
Book Reviews

COMPILED BY GEOFFREY TEMPLEMAN

Hermann Buhl – Climbing without Compromise

Reinhold Messner and Horst Höfler

Cordée, pp208, £16.99

In mountaineering there are some names which acquire mythic status. They have a resonance that goes far beyond mere skill or achievement. In fact it is often the reverse: the climber's exploits have an epic quality that has nothing to do with good sense, planning or rational behaviour. They tread too close to the edge. They trespass beyond the normal boundaries. They get in scrapes. They probably have flawed characters overloaded with God knows what emotional baggage. You would probably try to keep your daughter away from them. But they are heroes.

Of all the heroes who influenced my generation of climbers, the most enduring must be Hermann Buhl. His book *Nanga Parbat Pilgrimage* must have inspired countless youthful, deluded Boy's Own dreams of battling against the odds up terrifying precipices. Like Bonatti, he always seemed to be surviving terrible bivouacs, fighting his way up water-choked chimneys, leading his companions to safety or testing his nerve on outrageous solos, overcoming the odds, defying the impossible ... But also there was a simple, unaffected joy in the mountains, a freedom of spirit, a belief, however misguided, that total commitment to climbing could provide total fulfilment.

Hermann Buhl died when I was three so I never met him. My impressions were formed entirely through his book and through Kurt Diemberger's account in *Summits and Secrets* of Buhl's last expedition – to Broad Peak and Chogolisa, where a broken cornice ended his life. To some extent Diemberger idolised Buhl, perpetuating and amplifying the heroic myth already enshrined in the florid, romantic pages of *Nanga Parbat Pilgrimage*. So I was very interested to see a new study of Buhl by Reinhold Messner and Horst Höfler which attempts to get closer to the real man.

First I should make it quite clear that this is no debunking exercise. Messner, who presumably lent his name to the book to boost sales, makes no bones about his admiration for Buhl; and the author responsible for most of the legwork, Höfler, sets out to find all that is best about the hero. His main thesis is that *Nanga Parbat Pilgrimage* was not really written by Buhl at all, but by his friend and editor Kurt Maix, whose grandiloquent, overblown prose, says Höfler, obscures the real, simple, down-to-earth young climber. To illustrate this, he quotes copiously from Buhl's own previously

unpublished diaries, comparing their unadorned simplicity with Maix's embellishment.

This is all very well for those who want to examine the minutiae of Tyrolean climbing in the forties and fifties. The problem is that climbers don't necessarily make great writers; strictly factual understatement, whilst admirable in an official report, doesn't get the pages turning, doesn't fire you up with a sense of drama. I am not sure that Buhl's own diaries necessarily enhance our admiration for the man and his achievements. They are almost too matter-of-fact. What is revealing, however, is the constant reference to the short times taken on well-known testpieces, particularly in the Karwendel and Kaisergebirge mountains of his native Tyrol. He may not have contributed many new routes of his own, but he was zealously competitive about how he repeated others' famous routes.

I recently spent a spring day in the Kaisergebirge, thrilled at last to see for myself those limestone walls which keep recurring in the pages of *Nanga Parbat Pilgrimage* – the Totenkirchl, the Maukspitze, the Fleischbank, the Predigstuhl We drove effortlessly from Munich, but the young Buhl would cycle all the way from Innsbruck, arriving at the hut late on Saturday evening, climbing his heart out all Sunday and returning exhausted for work on Monday morning. It was a whole different world of penniless struggle, sustained by the enthusiasm and rapid recovery rates of youth. The struggle was important, as my local expert, Nicho Mailänder, pointed out. The idea of being tough, bold, courageous – before it became tainted by Nazi ideology – was highly valued in the Tyrol. It was an ethos handed on from mountain poachers to climbers. As we skied up towards the Fleischbank, heading for Wiessner's famous South-East Face route, Nicho pointed out the great routes of other pioneers such as Dülfer who was soloing to at least British 5a standard, on sight, up long mountain routes, on occasionally dubious limestone, before the First World War, and Rebitsch who was doing the same to 5b standard in the thirties.

This was the bold, competitive world which the young Buhl inherited, proving himself by dispensing with aid moves, making first solo ascents and adding variations of his own. One of his new routes, the Maukspitze Westwand, was made in 1943 with Wastl Weiss, a leading light in the Edelweissgilde – an anarchic group of individuals who defied the fascist leanings of the Austrian Alpine Club and actively opposed the Nazis, operating from a base in the Kaisergebirge. Where, I wonder, did Buhl fit in? What was his view of the War into which he had been sucked as an ambulance auxiliary? Did the courage he displayed on the cliffs help him to face the atrocities of war? What did he think about Nazism? It is a shame that neither his diary extracts nor Höfler's commentary really explore this side of his life. In the same way that Jane Austen's novels never hint at the Napoleonic Wars, this book ignores the momentous backdrop to Buhl's early climbing career.

Many of Buhl's greatest epics were staged south of the Brenner Pass, in

the Dolomites. In my recollection of *Nanga Parbat Pilgrimage*, he was always getting caught out by storms, the summit chimneys were invariably sheathed in ice or cascading with rainwater, the pitons were always on the point of ripping. It was heady stuff to an impressionable teenager. Thirty years on, reacquainting myself with those epics, I remain equally impressed. One of the finer passages in Höfler's new book is the original diary account of Buhl's winter ascent of the Solda route on the South Face of the Marmolada. Reading about Buhl's bold commitment – climbing light, with no sleeping bag, in winter, to complete the face in under two days – I can see why people like Messner still admire him.

