Book Reviews

COMPILED BY GEOFFREY TEMPLEMAN

The Villain: the life of Don Whillans
Jim Perrin
Hutchinson, 2004, pp354, £18.99

This is an immensely enjoyable book. Jim Perrin is one of our finest mountaineering essayists whose writings illuminate the nature of our sport sensitively and without inhibition. His account of the life of Don Whillans displays all his narrative strengths and enthusiasms, though I do have some reservations about the way the book is composed.

The book touched many chords for me. My own (admittedly brief) rock-climbing days were the early sixties, in Snowdonia above all, when the feats of Brown and Whillans were relayed like news from the front line, and the myths about them were already multiplying. How we gazed at the lines they had put up, and reset our ambitions to encompass them. Snowdonia is Perrin's milieu and his love of the place shines through. His ability to find fresh and enticing adjectives to depict a succession of routes is breath-taking, and I could sense my fingers curling over the holds he described.

I enjoyed becoming reacquainted with Whillans through Perrin's writing. As a modest performer on rock, I had access to these gods through my work as a journalist, and naturally sought out commissions which would enable me to meet them. Thus I can say (just) that I climbed with Brown and Crew on Gogarth, at a time when the first lines on the crag were being established. I came to know Whillans when he was hired as a camera assistant to Chris Bonington during the *Eiger Direct* melodrama. I enjoyed his laconic talk, his quips that made perfect soundbites for the neophyte reporter that I was, and admired his determination to eat and drink his way through as much of the *Telegraph's* expenses budget as was humanly possible.

I had later encounters which revealed his dark side and his deepening alienation from his former comrades. Mick Burke told me of the occasion when Audrey Whillans remarked to her husband: 'Don, you know it's our wedding anniversary today, don't you?'

'Aye,' Whillans supposedly replied. 'Don't f——ing remind me.'

When I was canvassing opinions for a magazine profile about Chris Bonington, Whillans was deeply reluctant to help, on the grounds that,

so he believed, it was Bonington himself who had suggested I write the article. I talked him round but it went deeply against the grain for Whillans to do anything to assist the man who had been his partner on so many important ascents. As Perrin relates, his alienation stemmed from a belief that Bonington had in some way 'sold out' to commercial pressures – when in fact, to most people, Bonington was exploring the possibilities of making a living from an activity which was at the core of his life.

I am gratified that my impressions of Whillans – the convivial drinking companion, the misogynist, the increasingly disgruntled fallen star – are at one with the character Perrin depicts. Perrin's research into his early life is meticulous, his cataloguing of the minutiae of Whillans' rock-climbing is detailed, bordering on obsessive. He provides an exhaustive account of a watershed era in British climbing, a time when both standards and the class basis of the sport were being irrevocably altered. This will appeal directly to a mountaineering readership, whom Perrin addresses without equivocation or the kind of compromises and interpolations a non-specialist audience might require. This strategy was an intriguing choice on Perrin's part, since his mountaineering obituaries in the *Guardian* are superb examples of how to write about our specialist subject in a way that appeals to insider and layperson alike.

At the same time Perrin examines the formation of the myths that enveloped both Whillans and Brown, so that his book becomes a deconstruction of the nature of heroism and the mythology of the sport. He accomplishes the same careful reporting and analysis of Brown's achievements in the Alps and the greater ranges. Because I had written about the dramas on the Annapurna south face in 1970, and had received first-hand accounts from friends such as Mick Burke, I felt I knew the outline of the story. Perrin adds a dimension to it with his account of the interplay of the characters, and where he does succumb to inference and judgment, they are absolutely to be respected.

The book is a genuine page-turner, luring you on with its detail and its love of climbing and mountains as Perrin constructs the distressing arc of Whillans' life, from high promise to pathetic loss of dignity. Perrin sustains suspense over his attitude towards Whillans and how it will play out. He accepts that Whillans had monumental faults but while he ultimately sides with him as a flawed hero, he provides enough data for readers to come to a different conclusion. Reading the book is an enriching experience that leaves you drained as you attempt to contend with your own conflicting emotions. It parallels his one previous book, *Menlove*, in broaching difficult themes, but the writing is far more graceful and confident.

My questions and reservations concern some of Perrin's decisions over narrative and structure. There are many extensive footnotes which he justifies by asserting that they provide context without interrupting the narrative flow. The problem is that some are so long that they do break the

narrative if you pause to read them, but my feeling is that they are forgivable indulgences on the part of a commentator whose observations are always worth hearing.

Occasionally they exemplify another questionable characteristic of the book. There is a long and disturbing footnote describing an incident related by John Cleare. Whillans and his wife Audrey had stayed with Cleare and his family, who were also providing temporary refuge for a young woman friend who was in London to have an abortion. In the early hours, and despite the presence of his wife, Whillans had attempted to sexually assault the guest, who was outraged and distressed. Cleare's wife Viki demanded that Whillans leave the house at once, although the ever-hospitable Cleare insisted he be given breakfast first.

My own feeling is that such an incident was so central to the character Whillans had become that it should indeed have been integrated with the narrative, rather than relegated to footnote. It is as if Perrin, usually so authoritative, has suffered a loss of nerve over confronting the worst of Whillans' nature, for he never fully signposts the central issue of Whillans' repellent behaviour towards women, but introduces it diffidently, as if through a side door.

