
Book Reviews

COMPILED BY GEOFFREY TEMPLEMAN

The First Fifty Years of the British Mountaineering Council A Political History

Edited by Geoff Milburn
with Derek Walker and Ken Wilson
BMC, pp xiv+320, £16.99

So the British Mountaineering Council, a little winded, on occasion bewildered, is still standing and looking pretty good as it enters the second half of its first century. That people celebrated the milestone at all is something to marvel at, given the tortuous and risky path the organisation has sometimes followed. And I can't avoid the conclusion that the biggest threats to its survival lurk just over the horizon, not defeated in the past. A collapse in funding, the threat of a competitor, the fragmentation of climbing into a range of different activities with little in common with each other, increasing pressures on the countryside, and so on; for a politicised voluntary body with a handful of professional staff, the future looks ominous.

But to begin at the beginning. In his introduction to this weighty volume, Geoff Milburn quotes G A Dummett on the BMC's prospects in 1946: 'It will succeed only in so far as it receives the full support of each and every mountaineer.' Under that criterion, the BMC failed years ago. One of the representative body's defining features is the underwhelming interest shown in it by the very people it champions. But then such pious expectations were unrealistic even then, writing from the ivory towers of Cambridge.

The reality is that the BMC has always been a committee designed by a committee of clubs, a kind of organisational camel, ponderous and of a ridiculous appearance – it can't possibly work! – but actually quite good at coping when things get hot since whoever has stamina in the desert survives. And the BMC has proved very good indeed at survival. In the late 1980s, when a slinky sport-climbing club dared to offer an attractive alternative to the matronly old BMC, the old battleaxe swatted the challenge aside without pausing for breath.

But what is it about the organisation that creates such ardent but almost constantly disgruntled support? 'Oh!' says the average climber. 'The BMC!' The eyes roll heavenward and there is a despairing shrug of the shoulders, as though he or she were commenting on some national joke, like the Millennium Dome or railway privatisation.

But quick as a flash they will come back: 'Although it does a lot of good work for access and conservation, doesn't it? And their insurance is very good, isn't it?' Well, sort of. The BMC has made serious mistakes over the years and adopted policies without sufficient debate, alienating one group in the interests of keeping or attracting another. It is poorly understood and undemocratic, is run by people with a strong sense of duty and is consequently unresponsive to the large majority of climbers who are not remotely as committed, making the BMC seem rather worthy and dull, at least formerly.

It wins and keeps the affection of so many climbers because of the huge voluntary contribution the organisation needs to survive. Even though the majority of climbers contribute at most a cheque and more probably nothing at all to its survival, the BMC is held in esteem because a fraction of climbers give up evenings and weekends to consider and develop ideas about every aspect of climbing. The fruits of their Sisyphean labours are minuted and accumulate, giving the BMC more impetus, making it appear like some unstoppable force. It is a rock for us to cling to or rail against, but at least it is there, like a favourite maiden aunt. (When crisis looms we can hide in her skirts and appeal for help. 'Do something!')

It has also meant, on the whole, that the BMC has escaped criticism in public, since nobody likes to be seen beating up old ladies. There have been bitter, even savage debates, particularly over training, but the level of scrutiny the representation of our sport is placed under barely exceeds vague indifference. Had the BMC been more open and those watching its activities a little more objective and enthusiastic then perhaps its current direction would be more focused. Instead it finds itself organising climbing competitions and events with the obvious consequence of attracting new participants while at the same time claiming to stick to a policy of doing the exact opposite. It concerns itself with defending adventure climbing while supporting those aspects of modern climbing which are most corrosive to – ghastly misnomer – 'traditional' climbing.

That is not to say that the BMC necessarily deserves duffing up. I am regularly astonished at how capable and thoughtful officers and volunteers are in the execution of their duties. It's simply that disapproval is heaped on anyone daring to criticise or question policies or actions. It's unpatriotic in some fundamental way to attack the BMC, as though we were perpetually at war and those opposed to the BMC's course were giving aid and comfort to the enemy. So it's unsurprising that a history of the BMC by the BMC should leave the interested reader feeling both impressed and irritated and the lay reader utterly confused. Unless you have a working knowledge of the role, function and history of the BMC and its politics, the book might as well be in Greek; it reads like a company history which lacks the saving grace of an Index.

Of immense benefit is the gathering together of experiences and lists, photographs and individuals, setting limits and giving a structure to what

seems so limitless and confusing. The photographs particularly are a constant source of delight, comprehensive and representative, expertly captioned and a valuable source in themselves. There are enough wry observations and thoughtful analyses to breathe life into what might otherwise have been desiccated, not least Dave Gregory's contribution on writing guidebooks. Like I said, camels have their uses.

What this book is not, however, is a history of the BMC. As I understood it at school, history takes all the evidence it can muster and makes an objective assessment of what happened and why. This doesn't happen here. Nobody in this book doubts that the BMC should exist, for instance, or acknowledges that sometimes they were the ones wearing the black hats running the sherriff out of Dodge. It isn't comprehensive and it doesn't examine important issues that require it.

The prime illustration of this is the so-called 'Brazilgate' scandal involving the former General Secretary Dennis Gray. References to this incident are dropped into the text like small unexploded bombs for reviewers to trip over. The consequence is that a question mark, hopefully not permanent, is left over Gray's considerable contribution. The chronology at the back of the book refers to a 'bogus training scheme' in Brazil which prompted a clearly discomforting question from the Sports Council. Geoff Milburn makes a gnomic reference in his introduction. "Would, or should we publish the facts of 'Brazilgate'?" he asks. (Imagine if you knew nothing of the BMC's history and read this comment. What possible sense could be derived from it?)

In his chapter on the 1990s, Derek Walker elaborates slightly on this scandal but we are left with something which is more suggestion than explanation. I can understand the motives of the committee in their guarded references to this incident, but it should have been examined in full or not at all. The consequence of episodes like this in a 'political history' is a weakening of credibility.

So the book is a bit of a camel, just like the parent who spawned it. It's frustrating, entertaining, well-meaning and occasionally exclusive but, also like its parent, I am pleased that it is there. I am also pleased that the BMC is running climbing and not an exploitative growth-hungry organisation with half an eye on the International Olympic Committee. Whether the Alpine Club is still celebrating the British Mountaineering Council in another fifty years is less certain.

Ed Douglas

The Ordinary Route

Harold Drasdo

The Ernest Press, 1997, pp258, £12.50

One of the minor pleasures of reading this exceptional book is a persistent question: what is the craft skill which enables Drasdo to exert such a magic

touch? The book isn't perfect. One or two chapters near the end could have been omitted without loss. And perhaps you need to have been in or at least, like me, near the golden age of British democratised climbing (1950-1960) to appreciate some of the goings on. But the book will endure; as good poetry does.

Drasdo's art partly shows in his non-self-centredness. He leaves you guessing about his own story, about the outcome of his wife's illness, about his jobs. But National Service isn't let off the hook: 'it made a man of me' and, one begins to see, a subversive too. The texture is always open and one's imagination is drawn in. The embroidery is thick at times. But that's the way with tradition. We could never have had tapestries without those stitching, gossiping, lore-enhancing ladies and their variant rememberings. The book is more of a shrub than a tree: no Deep Theme. The asides and branches are what make it: a chapter on hitch-hiking, the theology of falling (off), the Zen of sea and cliffs, the virtues of Catalan as a language for climbing guides, a lovely excursion into Ireland (he does let on, somewhere, that he knows a lot of Yeats by heart), an idyll in Yosemite and a brilliant paragraph which portrays Menlove Edwards finely. Many characters keep bobbing up but they are not name-dropped. You bump into them; the way you did.

It all starts with a bunch of teenage friends from Bradford making a group, making a club, an expedition to Helvellyn, to Langdale. Wall End Barn was their smoky shrine and Sid Cross one of their prophets. Then after a few years they have a reunion. Some of the lads are becoming rich; some aren't. Many of Drasdo's best yarns come from his unpicking and reworking the braid which started at Wall End Barn. He highlights three climbs which, for him, epitomise those golden Fifties when 'individuals and subcultures could remain untouched ... by the mass media'. The first is Deer Bield Crack which was part of 'our ambition to repeat all the great classics of the Lakes'.

In ... 1951 I found myself spending a night in the Grasmere Youth Hostel with Pete Greenwood, ... an outstanding climber but his restless energy diverted him into very varied adventures. He ran into problems with policemen, licensees, hostel wardens, girls, other climbers. A Berserker spirit ruled his nature. In the barn one crowded night he insistently provoked a Bradford area gritstoner known as Pablo ... considerably bigger than the tormentor. From the dimly lit further end of the barn we heard a solid smack as he hit Pete, and then, an alarming crack as Pete's head struck the crudely cobbled floor.

And that was only the beginning of the story.

Deer Bield Crack eventually succumbed. To me it has a magic name. I had heard about it in the 1930s but never got there. So many names echo from it: A T Hargreaves, Graham Macphee, Dick Barry, John Jenkins. Drasdo

suggests it has an 'anima' character. He is free with such interpretive offerings but I know what he means. His account of their snow-drifting ascent in stockinged feet is very much of the period and in tune with the crag's menacing, untameable beauty.

