

The Books of the Year

Hard Rock—an anthology compiled by Ken Wilson (Hart Davis, MacGibbon, 1974, 220 pp, 158 illustrations, £6.95)

This magnificent book is a credit to the publishers and to Ken Wilson, the compiler, and his writing and designing team. It consists of a series of essays by leading climbers on a selection of very hard rock climbs—17 from Scotland, 11 from the Lake District, 15 from Wales and 17 from various outcrops and sea cliffs. (The reviewer was surprised to find Gimmer Crack, which he once led, among this august company.) The range of styles among this multiplicity of authors differentiates the individual climbs quite remarkably, giving an overall impression of considerable variety. 'From the point of view of an anthology,' says one of the contributors, 'you cannot really put together a collection of climbs—only of climbers.'

The large format, 11 in x 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ in, does justice to the very spectacular pictures, both scenic and action, the overall standard of which is high. Just a few exhibit some lack of detail, arising more from the impossibility of hitting off conditions really suitable for photography than from any technical imperfections of reproduction.

One might quarrel with certain historical distortions in the text. For instance, the working-class climber did not emerge suddenly in the 1950s—a shining product of the new Socialism; he existed 20 years earlier, when entry into climbing circles required much more resolution and genuine enthusiasm than it does in the regimented present. The efforts of British climbers in the thirties are stigmatised as 'timid'. In those days mountaineering was a pastime where every man could enjoy himself at his own level; now it has become for its leading protagonists variously—war, a religion, a way of life or a means of earning a living. Nowadays, achievement, perfection, the ultimate and the new ultimate are all competed for strenuously; earlier generations just had no need to indulge in comparable activities.

Who will buy the book? The comparative few who can aspire to these heights may find a challenge in it. The much larger number, who could hardly leave the ground on routes of this standard (except for Gimmer Crack) may well be neither interested in a record of their limitations, nor wish to spend time explaining to their friends that this is rather different from what they mean by rock climbing. The non-mountaineer may be irked by his inability to distinguish adequately between the various crags and rock types and not be able to relate this to his own earthbound experience. However, let us hope that it will sell to a worthwhile number from all these categories.

We are promised, and shall look forward to, further volumes on these lines—perhaps there will be one dealing with less exacting climbs. In the event, will it sell more or less?
Edward Pyatt

Big Wall Climbing Doug Scott (Kay & Ward, 1974, £4.75)

Originally intended as an updated version of G. Sutton's *Book on artificial aids in mountaineering*, this book has been very considerably expanded and contains 3 sections. The largest and most important is on the development of face routes from the earliest climbs to the present day. The other 2 sections which are shorter describe attitudes and techniques, and the planning of these excursions. Treated chronologically the first section deals mainly with developments in the Eastern and Western Alps. Events in Yosemite, Norway and other areas are also touched on, whilst there are chapters on solo, and winter ascents of these routes. The main face routes, and their development are gone into in considerable detail and there are short mountain biographies of those involved in these ascents. Whilst this means careful and close reading it is not indigestible and must have involved a considerable amount of research by the author.

The crucibles in which the techniques of modern mountaineering were forged are to be found in the Eastern Alps. Of all the peaks the two which represent a microcosm of these developments are the Cima Grande and Cima Ovest Di Lavaredo. The first ascent of the N face of the Cima Grande in 1933, by Comici involved techniques of aid many years in advance of its time, whilst the Saxonweg, the first ascent of which was made in winter with full coverage from the media was the forerunner of the Eigerwand Direct. With its continuous bolting it must be one of the safest, and yet the most boring ways of uncomfortably getting to the top of a mountain. The mountaineering voyeur clamped to his TV set would get little vicarious thrill—no one is going to form a mound of blood and bone on the screens.