There is the same lacuna over Whillans' relationship with his long-suffering wife Audrey. Perrin tells how Audrey asked him to produce a 'warts and all' portrait. Yet Perrin justifies the fact that it took him 18 years to write by stating that he wanted to wait until Audrey died in case she was hurt by it. There is a further paradox, namely that Perrin hardly discusses the dynamics of the Whillans marriage at all, leaving you wondering how it functioned and what it meant to each partner, in view of the fact that – against all apparent odds – it survived. In the same way, Perrin does little to explore the nature of his two other most important relationships, those with Brown and Bonington, and what they represented to the respective partners.

There is one more gap in the narrative which I regret, namely that Perrin makes little attempt to explain why Whillans' life followed such a tragic course, or where his disfiguring misogyny, truculence and selfishness came from. I would like to have heard Perrin speculate on whether the wellsprings of Whillans' self-destruction were to be found in his childhood or upbringing, and whether some theory could be constructed to resolve why his flaws should become so overwhelming.

However, the book's readability and compassion far outweigh these caveats, and it establishes a marker for the standards that mountaineering biographers should aim for.

Peter Gillman

Whillans: a loyal friend with foibles

Dennis Gray

Jim Perrin's 'life of Don Whillans' is quite simply the best biography of a mountaineer that I have read. However its warts an' all approach, and in parts a lack of counterbalance may well annoy some of Don's friends. Anyone coming fresh to this subject, who never knew Whillans, might be forgiven after reading *The Villain* for concluding that he was a rotten little bugger without a single redeeming feature. This is far from the truth.

Perrin deserves plaudits for the amount of research and effort he has put into the project, but not for his tardiness in producing the book – his excuse being that he did not feel able to publish whilst Audrey, Don's widow, was still alive. Audrey originally approached me to write the Whillans story, and then a publisher suggested that Jim and I should combine and jointly write the saga. It quickly became obvious that this would have been a recipe for a disaster; I was over-committed working at the BMC and Perrin, understandably, wished to do the book on his own. I stood down, but I know that Audrey was willing to have a 'no holds barred' biography produced, and was subsequently upset by its non-appearance over many years. One can understand Jim's reticence, for *The Villain* is the story of an outstanding mountaineer destroyed by over-indulgence and excess, leading inexorably to a premature death, aged 52. But Audrey had no illusions and wanted the story to be told, for she suffered the most from Don's wayward behaviour.

The first part of the book is very well done, with fulsome coverage of Whillans's wartime childhood and adolescence in Salford. Being short, Don needed to stand up for himself from an early age in order to avoid being bullied. Occasionally this meant fisticuffs, standard practice in working class areas of the north in the 1940s.

Rambling in the countryside, first with family then with friends, led onto rock climbing, where he quickly emerged as an outstanding performer, and then the crucial meeting with Joe Brown at the Roaches in 1951. It was the beginning of a brilliant partnership. During the next few years, Whillans's feats on British rock, usually with Brown or other Rock and Ice members, earned him a legendary reputation for pioneering strenuous and/or extremely bold climbs at the highest standards of the day.

Yet it was his behaviour away from the crags that caused the most comment and the stories of his caustic wit and aggression began to build. Perrin has devoted a chapter to debunking some of these, including two stories, one ex Joe Brown and another from myself, concerning punch-ups with bus conductors. I stand by mine. It happened in February 1954 when I arrived to live in Manchester; the first half of the tale was common knowledge amongst the local climbing fraternity at that time and the second I had from Whillans himself. And I never knew him to exaggerate or misrepresent any event at which he was present. Surprisingly, after this

debunking chapter Perrin then buttresses the Whillans legend with many stories confirming its potency.

Brown and Whillans's great alpine breakthrough in 1954 with the third ascent of the west face of the Dru and the first ascent of the west face of the Blaitière, are given their due prominence. But then the story begins to turn sour with Whillans supposedly envious of Brown's invitation to join the 1955 Kangchenjunga expedition. In the 30 years of our acquaintance I never heard Don say anything 'anti' against Joe personally, only against some of those who hung around with him at a later date. Jim makes the supposed bitterness of Don against Joe quite a theme in the book and if true it would be an indictment of his character. On the contrary, several times he told me that Brown was the best climber he had ever been with. Don might say something in jest, and he called me everything from 'a drink of water to a bloody little ta-ta!' But if anyone else had said that I am sure he would have reacted strongly in my defence.

Don's Himalayan climbing began with the 1957 Masherbrum expedition. It ended in disaster with the death of Bob Downes, and a near miss summit attempt by Whillans. Downes's death affected Don more than he let on. They had climbed quite a lot together including the first ascent of *Centurion* on Ben Nevis. It was during this trip he started smoking, after winning a raffle of 200 cigarettes on the boat to Karachi. And even more ominous for his future wellbeing he started drinking alcohol on a regular basis.

Whillans came to Gauri Sankar in 1964 on an expedition I organised. Expeditions then were hard work and we drove overland to save money. I left home in June 1964 and arrived back in January 1965. We very nearly climbed the mountain, and Don, I believe, put in his career best climbing performance. One can understand that being with a small group in such close proximity for so long strained relationships to the utmost, but we all remained good friends, albeit with one or two fractious arguments en route.