Like Heckmair before him, Buhl transported his eastern skills to the western Alps. In the Chamonix region he excelled at knocking hours – sometimes days – off previous times on the big classics. He also contributed his own innovation, with the first complete traverse of the Chamonix Aiguilles. In Switzerland, he took part in the eighth ascent of the Eiger, eventually leading a combined international rope through a horrendous storm, immortalised in Gaston Rébuffat's *Starlight and Storm*. Opinions differed as to whether it was Buhl's obstinate arrogance or his superior skills which resulted in his being continually in the lead; either way, he was the one who got them up the Exit Cracks. Then of course there was the brilliant, joyful, four-hour solo of the Cassin route on the Badile, complete with bicycle ride all the way up the Inn valley from Innsbruck and over the Maloja Pass. And the spontaneous winter solo of the Watzmann's 1600 metre-high East Face, pulled off in a single night ...

As the title of Buhl's own book suggested, all these climbs – his whole life in fact – was a kind of preparation for the ultimate test of Nanga Parbat in 1953. Here Höfler's book really takes off. Buhl's diary emphasises just how driven he was to compensate for the weaknesses of his companions and the obstructiveness of Herrligkoffer's leadership. As Messner was to do on the Rupal Face in 1970, Buhl did the bulk of the leading on Nanga Parbat. His diary comments repeatedly on the inadequate back-up, culminating in the extraordinary command to return to base just as the top camps are being established in a spell of sustained fine weather. Buhl, of course (like Hillary in Antarctica) ignored advice from high command and got on with the job regardless.

When it comes to the final solo push on Nanga Parbat, Höfler has chosen one of several essays Buhl wrote, suggesting that it sounds the most authentic. Here, I have to agree with Höfler. There is a kind of raw, unadorned, honesty which evokes eloquently the most profound experience. The writing reinforced my hunch that Buhl was almost relieved when his companion would not get up at 2am. There is a sense that Buhl actually *wants* to make this pilgrimage alone. Little details are telling – at 7400 metres he is 'not feeling the altitude particularly – two breaths per step'. *Two breaths per step* and he has only just started! He dwells on the huge psychological effort of having to lose precious height, twice, to cross the

Bazhin and Diamir Gaps. He describes the actual terrain, pausing to enumerate technical obstacles – the kind of detail which makes you realize just how hard that endless ridge was and convinces you that he really was there (a lesson here for Mr Cesen). He agonises over whether or not to take the stimulant Pervatin and eventually, faced with the awful certainty of a standing bivouac without spare clothes (he left them far behind in the heat of the day) he succumbs to temptation.

You could say that Buhl cheated, using drugs to get himself out of a self-imposed fix. You would certainly fail him on a MLC course at Plas y Brenin. But then, when you look at the enormity of what he was attempting, so far ahead of his time, any doubts fly out of the window. He really was crossing new boundaries and that photo – of the young man not quite 29 suddenly looking like a 50-year-old – sums it all up. One of the great things about Höfler's book is that there are also other photos taken during the descent, and afterwards in Gilgit, when the deep-etched lines have begun to relax and the man radiates joyful serenity.

Despite the trauma of toe amputations and bitter legal wrangles with the expedition leader Herrligkoffer, Buhl returned to high standard climbing quite soon after Nanga Parbat. In the Western Alps he continued to upstage his predecessors. At home he was, according to his daughters, a kind but distant, even stern, father. (What a pity there is not more exploration here of his own childhood in an orphanage. Was that the foundation of his rather brittle, driven personality?) Then, when the children were still very young, he set off again, in 1957, for the Karakoram.

In this final part of the book, I was delighted to find photos I had never seen before. Delighted too to read Buhl's own diary extracts and expedition reports, typed up on the Baltoro Glacier. There is lots of revealing stuff here. On the one hand, there is the man who has finally found himself, leading his own expedition, on his own terms, carrying out his dream of a four man, unsupported ascent of an eight thousand metre peak (he was bitterly disappointed at one stage when the team nearly had to settle for a seven-thousander, Masherbrum). On the other, there is more than a hint of discord. The man who forged ahead on his own, when it suited him on Nanga Parbat, now grumbles at being left behind by Schmuck and Wintersteller. Buhl almost seems to be admitting to himself that he gave too much of himself for Nanga Parbat and that he is a spent force. But then there is the magical evening when he finds those deep reserves again, and somehow keeps plodding over the foresummit of Broad Peak. Diemberger returns from his own summit bid, finds his mentor still climbing, and goes back to the top with Buhl, gets out the Leica and takes those transcendental sunset shots.

Three weeks later Buhl was dead. The tragedy is underlined in Höfler's book with quotes from Buhl's last letter to his wife Generl, looking forward to meeting her on his triumphant journey home. The death is also tragic because Buhl seems finally to have created something unique of his own.

Unlike Bonatti, he did not pioneer scores of new routes in the Alps. Even on Nanga Parbat, he was part of a large and not always happy team, dictated to by an unsympathetic leader. But on Broad Peak, even if there were moments of discord, Buhl had initiated something that was totally his own creation. His vision had redefined what could be done on the world's highest peaks (and, in the process he had become the first person to make first ascents of two 8000-metre peaks). He and Diemberger were on a roll and they weren't going to stop, particularly after Schmuck and Wintersteller had raced to 7400 metres on Skilbrum. So the two of them set off for a truly alpine-style ascent of Chogolisa. They were very fit, very confident and very fast. Buhl, as Diemberger affirms, had regained his old form. At 32 he was at the height of his powers. Had it not been for the sudden storm which hit them at 7300 metres, they would certainly have reached the top. Instead they had to turn round and fight their way back down the corniced ridge.

Diemberger's photo of Buhl's final steps, straying from the track and disappearing over the sharp edge of a shattered cornice, remains one of mountaineering's most powerful and sobering images. Republished in the new book, amongst images of Buhl's wife and young daughters, and numerous shots of his own distinctive, vital, often smiling face, it evokes even more strongly that sense of cruel loss and waste. But then you look back at all those crazy, courageous, visionary adventures, and you flip to that cover shot of the man clutching his ski sticks on top of Broad Peak, with Gasherbrum IV shining gold above the deep shadows of the valley, and you think that maybe the world needs people like Hermann Buhl.

