The assertion in the blurb that the book is based on a 1980 publication, 'The Last Great Challenge', is a conceit – one which no doubt fulfils its purpose in intriguing readers in what is an overcrowded e-publishing market. However, it is redundant, as *The Mantis* stands firmly on its own two literary feet without need of extraneous support.

Temple sets himself the task of answering a number of questions about the pursuit of climbing – most notably on the spectrum of motivation. The

dichotomy between teamwork and ambition is tackled particularly well, offering a consideration of how competitiveness and co-operation co-exist, albeit uneasily, on a climbing expedition.

Where *The Mantis* excels is in its detailed examination of group dynamics in the high mountains. Temple has created his characters with conflicting ambitions, which must be both harnessed and contained. The raw talent of the two newcomers, Chase and Wyllie, 'drunk with anticipation' and eager to make their mark, is balanced against the dogged, brilliant and unflinching Dodge and Strickland, the team's nominal leader, who must set his accomplished dealings with the media against his increasing awareness that his contact with high mountains had become a 'partial life he had constructed and conspired to propagate.'

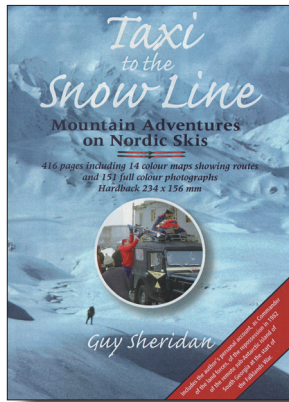
One of the weaknesses of the book is that the narrative is not always consistent in the quality of its descriptions and comparisons; it veers from the evocative to the awkwardly expressed, too purple in tone, too unwieldy to convince: 'Strickland was forced to make the agonising reappraisal that is to the mind as the menopause is to the womb.'

Further, whilst precise detail is helpful in envisioning the technical details of a climb, there are occasions when these sections are simply too long and claw away the tension created by the ever present high-altitude risk. However, the squalor, colourful camaraderie and physical and mental strains of life in tents and snow holes are brilliantly captured, especially by means of the internal dialogues in which the climbers engage. These revealing interludes offer the reader a fascinating perspective into the dynamics of confinement and deprivation – slights acknowledged and resented, motivations re-examined, loyalties reconsidered and adjusted.

The book returns firmly to form in its closing chapters with Dodge's accident and subsequent abandonment, Chase's decision to go back and wait with him for the rescue which will never come and Strickland's decision to walk out of base camp, utterly spent and alone after his traumatic descent from the mountain – still determined to prove himself, still wanting to preserve the charade of the successful mountaineer. These episodes are handled with a careful balance of compassion and emotional exposure, giving them a pathos, which has its roots in old-fashioned morality on the one hand and, on the other, a deep-rooted instinct for survival in a cause that has long been lost. By forcing readers to make stark decisions about what they might have done in the same situations, Temple plunges us headfirst into an examination of our own moral codes and how they might have been found wanting.

Val Randall

• *Letters from Chamonix*, which won the Banff Mountain Book Festival's Fiction Award, is available in print and e-book from www.imaginarymountains.com *The Mantis* is available for download from Amazon and Vertebrate Publishing.



Taxi to the Snow Line

Guy Sheridan

White Peak Publishing, 2006, pp351, £20

Few, if any, contemporary British mountaineers can claim to have had a mountain named after them but Sheridan Peak in South Georgia recognises the author's achievement in commanding the small detachment of Marines and SAS that successfully recaptured South Georgia at the start of the Falklands War in 1982. Guy's harrowing account of his attempt to climb this elusive peak 16 years later with David Nicholls in an Antarctic blizzard is one of the many thrilling adventures described in

this second volume of his life and times as a Nordic ski-mountaineer.