Drasdo's second strand of memory from that decade is the saga of his own attempts on, and first ascent of, North Crag Eliminate. (Here, as with several of his climbs, one yearns for a Heaton-Cooper style drawing to help one's inner vision.) It's a good, long-drawn account, ending with the following, so characteristic of the 1930-1960 age.

I had no hammer but happened [!] to be carrying two or three pegs. Using a loose rock from the floor of the niche I tapped a peg awkwardly in. ... (one month later, on the entertaining second ascent, Joe Brown [pulled] the peg out by hand.) But it looked real and often that's all that's needed.

Reminiscent of Collie sixty years earlier in Moss Ghyll: '... the rock was smooth, so I took my axe and fashioned a step.'

We get further clues to Drasdo's world-view when, also in Langdale, he mourns the skills that went to the building of the Barn.

The walls are neatly coursed, stream-dressed rubble, levelled on crude slate stringing. Any earth packing washed out centuries ago. The roof is slated in the diminishing courses characteristic of older Lakeland buildings ... [but] recently it's been meticulously restored. A melancholy shell. A spear of grief runs through me.

He is stricken by the hollow compromises of the heritage industry. The poet in him not only mourns the loss of friends and youthful optimism but also the dying of all those rural skills and focused lives which created their barn.

There is a touch both of the anarchy and the vitality of William Morris about Drasdo. Also of Wordsworth. It's a long time since I've read a mountain book which stirred me as this did: a far from ordinary route through the hills of memory.

Robin Hodgkin

Deep Play

Paul Pritchard

Bâton Wicks, 1997, pp192, £16.99

I don't suppose many Alpine Club members have been to Disneyland Paris, but amongst the many spectacular rides is one based on a flight simulator. The unfortunate 'passengers' are thrown into various galactic wars, plunged into bottomless chasms, crashed into alien spacecraft and generally shaken, vibrated and frightened out of their wits (well, I was anyway). All this

happens while you are strapped into a seat that scarcely moves at all. If you haven't experienced this and don't want to go all the way to Paris to do so, then for £16.99 you can buy Paul Pritchard's first book *Deep Play* and enjoy/suffer a remarkably similar set of sensations, for this book is no smooth roller-coaster. It picks you up by the scruff of the neck and doesn't let you go again until the last page.

The book is actually a collection of articles, most of them originally published in the climbing magazines but modified and sometimes rewritten for this book. Unlike many such collections, these hang together well and become more than the sum of their parts. Pritchard's writing is direct, uncompromising, occasionally naïve; always honest, sometimes painfully so, and redolent with echoes of Menlove Edwards whom the author acknowledges (together with Joe Tasker) as a major influence. His account of a near-fatal accident on Gogarth in which he suffered serious injuries and nearly drowned has an intensity and ghostly surreal aura that rivals passages in Joe Simpson's *Touching the Void*.

Occasionally I was frustrated by the 'stream of consciousness' style and couldn't quite work out basic questions of who, what, when and where. I realised, too late, that at the end of the book there are explanatory notes to each chapter. I think it would have been worth the trouble to integrate this important information into the main text, but this is my only minor quibble.

The central theme of *Deep Play* is an intense questioning of the author's lifestyle, living at the absolute edge of extreme climbing. Suffering physical deprivation, abject poverty, and ever-changing relationships, good and bad, with his small band of fellow-travellers, Pritchard gives us a brilliant insight into the sometimes crazy world of the modern climber. Compelling essays on ascents that range from free climbing on Sron Ulladale, mind-blowing aid climbing on the Central Tower of Paine and on Asgard are contrasted with gritty descriptions of life in Llanberis and a childhood in Lancashire. Strangely, I was reminded of Hermann Buhl's classic *Nanga Parbat Pilgrimage*, though Pritchard's writing is still essentially in the tradition of 'British understatement'. Appalling difficulties are coolly described, but Pritchard's admissions of his own fears and self-doubt are recorded with a frankness that is almost shocking.

The book is a worthy winner of this year's Boardman Tasker Award, breaking with recent tradition by actually being a book about mountains and climbing. Pritchard emerges as a gifted writer who, we must hope, will produce more of the same. Whether he can only do it while he is performing at the highest standards is a question he will have to resolve one day, hopefully in the distant future.

This was a book that made me wish I was young again, but also quite relieved that I will never climb remotely near to Paul Pritchard's standards. Turning the last page I unclipped my imaginary seat belt, got up from my comfortable armchair and doddered off to solo a circuit of increasingly easy routes at Burbage North. My brain was still spinning with thoughts

and memories of Trango, Patagonia and those far away places that still have the power to inspire and bewitch.

Jim Curran

Against the Wall

Simon Yates

Jonathan Cape, 1997, pp176, £14.99

In the autumn of 1991, Simon Yates, Sean Smith, Paul Pritchard and Noel Craine travelled down to Patagonia to attempt a new line on the Central Tower of Paine. This book is the story of the climb, but it is also a self-analysis of Simon Yates' climbing life over the last ten years.

The first ascent of *El Regalo de Mowana* on the 1200m East Face of the Central Tower of Paine was an outstanding achievement. The climb, made in fine style without bolts, received acclaim throughout the mountaineering world. It also marked the beginning of British involvement in the new league of alpine big wall routes which are at the cutting edge of today's technical mountaineering game. Recent British successes on Baffin, Greenland and Trango have all fed off the experience and confidence generated by the Paine route.

Simon tells the story well. The team soon found themselves on a steep learning curve as they taught themselves how to put up a new big wall route in an alpine environment. How the mountaineering experience of Yates and Smith was combined with the rock-climbing skills of Pritchard and Craine makes fascinating reading. Technical climbing can often appear tedious on the written page, but Simon has an easy style which captures the full atmosphere of being high on a big Patagonian wall. The reader is soon finding himself aiding on poor gear up icy cracks, jumaring up fixed lines, taking long leader falls and sitting out fierce storms. In the event, despite a long and determined struggle in which the whole team nearly made the summit, it was only Pritchard and Smith who had the time and mental resources to go back for a final try and eventual success.

The book is interspersed with Simon's climbing experiences over the last ten years. Flashbacks to Minus One Gully on the Ben, the Central Couloir on the Jorasses, all add to the depth of the book. Simon Yates did of course gain notoriety as 'the man who cut the rope' in Joe Simpson's *Touching the Void*. One cannot help thinking that one motive for writing the book was an opportunity to put his side of the story. It is no surprise, therefore, that the last flashback is to that awful snow slope on the Siula Grande. Here we find Yates sitting without anchors in a collapsing stance with Joe swinging on the rope 150 feet below. He is clear that ultimately he made the right mountaineering decision to cut the rope. After all, they did both survive.

It is this same mountaineering judgement which will not allow Yates to go back up the frayed fixed ropes on Paine for one last try. It is clearly a difficult personal decision, and the very act of making it allows Yates to

reassess the direction of his life. I, for one, hope that this new direction does not lead to less climbing, for I look forward to the possibility of further writing from Simon, and reliving more of his full and varied adventures.

Simon Richardson

Into Thin Air

Jon Krakauer

Macmillan, 1997, £16.99

There are two images in Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air*, a compelling and hugely successful account of the deaths on Everest in the pre-monsoon season of 1996, that stuck in my mind as being superbly illustrative of everything that is currently wrong with climbing the highest mountain on Earth. The first centres on Yasuko Namba, a middle-aged Japanese business-woman, who despite limited credentials as a mountaineer and a previously poor performance on the mountain, rallied on summit day to power her way up the final few hundred metres. She had, says Krakauer, 'the summit in her cross-hairs'. This idea of the mountain as quarry, with its echoes of tiger-shoots in the jungles of the Terai, seems apt. Self-glorification through a struggle with nature has long been an occupation of people with too much money and not enough respect.

The other image is of the team Krakauer joined as a reporter for the American magazine *Outside*. As Krakauer waits at the South Col, a place whose windswept misery clearly made an impact on his psyche, he reflects on the hollowness of his experience: 'In this godforsaken place, I felt disconnected from the climbers around me – emotionally, spiritually, physically – to a degree I hadn't experienced on any previous expedition. We were a team in name only, I'd sadly come to realise.'

The vacuum that lies at the heart of this book is a lack of emotional engagement. Krakauer quite likes most of the people he shares the mountain with, but they are acquaintances only, not friends. There is no shared dream or common purpose, in sharp contrast to expeditions of an earlier age like that which made the first ascent in 1953. When Yasuko Namba is found the morning after her ascent, exposed on the South Col with a three-inch carapace of ice over her face and close to death, the misery is compounded by a sense that she and the others who lived or died on the mountain did so in wretched solitude.