Stephen Venables

Hazard's Way

Roger Hubank

The Ernest Press, 2001, pp248, £12.00

An elegiac climbing novel set in the Lake District at the turn of the nineteenth century, published by a small Scottish publisher, not only wins the Boardman Tasker Award for Mountain Literature but scoops the grand prix at the Banff Mountain Literature Festival in Canada as well. So what has *Hazard's Way* got that makes it unerringly fingered by all the judges? The title suggests soap opera but it is more like a cinematograph as, before our delighted gaze, the familiar sepia photographs of Collie or George Abraham or O G Jones jerk into life, peeling off their boots at Wasdale Head after a challenging day on the hill, and maybe stuffing them with oats to keep them supple.

The hero, George Hazard, is a young man in search of a purpose to life. He progresses through his medical studies with a dwindling vocation; he is too hesitant to follow his twin sister into rebellion at home. His whole

happiness comes from the regular climbing parties at Wasdale, portrayed with a fine ear for the period and a loving eye for the crags in all weathers as the young men strive to better the achievements of their elders. Mountaineering as a metaphor for life is no new concept, but can seldom have been so deftly and elegantly portrayed. And if we were in any doubt, up pops Conway lecturing at the Alpine Club to tell us it is better to look for what we do not know than to slumber in the assumption it cannot be discovered or think it is not our business to pursue it.

Into this subtly recreated picture of heroic endeavour erupts the Boer War, a conflict which fails to run to a prescribed heroic pattern and reveals the unacceptable face of warfare. Family and climbing friendships are divided irrevocably by it. While over the whole book broods the carnage of a greater war to follow.

Yet this is a far from gloomy read. Roger Hubank exults with his hero in the energy of the climbing sequences and relishes the camaraderie of the crags. He has a good eye for an enjoyable vignette and a good ear for a tall story. His constantly shifting cast list is etched in with assurance, real Lakeland heroes mingling easily with the fictional. Nor is he disposed to mock his characters' postures with twenty-first century hindsight. He and his readers share their dilemmas as the book draws towards its inevitable bleak climax. Hubank has the rare skill to articulate the abstract and clothe it authentically in a novel of all too vulnerable flesh and blood.

Maggie Body

The Middle-Aged Mountaineer

Jim Curran

Constable, 2001, pp204, £17.99

Big, humorous Jim Curran has written a fittingly good-natured book. Despite its title, the book in fact describes a meandering cycle ride from the Shetlands to Land's End in the course of which Jim grasps the opportunity to shin up any convenient crag he passes. So there is a lot of activity among the misty islands of the far north even before Jim arrives at the more conventional starting point of Cape Wrath. He travels and writes with a climber's eye. He also encounters a number of climbing friends on the way.

His journey took him across pretty familiar country and the book could so easily have ended up as a rather tedious travelogue. Not a bit of it. Jim's light-hearted attitude to life and his many humorous asides, mostly at his own expense, combine to make an easy and entertaining read.

Indeed, I happened to be halfway up a charity ascent of The Old Man of Hoy when I saw Jim's familiar and bulky figure at the cliff top. He had dropped by on his way south. It was a nice reminder of the fact that we had climbed the Old Man together a couple of years earlier, with Jim shooting the TV film.

So his progress continued on his long journey south, with many entertaining meetings with both old friends and strangers – and a number of highly unwelcome near encounters with speeding trucks. These made me think back to my own carefree cycling days before WW2 when traffic was light and only the doctor or the lawyer could afford a car. My friends and I whizzed along the country lanes of Wiltshire without a care, in quiet and in safety. By contrast Jim, grinding along on his heavily laden bike, had many nerve-racking periods riding amid today's dense and speeding traffic. He minimised this hazard by keeping off the main arteries whenever possible and choosing instead a longer and more scenic route which zigzagged through many rock-climbing areas. He ends, appropriately enough, doing *The Long Climb* at Land's End. And all this was achieved on one of the wettest summers on record!

There are eight pages of good, sharp colour photographs – as you would expect from a professional cameraman. Jim is also an art teacher. There are therefore a number of his pleasant black-and-white sketches, as well as a collection of commendably clear maps. To sum up: the old stories are still good – always provided they are well told. Jim's book passes the test.

Mike Banks

The Andes – A Trekking Guide

Cathy and John Biggar

Andes 2001, pp196, £15.00

There are many guides on the market that cover trekking in South America, notably Hilary Brandt's famous series which started back in 1974 with the little yellow paperback *Ancient Ways in Peru and Bolivia*. However, there are very few indeed that give a complete overview of the entire Andean chain. For *The Andes – a Trekking Guide* we must thank the sister and brother team of Cathy and John Biggar. So are the authors qualified to do the job? The Biggars have climbed and trekked in the Andes for the last 12 years and we're not talking about just a few weeks of annual leave. John Biggar runs an organisation specialising in trekking, skiing and mountaineering in South America, and is to be found somewhere on this continent for much of the year.

In its 196 pages this slim A5 soft-back details more than 30 multi-day tours and many one-day walks. Descriptions are necessarily rather concise but nearly all information comes from personal experience. The guide is illustrated with 35 full-colour maps and over 150 colour photographs, and while some of the latter are a touch on the dark side, most are well-reproduced. Thirty treks may seem a relatively small number at first but how many of you will really want to do more than one multi-day circuit in the Huayhuash or three walks in the Blanca?

Understandably, the classics, such as Venezuela's Sierra Nevada de

Mérida, Peru's Huayhuash Circuit and Inca Trail, Bolivia's Taquini Trail and Chile's Torres del Paine Circuit are all included. Far less frequented are the adventurous backpacking expeditions described in the Puna de Atacama and Tierra del Fuego. More accessible than the latter but little known to the vast majority of British trekkers are the fine series of walks described in the Andean Lake District, which straddles the border between Chile and Argentina.