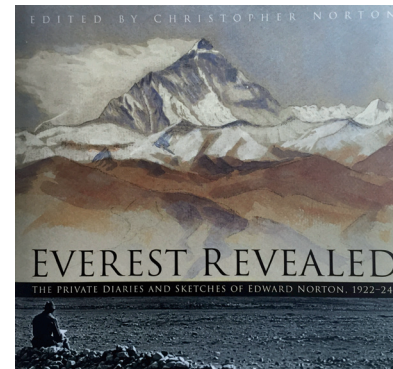
Sheridan is yet another Alpine Club member who has served with distinction in the Royal Marines, in his case for 31 years. Specialising in mountain and Arctic warfare, a natural progression through alpine and Himalayan mountaineering led him to the biathlon, that most demanding and exacting of winter sports which combines Nordic skiing and rifle shooting. After competing in the 1971 world championships, illness denied him a place in the 1972 Winter Olympic team. Eighteen winter seasons in Arctic Norway, his particular love, and various postings to Sarawak, Aden, Oman, the Balkans and East Africa gave Guy ample opportunity to mix his military duties with climbing and skiing. However, it was a chance meeting in 1974 with the Norwegian Everester Odd Eliassen that fired his passion for long distance, lightweight, self-sufficient Nordic ski expeditions to remote, untrammelled and, sometimes, hostile parts of the world.

While Guy's earlier book, *Tales of a Cross Country Skier*, describes prodigiously long traverses he and his companions made through Iran's Zagros Range, the Western Himalaya, the Yukon and Sierra Nevada, the present volume gives fuller accounts of those he did between 1989 and 2006 in the Drakensburg, Lapland, Iceland, Albania, California, Canadian Rockies and Zanskar. The final chapters recount sorties in his sixties to Kyrgyzstan, New Zealand and Iran. It is very well illustrated with many colour photographs and maps.

Such a remarkable catalogue of Nordic expeditions takes exceptional courage, stamina, resilience and technical competence and one can only envy Guy and his artist wife Mollie's inspired decision to have made their retirement home in the Pyrenees whose mountains he must know better than any other British mountaineer. These tales, by Britain's most outstanding Nordic ski mountaineer, read like some Norse saga and are told with humility, humour and self-deprecating modesty.

J G R Harding

• *Taxi to the Snow Line* is available from the South Georgia Heritage Trust website.



Everest Revealed

The private diaries and sketches of Edward Norton, 1922-24

Edited by Christopher Norton

The History Press, 2014, pp158, £20

It must be a curious sensation to watch as your parent or grandparent is absorbed into myth, a process familiar either to the progeny of celebrities or, in the case of Edward Felix Norton, a collaborator in a famous enter-

prise – in his case, climbing Everest. Yet Norton's presence in the story is somewhat hazy. While the world apparently cannot have its fill of the enigmatic, romantic George Mallory or the youthful optimism of Andrew Irvine, or indeed the self-sacrifice and overall decency of Howard Somervell, Norton's name is less familiar. And yet he it was who set an altitude record of 28,128ft on 4 June, 1924, a record that would not be broken until the Swiss climbed high on the mountain in 1952.

Why the relative obscurity? One answer lies in the historian's selective gaze. Walt Unsworth, in his highly regarded account, introduces him thus: 'The sixth member of the climbing team was Major E F Norton, thirty-eight years old and a grandson of Sir Alfred Wills, the man whose ascent of the Wetterhorn in 1854 had begun the Golden Age of Alpine climbing. He was also distantly related to Mallory, but his experience of climbing appears to have been slight and the best that Younghusband could find to say of him in his Introduction to the 1922 expedition volume was that he was well known in India for his skill and interest in pig-sticking!'

You can see why many writers have fallen into the trap of gazing upon John Noel's brilliant portrait of Norton, in which he appears debonair, intelligent and reserved, with the tip of his right ear gone to frostbite adding a mark of glamorous experience, and think: conventional army officer of the Empire doing his duty. And yet here is the man who, for all his inexperience of hard climbing, despite our assumptions about his background, goes highest and comes back, and acts with compassion and sensitivity towards the survivors of this most famous climbing tragedy.