The Cassin route on the Cima Ovest is a different matter and with the Walker Spur and the NE face of the Badile represent a triad unsurpassed in the Alps. All natural lines, the Cima Ovest was the key to these three. The Swiss/Italian and French routes on the blank walls to the left of the overhang are examples of national rivalry and competition. The Overhang direct, a triumph of technology, overcomes difficulties for their own sake, whilst the Squirrel's ridge must be an outstandingly beautiful climb.

The main impetus for the majority of face climbs in the Alps has come from continental mountaineers, whilst the part played by the British (whose main interest was Himalayan) has been small—the first British ascent of the Eigerwand was after all nearly a quarter of a century after the first successful ascent. However, the Brown-Whillans route on the Blaitière formed a significant landmark as it was probably the hardest rock climb in Chamonix for some years.

The Yosemite influence in the Western Alps is probably most evident in the Harlin-Robbins Direct route on the W face of the Dru and the chapter on N America, although concentrated mainly on Yosemite, includes other areas such as the Bugaboos.

The section on techniques which has many diagrams and illustrations shows how burdensome the equipment for a face route may be. There is no doubt at all, that any face however difficult may be climbed, providing enough time, money, equipment, and personnel are deployed. This leads directly to the next premise that money may now determine which of these routes shall be climbed, rather than the mountaineer's wish. For instance, because of the name, it is easier to get money for the SW face of Everest, than it is for a similar route on another peak. Therefore does the real future of mountaineering lie with the 'media spectacular', undertaken for the prestige and income of a few? I hope not.

Preuss who made a sensational and solitary first ascent of the E face of the Campanile Basso in 1911 was many years ahead of his time. He seldom used artificial aids and considered that the unchecked use of these could lead to a reduction in climbing skills. This example is now being followed, and with the increasing cost combined with the boredom of completing some face routes the trend towards free climbing is increasing. This point is emphasised by the Author, whose chapters on solo and winter routes are fascinating and represent an expanding trend.

This is a book for the committed mountaineer rather than the mountain-lover. It is packed with information and needs concentrated reading. It should be studied by all those who wish to have some basic insight and knowledge of the paths that mountaineering is following and the ways in which it is likely to extend.

Michael Ward

Himalayan Odyssey Trevor Braham (George Allen and Unwin, 1974, 32 photos, 14 maps, £6.50)

The author of this book had the good fortune to spend much of his boyhood in Darjeeling within sight of so many of the great Himalayan peaks. It is not surprising, therefore, that he developed an enduring love for the high and lonely places which the Himalayas provide in such abundance.

Having spent so much of his spare time during the past 30 years climbing and exploring in some part of these great ranges from Sikkim to the Hindu Kush, Trevor Braham felt the urge, which seems to come irresistibly to so many mountaineers, to put pen to paper and describe his experiences and his own personal involvement with mountains. The result is a most readable book, if rather an expensive one.

During this period there were successful attempts on most of the major Hima-

layan peaks, but this book is not mainly concerned with them; it is devoted to the activities of smaller parties on minor peaks often in lesser known areas. After a chapter of historical background the book is divided into sections, each covering a specific area of which the author gives a brief history as well as accounts of his travels and climbs.

As was natural, having lived in Darjeeling, his introduction to mountaineering was in Sikkim which he visited several times in the years immediately after the war. In Sikkim he trod the well-known tracks, almost climbed Kangchenjau, and in 1952 took part in a reconnaissance led by John Kempe of the SW approach to Kangchenjunga. During subsequent years he was invited to join a number of expeditions including John Tyson's to the Kanjiroba Himal in 1964. Most of these expeditions have already been described in the 'Alpine Journal' and the 'Himalayan Journal'.

I liked the chapter on Kaghan, an area NE of Kashmir, which was often visited in the early part of the century by General Bruce and which is easily reached from the plains. Its mountains are Alpine rather than Himalayan both in character and stature, the highest being Mali-ka-Parbat, nearly 5300 m. This area poses no acclimatisation problems and appears ideal for a short holiday.