Clearly marked within the title pictures at the start of each description are the distance, duration (in days), total ascent, highest altitude reached and whether this is a 'trek' (where you can arrange for your baggage to be carried) or a 'backpack' (where you have no option but to carry it yourself). If there is a hill or mountain along the way that can be classed as a 'trekking peak' and climbed with, at most, one axe and a pair of crampons, this is also described. For instance, the demanding four-day Marmolejo Traverse in the Chilean Central Andes has the optional extra of a straightforward side excursion up 6108m Marmolejo itself, while the serious but non-technical *Normal Route* on 6959m Aconcagua, the world's highest walking peak and South America's most popular, is also fully covered.

As expected, there is a comprehensive introduction to the various aspects of getting to and surviving in South America, plus a number of appendices. Good here are: maps – this book is particularly strong on defining the best map for the job and where it can be purchased; travel information for various towns passed through while approaching the start of these treks (this section tells where to buy your food and fuel, recommends hotel accommodation in three categories and supplies relevant contacts for up-to-the-minute information on both trekking in the area and the organisation of onward transportation); a flora and fauna section, in which it is clear that the authors are enthusiasts and where nearly every species described is illustrated by a colour photo. There is also a bibliography, a useful list of web addresses and a trekkers' dictionary.

Working on the principle that few books are perfect and it is, supposedly, a reviewer's job to point out any faults, I looked long and hard before coming up with the following very minor criticisms: the book sports rather too many typos and grammatical errors, though remarkably few considering it is self-published; the main picture used to introduce each walk is rarely captioned (it is often possible to make an educated guess on reading the trek notes but it would be nice to know if one was right); the writing is very factual, the introductions to each trek very short – you are obliged to find stimulation by reading the whole package and then deciding whether a particular walk meets your requirements. Finally, while the highly important subject of in-country security gets a brief mention, this is obviously not a subject on which to sell a book. (Whilst it is possible to generalise in certain cases, eg Colombia, I can see a strong argument for detailed information being better placed in regularly updated publications such as the *South American Handbook*).

The Andes offer a complete range of scenery and experiences, from dense jungle to spacious altiplano, from spectacular fluted ice peaks to high-altitude desert. Anyone with a desire to trek in South America should make this book their first port of call. Experienced trekkers, looking for something different, will equally find inspiration in the pages of this authoritative work.

Lindsay Griffin

Mystery, Beauty, and Danger
The Literature of the Mountains and Mountain Climbing
Published in English before 1946

Robert H Bates

Peter E Randall Publisher, 2000, pp230, £26

The sub-title gives this book away as a thesis. In fact, it is the PhD thesis of Bob Bates submitted to the University of Pennsylvania in 1946. When, with Charles Houston, Bob received a standing ovation at the 13th International Festival of Mountaineering Literature at Bretton Hall in 1999, he mentioned this unpublished work. Now that it is published it is like recovering an important and timeless manuscript which had been lost for half a century. There is still not another book quite like it: a literary guide through the literature of our sport before 1946. The charm and wit of Bob Bates himself is the perfect guide, with his elegance of style and generosity of spirit.

Liberal use of quotation makes this a wonderful read of the familiar and the surprising. 'Who so base as live in Sheffield ... with all the delectable mountains of the world to feed on ... ?' quotes Bates from a book published in 1924. The American material may not be so well known by British readers. With well-chosen illustrations, including a page from Frederick Cook's *To the Top of the Continent* annotated amusingly by the then President of the American Alpine Club, this is a great publishing initiative, none the worse for being fifty years late.

Terry Gifford

Sicilia

Giuseppe Maurici and Roby Manfrè Scuderi

CAI/TCI, 2001, pp367, E36.15

In 1997 the Italian Alpine Club broke away from its traditional coverage of the 'high mountain' regions to publish a definitive guide to the island of Sardinia. The latest in the series, the number of which now runs to 55 with eight more in progress, all under the management of our member Gino Buscaini, is a comprehensive guide to climbing in the home of the Mafia. Uniquely, it is the first time that many of the venues have ever appeared in

any guidebook and the production quality is the usual high standard that we have come to expect from the CAI.

All the serious climbing would appear to take place on limestone hills and cliffs close to or on the North Coast, some giving routes up to 800m in length. There are many climbs described and the two guidebook authors have made a significant contribution to these since the beginning of the 1980s. Rock quality seems to vary but there are obviously some first rate routes, such as those on the West Face of the Roccia dello Schiavo, where the 220m 1974 Direct (VI+) is Sicily's great classic. There is also a detailed guide to the many walking routes up the island's most famous hill, 3323m Mount Etna.

Lindsay Griffin

Sassolungo

Ivo Rabanser

CAI/TCI, 2002, pp340, npq

The latest guide in the Italian Alpine Club's series, coordinated by our distinguished member, Gino Buscaini, and authored by local activist and prolific pioneer Ivo Rabanser, features the Dolomite stronghold of the Sassolungo. The Sassolungo, or Langkofel in German, lies immediately west of the Sella Pass and is a sufficiently famous and complex massif to warrant its own guidebook. Routes here, both established and modern, are traditional and adventurous in style. This is certainly not a playground for the Alpine sport climber. On the 3181m Sassolungo itself the climbs are usually long and committing with an equally involved descent from the summit area. The North West Face is home to the classic and now much frequented Comici Route on the Salame (350m: VI+) and the modern (1993) Goedeke/Rabanser route, Pilastro del Sole (1,200m of climbing at V and V+). The vast North East Face, well-seen from the main road north of the Passo di Sella, saw considerable development in the '90s and now offers quasi-classics such as Via Lionel (900m: V+), Ultimo dei Balkani (550m: VI-) on the Pilastro Paolina and the 850m Linea Logica on the Pilastro Stenico (VI-).

Elsewhere and at a lower grade is the very popular and airy traverse of the Punta della Cinque Dita via the South West Ridge (IV+), while in the more remote Sassopiatto Group to the west some of the modern routes on the Torres del Sassopiatto appear worthwhile. The only other recent work on this group is Richard Goedeke's Langkofel-Sella (1996; in German) but with 60 colour photo-diagrams, four colour maps and nearly 60 topos, all presented in the usual high-standard format that we have come to expect from the CAI, Rabanser's 2002 guide is now the definitive work.