This impression has prompted a rash of negative publicity in the United States and Europe, the theme of which is the death of a noble ideal. The last time newspapers were interested in Everest, Ed Hillary and Tenzing Norgay were reaching the summit, the Americans Tom Hornbein and Willi Unsoeld were pioneering the West Ridge, Chris Bonington's team were plotting their way up the South-West Face. These were great endeavours and now, public opinion believes, we are left with cynicism and greed. The

attitude is reinforced by the garbage and dead bodies apparently strewn on the mountain, a physical manifestation of the mountain's corruption. Among mountaineers, however, there has been some discomfort from the inquisitorial nature of Krakauer's account. While the general public – in the West at least – are used to enquiries and criticism if something goes wrong, we are usually reluctant to point a finger at individuals so accusingly. Krakauer has no such misgivings and is critical of the Seattle-based guide Scott Fischer and his Russian employee Anatoli Boukreev. In the latter case, Krakauer has no sympathy for the Russian's *laissez-faire* attitude, which he correctly identifies as being a cultural difference from the usual American abhorrence of fatalism.

Fischer's lead Sherpa, Lopsang Jangbu, is also criticised and the young tyro was forced to defend himself in the American press shortly before he too was killed on Everest in the autumn season of 1996. Krakauer's attitude to the Sherpas is strangely disengaged. He dutifully fills us in on the background of the more important ones, tells us about some of their quirky customs, but there is a powerful divide in the relationship between the climbers and their 'servants' who, in effect, climbed the mountain for them.

Jon Krakauer's additional title for his book is 'A personal account of the Everest disaster'. All the way through the book I couldn't help wondering which tragedy he meant. The multiple deaths of those terrible days and nights in May 1996, or something else? Certainly, there have been many other tragedies on Everest. Statistically, 1996 was a pretty safe year allowing for the numbers who were active on the mountain, a point Krakauer makes in his concluding remarks.

This particular tragedy got so much attention partly because of the final hours of Rob Hall, who said goodbye to his wife for the last time over his radio as he froze to death near the south summit, but also because some of the climbers involved were well-known Americans whose colleagues at base camp had lots of very sophisticated communications equipment with which to keep in touch with the world's media.

This instant access to the dramas enacted on Everest's slopes has been one of the most significant changes in recent years. Problems encountered by mountaineers are played in real time, not reported at a later date when the immediacy has gone. And physical access to the mountain has also speeded up. Helicopters fly to Shyangboche, cutting weeks off the approach endured by John Hunt and his team. The convenience of such rapid communications has cut the real story of Everest – the story, if you like, of Chomolungma – out of the agenda. The real story of Everest is not about the private aspirations of men and women who enjoy climbing, but the story of those who live and work in the Khumbu, who bring up their families and follow their *dharma* in the shadow of the mountain.

While the general public are riveted by what they perceive as a tragedy, the real story is more hopeful. Western environmentalists may warn that the Khumbu is being spoiled, but there is a convincing argument to be

made that the management of the region is a success, albeit a qualified one. The numbers visiting may have increased exponentially in the last twenty years, but much of the region's allure has been effectively preserved.

Ultimately, Jon Krakauer's account is a catharsis of the guilt he felt following those harrowing hours. Guilt at survival, guilt over the death of the guide Andy Harris and his failure to notice the young New Zealander's distress, guilt at the pain he caused relatives of the dead in his uncompromising assessment. It is a horrifying story brilliantly told. But it is not the story of Everest, more a comment on the over-confidence of people who believe that wealth and position make the slightest difference when a storm settles on the roof of the world.

Ed Douglas

Dark Shadows Falling

Joe Simpson

Jonathan Cape, 1997, pp 207, £15.99

This is the second book which I have read by the same author. The first, unique in its category, described in compelling terms a personal experience almost beyond human belief, when survival was achieved by means of an indomitable will in the face of seemingly impossible odds. In some ways this latest book is a natural sequence to that experience. It is about Mount Everest, more specifically about the behaviour of people towards their fellow-creatures when faced with the extreme conditions which any ascent of Mount Everest must involve. There are two obvious reasons for the author's obsession with this theme. Firstly, only someone who has actually experienced the sensation of a resurrection to life from almost certain death could summon such emotional reactions towards the apparent disregard shown by climbers for those in distress high up on the mountain; secondly, because of the author's own lurking desire, not explicitly stated but implied on three separate occasions, to climb the mountain himself.

No press reporter could surpass the exposure which Simpson provides of the circumstances under which Everest is climbed today, with his blow-by-blow accounts of emergencies on the north and south sides of the mountain – many inevitable, a few avoidable – resulting in a growing series of deaths. Writing of this *genre* is all very well if the object is to stir the emotions, or to cater to a demand for mountain melodrama. But since the author must have had additional motives for writing this book, it seems a pity that he has made no attempt to probe into cause and effect, nor to examine the ethical and moral attitudes which led to the situations he describes. How many of the eleven persons stranded at night in a storm at 8000 metres were physically and mentally prepared for the situation in which they found themselves? For what reasons were they pushed to such an extremity – arrogance, ignorance, vanity, false expectations, value for

money? The author does not delve deeply into these matters and some of his more cynical opinions seem to conflict with the emotional approach he adopts elsewhere in the book. Guiding on Mount Everest, for instance, is referred to as a 'lucrative flagship' for the guide; Everest is described as 'another holiday destination ... from which *everyone* (my italics) benefits'; and, 'it will always be a significant social asset' to ascend the mountain. Those are some of the ideas which the author propagates.

Simpson joins the current chorus of blame heaped upon the media for the depths to which some forms of climbing have sunk, forgetting that press reporting is fairly consistent in its style, being generally exaggerated and often inaccurate. But he appears to overlook or even tacitly to condone the behaviour of people who, by playing with their own lives, involve, with full knowledge, the lives of others. The attitude of the Japanese climber, whose remarks are quoted on page 48, is essentially defensible: 8500 metres on Everest, where each human being is himself precariously balanced on a knife-edge, is not the place to attempt to repair the follies of others. Those who do not treat a mountain with respect forfeit their right to be there. It is difficult not to label the behaviour of such people as reflecting the values of some sections of present-day society, and their actions have led to a growing series of events which has brought some areas of Himalayan activity into disrepute. One hopes devoutly that the minority which they represent will grow increasingly aware of the spreading distaste for their attitudes and actions.

Himalayan history is filled with accounts of valiant deeds performed under exceptional circumstances, when calculated risks taken by competent mountaineers have had an unfortunate outcome owing to unforeseeable events. The golden principle of mutual help has always been the guiding factor. But the alarming pace of change evident all around us today has resulted in an emphasis on individualism, which, in the Himalaya, has tended to mean 'every man for himself', and the adoption of a different set of ethical values. There are no miracles: there is no easy way, and there are always clear warning signals – individual capacity and skill, current form, weather signs, the time factor. The survivors are those who heed the signals; to ignore them is to accept the possibility of disaster, and worse, to assume selfishly that others ought to endanger their lives in a rescue attempt.

The book includes episodes from the author's expedition to Pumori in the autumn of 1996, recorded largely in the form of conversations between members of the party. Some of the moralising reveals ambivalent attitudes to perceptions which are condemned elsewhere. In his summing-up at the end, I cannot quite make out whether the author's specious argument, that if others behave badly why should not we do so, is seriously intended.

There are deeper issues involved. The attraction of the masses towards Everest and K2 could be curbed if the authorities in China, Nepal, and Pakistan were to adopt a different policy for issuance of permits. A moratorium for two or three years on expeditions to those two mountains might

have the effect of calming the growing hysteria, and would provide an opportunity for cleaning-up operations. But we do not live in an ideal world, and the importance of foreign exchange earnings for all concerned will almost certainly dictate the policy of the authorities in the end.

There is no substitute for self-restraint on an individual level. If some of the follies and disasters graphically described in this book help to stir the majority sufficiently to make them raise their hand and say 'Enough', I think it will have served some purpose.

Trevor Braham

Spirits of Place

Jim Perrin

Gomer Press, 1997, pp250, £17.50

There is a phrase in Welsh, *dyn ei filltir sgwar* ("a man of his own square mile") that in a sense defines D J Williams's literary project. It might sound simple, but the web of interdependence, knowledge, role and responsibility implicit in that phrase is intricate and profound. Its design is comprehensible, the individual's relationship to it defined. It's not some web site you can log in and out of at will. As a literary work *Hen Dy Ffarm* was the expression of a historical moment and a nation where scale was human and appropriate – where the *filltir sgwar* could both contain and satisfy aspiration. Perhaps the reason why I so passionately love this small country is that the diminishing echo of that moment remains. (p. 238)

This wish to close in and say not just well but exquisitely what can be said about a particular land – Wales – and its culture is increasingly Perrin's ambition. This collection of essays and radio talks, his third, includes fewer climbing pieces than previously, and its comments on modern climbing convey as much by omission as by invective. One of the most complex and civilised of men, certainly one of the most talented who currently makes a living from our sport, Perrin sees an increasing simplification and lack of sophistication in the game, and it dismays him. He is a traditionalist, for whom climbing is about adventure before it is about anything else, and for whom 'spontaneous adequacy, not planning and conquest, is [the] lynch-pin.' The reason is the same as it has always been: adventure opens our eyes and enables us to see. Perrin is above all a writer who wishes to see and to encourage others to do so, who views blindness as a spiritual failing.