So this compendium of Norton's diaries, letters and watercolours is doubly welcome. First, it gives those of us with a passion for Everest history undiluted access to the thoughts and behaviour of one of the key men from those mesmerising early years. It also gives his grandson, who brought the material together so effectively, and his sons, who wrote the introduction, the chance to present their own ancestor in a congenial light.

Norton is not the greatest artist who ever lived, not even the best artist at Everest in 1924 given Somervell's presence, but his sketches and paintings not only have flair, not only exhibit a good eye, they have considerable wit

as well. In fact, this is one of the great revelations of this delightful book: Norton was a good laugh. On reaching Langram bungalow in the second trekking party he writes: 'Geoff [Bruce] left us a half bottle of whisky – which turned out to be tea: we failed to connect this with April 1.' And then, later in April, after a wonderful morning indulging his great passion for bird-watching: 'Spent pm writing *Times* article – fearful tripe – I only hope the British public will like it.'

This sense of fun, something often missing from weighty accounts of imperial adventuring, is on show in a beautifully reproduced photograph of Norton, hand on hip, meeting the Dzongpen of Shekar a few days after his entry about meeting the British public's great appetite for tripe. Mallory stands alongside, his soft hat brought to a ludicrous point, the brim lifted slightly, to give himself the air of a simpleton. This is the quicksilver of the climbing life that falls into the cracks of history.

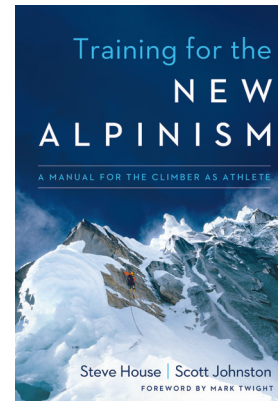
Japes aside, and with the leadership of the 1924 expedition in his hands following Bruce's withdrawal, it was left to Norton to offer consolation to those relatives waiting for news of how their loved ones met their end. His letter from base camp to Ruth Mallory is powerfully affecting and deeply compassionate:

'And then – on the mountain – I wish I could describe to you what he was like. Physically he was a wonder – the best of us without the least doubt from start to finish – but this hardly mattered for his great heart carried him on entirely independent of physical considerations. I really believe the struggle between him and the mountain had become a personal matter to him. He simply would not accept defeat and yet (from 1000 talks on the matter) I know how his determination was tempered with discretion; he fully realised his responsibility as leader of the climbing party – he and I saw eye to eye over the question of the absolute necessity of avoiding a single casualty even to conquer the mountain... He was a great mountaineer.'

It's the opinion of some that Mallory pushed on recklessly to reach the summit of Everest and took Irvine with him to his doom. You could argue that Norton is offering Ruth Mallory comfort in her darkest hours, and that he exaggerated Mallory's sense of caution; that he himself felt a level of responsibility for what had happened as the leader. The latter might be true, and I suppose the former might be too, but I think Norton believed what he said. 'I wish I could help you in your great grief,' he writes, repeating the sentiment at the end of the letter.

This beautifully produced and quietly moving book will do a great deal to advance our knowledge of Edward Norton beyond our expectations of his class and profession.

Ed Douglas



Training for the New Alpinism

A manual for the climber as athlete

Steve House and Scott Johnston

Patagonia, 2014, pp448, £24.95

A decade ago I bumped into Steve House at a presentation weekend for the *Piolet d'Or* mountaineering awards. I was nursing a hang-over and making a beeline for the breakfast buffet while Steve was heading out for a two-hour run. The encounter reminded me how decathlete Daley Thompson made sure he did an extra-hard training session on Christmas Day because he knew his rivals would be

taking things easy.

The reality of my own position compared to Steve's was even more obvious. I was a fully paid-up member of the traditional no-training culture, believing you should just climb as much as possible. The shortcomings of that ethos were patently obvious; Steve's dedicated preparation was one of the key reasons he was climbing several notches better than anyone in Britain at the time. That truth was underlined when Steve and fellow American Vince Anderson scooped the top prize that weekend for their extraordinary alpine-style new route on the Rupal Face of Nanga Parbat.