Lindsay Griffin

High Altitude Medicine and Biology

John B West (Editor-in-Chief)

Mary Ann Liebert Inc, 2 Madison Ave., Larchmont, NY 10538-1962

In its short existence this medical scientific journal, first published in 2000, has gained an enviably high reputation and is already listed in the *Index Medicus*. Its Editor-in-Chief is John B West who led the American Medical Research Expedition to Everest in 1981. Currently he is Professor of Medicine and Physiology at the University of California, San Diego, USA.

The journal is a quarterly, peer-reviewed journal that publishes original research articles, review articles and short communications. Contributions are welcome in the field of high altitude diseases and other high altitude life sciences, including physiology, pathology, comparative biology, anthropology, evolutionary biology, and human and animal ecology. It has a strong inter-disciplinary coverage and an international editorial board.

Information may be obtained from Prof John B West, MD, PhD, University of California, San Diego, Department of Medicine 0623, 9500 Gilman Drive, La Jolla, CA 92093-0623, USA. Tel: 858-534-4192, Fax: 858-534-4812.

*Michael Ward***Wanderlust: A History of Walking**

Rebecca Solnit

Verso, 2002, £17 [for the AC]

The oddness of the motivation for founding the Alpine Club, says Rebecca Solnit, has so long been taken for granted that it 'has seldom been remarked'. It was, she says, 'a British club focused on Continental mountains' whilst 'more technically demanding climbs in the Peak and the Lakes had yet to receive much attention'. This gives a flavour of the no-nonsense, provocative thinking that is characteristic of this seminal book. Is there any connection between walking steeply uphill to a Himalayan summit, wandering about the Cairngorms with binoculars, taking a walk alone along the nearest footpath to home in order to make a difficult decision, walking on a peace demo (as we used to call them), or walking on a treadmill in the gym? Rebecca Solnit believes that there is and it is the cultural history of the different things it might mean to 'take a walk' that she explores in this brilliant book. She begins with philosophers ('The rhythm of walking generates a kind of rhythm of thinking, and the passage through a landscape echoes or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts.') and ends walking in the virtual reality of a newly pedestrianised casino in Las Vegas.

It is stimulating to find this inhabitant of San Francisco placing British evidence in a broadly conceived context that engages with walking and

anatomy, anthropology, architecture, gardening, political and cultural history, literature, sexuality, sport and religious studies. Dorothy Wordsworth's outrageous, impressive walks 'out of doors', William Wordsworth's walking mode of composition, Jane Austen's unconventional women who actually prefer to 'go by foot', the Peak District's tradition of trespassing, the political function of the Ramblers' Association and the role of the Alpine Club, all gain a new kind of significance from the alert reflections of a writer who is an art historian by training.

Solnit distinguishes between two kinds of first person mountaineering literature: the epic and the episodic, the single story and the memoir. 'You could say that the epics are History and the episodic books are escape from history.' She ponders on the old question of 'to summit or to travel: what does it mean to arrive?' She says that indoor climbing is 'nature as the body', but mountaineering is also nature as ecology, geography and aesthetics, that is: 'landscape' in our traditional definition of it. But isn't she wrong to say that 'the more challenging the terrain, the more oblivious to the scenery one becomes'? And she knows little of Messner's great achievement: the getting down, a subject she neglects.

For Solnit, walking is a subversive activity. Historically, we know this very well in the UK, although it is now so institutionalised at home that we may be in danger of taking for granted access to high mountain trails worldwide. This rich cultural history should remind us of some basic impulses and complex contexts.

Terry Gifford

El Santuario Incaico del Cerro Aconcagua

Juan Schobinger, editor

Universidad Nacional de Cuyo, Mendoza (Argentina), 2001, pp452, npq

Centuries before the summit of any rock or ice Alpine peak, large or small, was won, at least some 300 snow and even ice peaks up to 6700m had already been ascended by very primitive peoples. Between some 500 and 18,000 years ago the ancient highlanders had even dared to inhabit high volcanic ridges, if only to quarry obsidian or to descend from their vantage points to hunt in the mountain ecozones. Orology also originated further climbs. But these earliest ascents are all too often missing from historical research. When will the history of mountain ascents be surveyed from a purely realistic point of view?

When such a revised history of mountaineering finally comes, this volume, edited by the Argentinian archaeologist-mountaineer Juan Schobinger, will be in the forefront. It deals in all its possible aspects with an Incan shrine found in 1985 on Aconcagua. That year, several Mendoza climbers discovered at 5300m on the south-west ridge of the 6960m-high mountain a small rock wall and a row of feathers tied together. An

excavation led by Schobinger himself uncovered the corpse of a child, endowed with the dowry and ornaments proper to an offering to the mountain gods.

This book is a compilation of some 35 contributions by almost as many authors, mostly Argentinian, covering the finding itself in multiple aspects, ranging from the purely scientific to others pertaining to history, folklore, art and mountaineering. Detail is impressive; even a few segments of the mummy's hair were analysed in order to ascertain whether the victim had been previously intoxicated with cocaine or some other drug before the sacrifice took place.

It will interest mountaineers to learn that the corpse had been entombed there as an offering to a major mountain, giver of water, that is, *life*; that it belonged to a child of unknown origin, about eight years old and probably buried there some time between 1480 and 1533; and that the Aconcagua district has a number of other archaeological sites proving that it was a revered mountain area for the ancients. Incidentally, in Edward Fitzgerald's *The Highest Andes* (Methuen, 1899) some attention was drawn, even at that time, to several such sites.

This is certainly a work of scientific scope. But to mountaineers it will represent further solid proof that in prehistoric times even some of the highest mountains in the world were sites for great economic, and by consequence, strong religious activity. In the Andes alone no less than 130 summits over 5000m were climbed before the Alpine people would lift their eyes unto the hills.