Throughout the late fifties and into the mid-sixties Whillans was without doubt 'the man', his reputation confirmed with climbs such as the Poincenot, the Central Tower of Paine and the Central Pillar of Frêney. I was Secretary of the Alpine Climbing Group and Don was the President for some of that time. He was the climber other British alpinists looked up to and he did not spare himself in encouraging others and handing down advice.

As to his fruitful partnership with Chris Bonington, initially Chris was the young acolyte, following in Don's footsteps, then things moved on and Bonington became 'Mr Big' and Don a team member. This was something Don found hard to swallow and here again Perrin highlights Don's sense of betrayal, particularly over the first British ascent of the *Eigerwand*.

Whillans greatest success was his 1970 ascent with Dougal Haston of the south face of Annapurna. But its genesis was misreported. When I returned from Gauri Sankar in January 1965, we planned to make Annapurna our next objective. We knew we could not go back to Gauri Sankar for the route we had opened up took us into Tibet. But the expedition

had proved that a major technical face climb in the Himalaya was possible. After discussing objectives with Erwin Schneider, then engaged on mapping the Nepal Himalaya, I decided that the south face of Annapurna was the one most likely to yield a success. And I brought back a photograph of the face given to me by Jimmy Roberts. We started our planning; once again I was to be the organiser with Don as climbing leader. But then because of the Patterson incident Nepal was closed. When it re-opened for climbing in 1968/9, Chris Bonington wrote to me and asked if I thought it was feasible to get permission for Menlungste, I wrote back and said I did not think so but that the south face of Annapurna was a real possibility. He then expressed an interest and I sent him the photograph I still held because I could not go myself due to my changed circumstances. Thus Whillans knew all about the south face of Annapurna as an objective before Chris. And he believed, rightly or wrongly, that the project was as much his as Bonington's. One can make too much of such events, and Don's tragedy was that he could not let go and move on. If anyone slighted him then he held a grudge past all reasonable limits.

Perrin also touches on what he sees as Whillans' incipient racism and sexism, though in this he was not unlike other white working class men of his era. On one occasion when Audrey had kicked him out of their house I recall him living at my father's. He had turned up with a small battered suitcase containing a few possessions and my dad had taken him in. My father, a vaudeville and theatre artist all his life, a heavy drinker and smoker was nevertheless Old Labour, and no racist. Once in 1930s London he had been badly beaten by Mosley's black shirts, defending a fellow artist who was Jewish. He poked fun at Don mercilessly as he sat on his sofa holding forth about how lazy were the then recently arrived West Indian and Asian immigrants. 'They don't like hard work,' Don was complaining, but dad gave him short shrift. 'That's Bloody rich coming from you yer bugger, when did you last do a hard day's work?' And they both fell about laughing. I make no excuses for him; he was an unreconstructed male chauvinist, but he was a loyal friend and despite his foibles he and my father were good pals.

After his two trips to the south-west face of Everest, in 1971 and 1972, on both of which he was a star performer, it was downhill physically. Don was drinking and smoking heavily and although he continued on expeditions to Roraima, Huandoy, Patagonia, Tirich Mir and the Karakoram, his lack of fitness began to mean he was more and more becoming a climbing back number. The journeying also continued, with lecture tours to Australia and South Africa, a trip down the Amazon and to the Red Sea where he took up diving. He became ever more rotund and overweight but still outrageous in his behaviour as Perrin leaves one in no doubt. A famous run-in with the Lancashire Constabulary in 1975, for drunken driving, cost him dearly in the Birthday Honours List and how he avoided a custodial sentence is still a wonder.

Yet he remained the most popular climbers' climber in the country. If you went to a Whillans lecture it was always full of hardcore activists, and his wit and timing were widely appreciated and imitated. He also put something back into our sport, serving a full three years as a BMC vice-president. He was a prisoner of his times however and when I took him to the Leeds University wall to show him the new developments in rock climbing, Don came away shaking his head, 'There's no bleeding adventure on climbing walls,' he remarked. *The Villain* highlights this failure to adapt and change with the times.

Why was Whillans so popular? I guess because he remained what he was, a working-class climber totally without pretension. I was with him once when we met the Duke of Edinburgh at a function in the Mansion House. Don stood there in his flat cap, baggy trousers and desert boots looking just like Andy Capp. The sycophants about us were kowtowing, but when the Duke came over to us Whillans simply said ' Ah doo' which made the old fellow smile, and me too.

Whillans was the outstanding mountaineer of his generation and for almost 20 years a premier division climber. He should have stayed active much longer. If only he had kept himself in shape like, say, Brown or Bonington, he might still be with us, and probably climbing at a reasonable standard. But anyone familiar with the theory of the outsider will know this was just not a possibility. Such people are on a path to self-destruction and like Byron they're mad, bad and at times dangerous to know.

I liked Jim's concluding chapter, the calm after the storm set in the plantation in the Chew Valley where Don did his first climbs. It is poetic and worthy of the man. Climbers a half century from now will struggle with *Grond*, tiptoe up *Slanting Slab*, fight their way up *Goliath* or *Taurus*, arm bar in *Forked Lightning Crack* and fall off the *Cave Wall* at Froggat Edge, a route I was on with him when he made the first ascent. They will think, 'That bloody Don Whillans must have been one hell of a climber'. And so he was. *The Villain* is his story; it does not make for a genteel read, for it is unsettling, but it is a superb piece of work and I recommend all to read it.