Nowadays the stigma of training for alpinism is lifting; the achievements of Ueli Steck are a shining example of what is possible if you systematically apply yourself. As a result Steve House and skiing and climbing coach Scott Johnston's new book have seized on the zeitgeist.

Training for the New Alpinism is an immediately impressive book. It is huge and lavishly illustrated with stunning shots of alpine training and practice from many of the current top players. The shots by Slovenian Marko Prezelj in particular get the pulse racing and clearly demonstrate the purpose of all the hard work listed in the book.

The first section of the book might seem a little daunting to the uninitiated, spending almost 150 pages detailing 'the methodology and physiology of endurance training'. The authors make no excuses for this. Steve has always had a reputation for taking his climbing seriously, and the book's recommendations are grounded in practice but also tested by sports science. Steve was well known in the past for the motto 'talk minus action equals zero;' this book is the embodiment of that ethos.

The science is nicely interspersed with stories illustrating practical lessons in the mountains written by a whole host of international stars from Voytek Kurtyka to Ines Papert and Ueli Steck to Peter Habeler. These words of wisdom aren't all from the sources you'd expect either; the book draws on the knowledge of endurance trail runners and rock climbers like Tony Yaniro. It was a nice surprise to see a valuable exposition of Soviet alpine training by Alexander Odintsov. The book often draws – bravely –

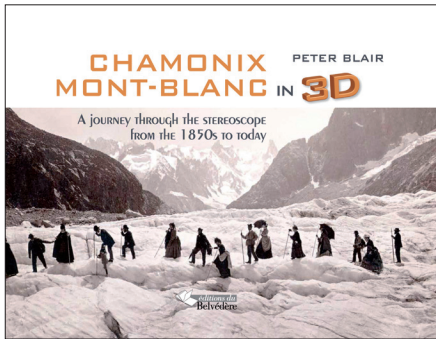
on Steve's own failures and mistakes, and is unafraid to debunk training myths where necessary, such as Mark Twight admitting the mistake of his exclusive obsession with fashionably short high-intensity training.

Chapters follow on such arcane subjects as periodisation, tapering, nutrition, altitude and mental fitness among several others. Steve and Scott cover every conceivable aspect of training for the mountains; there's even a section that would have hit a nerve with me a decade ago called 'Training by Climbing', explaining how this approach can be made effective by sound structure.

This manual will obviously appeal to top-end committed alpine climbers, but there is a lot here for mountaineers with more modest ambitions. The – comparatively slim – 60 or so pages of practical workouts are the best I've seen specifically for alpinists.

So far, the book is unique, offering the level of information and guidance taken for granted in more mainstream sports but until now unavailable to alpinists. It reminded me of Tim Noakes' legendary book *Lore of Running*, which is accepted as the bible of athletics. *Training for the New Alpinism* is a book of similar stature and is essential reading for anyone serious about preparing properly for the mountains.

Ian Parnell



Chamonix Mont-Blanc in 3D

A journey through the stereoscope from the 1850s to today

Peter Blair

Éditions Belvédère, 2014, pp128, €29 plus postage

I first came across 3D photography as an architecture student. It was 1972 and I had been offered an internship. (We didn't call it that then, we called it 'working for very

little money while learning the job.') As the internship was to be in Japan, I couldn't bring the models I had made of my projects. Instead I made 3D slides of them from various angles, built a slide viewer, and thereby had a mobile portfolio of my work. I have been making 3D images ever since.

My method is based on taking stereo pairs with a single camera. I soon found that the best stereo modelling was done with a six-degree angle between the camera lines, which is also the angle between the eyes when looking at an object in your hands. I also found that dentists had been using the technique with x-ray images, by hanging up the plates and crossing their eyes to generate 3D images. The middle image, the overlapping one, was in stereo. It is all good harmless fun.

What I did not know was that stereo imagery is as old as photography

itself. So I was delighted to be asked to review this book which under one set of covers combines images from the giants of Alpine photography – by Tairraz, Savioz, Couttet, Bisson, Braun and England – with some of my favourite subjects: a history of technology, 3D photography and the Chamonix valley.