Evelio Echevarria

Atlas Traverse: Afoot from Taza to Tamri, GTAM 95

Hamish Brown

*Published privately by Hamish Brown, 26 Kircaldy Road, Burntisland,
Fife KY3 9HQ, 2001, ppx+224, npq*

What an amazing fellow is Hamish Brown, for he never seems to tire of either peak bagging or wielding a pen. The story of his 112-day continuous walk, the first ever, over all the Scottish Munros is well known, but the 1440km, 96-day epic in 1995 described in *Atlas Traverse* is, I believe, even more impressive. For me, the scale of the Moroccan mountains and my own personal experience make this so. I once trekked, taking 42 days in all, from the Bou Goumez valley in the Central Atlas to Marrakech and back, via the summits of Toubkal (4167m) and M'Goun (4071m), an experience which completely shattered mind and body and at the end of which all I wanted to do was to lie horizontal – an experience which has given me some indication of the scale of achievement by Hamish and his companion Charles. Starting in the Middle Atlas in March, they finished in the Western High Atlas in July, with a break of about five days at the end of May when

they had to fly to Spain to comply with the three-month 'tourist' limit on their passports. The stamina and planning required for such a marathon, following as near as possible the route of 'La Grande Traversée de l'Atlas Marocain' set by its progenitor Michael Peyron, is in the best traditions of lightweight mountain travel set by the likes of Shipton, Tilman and Bill Murray.

The weather at the start of their traverse was (unusually for Morocco) abysmal, with 19 days of rain in the first 37; after that it was heat and dehydration that threatened their chance of a successful completion. Water and where to find it is crucial in such terrain, but years of travelling in the Atlas Mountains have given Hamish and his friends a unique group of local contacts. His two Berber companions on the trek, Ali and Hosain, were often able to find water where off-comers would not. Indeed I am sure Hamish would be the first to acknowledge that their contribution to the whole enterprise was crucial.

Few mountaineers know the mountains of Morocco better than Hamish Brown, but it is not true, as he infers, that rock-climbing developments have stalled there in the last two decades. In the Anti Atlas new routes by British climbers around Tafraoute and in the Ameln valley are first class, and were still being pioneered as recently as March 2002. Whilst in the Todra gorge, climbs and developments by Spanish and French climbers have made this into a world-class sport-climbing venue. Hamish seems dismissive of such developments, referring, in particular, to the climbs on Jbel Aioui (Aroudane), with its 600m-high, 3km in length cliff face where many new routes have been ascended, mainly by Continental climbers. He finds such intense activity rather ridiculous and contrived when there are miles of rock faces in areas like the Targia and Tamga gorges which have not even been approached.

The text of *Atlas Traverse* takes the reader down many other paths than the GTAM, for Hamish is a man of strong opinions. He castigates the West for its materialism, and its attitudes to mountain tourism and the exploitation of what he sees as a kinder, more together and caring society instanced by the families of his friends, the Berbers. But like mountain people everywhere, these come in all shapes and sizes, tall and elegant, slim and fat, honest and a thief. My own experience in such matters has been both good and bad, and although the Berbers might live amongst dramatic scenery and undoubtedly have a rich culture and an outstanding history, I have not met one who would not have swapped places with me.

One of my own acquaintances, Mohammed from Knob village in the Sarhro mountains, lost all of his children to childhood diseases that would have been treated easily in the West. Do not misunderstand me, I am not querying Brown's sincerity. Indeed, as he is a poet of ability, the lines he has written in *Atlas Traverse* for the boy, Mustapha, the son of a close Berber friend Mohammed, who developed a wasting disease and slowly over several years became paralysed and eventually died would make anyone cry. One

can only report as one finds, but it is rewarding to be reminded from the pages of this book of so many old friends, like Michael Peyron and Mohammed Achari.

Like Hamish, I too love the mountain regions of Morocco but I bow to his superior knowledge of its peaks, and its fauna and flora. Indeed, I am sure any botanist, bird watcher or nature lover will find plenty to keep him turning the pages of this book, despite some startling views expressed by its author, eg his uncritical support for the former king and his belief that fictional writers (in English or in translation) on Morocco are beyond redemption, with too much concentration on deviant sex, kif and dreary introspection! One of my own most memorable evenings in the country was the night I spent in Tangiers, staying in the room where William Burroughs wrote *The Naked Lunch*. The place was truly atmospheric and fitted that author's persona as I guessed it to be.

Atlas Traverse is self-published and is obviously a labour of love. It contains 230 pages, and a full-colour front and back cover, with a page inset of composite photographs also in colour. It is plastic bound and will be compulsive reading for anyone attempting sections of the GTAM, or even the whole route in the years ahead. The appendices on equipment, birdwatching and flowers, a glossary and a bibliography all add to the work's authority. And a 2001 note informs us that, since this first successful crossing in 1995, Hamish has continued his peregrinations in the mountain ranges of Morocco, including, amongst many other outings, a traverse of the Anti Atlas in 2000. Good on yer Brown and '*Lang may yer lum reek!*'

Dennis Gray

Beyond Adventure

Colin Mortlock

Cicerone Press, 2002, pp.128, £7.99

Let me report immediately that I believe this to be a very important book, one that deserves to be widely read and discussed. Colin Mortlock has been a seminal figure in Outdoor Education in the UK for almost four decades, even though he is a man with highly individualistic and some would say controversial views. This present work is about his journey through life, and describes how his adventures and experiences have slowly changed him, and brought about a heightened awareness of our relationship with nature and the cosmos.

Colin used to be an outstanding climber; this much I know, for I climbed with him occasionally in the sixties. He was a member of the successful Trivor Himalayan Expedition along with Don Whillans and Wilfrid Noyce, and was an original pioneer of Pembroke sea-cliff climbing, writing the first guide to the area. He then took up, in turn, white-water canoeing, small boat sailing and finally sea kayaking.