Dennis Gray

Broad Peak
Richard Sale
Carreg, 2004, £22.50

First a quotation: 'My heart thumping like mad. But there are the last few rocks, the summit snow slope, just over there...and Marcus and Fritz...They had just finished taking their summit photographs and were on the point of starting down.'

So there we have it, the first ascent of Broad Peak in 1957. Marcus Schmuck and Fritz Wintersteller had reached the summit well ahead of

Kurt Diemberger – he of the thumping heart. Way behind was the fourth member of the Austrian team, Hermann Buhl.

The description comes from Diemberger's 1971 classic *Summits and Secrets* and leaves no doubt about the order of the ascents that day. Yet Richard Sale's contention in *Broad Peak* is that Diemberger has kept tight hold of the detail of the climb and has somehow rendered Schmuck and Wintersteller 'invisible'.

It is true that the two names that spring first to mind in association with Broad Peak are those of Buhl and Diemberger, but this could be explained without the nefariousness ascribed to Diemberger in this piece of relentless revisionism. Diemberger came back from the Karakoram with an attention-grabbing story: Buhl, remember, was already a legend after his gruelling solo ascent of Nanga Parbat. Diemberger had not only accompanied him to the summit of Broad Peak and photographed him there at sunset, but was on the ridge of Chogolisa when Buhl fell with a collapsing cornice to his death. Added to this, Diemberger was the only one of the summiters to have a book covering the ascent published in English. An account by Schmuck, the leader of the expedition, was never translated.

Sale has certainly brought Schmuck and Wintersteller back centre stage and in doing so has underlined the bold, pioneering nature of the Austrian expedition – the ascent of an 8000m peak without the aid of bottled oxygen or porter support high on the mountain. There is also a fascinating insight into the machinations of the Austrian Alpenverein as Schmuck was installed as leader in preference to Buhl, who was resisted by his own Innsbruck section of the Alpenverein as a troublemaker. Schmuck agreed to defer to Buhl's experience on the mountain; however the issue of leadership seems to have remained a running sore.

Sale has drawn on the diaries and testimonies of Schmuck and Wintersteller, who both appeared in rude health at the International Mountain Literature Festival in 2005, and on recently uncovered material by Buhl – reports sent back to his wife and a diary transcript. Buhl's diary has become a real bone of contention between the protagonists. Schmuck wrote in his own diary following Buhl's death: 'Kurt steals Hermann's diaries in which he is described.' Diemberger vehemently denies this, saying he kept them safe and returned the originals to Buhl's widow, Eugenie. In return, he accuses Sale of using the material without Mrs Buhl's permission. So too does Mrs Buhl, who is due to publish the diaries this autumn.

It all seems rather sad when set against the team's achievement. The diarists complain that Diemberger was not pulling his weight in breaking trail, neglected his duties as 'doctor', ordered the liaison officer about like a servant with personal requests, failed when called upon to act in his role as supposed 'ice specialist', revealed an 'increased truculence on the mountain' and attached himself to Buhl as a young acolyte, to Buhl's occasional annoyance. Towards the end of the trip, Schmuck boils over, calling Diemberger a 'lazy bastard' and 'self-centred egomaniac'.

Diemberger is, not surprisingly, exercised about the book, though his reaction to Schmuck's string of abuse was wonderfully laconic: 'What a bouquet of flowers!' The pity of it is that, after years of estrangement, the three old men of Broad Peak had patched things up sufficiently to co-operate on a reconstruction of their Camp II for the 'Call of the Mountains' exhibition in Salzburg five years ago. That fragile truce must be over.

Sale has invested a great deal in this book, not just in time but by paying for its production. But one wonders at his motivation. In 2000 he was ready to publish, with John Cleare, a history of climbing the 8000m peaks, *On Top of the World*. He had an agreement with Diemberger that his pictures could be used on the condition that Diemberger could see what was written about himself, with the offer to correct inaccuracies, but with responsibility for the final text remaining with the author. After page proofs had been checked by Sale, Diemberger contacted the publisher to withdraw permission for the pictures unless changes were made in the text. Pressed for time, the publisher, Collins, made the changes, with Sale remaining unaware until after the book was printed.

Schmuck and Wintersteller, who had allowed their diaries to be used, then wrote to the author to chastise him. Sale has set out to make amends and lift the pair from their unwarranted 'bit part' in the history of Broad Peak, as he sees it, to full acknowledgement as the first ascensionists. He has succeeded. However as the key facts are not actually at issue, the book's eyebrow-raising fascination is as a study in rivalry and resentment.

Stephen Goodwin

When the Alps Cast Their Spell
Mountaineers of the Alpine Golden Age
Trevor Braham
The In Pinn, 2004, pp314, £20

We have had a quite a few new books recently on our Victorian climbing ancestors. The trouble with these overviews is that they often tend towards the facile, regurgitating second-hand preconceptions, with the odd inaccuracy thrown in for good measure. So – what a joy to open Trevor Braham's treasure box of glittering surprises and correct some of my *own* preconceptions.