This is a coffee table book, pleasant to hold and nicely printed. It also comes with a cunning little pop-up viewer. On each pair of pages is a paragraph or two of text and several stereo images.

Hold the viewer before you and suddenly, as if through a window in time, it comes to life.

We see the mountains and mountaineers of the Belle Époque. We see the nineteenth century Bossons Glacier bulging into the valley, the Argentièrè Glacier reaching almost down to the church and its cemetery, the Bois Glacier, now known as the Mer de Glace, overflowing moraines that are now cliffs of rubble more than a hundred metres high. Climbers scramble across fragile cornices, the void beneath their boots so much more abysmal in stereo. And among the peasants we witness the now archaic transhumance, the cows and sheep of pre-industrial Chamonix. With these views it is easy to add the sounds and smells of the age.

In an image from the next century, in 1924 in fact, there is an astounding shot of a ski jumper, flying through the air and captured in 3D forever. The final stereogram is of the author, also on skis, enjoying Grandes Montets in powder. It is all very good.

The texts accompanying the photographs are often not related but always fun to read. Some are quotes from Victorian visitors. Ruskin, Byron, Turner all make an appearance; there are also descriptions of everyday life, for instance how the Bossons Glacier was mined for ice to be transported as far afield as Geneva. There is also an explanation of the changing technology of photography during the period. There is a serendipitous quality to the texts; they are nuggets of pleasure. Chamonix in 3D is recommended

Victor Saunders

• *The English edition of Chamonix in 3D is currently available only from Peter Blair (peter3dblair@gmail.com).*

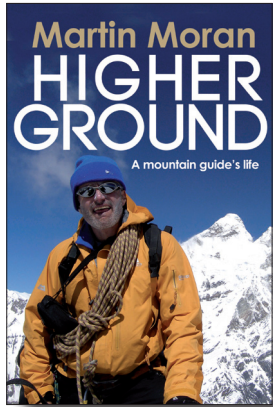
Higher Ground

A mountain guide's life

Martin Moran

Sandstone Press, 2014, pp278, £14.99

Martin Moran's qualification as an accountant in 1980 seems an improbable start to a successful career as an international mountain guide. But his passion for the mountains overtook his talent for figures and he sped through the guides' training scheme, qualifying in 1985. In addition to his work as a guide, he and Simon Jenkins completed one of the few non-stop



traverses of the Alpine 4000m peaks in 1993, using only foot and pedal power to get from the Bernina to the Dauphiné in just 52 days, including a 33-hour circumnavigation of the Mer de Glace skyline. It was testament to the scale of this achievement that a number of local guides questioned whether they had actually done it.

Guiding as a profession has sometimes had a mixed reputation. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was largely regarded as a partnership of equals, one partner with local knowledge, the other with similar technical prowess but even greater ambition. In the latter part of the twentieth century, it became tainted with the notion of 'cheating', perhaps due to the number of clients pulled up peaks like Mont Blanc and the Matterhorn. While this remains true of the honeypot routes, British guiding came of age during the period covered in Martin's book. In a time-pressured world, it is also seen as a convenient way for competent mountaineers to achieve their objectives quickly, often when climbing partners are difficult to organise.

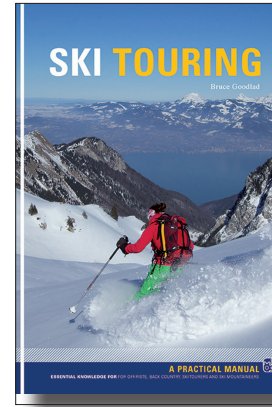
Moran's guiding career is different from the norm in two major respects. The first is that he used guiding to explore new places and paths less trodden; the other is the fact that Martin ran a guiding business, employing other guides to do some of the work, unlike the vast majority who are sole traders.