If, as I think, mountaineering's full experience involves both ultimate blindness and the most penetrating awareness, and if the contemporary Everest circus (say) can be thought of as a good example of the former, then it is clear that Perrin's ambition is to stake out the opposite ground. He is one of two contemporary British mountain writers (the other is Joe Simpson) whose talent clearly deserves an audience beyond his own

milieu. But his larger ambition, and it is not an absurd one, is to stand in the great tradition of radical British essayists whose concerns are much wider: environmental, social and ultimately political.

I do not know how successful this project will be. The work is in any event still ongoing. This latest contribution to it is organised into four sections: pieces written (or rewritten) for radio broadcast – these are all good, very fresh; portraits and obituaries; articles on climbing and the climbing scene culled almost entirely from his columns in *Climber* and *The Great Outdoors*; and ‘sketches from a journey through Wales’, which takes us on a long walking project southwards from Snowdonia, with wonderful portraits of people and places interwoven with a contemplative sadness at the creeping *embourgeoisement* of rural Wales.

I still think his climbing writing is the most consistently successful aspect of his output. He is one of very few writers who can bring alive the description of a rock climb – something which in most hands comes across as banal, tedious, blind; who can describe its aftermath with fresh phrases each time: ‘chastened laughter from prisoners on parole who know they must go back, are unsure which is captivity, which is release’. It was Perrin’s ability to write about climbing in this collection which led me to change my initial view that he lets in too much political comment. I still think some of this is too polarised – to see the Tories as *always* the bad guys, the socialists *always* as the keepers of decent values is too simple and it can be artistically unwise – party political comment can be too much of the moment, can jar with more timeless concerns. But one has to accept that without such comment not only would Jim not be Jim, but his work would be far less sharp, far less powerful. I was left at the end of the collection feeling that his artistic judgement, the main point at issue here, was right after all. Much of what he has to say cannot be satisfactorily divorced from contemporary political comment. One of the climbing pieces here, *Judas Climbers and the Trees*, which tackles the environmental stand-off at the site of the Newbury bypass and denigrates some climbers who earned considerable sums by offering their expertise to the authorities, drew criticism when it first appeared. Who was this man to pass judgement on others? Well, someone whose ethical analyses I would put some faith in.

Perrin is above all a writer – and a man – of passion, and must produce his best writing in that context. His descriptions of place, so much at the heart of the book, need to be approached differently from the run-of-the-mill essays which make up the bulk of the fare in outdoor magazines and journals. The value of these is generally to introduce a place or area, tell one how to get there, and send one off full of enthusiasm to experience it first hand. This is entirely good. But with work of Jim’s quality and density, the situation is somewhat different. His essays are not always easy. There is too much in them, too much knowledge and literary allusion for that. They make me want to go there, but much more; they make me want to experience it, and *then* read what he has to say.

Jim is an interpreter of landscape; and true landscape art, whether in the medium of writing, pictures, or music, has value in itself. It not only feeds off the land it celebrates but interprets its hidden or subtle features and so returns something to it. Real art recognises that perception is not a passive activity, that the interpretation of the artist can alter the way we see and appreciate things. Art is then not mere self-expression – something which can slip so easily into self-indulgence – but something of immense social value. Whatever one's final judgement, I do think that Perrin is in the class of writers who should at least be discussed and criticised in that context.

It is a select and distinguished group in any age. It is one which Perrin is inclined to interpret as overwhelmingly Celtic. I feel a slight unease here. At the beginning of his marvellous portrait of Dervla Murphy he writes that the tale 'takes place in Ireland – a place to which I go frequently, especially since the alternative, going the other way, is to arrive in England and I'm not sure I'd like that.' This is certainly true to Jim's feelings. He is of 'the Celtic fringe', using the phrase geographically, not disparagingly, but it seems oversimplified for the subtlety of Jim's character. Is Celtic Culture truly the last repository of contemplative decency in modern Britain? Do we Anglo-Saxons really have nothing to offer? Quite possibly. But I would like to see the evidence. Jim is a great romantic, and like all romantics can overdo his enthusiasms, delineate too starkly his likes and dislikes.

For all his intelligence, it is the emotion behind his writing which is the key to its power. If the Murphy portrait is good, the one of Michael Foot, that 'close reasoner and ... loose dresser', is even better. Some of the other portraits, those where a close personal involvement is lacking, are not as good. I don't think Perrin is a particularly good obituarist, possibly because his natural style is cramped by the requirements of the genre – the need to record a life's events, to get the information down. And ironically, the sheer decency of the man doesn't always help. No one is seriously criticised in a Perrin obituary; everyone is too much an irreplaceable character. All this might be true, but it does not make for a powerful read.

Spirits of Place is as distinguished as one would expect. It is meticulously sub-edited, suitably designed, expensively produced, well illustrated by sharp and good black and white photographs, and published by Gomer Press of Llandysul, a quintessentially Welsh press in whose select literary list Perrin clearly takes pride. It is presumably not destined for best-seller status. It requires time and care. And this is as it must be. I think it was Blake who insisted that it was time above all that was needed for the spiritual life to flourish. Perrin has given the best part of his life so far to trying to see beyond the obvious in landscape and what we do there, and to express those moments when life does seem infinitely precious, whether in the company of people or the land. Absorbing what he has to say is bound to take time. You cannot 'skim' Perrin.

Phil Bartlett

The Death Zone

Matt Dickinson

Hutchinson, 1997, £16.99

'I'm not a climber,' the author said to me. 'I got to the top of Everest by a fluke, filming Al Hinkes's ascent.' I took him at his word and then I read his book. He had never been to the Alps, never climbed by the light of a head torch, never even been to the highest summits of the UK. But in a sense he had been training for Everest for all of his adult life – as a determined and resourceful survivor. At Durham University he joined the Exploration Society, got a first job as a trek leader in the Atlas Mountains and became an adventure film maker, joining teams who were proving 'that it's not all been done'. Most of these journeys demanded that Dickinson himself be part of the proof, with none of the 'fine wine at grand hotels and away in the Land Cruiser in the morning' that mars David Roberts' new collection of 'adventure' essays. For every project, Dickinson wanted both the toughest journey and the most challenging filming.

Thus he came to be filming the third Everest attempt by the 60-year-old thespian, Brian Blessed, whose money had been taken (again) by *Himalayan Kingdoms Expeditions*, with Al Hinkes along for support. Ascending from the north, Blessed was turned around just above the North Col and Al Hinkes became the focus of the film which was shown on Channel 4 on 26 August 1997. Dickinson became the 27th Briton to summit and the first to film on the summit and return.

So is the book of the film worth reading? I found it fascinating, a gripping read, honest, and revealing in more ways than it perhaps intended. Everest is presented in the book as an opportunity to sort himself out and make some decisions. All those requests for the wild caver or rafter or climber or surfer to 'do it one more time' for the camera were beginning to haunt him with their near misses. Then there is the matter of the ethics of filming Brian Blessed's third attempt. Dickinson raises the issue. He has recently admitted that he sought the advice of British guides on the chances of Blessed reaching the summit. He became a convinced fan of the Blessed project. When sensible decisions had to be taken above the North Col, Dickinson admits that he was an angry and naive contributor to that discussion, seeing his film project turned around by the voices of experience.

Should he film the body of an Indian climber over whom he has to step, knowing that, after the huge news interest in the disaster of a few days before, ITN would want his footage and that this was part of the reality? He was there to film anyway. 'I could not bring myself to film the dead man,' seems more an emotional than an ethical decision. Earlier he had admitted in the book that 'the truth was that the mountain had dehumanised me and hardened my emotional response.' This is grist to the mill of Joe Simpson's *Dark Shadows Falling*, the more so, I think, because Dickinson has not had the apprenticeship of loss as a part of the climbing community.

Dickinson manages to convey well the real climbing, emotional waves and final summit fever of his summit day. It is amazing what he carried to the top: two useless litres of frozen juice, a video camera, an SLR camera, his mum's Xmas pud and a throw-away fun camera with which he took summit stills. That he descended to the same unresolved personal problems with which he began is no surprise, but does raise the suspicion that lifestyle issues are in the book to help make a good story. This is certainly what he achieves, (unintentional) warts and all.

Terry Gifford

Chomolungma Sings the Blues. Travels round Everest

Ed Douglas

Constable, 1997, pp226, £18.95

Members of the Alpine Club will find this book worth reading for the first page alone. Our member Ed Douglas brings his writing skills to bear on the Club as it is today in a description to delight us all.

The book is an account of his travels over a three-year period to the base camps on the Rongbuk and the Khumbu glacier approaches to Mount Everest, supported by a travel fellowship from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust. The author's concern that we might think that there is 'nothing more to be said about tired old Everest that had not been said a thousand times before' is allayed even before he leaves the Club Library. The ghosts of past Everesters begin to materialise as soon as you read the Acknowledgements and inevitably continue right through to the Epilogue. He does not even need to name Mick, Dougal and Nick for familiar faces to be evoked, but this is not a morbid account. It is a reflective piece by a journalist who reports and interprets for us what he sees and what he is told by all the people he meets, not only climbers and Sherpas but lawyers and bike boys in Kathmandu as well.