The first ascent of the Meije, in 1877, was made not by Coolidge, as I had thought, but by Emmanuel Bolleau, whose exploits merit a full chapter here, alongside our more familiar British pioneers, Wills, Tyndall, Stephen, Moore, Whymper and Mummery. Wordsworth and Coleridge, so often trumpeted as the instigators of a new romantic appreciation of mountain scenery, were actually beaten to it, many years earlier, by the Swiss scientist Albrecht von Haller whose poem, *Die Alpen*, extolled the glories of the Alps way back in 1732. And I never knew – or had forgotten – that Leslie

Stephen was the mentor responsible for getting into print Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd*. And the ever inconsistent Ruskin, for all his castigation of mountaineers' 'greasy pole' athleticism, was actually a closet adrenaline junky, confessing in a letter from Chamonix that 'if you go through with the danger ... you come out of the encounter a stronger and better man'.

That Ruskin letter is one of countless precious nuggets unearthed in this gloriously discursive book in which Braham celebrates the prodigious energy – physical and intellectual – of those Victorian pioneers. Stephen was a pillar of the literary establishment, who, like Tilman after him, scorned scientific 'adjuncts' to mountaineering. Tyndall, a friend of Faraday and Huxley, struggled to reconcile his scientific agnosticism with the inescapable spiritual sensations inspired by the mountains, writing that 'in the translucent glory of Nature I entirely forgot myself as a man'. Even Whymper, for all his brittle, pedantic egotism, had an insatiable curiosity and knew how to turn out fine prose.

And what about the actual climbing? Well, unlike some of the more pop dabblers in mountaineering history, Braham is a meticulous scholar who knows what he is talking about. His selection is based on a real appreciation of what was significant – Moore's futuristic ascent of the *Old Brenva*, Mummery's radical guideless pioneering, and so on – and he reminds us not only of how young these pioneers were (Bolleau was still only 20 when he climbed the Meije) but also how incredibly skilful. Mummery and his chamois-hunting friend Burgener climbed the Zmutt Ridge, on sight, in just nine hours, without the fixed aids now deemed necessary by the Swiss Alpine Club; his route on Dych Tau, done in eight-and-a-quarter hours, now normally requires an intermediate camp. And as for 25-year-old Whymper's campaign of pass crossings and first ascents in 1865 – who could match that record now?

The publishers have done Braham proud, resisting any editorial temptation to curb his eclecticism. I like, for instance, to be told in passing that Whymper's brother ran the Murree brewery in what is now Pakistan. The photo selection is good, with some spectacular comparisons of the 19th and 20th century Rhône glaciers to refute the flat-earth deniers of global warming. We are treated also to copious notes, an excellent table of first ascents and a proper index. And, in case anyone should think that Braham is merely peddling Golden Age nostalgia, he ends with a personal appraisal of some recent mountaineers who have impressed him. The fact that his choice includes Wilfrid Noyce, Peter Boardman and Pierre Béghin shows that he – and they – know what it is really all about.

Stephen Venables

This Mountain Life
The First Hundred Years of the Rucksack Club
Edited by John Beatty
Northern Light, 2003, pp114, £20

It all began when ramblers in Lancashire expressed regret that ramblers in Yorkshire had stolen a march and organised themselves into a club. The Yorkshire Ramblers was already founded and providing regular escape from the industrial north when two Mancunians, John Entwistle and Arthur Burns, responded to a leader in their local newspaper 'extolling the virtue of being out and about on mountain and moor'. They were keen walkers with a secret ambition to handle a rope and axe, who lamented that west of the Pennines there was no organisation where enthusiasts of the outdoors could fraternise. In 1902, from their initiative, the Rucksack Club was formed.

The first hundred years of the club's distinguished history are celebrated in *This Mountain Life*, a handsomely illustrated portrait, edited by John Beatty, spanning the century during which the Rucksack Club grew from an Edwardian society 'facilitating walking tours and initiating members into the science of rock climbing and snow craft' to its present respected place among the ranks of mountaineers, explorers, long-distance walkers and, as the founders described the membership, 'enthusiasts of like passions'.

Until local clubs were established, the strongest enthusiasm and passion had been directed at the grander mountain ranges and in Manchester a number of eminent mountaineers rallied to support the new club. Harold Dixon, professor of chemistry at Victoria University of Manchester and AC member, celebrated for his climbs in the Canadian Rockies, was the club's first president followed by Joseph Collier, a pioneer among rock climbers, and Charles Pilkington, former AC president and the first climber to prove that the Inaccessible Pinnacle was in fact accessible. Among the first members was J Rooke Corbett, first Englishman to complete the Munros and compiler of the list of Scottish mountains of between 2500 and 2999ft, now known as Corbetts. His other claim to fame was an ability to play several games of chess simultaneously.

The photographs show an exclusively male society, flat-capped and clinker-booted, swarming up the hills and rocks of Lancashire, North Wales and Scotland; in all, rather solemn-looking enthusiasts of like, perhaps narrowly focused, passions. A vote allowing women to become members did succeed by the narrowest of margins but not until 1990. As hill walkers, club members were formidable. Eustace Thomas in 1922 successfully attacked the Lakeland Fell Record, covering 25,500ft of ascent and descent over 66.5 miles within 24 hours. He also became the first British climber to scale all the 4000m peaks in the Alps. Other records fell to the redoubtable

boots of Rucksack members.