Anecdotes about the vast array of clients Martin has worked with form the backbone of the book. Any reader familiar with the places described will thrive on the local references: the Cuillin Ridge, the winter routes in Torridon or some of the Alpine peaks. He has picked out plenty of 'characters', some of them setting him personal rather than technical challenges. Martin is at all times honest about these encounters, the joys and frustrations they caused, but also his own shortcomings when his patience was tried.

But it is the sense of exploration and freshness that captures the difference in approach from average. Two areas in particular realise Martin's dream to explore new places with clients: Norway and northern India. Both have provided workplaces that would be beyond the comfort zone of the average guide from the Alps. And it is the descriptions of these expeditions that show off a fascinating career in its best light and take the reader to places of which they too can dream.

For the non-mountaineer, the book is an interesting travelogue with anecdotes of human relations. For the mountaineer, it is a compelling and fascinating account of a familiar world seen in a new light.

Chris Dodd



Ski Touring: a practical manual

Bruce Goodlad

Pesda Press, 2015, pp280, £16.99

Ski touring, ski mountaineering, call it what you will, mountain travel on skis is a craft, and like all crafts it takes time and attention to learn. Some might elevate it from a craft to an art; inscribing perfect turns from a tight gully out to a fan of glorious powder. But this is a short review – no time to get into semantics.

Time was when learning a craft – joinery, machinist, newspaper reporter and the like – meant serving a 'proper' apprenticeship, three and a half years in the latter case, as I remember well. The apprenticeships trumpeted by ministers today seem little more than a spell of work experience. In ski-touring terms this would be like following a guide either for a day off-piste or a few days' hut-to-hutting in the Silvretta. It's a useful taster but craftsmanship remains far distant.

The model of the old apprenticeship is a good one for ski touring. Traditionally it would have comprised three or more years of on the job training, working alongside a time-served craftsman – that's your couple of weeks in the Alps each spring, in the company either of experienced amateur tourers or a guide (as Bruce Goodlad is an IFMGA guide I feel obliged to include this route, though guided skiers can get lazy about learning). An additional requirement for any apprenticeship would have been 'block release' at the local 'tech'; the ski equivalent is an avalanche awareness or crevasse rescue course. Finally there would be the manual: a hefty tome backing up your course work or skills you'd half-learned on the job with much needed explanation and refinement.

Bruce Goodlad's *Ski Touring* is that hefty tome. Subtitled *A Practical Manual: essential knowledge for off-piste, backcountry ski tourers and ski mountaineers*, it is the best exposition of the skills needed for safe (it can never be 100 percent safe) ski travel in the mountains that I have come across in 35 years addicted to this form of play. There's still new stuff for me to learn here – and plenty to revise. The meat of the book is the chapters on avalanches and rescue, glacier skiing and navigation – the 'solid tools' as Bruce calls them.

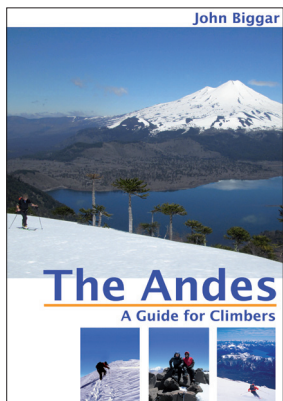
Decades ago the Swiss guide Martin Epp told me that if the choice was between clients who were good skiers but poor mountaineers or poor skiers but good mountaineers, he would prefer the former. The mountaineers may be competent and confident on the final summit climbs but hold the party up if they can't cope with tricky snow conditions on the descent – too much falling down and struggling back on their feet again. If any of this gives a twinge of recognition, you may benefit from the chapter on 'Down-hill Skills' written by BASI instructor Alison Culshaw; really good advice

on honing your technique.

The blurb on the cover says the book contains everything you need to make the transition from piste skiing to ski touring, and this is true in spades. Indeed it contains much for the experienced tourer to catch up on too. My worry would be that a would-be ski tourer might find some of the detail, say on creating a direct haul system for a crevasse rescue, so mind-boggling they'd dismiss touring and stick to the piste. But don't be deterred, the technical stuff can be learnt over time, using the manual as support.