His sea kayaking subsequently became ever more ambitious: he led a six-man expedition along the Arctic coastline of Norway and round the North Cape; he made a two-man trip along the Alaskan coastline from Prince Rupert to Sitka, to be followed a couple of years later by a solo trip 650 miles north from Sitka, including Glacier Bay. He has many other adventures to recount, some of which make gripping reading, but these are not primarily what the book is about. His underlying theme is that such experiences have the power to change us by putting us in touch with our real selves and our relation to the natural environment, leading to a respect for all the other forms of life on this planet and enabling us to realise that we are no more important than any other human being, creature or life form.

Mortlock has boldly ventured where few British adventurers have been before. He honestly admits that in the past there were times when burning ambition, lack of consideration for others and a narrow focus made him a less than amiable companion. There is a wonderful chapter on how in later life he learned to love flowers and walking (like many climbers he originally disliked this activity), covering since his retirement in 1991 over 15,000 miles of trekking in the mountains of Europe, often alone.

But these adventures are not what this work is really about. In truth it describes a spiritual journey, and on the way we have 'notes' from such wilderness heavies as Rousseau, Wordsworth, Keats, Thoreau, Muir and Matthieson, plus an eclectic mix of other original thinkers, including Eckhart, Jung, Bob Dylan and the Zen Masters. The bibliography is equally impressive, although I missed in it La Zi, Einstein and Tom Price, who I believe are worthy of a place in such a wonderful array of purveyors of the dialectic discourse.

Many of Colin's thoughts are not new, and he gives full notice of this, for his central theme of the primacy of nature has been noted many times before. Zhung Zi who lived 300 years before Christ, taught a true path in life is the way of nature; he also noted 2000 years before the birth of Einstein that matter and energy are interchangeable, and that the balance in the universe remains for ever the same. Lao Zi, the author of the Tao Te Ching, who lived 200 years earlier, noted the eternal and pervasive oneness of the universe, as did the Gautama Buddha.

In addition to these themes Mortlock reflects much on his belief in modern man's need for adventure, to develop his inner resources and establish a framework of values. In a series of appendices he lays out his basic belief in the need for Outdoor Education, the development of inner resources, including humour, and ways of searching for the inner and ideal self. He is searchingly honest in all this, but some of his ideas failed to register with me as I questioned their relevance to those I see around me every day in a run-down inner city area, or to the wider community of mankind.

However, I think Colin and I can agree that we are privileged to be able to travel the world, to climb, to canoe and kayak and to go sailing, and to be able to engage in what are essentially self-centred activities, whilst

millions of others are starving in Africa or dying of Aids. And almost the same number are living in caves, even today, in parts of China.

I accept that we cannot do much about the state of the world, and the only people who can are governments, but I believe we can make a difference by suggesting that there may be a better way to order our lives. That, I believe, is the value of Colin's book and I defy anyone to read it and not be absorbed and influenced by it. I would recommend it as essential reading for anyone engaged in adventurous pursuits, whether physically or of the mind.

Dennis Gray

Trekking and Climbing in the Indian Himalaya

Harish Kapadia with Victor Saunders

New Holland, 2001, pp176, £13.99

A Passage to Himalaya

Ed. Harish Kapadia

OUP (Delhi), 2001, ppxx+351

For Hills to Climb

The Doon School Contribution to Mountaineering. The Early Years.

Ed. Aamir Ali

Doon School Old Boys' Society, n.d.(2001), ppxxvi+441

Three interesting books on mountaineering in India were published last year. The first, by Harish Kapadia, is in New Holland's 'Globetrotter Adventure Guides' series. It covers 25 treks throughout the Indian Himalaya and, being by the editor of the Himalayan Journal, it can be taken as authoritative. The ascents of the peaks that can be made during the treks are included by Victor Saunders. All necessary details are included and the photographs are excellent.

Harish's second book published in 2001 celebrates the millennium for the 72-year-old Himalayan Club. It is a selection of the best writings in the 56 volumes of the *Himalayan Journal*. The authors range from Kenneth Mason and Wilfrid Noyce, through Hermann Buhl and Kurt Diemberger to Victor Saunders and Stephen Venables, and to Aamir Ali and Harish himself. A fascinating read.

In the third book Aamir Ali has brought together the story of climbing by Doon School teams between 1942 and 1966. It celebrates the 50th anniversary of the ascent of Trisul by a Doon School team – an historic first ascent of a major Himalayan peak by an Indian party and probably the true start of Indian mountaineering. The editor was assisted by Gurdial Singh and Nalni Joyal, who also wrote a number of the articles, as did Jack Gibson and R L Holdsworth, two masters who introduced many Doon boys to the mountains.

Geoffrey Templeman

Mountain Men

Mick Conefrey & Tim Jordan

Boxtree, 2001, pp208, £15.99

Most documentary series on TV these days have a book attached, and this is the one for the three programmes of the same name on BBC2. The chapter headings are rather indicative of the style: 'The Man who Sold the Alps' 'The Misfit and the Matterhorn', 'The Fingerprints of Dr Cook' and so on. The people featured are Albert Smith, Edward Whymper, the Duke of Abruzzi, Frederick Cook, Maurice Wilson, Fritz Wiessner, Charles Houston and the Italians on K2. For those who want potted histories of these rather varied individuals, the book is a good read.

Casualty Care in Mountain Rescue

Ed. Stuart Durham & John Ellerton

Mountain Rescue Council, 2000, pp220

'The aim of mountain rescue is to deliver a casualty in the best possible condition to hospital', says the foreword to this manual, which covers every eventuality you can think of to attain that end, even covering first-aid for search and rescue dogs. The manual has been assembled by an editorial group of surgeons, doctors and others involved in mountain and cave rescue in the Lake District area. Although one of the authors describes the book as 'a step in encouraging effective casualty care', it appears to be a remarkably thorough volume.