A difficulty that a journalist can get into by frank reporting of his sources is that his account may bring retribution onto any of them. Moreover, his partisan assessment of Chinese measures to suppress Tibetan nationalism might just delay the issue of a visa to visit Tibet in the future. But Ed Douglas may not wish to travel over that dismal crossing at Zhangmu and Nyalam ever again, an antipathy I recall feeling fervently after several experiences of the Friendship Highway ten years ago.

While giving his unequivocal support to the Free Tibet campaign, Douglas would have given us a more balanced account by reporting the Chinese point of view as well. Their publications used to be readily available in Tibet as well as in Beijing. When last I saw the ruins at Shegar it was in the company of military friends when we climbed to the top of the Dzong. If there ever was an airstrike on the fort by MIG bombers, as he reports, it was not apparent to us then. In spite of these minor carpings, anyone who

has travelled in these parts recently will identify with the grim experience that Douglas describes and appreciate this account. Back in Kathmandu he is on safer ground, and is not prisoner to the schedule imposed on all organised parties in Tibet, with one of which he had been obliged to travel. In Kathmandu he had more time for research and he records a wealth of detail. He succeeds in his aim to do a comprehensible analysis of the success, or otherwise, of aid projects in Nepal. He discusses the dire environmental state of Kathmandu with its contaminated water, smog and traffic. His anecdotal approach is entertaining; his story of lingams belies his prudish response to temptations later to be put in his way in the Khumbu by his mischievous Sherpa guide. He is aware of the ironies of Kathmandu ('irony' is a word he uses a lot), such as Eco-tour advertisements glimpsed through exhaust haze across the street.

Trekking on to the Khumbu, I warmed to his opinions on the name Sagarmatha (Chomolungma is much preferred) and 'garbage hobbyists'. He applauds the sensible efforts of the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee, as well as those who offer a trash recovery bonus to encourage Sherpas to bring rubbish off the mountains when they are descending empty-handed after a carry. He hopes the focus of Western concern will now shift to the more important issues of poor sanitation and air pollution. There is a delightful exposition on potatoes which brought back fond memories of platefuls of hot buttered 'rigis' served at Base Camp. He parallels the development of lodges all along the trekking trails as far up as Gorak Shep with that of huts in the Alps a century earlier. (And is there not a parallel between what happened to the Matterhorn, such as a dancing bear on the summit, and TV broadcasts from the top of Everest?) He pays handsome tribute to Jimmy Roberts for introducing trekking to Nepal, which I am sure he would have appreciated if he had lived to see publication of this book.

Douglas makes several assessments of recent fatalities on Everest. His unflattering verdict on the first Sherpani's ascent will doubtless upset some in Kathmandu, but as a seasoned reporter he is no doubt prepared to take the rough with the smooth. He was himself at Base Camp in the Spring 1996 season and gives a first-hand description of some of the protagonists. Of the 33 climbers who went for the top, five were to die, including Rob Hall and Scott Fischer. (And Anatoli Boukreev who played a key role in the event has now gone too.) His climber's overview of the tragedy and its subsequent recriminations are well judged and make riveting reading. He weaves all this in with other triumphs and failures, yet he makes no bones about having no wish to try to climb Everest himself. He freely admits that, while he scorns those who are only interested in Everest for its fame, some of them are climbers he respects. He calls it the \$64,000 question: why climb Everest at all?

This is a well-written book which will appeal to anyone with an interest in an up-to-date account of the Everest scene.

Henry Day

The Duke of the Abruzzi. An Explorer's Life

Mirella Tenderini & Michael Shandrick

The Mountaineers/Bâton Wicks, 1997, pp190, £17.99

The Duke of the Abruzzi was the grandson of King Vittorio Emanuele II of Italy. During vacations from training for the Italian navy, he explored the Gran Paradiso massif, a hunting area popular with the royal family. By 1890, aged 17, he had developed a passion for mountaineering, largely inspired by his aunt, Queen Margherita of Italy.

By the time he was 21 the Duke of the Abruzzi had completed, with guides from the Val d'Aosta, a number of fine Alpine climbs in the Mont Blanc range and the Monte Rosa group. Other notable climbs included his ascent of the Zmutt ridge of the Matterhorn with Mummery, Collie and the guide Josef Pollinger in 1894. Two years later, after completing one of his long voyages with the Italian navy and faced with an unexpected obstacle to his plans to lead an expedition to Nanga Parbat, the peak on which Mummery had lost his life in 1895, the Duke decided to attempt the ascent of Mount St Elias in Alaska.

So started his famous trio of mountaineering expeditions: the ascent of Mount St Elias in 1897, the exploration of the Ruwenzori mountains in 1906 when he climbed most of the major summits, and in 1909 the attempt on K2 by the ridge now named after him. These expeditions, which are described in this book, may be familiar to British climbers through the series of books by Filippo de Filippi, published by Constable at the time, with Vittorio Sella's magnificent photographs. Not so well known, perhaps, at least among mountaineers, was the Duke's Arctic expedition of 1899-1900, an attempt to reach the North Pole which achieved the 'farthest north' at that time.

The authors, however, relate more than just the adventurous side of the Duke's life, and describe his naval and (reluctant) political career. They also tell the story of his love for a young American heiress, which foundered, amidst much publicity, as a result of opposition from the Italian royal family. In the latter part of his life, the Duke established a communal farming village in Italian Somaliland and carried out further exploration into the interior. There he died in 1933, much loved by the local people.

The Duke of the Abruzzi is a name well known and revered among mountaineers everywhere but, until now, details of his life were almost unknown outside Italy. It is a pity, therefore, that this book, the result of a study of some excellent sources of reference, is marred by poor proof-reading, many careless errors and confusing contradictions which detract from the value of the historical content. For instance, the Duke did not learn during his voyage in the *Cristoforo Colombo* – which was his *first* voyage round the world (page 26) – that a fifth expedition had failed to climb Mount St Elias (page 27); the Duke did not plan to mount an expedition in 1896 and did not climb in the Alps in 1896 (page 28); the Duke was not Sella's monarch (page 104); in 1887 Francis Younghusband was not 'Sir' and was not a colonel

(page 105); and Freshfield did not map and study the Kangchenjunga region in 1899-1902 but was there in 1899 only (pages 106-107).

The book, which includes a useful bibliography, contains a number of interesting photographs, many of which were taken by Sella, relating to an exciting and colourful life.

Geoffrey Templeman

C A Russell

The First Descent of the Matterhorn

A Bibliographical Guide to the 1865 Accident and Its Aftermath

Alan Lyall

Gomer Press, 1997, pp 674, £45

'The Matterhorn rises above Zermatt like ...' How many magazine and newspaper articles include this sentence? Just fill in your own simile. I've proffered a few myself over the years, most slightly embarrassing to recall. But as readers this time are Alpine Club members I should not need to be topographically literal. You've seen it. So as a metaphor look at it as a giant Question Mark. Extend the great triangle above the east face, the classic view from Zermatt, and it is not difficult to visualise. Then you have a mountain that has spawned questions from the technical to the philosophical like no other.

One of the first of the 'Whys', of course, was *The Times* of 27 July 1865, just thirteen days after the first tragic ascent: 'Why is the best blood of England to waste itself in scaling inaccessible peaks ...' etc. But no doubt Edward Whymper and the Taugwalders were turning over the questions and judicious answers even as they descended after the accident. Alan Lyall's compendious labour of love corrects past distortions of the Matterhorn saga and answers many questions. In the five months I have owned a copy it has proved of invaluable assistance in writing three Matterhorn-related articles. Yet it too cannot help but raise deeper questions as others are answered. And when it gets down to the conflicts of interest of the hotelier Joseph Clemenz who chaired the accident inquiry, and Arnold Lunn's virulent 'allergy' to Whymper, then we really are in *X Files* territory, or Peter Wright-style machinations, for an older generation. The mind swims and there is no distant shore of certainty.

Over the decades, the climbing fraternity has been split between those who say Whymper displayed callous indifference to the deaths of Hudson, Hadow, Douglas and Michel Croz, and those who believe he avoided casting blame to spare the feelings of the bereaved and the reputations of the Taugwalders. Thanks to Frank Smythe's confused interpretation of the Cowell memorandum, detractors Lunn and Carl Eggar were even able to suggest that Whymper accused the Taugwalders of plotting to murder him so that they could profit from the publicity of being the sole survivors.