Interspersed through the text are Bruce's 'Top Tips' – on anything from a Klemheist working best with the longer tail being in the direction of pull, to putting a slice of fresh ginger in your hot blackcurrant juice (of course you always carry root ginger on tour, don't you?). My own 'Top Tip', be you novice or veteran, is simple: buy this book.

Stephen Goodwin



The Andes – A Guide for Climbers

John Biggar

Andes; 4th Edition, March 2015, pp352, £26.95

It is a gargantuan task to attempt to cover the whole of the Andean chain in one pocket-sized guidebook, but this is what John Biggar has accomplished in the fourth edition of his guide to Andean climbing. Following broadly the same format as earlier versions, the author first provides some extremely useful, indeed essential, introductory information that will be of particular value for those planning to visit South America for the first time. He then progresses southwards from Venezuela and

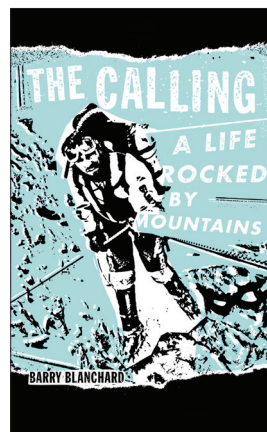
Columbia through Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia to Argentina and Chile. The book describes routes on all of the major 6000m mountains, many of the more frequented 5000m mountains and the more popular peaks in Patagonia. In order to contain this vast wealth of information in such a compact volume the author has necessarily limited the detail provided, but this in no way detracts from its value to the experienced mountaineer. While most of the Andes are not noted for their ski touring, opportunities do exist, particularly at latitudes below 35°S and on individual mountains and glaciers further north. This volume has extended coverage for those that are keen to ski tour in South America.

In each section the author has provided colourful maps showing the general orientation and access to each peak alongside colour photographs indicating the major routes described. The inclusion of some key GPS waypoints is a bonus, but there is some way to go before this becomes a more comprehensive compilation.

John Biggar is a professional climber who has spent many seasons

climbing in South America. He has first-hand experience of many of the mountains described in this book, but understandably he has been forced to rely on the accounts of others for those that he has not personally visited. References to other regional guidebooks are given, although no other English language guidebook offers the breadth of knowledge embraced by this book. It is a 'must have' for anyone planning to climb in South America.

Derek Buckle



The Calling: A Life Rocked by Mountains

Barry Blanchard

Patagonia, 2014, pp 429, US \$27.95

Forgive me for starting the review of this great book with clichés. Perhaps it is more of a truism than a cliché, but it has to be said. Barry Blanchard and his tales of mountaineering are 'larger than life.' Mountains are of course very much larger than life. Despite their indifference and inanimate nature, they are as memorable as the many renowned mountaineers who populate the book, many of whom are equally and powerfully caught up by the call of the mountains.

Blanchard's many 'brothers in alpine style' are made to seem at once insignificant by the vast scale of the challenges they undertake yet god-like and almost unstoppable on the vast stage of one unclimbed face after another. The mountains are as much characters in the book as the climbers. Some chapters are dedicated to friends; e.g. Kevin and David to name but two chapter titles (for Kevin Doyle and Dave Cheeseman). Some chapters are the names of mountains; e.g. Mount Fay and Rakaposhi.

At one point the author describes the lines that alpinists make on the mountains like those of an artist's etching. And when the writing is this good, it is truly a form of art. At times there seem no boundaries, the mountains are canvases on which men and women pursue expression through mountaineering. The writing can one moment be quite delicate, capturing intimate details of a campsite or a bivouac conversation, and in the next paragraph down you are in the midst of an avalanche and a gripping struggle to survive.