The Hermitage Years of Mannering & Dixon The Beginnings of Alpine Climbing in New Zealand

Guy Mannering

Rainbow Print, Christchurch, 2000, pp212, NZ\$ 45

Guy Mannering has written this tribute to his father, George Mannering, and his father's friend Marmaduke Dixon, both the sons of Canterbury sheep farmers, and renowned for their attempts on Mt Cook between 1886 and 1890. He has found much of his material in family papers and diaries, so a lot of the text is in George Mannering's own words. The book is amply illustrated with sketches, paintings and historic photographs.

Everest

Rebecca Stephens

Doring Kindersley, 2001, pp64, £9.99

This is one of the Doring Kindersley 'Eyewitness' Guides, of which there are many, the intention being that you build up your own 'multi-volume

encyclopaedia of world information'. It is primarily a picture book with extended captions, but if you are wanting detailed information on Everest, this is not the place to look, there being only two pages on 'the ultimate challenge' and two on Hillary and Tenzing. As a general introduction to mountains for children, however, it is an attractive, informative publication.

Everest. Reaching the World's Highest Peak

Richard Platt

Doring Kindersley, 2000, pp48, £9.99

By the same publisher as the above, this book is in an identical format which, in addition to some general information on mountains and mountaineering, tells the story of the 1953 ascent, together with other attempts and ascents. It is all done in Doring Kindersley's well-known and attractive style of pull-out details and exploded views.

A Brief History of British Mountaineering

Colin Wells

The Mountain Heritage Trust, 2001, ppviii+120, npq

This book was produced as a handbook to accompany the National Mountaineering Exhibition at the Rheged Centre near Penrith, but is, in fact, considerably more than that, being a very well illustrated account of British mountaineering, from Samuel Taylor Coleridge on Broad Stand to Leo Houlding on El Niño in Yosemite. Most of the major figures in between are featured, together with many of the outstanding events, and it makes a useful introduction for the layman.

Mountaineering Maps of Karakorum & Hindu Kush

Tsuneo Miyamori

A Study of Karakorum & Hindu Kush Mountains

Tsuneo Miyamori & Sadeo Karibe

Nakanishiya Shuppan, 2001, pp371, Y.33000

Nakanishiya Shuppan in Kyoto has published *Mountaineering Maps of Karakorum & Hindu Kush* in a two-volume boxed set, the first volume containing thirteen coloured maps, four to the Hindu Kush and Hindu Raj and eight to the Karakoram at a scale of 1:150,000, with the final map being a detailed one of the Baltoro Glacier at 1:75,000. The maps contain all 1215 peaks over 6000m, and are in English.

The second volume is a study of the area, with details and photos of most of the major peaks. The text of this is in Japanese, but there is a part-translation in English and all names, locations and picture captions are also in English.

A batch of new books reached the Club in the early part of the year, which can best be dealt with together:

First was *Top Treks of the World*, edited by Steve Razzetti (New Holland, 2001, pp168, £29.99) in which New Holland have produced another of their large format, superbly illustrated mountain volumes. This time, 12 authors describe 29 treks from all over the world, from the Pyrenees and Morocco to the Himalaya, Australasia and the Americas. Many of the great treks of the world are here, plus one or two that may be new to readers.

On the subject of big books, there is *The Wall. Alexander and Thomas Huber. A New Dimension in Climbing*, edited by Reinhold Messner (David & Charles, 2001, pp128, £19.99) in which the extreme exploits of the Huber brothers are described, with many of their superb photographs. Messner draws the whole book together with his own linking commentary.

Messner is also the author of *Big Walls. From the North Face of the Eiger to the South Face of Dhaulagiri* (Crowood, 2001, pp216, £25.00). After 70 or so pages on big walls in general and the classic problems of the Alps in particular, the rest of the book lists the big walls of the world, giving a large photo of each and a page of informative facts, which are very useful for reference.

Returning to 'normal size' books, Messner is also the author of *The Second Death of George Mallory. The Enigma and Spirit of Mount Everest* (St Martin's Press, 2001, ppxii+206, \$23.95) in which he retells the stories of the twenties' Everest expeditions, not only using extracts from Mallory's own letters and journals, but also supplying an imaginative recreation of Mallory's thoughts. Later expeditions are also included, with imagined comments from Mallory indicating how his original idealism has been lost in this modern age.

Remaining with Everest, we have *Climbing Everest. A Meditation on Mountaineering and the Spirit of Adventure* by Pat Ament (Ragged Mountain Press, 2001, ppxiv+146, \$17.95). The emphasis here is on the sub-title, as the author says that it isn't important to climb Everest (he hasn't). What is important, he maintains, is to seek out 'the sacred and the beautiful'. There are some intriguing thoughts here from this writer/poet/artist.

Closer to home, *The Way to Cold Mountain. A Scottish mountain anthology*, edited by Alec Finlay (Morning Star, 2001, pp208, £7.99) is a fascinating collection of articles and poems by David Craig, Geoff Dutton, Andrew Greig, Tom Prentice and others on all aspects of the Scottish hills.

Finally, *Kiss or Kill. Confessions of a Serial Climber* by Mark Twight (The Mountaineers, 2001, pp208, \$22.95). Mark Twight is one of America's

seriously good climbers, and this book relives many of his great climbs. Whether he is on the Czech Direct Route on Denali, the South Face of Mount Bradley, 'Deprivation' on Mount Hunter or the Rupal Face of Nanga Parbat, you can be sure of some gripping reading. But, as the blurb says, they call him 'Dr Doom' – 'raving and kicking against mediocrity, his anger and pain simmer close to the surface. He speaks and writes the language of the punk music that defined him.' This is all very well but, like most punks, the author seems to go out of his way to make you dislike him, which makes for sad reading in some parts. Many of the chapters have appeared elsewhere, and a '2001 update' is added to each one. Twight says that this is the only book he will ever write, so make the most of it!

Geoffrey Templeman

For the past twenty years or so, the Book Reviews section has ended with a listing of all guides, instruction manuals, travel guides, reprints and other books not given, for one reason or another, a full review. To avoid duplication, and the fact that all books submitted to the Library are now listed in the *Alpine Club Newsletter*, they will no longer appear in the *Alpine Journal*.