I hope that in spite of its price this book can be widely read by the increasing number of young Indians and Pakistanis who take to the hills for their enjoyment. The 14 sketch maps are clear and helpful and there are 32 photographs, all in black and white, nearly all of which were taken by the author.

V. S. Risoe

Companion to the Alps Hugh Merrick (Batsford, 1974, 280 pp, 31 illustrations, £3.20)

This book aims to provide a condensed and yet readable account of the region commonly referred to as 'the Alps', in the compass of a volume of moderate size and cost. Although written by a mountaineer of long experience it is not primarily directed at climbers but rather to the general tourist and holiday-maker who wishes to appreciate the unique benefits of the mountains without necessarily undertaking arduous expeditions. In his endeavour to cover these multifarious aspects of this very large and varied region in a book of little more than pocket size, the author has undertaken a formidable task, and his own remarks in the Foreword show how well he is aware of the problems involved.

The reader already acquainted with Alpine history will be bound to see this book in his mind's eye alongside 'The Alps' by R. L. G. Irving, also published by Batsford, which appeared just 35 years ago. That book must have inspired many readers, mountaineers and others, to observe, admire and understand the grandeur of the mountains and their influence on the course of history. But in the intervening period much has happened in the Alps to make them,

and many of their enjoyments, accessible to a far wider circle of admirers. Mr Merrick's book is well up-to-date in this respect, and those with little background of experience will find many helpful suggestions on how to make the most of their opportunities.

One of the central problems in planning a book of this kind is the relative allocation of space to different districts, or topics. It is probable that no 2 authors would tackle this in quite the same way, and it is equally unlikely that any 2 reviewers will have the same opinions as to the optimum 'weighting'. It might be thought, for instance, that the Italian National Park of the Gran Paradiso and the wonderful group of valleys radiating from it to the S of the Val d'Aosta deserved a little more notice than the brief and rather uninformative mention on p 106 which compares oddly with the much more detailed treatment given to some other relatively minor features. It would, however, be very easy to find fault with almost any individual arrangement, except of course one's own, and this is a book written by an individualist, not, thank goodness, by a committee! Mr Merrick has, in the main, meted out as fair treatment as one could expect within the limits of space available to him and the result is a book which cannot fail to help the relative newcomer to the Alps and in which the more experienced will also find much novel information.

The serious reader would do well to have at hand a good large-scale map of the region to help him through the more detailed topographical sections, as the map on pp 10-11 is of somewhat limited value. A few folding sketch maps distributed through the text would have helped a great deal in this respect, but no doubt with the penalty of extra cost.

R. S. Dadson

Naked before the Mountain Pierre Mazeaud, translated by Geoffrey Sutton (Gollancz Ltd., London, 1974, 256 pp, Photographs, £3.50)

The climbing autobiography of such a distinguished mountaineer as Pierre Mazeaud can hardly fail to be of great interest. He took part in many important climbs, notably the first ascent of the French route on the N face of the Cima Ovest di Lavaredo, of which he gives an absorbing account; and he was, of course, one of the 3 survivors of the prolonged tragedy of the retreat from the Central Pillar of Fréney in 1961, the story of which is movingly described.

The flyleaf tells us that 'Naked before the Mountain' first appeared under another title in Germany in 1968, in which case the expedition to the Hoggar in 1966 must have been the last actual climbing it described. The present final chapter, an embittered account of the International Everest Expedition, is presumably an afterthought written for the French edition of 1971. This chapter adds nothing to the book; even if one understands Mazeaud's feelings, one or two of the personal accusations he makes seem absurd.

Now and again, an element of bitterness crops up elsewhere. In particular, Mazeaud clearly thinks that, after the tragedy on the Central Pillar, the climb

ought to have been left alone for the survivors to come back and complete—this is said to be one of ‘the traditions of mountaineering’. As evidence, he cites ‘the example given after the death of Meier [*sic*; Haringer must be meant] on the N face of the Grandes Jorasses, when other climbers left the face alone so that Peters might have the joy of returning to commemorate his friend’. It is difficult to reconcile this statement with the facts; Gervasutti, for example, mentions parties of 4 different nationalities who were hoping to anticipate Peters on the first ascent.