Mountains are much larger than life, yet when climbing them, and describing those experiences as well as Blanchard does, you realise that he is very aware of the complexity of the sport that is his calling. For Blanchard, climbing is at once a very personal and an extreme form of engagement with life. But what sort of life engagement is it? This is a very old question that climbers ask themselves, and Blanchard tackles it without

becoming analytical, philosophical or overly romantic. It is much simpler than that. It is as if someone like Blanchard who has truly known fear has no fear in truly telling it like it is.

The Calling is also a call into parallel life, and away from the life of his childhood. The mountains provide a life that is physically harder, more threatening, exhilarating, exhausting and overwhelming than the life Blanchard led as a child being brought up on the wrong side of the tracks in Calgary. Being in the mountains for Blanchard is solace, a place to forget bad things that happened to his family. Part of that forgetting is through the act of taking on the bad-ass things that mountains throw at you. The mountains erase his worldly concerns (most of the time). Being there on their unclimbed faces, the author finds a place in which he feels at home. But like the home of his childhood, the mountains are also broken; falling stones, collapsing seracs, endless avalanches, horrendous storms, injuries to friends and to himself. This is the parallel world of a true mountaineer.

There are some great one liners in the book that capture the climber's reality. During continuous nasty weather on a new route on the east face of Mt. Fay, Blanchard writes:

'... I turned out from the mountain and began screaming obscenities into the driving snow, challenging the storm. I wanted perfection in my alpinism and this is what you get. I spent what was left in my lungs and crumpled back into the slope. Carl caught up with me, waited ten heartbeats and then said; "hey, man, it don't gotta be fun to be fun."'

At first I could not quite explain to myself why the writing is so alive and vivid. In part it is because it is written fearlessly. In so doing, Blanchard finds many wonderful turns of phrase when describing his friends, the mountains, the 'real world' and the experiences shared by so few. For example, he goes to the north face of Mt. Alberta with Gregg Cronn:

'...a lean and tall American with elongated El Greco looks intensified by a black beard, and sad lack-bellied Benicio del Torro eyes. But his eyes were misleading because Gregg was easy to laugh . . . I'd get him guffawing with my ribald irreverent humour; "those lick-dick, conservative butt-knuckles wouldn't know leniency if it came up and bit his in the ass."'

Anyone who knows Barry Blanchard will know that's the way he is. He just comes out with things regardless of the audience and he is very entertaining and funny. It is part of his 'as I see it' nature. For British readers who remember Mo Antoine, they will find in Barry Blanchard a native American soul mate of Mo's.

Several days after introducing us to Gregg, they are approaching the top of Alberta's North Face:

'(Now) an ice filled groove and I hauled up my crampons once again. The rock and ice were so good and the angle was easing back. My climbing became a joy and I realized that I was the only expression of joy for many a mile and thousands of feet.'

This is compelling stuff, and compulsive reading, especially for mountaineers and anyone who loves the alpine world. It is compelling because

his writing has a cinematic, IMAX, surround sound feel that envelopes the reader in the experience of dark, deep and dangerous mountains. The detail is almost tactile. You feel the cold, the pain, the altitude sickness. 'I hurt therefore I am' is one of the mottos of the book. The compulsive nature of the book comes from a deep love of the mountains and life, the wanting to just go climb as long as there is energy and daylight. And for the reader, you just want to be there, to grab the next pitch. Even though many of the climbers in the books are not well known in Britain and Europe, you get to know them through Blanchard's excellent characterisation. You want to know them better and share the experiences. The people in the book are as vivid and real as the contradictions and realities that the mountains can bring so unexpectedly, painfully and sometimes fatally.

The Calling is extremely well illustrated throughout with black and white photos relevant to the particular chapters and two sections of full colour plates. Oh, and I must not forget to mention the sex, drugs and rock and roll. The author provides us with suggested play lists for each chapter, indeed, as the subtitle suggests.

In his acknowledgements, Barry Blanchard pays tribute to the many great climbers who, through their writing, inspired him to climb. Among them are Walter Bonatti, Lionel Terray, Tom Patey, Gaston Rébuffat, Yvon Chouinard and many other familiar names. Barry Blanchard, for future generations of mountaineers, will be part of that 'play' list.

John Porter