On British crags club members were among those now recognised as being part of the forefront of British rock climbing, and here they are, pictured with their baggy breeches, Woolworth plimsolls and coils of hemp rope on fearsomely unprotected routes. As a new age dawns, the picture improves, members are seen well geared up and actually smiling as the club tigers take off to the distant summits of Nepal, the Hindu Kush, East Greenland and the scorched flanks of Yosemite.

But this is essentially the story of a club with great camaraderie dedicated to the simple end of enjoying mountains, wherever there are long paths to be trodden, rock to be climbed or rucksacks to be worn. Founding member John Entwistle, he of the resoundingly northern name, set an admirable example at the age of 82 by walking from Land's End to Manchester in time for the bowling season, later completing the ramble from John O'Groats to Manchester. A true Rucksacker.

Ronnie Faux

Between a Rock and a Hard Place
Aron Ralston
Simon and Schuster UK Ltd, 2004, pp354, £14.99

Mention of the name Aron Ralston will, I suspect, produce blank expressions on most faces. However, if I start talking about spring 2003 and a young American who amputates his own arm after becoming trapped by a boulder in a remote Utah canyon, there will probably be a good many ringing bells. At the time, the incident received huge global media attention and after all the hard-sell a book seemed inevitable. Would it be full of American hype? Would it be ghost written? Would it manage to convey anything like the real story? Was there even enough material to warrant a 350-page book?

By the time I reached page 23 the incident had already taken place. By the time I was half-way through the third chapter nearly all my questions had been answered. Despite his modest age of 28, Ralston is a remarkably articulate and perceptive writer. *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* is fast becoming an American Best Seller.

The story, for those not aware of it, is in essence quite simple. Ralston takes off from work in Aspen for a long weekend of solo mountain biking and canyoneering. He has no real fixed plans and therefore tells no one of his potential destinations. Driving his truck deep into remote Canyonlands National Park, he bikes a considerable distance to the head of Blue John Canyon, spends a night out and the following morning begins a descent of this narrow gorge 10 or more miles north towards his truck. Several hours later, while attempting to lower himself over a small drop in a narrow slot, the chockstone from which he is hanging cuts loose, slides down the constriction and pins his right hand against the canyon wall.

The whole incident, his eventual escape, and the simultaneous detective work by family, friends and the SAR team to discover his location, are fluently interwoven with the story of his youth and incidents from his relatively short but exciting mountaineering, skiing and adventuring career. OK, there is a section in the middle that is somewhat longwinded but thereafter it is gripping stuff.

This certainly isn't a book for the squeamish. Deciding at an early stage he would have to drink his own urine to survive, then subsequently try unsuccessfully to saw through his wrist with the ineffective blade of a Leatherman, will make even the most macho wince. Ralston confesses to a certain faith and feels it was divine intervention that led him to solve the problem of amputating his hand at the exact time that he did. Any earlier and he most likely would have bled to death before he got out of the canyon; any later and he probably wouldn't have had the strength to continue.

Two years on and he is climbing again (the front cover shows the ice axe prosthetic he uses on both rock and snow). He is training to be an American Mountain Guide and has just become the first to solo all the Colorado 14,000' peaks in winter. The book appears to be an inspiration to many American people, although the majority of Ralston's audience are more impressed by how he first gave up a promising engineering career with Intel, simply to go climbing: the '70s drop-out culture has long disappeared from the American technology industry, if indeed it was ever really present.

Although not on a par with *Touching the Void*, this is a remarkable story well told. I suspect it is not the last book we will see from this author.

Lindsay Griffin

Alpine Points of View
Kev Reynolds
Cicerone Press, 2004, pp237, £22

When Geoff Templeman asked me to review this book, the fact that (much to my surprise) Kev had dedicated it to me was not accepted as a reason for refusing. I'm bound to say that it's an excellent book: my praise is heartfelt and, believe it or not, entirely objective.

The book, 'a collection of images of the Alps', is a selection of one hundred splendid photographs, accompanied by appropriate comments, covering the Alps 'from end to end', from the Maritime Alps to the Julians. It presents an evocation of the Alps in all their aspects – peaks, valleys, glaciers, snow, ice and rock, mountain paths, villages, flowers, people and animals. (Kev will forgive me if I reveal that, among the people providing attractive foregrounds, I discern his wife Min, a steadfast companion and support on many of his alpine wanderings over nearly 40 years.) The book is a worthy companion volume to Kev's *Walking in the Alps*, reviewed in *AJ104*, 313, 1999.

According to the blurb, 'for some these views will reawaken old memories, for others they will inspire new dreams and ambitions'. For me they do both at once, even though in my case the dreams may have to remain dreams (one lifetime is just too short).