Alan Lyall, after calling all the witnesses and commentators, basically confirms Whymper's own account in *Scrambles* and concludes that much of the criticism levelled at the AC's past vice-president (1872-74) was 'unjustified'. The 674-page guide draws together scores of contemporary documents, including letters to *The Times*, private correspondence and a first English translation of the Enquiry Report, and subjects their verities and inconsistencies to thorough analysis. Lyall is, after all, a lawyer. Is 'The First Descent of the Matterhorn' a lawyer's title, though? Lyall is fastidious about detail and, I know, scathing about newspaper distortions. Yet the title has the mocking flippancy of a *Guardian* headline. One senses a publisher's pressure for something snappy and that the sub-title 'A Bibliographical Guide to the 1865 Accident and Its Aftermath' might have been Lyall's first choice. It is more accurate, though too forbidding for what is, in fact, an absorbingly readable tome. The biographical sketches of 60 of the characters involved in the early years of the Matterhorn's notoriety are perhaps Lyall's greatest contribution to the endless debate. Of course nothing has changed about the immediate cause – the blundering Hadow slipped at the wrong moment and that was that. Lyall concludes that the inexperienced youth was in the party because neither Hudson, who invited him, nor Croz, their guide, believed there was any prospect of getting onto the trickier rock above the shoulder.

But it is the Taugwalders who dominate the saga. The biographical sketch of Old Peter Taugwalder alone runs to 16,000 words and does not leave a favourable impression – easily unnerved and prone to drink is being kind. The picture of his son, Young Peter, is blacker; the first to see the commercial gain from the disaster. Whymper may have wanted to spare the Taugwalders any blame for the accident but over the succeeding years plenty leaked out to besmirch their characters. Deservedly so? Lyall offers little mitigation. The disturbing side to this is how it chimes with our stereotypes. Here were a pair of Zermatt guides whose first concerns were next season's profit and the reaction of the rival guides' company in Chamonix, one of whom – Croz – had been killed. The Enquiry – the report of which Lyall had translated into English – amounted to little more than a cover-up. Clemenz, apparently, did not want further to provoke the Zermatt families who already distrusted him as an incomer. Even a Swiss newspaper protested at the secrecy over answers given to his enquiry. Yet the aura of secrecy continues. When recent enquiries were made about Old Peter's *Führerbuch*, which has never surfaced, the response was that even if it still existed 'nobody was going to see it'.

The stubborn, parochial defensiveness of the Zermatt guides has been in evidence most recently over their equipping of the Matterhorn's Zmutt ridge. Commerce is at the bottom of it again – the bolts and stanchions on the hitherto untamed route followed the gift of a hut from the Swiss chemical giant Lonza AG. When I telephoned to get the guides' side of the story, one of the first things their president told me was that he was a descendant

of Old Peter Taugwalder. 'I know all about that,' he began. The tone was oddly challenging, since I hadn't asked about 1865. But thanks to Alan Lyall, I know all about it too. Do not be deterred by the price.

Stephen Goodwin

Alpi Retiche

Renato Armelloni

Alpi Pusteresi

Favio Cammelli with Werner Beikircher

Sardegna

Maurizio Oviglia

Club Alpino Italiano and Touring Club Italiano, 1997, approx. L65,000 each

In 1997 the CAI/TCI under the guidance of their General Editor Gino Buscaini (who is also an AC member) published three new guides. In common with their volume on the Bernina (reviewed in AJ102) each comes with a sturdy softback cover and beautiful colour pictures, photodiagrams and maps, enhancing the CAI's already established reputation for producing probably the best definitive guidebook to any alpine area under its remit.

The Retiche is a region of lower altitude peaks that many will have seen, yet never visited. It lies south of the Engadine between the popular honeypots of the Bernina and Ortler Alps. AC members made first ascents of several of the main peaks during the mid-19th century but thereafter pioneering became the preserve of locally based mountaineers. Because of its generally arid nature during the summer months and mainly poor quality limestone, the Retiche is a collection of peaks that will appeal most to the adventurous mountaineer happy to reach altitudes of little more than 3000m by non-technical routes. Having said that, the highest summit, the 3439m Cima de Piazzi, has a fine little glaciated north face, while the 3233m Corno di Dosd  offers a 350m wall of solid gneiss with an eight-pitch ED2/3. Like the Albula to the north-west, the Retiche contains considerable areas of wild country that offer good walking/scrambling as well as extensive ski touring during the winter/spring. The new guide documents all this well and also includes a small section on valley cragging and icefall climbing.

The Pusteresi straddles the Austro-Italian border to the north-east of Brunico and south of the Zillertal. It is even less familiar to foreign climbers than the Retiche and, strangely, appears to have no equivalent name in German. The region has around 50 mountains rising above 3000m and the rock is generally gneiss, though certain peaks offer good quality granite. The best-known summit is the 3435m Callalto (Hochgall) in the Vedretta de Ries (Rieserferen Group) with its 350m Eisnase route (TD+/ED1) and on the snowless south side 800m pillars of solid, compact granite. The highest summit, the 3498m Pico de Tre Signori (Dreiherrnspitze) to the north, sports technically one of the hardest mixed routes in the Eastern

Alps. However, the majority of the climbs described in this guide are far more modest in standard and the many relatively short rock scrambles and snow routes will appeal to the alpinist operating at AD and below. The guide also features useful sections on the ski mountaineering potential and icefall climbing during the winter months.

Probably of most interest to British climbers will be the first comprehensive guide to the now internationally famous rock walls and crags on the island of Sardinia. It presents an interesting departure from traditional mountain venues for the CAI/TCI but not an illogical one. The interior of the island has walls of perfect 'Verdon' limestone up to a full 500m in height, the potential of which was first realised back in the early 1980s by luminaries such as Gogna and Manolo. Oviglia has spearheaded activity in the last decade, introducing ground-up, bolt-protected climbing on some of the bigger compact walls, while seemingly respecting traditional ethics on all the established lines. The majority of the routes described in his guide rely on natural protection and are graded under the UIAA system. Those that don't are generally distinguished by a French rating. In keeping with other CAI publications, this guide concentrates on climbs with an 'alpine' character. These can be as diverse as long multi-pitch offerings on dramatic limestone sea cliffs and short granite routes high in the mountains. Pure sport climbing is covered by topos in a small appendix and a somewhat more lengthy section deals with various excellent walking excursions throughout the interior, over terrain that can often feel quite wild and remote (the highest summit reaches 1823m and is often extensively snow covered in winter). The 100 or so excellent colour prints, photodiagrams, etc, really inspire and have effectively added yet another climbing venue to the list of those I simply have to visit.

Lindsay Griffin

Icefields

Thomas Wharton

Jonathan Cape, 1997, £9.99

It was reported locally at the time, but many UK alpinists may not have heard about the fall into a crevasse by Dr Edward Byrne on the Arcturus Glacier in the Canadian Rockies. He wedged upside down sixty feet from the surface, unconscious. In order to haul him out, his partners had to cut his rucksack away. As he recovered in Jasper, Byrne recalled seeing in the depths of the glacier ice a pale human figure with wings. He could never be certain about what exactly he saw, but this image haunted him for the rest of his life.

The time was actually 1898 and, in an era when retreating glaciers across the globe are giving up their secrets, this might have appeared to be a weirdly contemporary story. In fact it was the starting point of the first novel by the Canadian Thomas Wharton. This intriguing, understated, poetic novel

won the Grand Prize at the 1995 Banff Mountain Book Festival and was shortlisted by the Boardman Tasker judges here.

So, back in England after the 1898 expedition, Byrne is restless and returns to Jasper, eventually building a hut on a nunatak in the Arcturus Glacier for his regular summer glaciological research. He appears to be calculating the moment when the section of ice into which he fell will peel off at the terminus. Meanwhile his relationships with a series of enigmatic women reveal as much about his psychological and emotional handicaps as they do about the history of tourist development in the Rockies. Sara is the daughter of an abandoned servant 'acquired' in India. Fraya is a lone woman explorer and climber. Elspeth keeps an extraordinary glasshouse linked to a hot spring and becomes the manager of the glacier visitor centre. What the tourists can see in later years is the grown fruit of Dr Byrne's rucksack.

The narrative picks up the stories of several characters in several short sections which can feel frustratingly fractured at first, but the book is worth hanging in with. It is as haunting and echoing as an ice cave that cannot give up all its secrets at once.

Terry Gifford

Storms of Silence

Joe Simpson

Jonathan Cape 1996, pp304, £17.99

Vintage 1997, ppvi+330, £7.99 (paperback, fewer photos)

It must be difficult for an author to follow a best-seller such as Joe Simpson's *Touching the Void*, and the successful *This Game of Ghosts*. The present book is a curious mixture of essay-like writing, rather over-long conversation pieces and wonderful passages describing parts of Nepal – so well written that they made me long to return there yet again.

Throughout the book, from the end of the first three chapters (about an expedition to the Langtang), there runs the thread of aggression and modern-day violence, comprising everything from a nasty brutish scene in a pub (really rather tedious) to Simpson's thoughts on Chinese atrocities in Tibet. He returns to Peru, for the most successful summer's climbing he ever had, and visits Yungay, the town buried in 1970 by a mud slide following an earthquake. This sets off a train of thought about Belsen, which he had visited as a schoolboy.