But to lay too much stress on points of this kind would be to give a distorted picture. The genuine passion which Mazeaud feels for the mountains is unmistakable. He is prepared to drive, and quite often does, from Paris to the furthest corner of the Alps, and back, for the prospect of a single ascent. Achievement means a great deal to him, but not everything; the true mountaineer is one ‘who has grown out of the spirit of competition and is sensitive to the real joys of the sport, wherever they may be found’. If he makes no bones about having made some enemies, he is as passionately devoted to his friends as he is to the mountains themselves. And, whatever happened on Everest, many of his close friends and climbing companions are foreigners; he believes strongly, and clearly genuinely, that there are ‘no frontiers between mountaineers’.

Mazeaud emerges from his book as a man of deeply felt, and sometimes irrational, emotions, which he does not try to disguise. Like the little girl in the nursery rhyme, when he is good (as he is most of the time) he is very, very good, but when he is bad he comes a little too near to being horrid. Translation of the book into English cannot have been easy, and Geoff Sutton is to be congratulated.

David Cox

Barrier of Spears R. O. Pearse (Howard Timmins, Capetown (Robert Hale, London) 304 pp, illustrated, £7.50)

Barrier of Spears is the Zulu name for the Drakensberg, the range separating Natal from the Orange Free State and Basutoland. Mr Pearse has spent 20 years on this book and very much longer wooing these beautiful mountains; the result is a labour of love.

The epigraph is from Charles Evans's Valedictory Address. The words of his young son, near the top of the N ridge of Tryfan, ‘Mummy, these are the wild and lonely places’ set the spirit of the book, but the body is knowledge. Mr Pearse knows every kloof and kopje between Mont-aux-Sources and Giant's Castle, indeed he has surveyed and mapped several sectors. He starts with the geological history before dealing with the human inhabitants, the animals, birds, trees, flora, early travellers and later climbers. The landscape, rocks and running waters inform nearly every paragraph.

There is the necessary political and military history. At the start of the 19th century the foothills were inhabited by the Amazizi, peaceful and well-mannered, living in amity with the Bushmen higher up. They had no territorial ambitions and pursued no will-o'-the-wisp of economic growth. Other related tribes had settled to the N, among them the then insignificant Zulu; all of these, or all of their chiefs, were a bloodthirsty and treacherous lot. Out of their reciprocal slaughter, in 1818, fled the Amahlubi into the Drakensberg foothills; the surviving Amazizi fled. After the Amahlubi came the Amangwane; again the survivors fled. Then came Shaka, brilliant military leader and innovator but ruthless and bloodthirsty beyond belief, sending his impis into the foothills; the Amangwane perished or fled. Shaka was in the wrong century; he used Hitler-jugend methods for training his young men and Stalin's methods for dealing with real or imaginary enemies. His reign was a decade of ceaseless warfare and vengeance. Huge areas were depopulated and among the whitened bones cannibalism took root. But it was decisive in South African history; the pressure of demoralised refugees on the border of the Eastern Cape and the population vacuum into which the Voortrekkers were drawn have both moulded the shape of subsequent events. The folk-memory of these dreadful years still erupts in sporadic outbreaks of savagery.

Drakensberg rock, although creating some of the most photogenic scenery in the world, has long had a poor reputation. It is indeed friable, but it is interesting to learn that this has been the cause of few serious accidents, the commonest killer has been exposure to wind and cold on the icy plateau. Much more deadly than wind and ice, of course, is man. Broken glass, tin cans, theft and vandalism, the speculative builder and the pollution of water are the real perils. The author makes a well-reasoned and impassioned plea for responsible conservation. The sadness lies in the neglected tautology that 'the wild and lonely places' cannot also be tame and populous. Preservation demands that access be arduous and amenities sparse.

Francis Keenlyside