Kev Reynolds is a worthy successor to earlier great celebrants of the alpine scene such as Julius Kugy and Janet Adam Smith, and I am glad to see their classic books included in the list of recommended reading. But in addition to poetic evocations, his book gives practical advice on matters such as photography, and two points stressed by Kev seem to me particularly important. Firstly, he is no *Gipfelstürmer* who wants to look at the Alps only from the tops, nor (like John Ruskin) does he confine himself to peering up from the valleys. He believes in the mid-mountain vantage point, somewhere between valley bed and lofty summit, where you can 'look up and down in a single glance and absorb the best of both worlds' – what he calls 'alps upon the Alps'. And, secondly, he emphasises that, in the Alps which are considered by many to be nowadays overcrowded, spoiled and practically ruined, it is still perfectly possible to wander at length in solitude in regions that remain peaceful, undefiled and as delightful as ever. Of course he is wise enough to let readers discover these secret pleasures for themselves, but for those able to take a hint there is plenty of material in this wonderful book to stimulate their dreams and shape their plans for many years to come.

Ernst Sondheimer

The Joy of Climbing
Terry Gifford
Whittles Publishing, 2004, 174pp, £19.95

Terry Gifford would be a happy man indeed if this book sold half as well as the manual from which its playful title is derived – *The Joy of Sex*. It is intended as an antidote to the angst and morbidity school of mountain writing.

As if in homage to that earlier, and celebrated 'Joy of...' title, Gifford has liberally illustrated his book with rippling torsos, often his own. The cover photo sets the tone: Terry well-hung with a jangling rack that appears to be all he is wearing bar rock shoes and helmet as he laybacks some soaring sea cliff. Actually there are shorts hidden beneath that rack, though, like the helmet, they are of a certain vintage. How our holiday snaps give us away.

If this seems too much a case of judging a book by its cover, I call in aid Gifford's rhetorical question: 'Can the edges define the core experience?' He believes so. 'Some of the greatest fun has been going out climbing knowing the edges are going to be interesting.' And so he writes about the orchids, the peregrines, the jokes and the blisters. And ever the rock, the

wine and the people; in Scotland, the Lakes, Wales, his adopted Peak, Europe and the USA. It is quite a pot-pourri.

The pieces about people, profiles of sorts, are among the most interesting – the author Anne Sauvy, Allen Steck, Gordon Stainforth, and the late William Heaton Cooper. The book is a compilation of Gifford's articles for magazines and journals over many years, but neither the organ nor the date of original publication is given. This could be irritating or intriguing.

Heaton Cooper died almost a decade ago and I guess this interview with the artist, still in fairly energetic old age, must be 15 years old. Yet some things are timeless. Heaton Cooper is ruminating on the imperative of climbers (in his day) not to attempt a route they were incapable of reversing. Then he observes: 'I think the art of climbing down is needed now, don't you, in world leaders for example?' Ah, there is wisdom at the edges of this book as well as joy, and, as you would expect from Terry, several piquant poems.

Stephen Goodwin

The Central Buttress of Scafell
edited by Graham Wilson
Millrace, 2004, pp184, £13.95

> 'What we really lack is the possibility of new ascents. They are all exhausted, and I think you must admit as much!'
>
> 'Not at all,' immediately returned the Old Stager. 'Have any of you noticed a bayonet-shaped crack descending from the skyline about midway between Moss Ghyll and Botterill's Slab on Scawfell? No? Has it never occurred to you that between these two climbs there is a stretch of nearly two hundred feet of unscaled rock?'

Thus in 1907 did Ashley Abraham imagine a conversation in 'An Hour in the Smoke Room at Wasdale'. Of course, he was playing the part of the Old Stager himself in writing this provocation in the *FRCC Journal*. In his story three parties rush up to the crack in the morning. 'After spending four futile hours thereabouts, they hastened down to Wasdale, intent upon slaying the Old Stager.' Twas ever thus. This little book charts the history of 'a project' in the words of the participants who produced ten articles between 1907 and Mabel Barker's reversing the climb with Jack Carswell in 1936. That project has come to be known simply by two letters: CB. There is a rich heritage of writing here that, when brought together, reveals a community sharing the gradual solving of entertaining problems in all its competitive detail. Graham Wilson adds provocative speculation in his linking commentary and concludes with a 2004 account by a young woman of the easiest ascent now possible (E1 5b) up the wall of the flake since the chockstone took a life in its flight from the crack in 1994.

In this small format, fine press, inspired book Abraham, Botterill, Herford, Sansom, Holland, Frankland, Beetham and Barker demonstrate what ought also to be true today: how questions of style, imagination and personality are resolved into the changing meaning of a climb and its reputation. Such historically appreciative initiatives as this little book deserve our support, which will be repaid by the entertaining interplay of writers teasing their peers in the manner of Ashley Abraham.

Terry Gifford

Millican Dalton: A Search for Romance and Freedom

Matthew Entwistle
Mountainmere Research,
69 Harwood Road, Rishton, Blackburn, Lancashire BB1 4DH

Millican Dalton, the self-styled Professor of Adventure, ranked as an extraordinary and eccentric character in a sport that produces its fair share of likely candidates. This biography by Matthew Entwistle is an affectionate tribute to the Borrowdale caveman and climbing guru who rejected convention and a stifling career as a fire insurance clerk and chose instead an al fresco life 'in search of romance and freedom'. Perhaps in an era of commercialised adventure, when 'opting out' for a year is a normal part of student progress, Millican Dalton was ahead of his time. His cave 'hotel' near the summit of Castle Crag in the Jaws of Borrowdale, where he spent many summer months, remains to this day a place of quiet interest for anyone intrigued by the Millican Dalton story.