There is an odd chapter about training in various gymnasiums, and another on his fear of flying. It seems that he is an introverted character, who wants his readers to know what he is thinking and feeling most of the time. Is this a good thing? The book is very readable, simply because Simpson writes so well, but this reader was left with the thought that there is a lot of padding, and that it lacks cohesion.

Sally Westmacott

Traumberge Amerikas. Von Alaska bis Feuerland

Edkehard Radehose

*Bergverlag Rother, 1996, pp 191, npg***The High Andes. A Guide for Climbers**

John Biggar

Andes, 1996, pp 160, £16

The main contribution of these two books lies in their many pages of useful information regarding individual peaks of the New World, and the particular problems those peaks may pose to the expeditionary mountaineer. The scope of each book differs only slightly. The German work is more a collection of contributions by the author himself and by other climbers (including the very experienced Andeanist Herbert Ziehenhardt) on several peaks, ranging from Alaska to Patagonia (but not 'Feuerland'). The Scottish work is an Andean guidebook with basic information conveyed in a direct style. Statistics for both books are impressive. Radehose's guide surveys a total of 32 peaks, each one covered by a long description of climbing conditions to be found, illustrated with 133 top quality colour pictures and 30 colour maps. There is also an index. Alaska is represented by Mount McKinley and by four other peaks; the rest, all Andean, are mostly Peruvian ice peaks and Chilean desert volcanoes. Biggar's book deals purely with the Andes and it surveys 165 peaks in all, covered by means of a brief description of access and normal route, of other routes and of existing maps. It also offers 8 colour photos, 50 sketch maps, 72 line drawings (of normal routes), 8 short appendices and 2 indexes.

Both works seem to prefer the Peruvian Andes to the rest. Both were well prepared and designed to get a climber started on the road to the more representative peaks of the American continent. If any adverse remark is to be made it would be about the height of the peaks. The authors don't always use the most recent figures. Still, the amount of up-to-date information is remarkable and the Biggar book, in particular, promises to be of great practical value in the field.

*Evelio Echevarria***Visions of Snowdonia. Landscape and Legend**

Jim Perrin

BBC Books, 1997, pp 224, £18.99

Jim Perrin, our most eloquent mountain essayist and controversialist, describes the theme of this elegant book as a celebration of 'Snowdonia's richness, history, cultural texture and beauty'. Although a Mancunian born, Perrin's ancestral roots are Welsh and his lyrical writing echoes a genuine *hiraeth* for the land of his adoption. From Giraldus Cambrensis's 12th

century tour of Wales through to Jan Morris, the best travel books about the Principality have been written by Anglo-Welsh or English writers. Although Perrin's vision is determinedly Welsh, his *Visions of Snowdonia*, illustrated with Ray Wood's hauntingly beautiful photographs, joins these ranks.

Perrin's journey through Cambria's northern hills and vales has the intensity of a pilgrimage. His *Landscape and Legend* draws comparison with Simon Schama's kaleidoscopic *Landscape and Memory* in examining the effect that mountains have had in shaping man's culture and imagination. But although Perrin paints an altogether more intimate picture on a smaller canvas, this is an ambitious book extending beyond landscape and legend to embrace history, literature and art (with a dash of socio-political polemic thrown in), and combining powerful descriptive passages (for example, his account of Castell y Bere on p.208) with an empathy for country and people:

... the broken walls of Castell y Bere trail haphazardly around the summit of this surprising rocky outcrop, where the ubiquitous spleenwort grows. A cool wind drifted from the mountain as I entered its green curtilage. Thyme was spreading and violets discreetly blooming. In months to come the delicate harebells would wave here. The place is still. Seven hundred springs have passed since the murderous commotions of war, since the siege and the fall, the blood and the cries at noon ...

But this poetic voyage through the Cymric heartland can never have been intended as a comprehensive artistic and literary compendium. Contemporary Welsh writers are freely quoted but the older poets less so and there are virtually no references to the many English writers and artists who, at least from Leland's 1536–9 *Itinerary in Wales* onwards, have recorded illuminating accounts of their travels through Snowdonia. Thus, although Wordsworth, the founding father of British romantic poets and himself a Snowdon ascensionist, is quoted, there is nothing of Southey, Shelley, Thomas Love Peacock, Tennyson (who wrote his Arthurian verse at Bala) or even Thomas Gray, whose poem *The Bard* inspired John Martin's dramatic depiction of Edward I's army marching through the Pass of Llanberis. This is the archetypal revolutionary picture with its wild-eyed, streaming-haired poet-seer perched barefoot on an overhanging crag clutching his harp and cursing the English invaders.

Painters of Snowdonia fare little better. Richard Wilson and John Dickson Innes get their due, but there is no reference to the romantic 19th century Welsh mountain paintings of Turner, Varley, Cox and Leman. Turner's magnificent *Dolbadarn Castle* (1800), the stronghold above Llyn Peris where the patriot hero Owen Glendower was imprisoned, was the culmination of his paintings of Wales.

Although Winthrop Young and Tilman get a mention, this is not intended as a mountaineering book. However, some reference to Lord Lytton's

first sporting ascent of Snowdon in 1756 and the Reverend William Bingley's first British rock climb of Clogwyn du'r Arddu's Eastern Terrace in 1799 might have added historical perspective.

Snowdonia offers more than one nation's heritage, but it is probably appropriate that the theme and flavour of the book should primarily be local. The narrative is interleaved with cameos of contemporary local characters – artists, writers, National Park Wardens, RSPB officers, naturalists, farmers, mountain-bikers and clerics – whose lives have been shaped by their mountain environment. A spoonful of Perrin polemic enriches the stew and many of Jim's arrows – touristic and municipal philistinism; landscape desecration and degradation (notoriously, the Welsh Water Authority's destruction of Pont Scethin and the Forestry Commission's planting of 600,000 acres of coniferous forest: 'the biggest environmental catastrophe in Britain this century') and conservation issues generally strike home.

Wales is a land of legend which stretches back to the dawn of folk memory (its fairies and lake maidens supposedly reflect Bronze Age man's clash with the new Iron Age culture) through to Merlin, Arthur and a host of naturalistic superstitions about wells, caves, standing stones and circles, inundations, dragons and the like. The *Mabinogion* was a masterpiece of European medieval literature yet the portrayal of legend in the context of this journey through landscape was for me a less convincing aspect of this generally excellent book. Although legends, ancient and modern, are seamlessly interwoven into the narrative, their interposition sometimes arrests its flow. Many myths are so obscure that without detailed elucidation and explanation, their significance is lost. Two important source books might profitably have been added to the reading list: Carr & Lister's magisterial *The Mountains of Snowdonia* (Bodley Head, 1925) and *Snowdon Biography* by Winthrop Young, Sutton and Noyce (Dent, 1957)

However, these are minor quibbles. *Visions of Snowdonia's* enchantment lies in the lyricism and conviction of Jim Perrin's writing and Ray Wood's evocative photographs. Both capture the essential spirit of *Eryri* ('the home of the eagles'), the Welsh name for these mountains which sadly, like the eagles, has been supplanted by the prosaic 'Snowdonia'.

J G R Harding

Hypoxia and the Brain

Proceedings of the 9th International Hypoxia Symposium, 1995

Editors: J R Sutton, C S Houston, G Coates

Queens City Printers Inc., Burlington, Vermont, USA, 1995, US\$45.00

These Proceedings contain a wealth of information not only on the effects of oxygen lack on the brain but on many other subjects, notably the development of the foetus in utero and the effect of oxygen lack on vessels in the lung.

For mountaineers and others it has been known for over a century that the organ most sensitive to oxygen lack is the brain, and there are numerous accounts of hallucinations, personality changes, profound lack of judgement and speech disorders in the mountains. Exhaustion and cold also have mental effects. Those who advocate 'character building' in the mountains, an increasingly discredited concept, should be made aware of this.

These regular meetings held in North America at two-year intervals are mainly for medical scientists and enable those who work on the subject of oxygen lack, from whatever cause, to discuss advances and understand trends. These Proceedings should be studied by all concerned with the subject of oxygen transfer in human beings – a subject of critical importance to all mountaineers.

Michael Ward

High Altitude Medicine

Herb Multgren

Multgren Publications, Stanford, California, USA, 1997, US\$45 (inc. p&p)

This is the latest in the now considerable number of major textbooks on high-altitude medicine. It is not comprehensive, since it omits any discussion of cold and cold injury. But it does embrace many other important topics that are either new or not normally covered, such as medico-legal aspects and a section on women at altitude. Mountaineering doctors will find a great deal of useful information in this book and being so reasonably priced it is excellent value for money.

Herb Multgren, who died just after the book was published, was a very highly respected Emeritus Professor of Medicine at Stanford University in California. He made major contributions to our understanding of high altitude pulmonary oedema, and climbed extensively in Europe, and in North and South America. He was an excellent teacher and companion. Both medical and mountaineering libraries should certainly have this book on their shelves, and many doctors who climb will wish to buy it.

Michael Ward

Guido Monzino

Rita Ajmone Cat

Alberti Libraio, 1997, pp216, npq

Our late member Guido Monzino was one of Italy's leading mountain and Arctic explorers, and this book describes all his major expeditions. From 1955 onwards Monzino organised expeditions every year, sometimes twice a year, to the Alps, Patagonia, the Sahara, Karakoram, Ruwenzori, Mount Kenya and Kilimanjaro, and many times to Greenland, culminating in his 1971 trip to the North Pole and in 1973 to Everest. Every expedition is briefly described, with a complete list of participants and many photographs.

There are photos, too, of the Villa Barbianello, Monzino's home on the shores of Lake Como. Anyone who has visited this glorious house and the museum Monzino established there will wonder how he could bear to leave it so often to go expeditioning around the world!

Annapurna Circuit. Himalayan Journey

Andrew Stevenson

Constable, 1997, pp224, £18.95

Andrew Stevenson's first book describes his two-month trek through Manang and Muktinath and over the Thorong La with a trip up to Annapurna base camp to finish. The Annapurna circuit has been described many times, but this book is rather different. For one thing, it is light on scenic descriptions, and for another there are no illustrations. Stevenson's interest is in the people who inhabit the area, and in his fellow back-packers, some of whom he joins up with on his travels. His book gives an in-depth picture of the lives of the hill people of Nepal, and also shows how standards of behaviour are deteriorating among some of the youth in Pokhara and Kathmandu. He is less than complimentary on the attitudes of many of his fellow travellers. Although the book is expensive for one with no photographs, it is worth acquiring a copy to read such a well-written travel book on the Annapurna region.

THE ALPINE CLUB LIBRARY ALSO RECEIVED THE FOLLOWING BOOKS DURING 1997:

Classic Rock. Great British Rock Climbs Compiled by Ken Wilson
Bâton Wicks, 1997, pp256, £19.99 Revised edition with added historical commentary, new colour plates and revised gradings.

Spy on the Roof of the World Sydney Wignall
Canongate, 1996, pp xviii+268, £16.99

Hamish's Mountain Walk & Climbing the Corbetts Hamish Brown
Bâton Wicks, 1997, pp704, £16.99

50 Best Scrambles in the Lake District Bill O'Connor
David & Charles, 1997, pp144, £9.99

On Foot in the Lake District. 1) Northern & Western Fells 2) Southern & Eastern Fells Terry Marsh. *David & Charles, 1997, pp128, £14.99 each*

Walking in Cornwall John Earle. *Cicerone Press, 1996, pp176, npq*

Cornish Rock. A Climbers' Guide to Penwith Rowland Edwards & Tim Dennell. *Cicerone Press, 1997, pp266, £18.99*

50 Classic Routes on Scottish Mountains Ralph Storer
David & Charles, 1997, pp112, £14.99

Britain's Highest Peaks. The Complete Illustrated Route Guide
Jeremy Ashcroft. *David & Charles, 1997, pp184, £12.99*

Winter Climbs in the Lake District Bob Bennett, Bill Birkett & Brian Davidson. *Cicerone Press, 3rd edition, 1997, pp192, £14.99*

East of Himalayas. Mountains and Valleys of Yunnan, Sichuan, SE Tibet and Myanmar Tamotsu Nakamura. *Yamakei, 1996, pp330 (in Japanese)*

Descent into Chaos. The Doomed Expedition to Low's Gully
Richard Connaughton. *Brassey's, 1996, ppxiv+142, £14.95*

Kinabalu Escape. The Soldiers' Story Rick Mayfield with Bob Mann
Constable, 1997, pp282, £7.95

**Stasera si mette al bello ed io partiro domattina per le montagne ...
Lettere e scritti alpini di Costantino Perazzi (Novara 1832–Roma 1896)**
Giuseppe & Paolo Sitzia. *C.A.I., 1996, pp238, npq*

Histoire Monumentale des Deux Savoies. La Memoire de la Montagne.
Gilbert Gardes *Horvath, 1996, pp392, FF195*

Les Alpinistes Victoriens Michel Tailland. *Presses Universitaires du
Septentrion, 1996, 2 vols., pp1-425, 426-695, FF345*

Trekking en Bariloche. *Club Andino Bariloche, 1995, pp120*

Amor Por Carta. Recuerdos de un Andinista. *Club Andino Bariloche, 1995,
pp82*

Annapurna. The First Conquest of an 8000-metre Peak Maurice Herzog.
Pimlico, 1997, ppxxii+246, £10.00

November Jon Barton, Paul Evans & Simon Norris.
Vertebrate Graphics, 1996, £4.95

Scrambles Amongst the Alps in the Years 1860–69 Edward Whymper
Dover Publications (New York), 1996, pp xviii+468, £13.95. A 'slightly reorganised' republication of the 5th edition.

Central Apennines of Italy. Walks, Scrambles & Climbs Stephen Fox
Cicerone Press, 1996, pp144, £8.99

Cape Rock Julian Fisher
Nomad Mountain Publications, 1996, pp111+145

Mountain Memories. Wolverhampton Mountaineering Club 1951-1996
Hilary Clark, 1997, pp168, £6.50

**Montana Magica. Veinticinco Anos de Expediciones Navarras
Extraeuropeas** Gregorio Ariz Txoria Errekan, 1996, pp120, npq

Heart of the Himalaya. Journeys in Deepest Nepal David Paterson
Peak Publishing, 1997, pp144, £14.95

Zen Explorations in Remotest New Guinea Neville Shulman
Summersdale, 1997, pp160, £12.99

A Climbing Guide to Crafnant Tony Shaw. *Mynydd C.C., 1997, pp94*
Escursioni in Val Divedro, Alpe Veglia, Devero Gianfranco Francese.
Pro Loco Val Divedro, 1996, pp258

**Fotografia e Alpinismo. Storie parallele. La fotografia di montagna
dai pionieri all'arrampicata sportiva** Giuseppe Garimoldi
Priuli & Verlucca, Torino, 1995, pp312

Skye and the Hebrides. Rock and Ice Climbs. S.M.C., 1996, £19.95

Vol 1 The Isle of Skye John R MacKenzie & Noel Williams,
ppxvi+352

Vol 2 The Outer Hebrides, Rum, Eigg, Mull & Iona

Dave Cuthertson, Bob Duncan, Graham Little & Colin Moody,
ppxii+324

Arran, Arrochar and the Southern Highlands. Rock and Ice Climbs
Graham Little, Tom Prentice & Ken Crocket. *S.M.C., 1997, ppxiv+386*

**Mountain Moments. A Miscellany Celebrating 40 Years of the Army
Mountaineering Association** Ed. Lt Col A J Muston, 1997, pp80

Walking in Italy's Gran Paradiso Gillian Price
Cicerone Press, 1997, pp192, £9.99

Primiero Nelle Immagini di Nanni Gadenz Sandro Gadenz, Marco Toffol
& Luigi Zanetel. Introduction by Reinhold Messner
Casse Rurali, Primiero, 1996, pp165

Trekking in Bolivia. A Traveller's Guide Yossi Brain, Andrew North & Isobel Stoddart. *Cordée*, 1997, pp224, £10.95

Planning a Wilderness Trip in Canada and Alaska Keith Morton
Rocky Mountain Books/Cordée, 1997, pp384, £16.95

Alpinismo e Cultura Giovanni Rossi.
Club Alpino Accademico Italiano, 1996, pp112

Oz Rock. A Rock Climber's Guide to Australian Crags Alastair Lee
Cicerone Press, 1997, pp176, £10.99

Vaud. Guide to Lac Léman-Lake Geneva, Jura and Alpine Regions
Elisabeth Upton-Eickenberger. *U-Guides (Cordée)*, 1997, pp296, £12.95

A series of 8 rock-climbing/bouldering guides (+2 supplements) to climbing areas in Poland. Malgorzata & Jan Kielkowsky, 1992-1997

Rescue. True Stories from Lake District Mountain Rescue John White.
Constable, 1997, pp214, £16.95

The Munros in Winter. 277 Summits in 83 Days Martin Moran
David & Charles, 1997, pp240, £9.99

Alps 4000. 75 Peaks in 52 Days Martin Moran.
David & Charles, 1997, pp240, £9.99

L'Incanto del Giappone Fosco Maraini. *Museo Nazionale della Monagna 'Duca degli Abruzzi'*, Walter Weston, C.A.I., 1996, pp132

Above the Horizon Rosemary Cohen
Allison & Busby, 1997, pp256, £7.99. A mountaineering novel

K2. El Maximo Desafio (The Ultimate Challenge) Chile K2 1996 Expedition Rodrigo Jordan. *Rodrigo Jordan Fuchs*, 1996, pp136, npq

The Mountain Weeps Ian R Mitchell
Stobcross Press, 1997, pp128, £7.99 Short Stories

Tree of Crows Lewis Davies. *Parthian Books*, 1996, pp102, £4.99
A mystery novel.

Trekking in Nepal. A Traveller's Guide Stephen Bezruchka.
Cordée, 1997, pp384, £12.95 7th edition