Born in Nenthead in 1867 and brought up and educated in the Quaker tradition, Dalton was an able pupil with a strong streak of adventurous spirit and willingness to challenge convention, treating his life as 'a chemical experiment'. At the age of 35 the experiment became critical. His philosophy was so determinedly set along lines of pacifism and left wing socialism and his love of the outdoors was so great that he gave up an easy life in the City to become a true professor of adventure, 'free as the buzzard mewing by day or the owl hooting by night'.

He was among the early enthusiasts for rock climbing in the Lake District and a commercial guide long before there was any formal organisation. Although he showed little interest in being listed among the first to climb new routes in Borrowdale, it seems probable that a number of the more obvious lines were quietly pioneered by Dalton. He was regarded as a steady and safe pair of hands – even though publicity photographs of him peering unbelayed over the edge of a cliff, a loose coil of rope in one hand, might suggest otherwise.

A tall, goatee-bearded figure, Dalton moved with long strides among the hills and lived a Spartan existence. His appearance became his trade mark: rough, home-made clothes, clinker soled leather boots worn without socks

and a Tyrolean hat sporting a feather held in place by what looked like a large ruby but which on close inspection proved to be no more than a red reflector from his bicycle. He, rather than Baden-Powell, is credited with introducing short trousers as a functional article of clothing and he was an ingenious designer of equipment useful for camping and the general outdoors. He would improvise, using anything he could find on the basis that one man's rubbish was another man's treasure.

Dalton never drank alcohol having signed the Band of Hope pledge at an early age, although he did smoke Woodbine cigarettes incessantly. His diet was simple, oats roasted in a pan and made with syrup into porridge. Wholemeal bread, which he baked himself, was washed down with strong coffee. Fruit and herbs that grew naturally in Borrowdale rounded off an austere but healthy diet prepared over an open fire, a Woodbine clasped between his toes to prevent ash falling into his food.

Dalton divided his time between Borrowdale and Epping Forest where he had a similarly outdoors lifestyle but closer to his family, whose address he used for his 'business'. He climbed with clients in the Lake District, Scotland and the Alps and was generally regarded as a man of very firm opinions, who could be argumentative though delightful, unselfish and intelligent company. He disliked crowds but there was nothing of the reclusive hermit in his nature. He mixed as easily with gypsies and vagabonds as with the well-educated fringes of intellectual society.

Although this account offers little evidence that Dalton had much interest in romance he was no misogynist and was at ease in female company. He dismissed Victorian protocol by organising mixed-sex expeditions and though occasionally pursued he remained a bachelor. Dalton introduced the redoubtable Mabel Barker to mountaineering. She was university educated, unconventional, one of 25 spirited young women from Essex known as the Walden Gypsies. She became the most accomplished rock climber of her generation and regarded Dalton as something of a Robinson Crusoe rather than a romantic hero, greatly impressed that the seat of his shorts had sewn into them a large patch of Willesden canvas to keep his rear end dry whilst seated. According to this account, there was about him a whiff of wood smoke and tobacco mingled with body odours that made standing up-wind a more congenial position.

Dalton's friendship with Mabel Barker lasted many years as he introduced probably thousands of newcomers to the notion of real adventure; rock climbing, rapid shooting and raft sailing – 'nature first hand and not merely in books' under the safe leadership of Millican Dalton otherwise known as Robinson Crusoe, Buffalo Bill, Peter Pan, Sinbad the Sailor, and the Wizard of the North.

Dalton retired as a mountain guide at the age of 75 and moved to High Heavens Camp in the Chiltern Hills as his winter quarters. His home was a wooden shed, which in 1947 burned down. Undaunted, Dalton moved

into a tent that was poor protection for a 79-year-old against the historically severe weather that winter. He fell ill and died in hospital at Marlow after a life that well deserves this excellent tribute.

Ronnie Faux

With Friends in High Places
An anatomy of those who take to the hills
Malcolm Slesser
Mainstream, 2004, pp256, £15.99

I spotted the evocatively titled *With Friends in High Places* on the shelves of a local shop. Malcolm Slesser and I had both been members of the British North Greenland Expedition 1952-54. Near enough the same age as him, I guessed, not wholly correctly, that his book would recount the highlights of 60 years of mountain activity. I could hardly wait to read it and was about to buy a copy and share it with Mike Banks, another Greenland 'old hand', when the invitation came to review it.

After I had rushed through the first few chapters my first reaction was disappointment – over the inadequacy of the maps! I was aware that Slesser had done a lot in the Staunings Alps in East Greenland and, like him, I had seen this magnificent area from the air. I was keen to know more about his travels there, but the map was useless and without a magnifying glass it was impossible to decipher a single name. It was not until I had found, in *AJ* 1961-62, the map accompanying the account of John Hunt's expedition that I was able to appreciate the significant part that Slesser played in early explorations, namely: the exploration and ascent of some of the peaks surrounding the Bersaerker Braie, the first crossing of the southern Staunings from Alpefjord to the Schuichert valley and southward to Sud Kap on the shore of Scoresby Sound, the first crossing of Col Major from Gully Gletscher to the Bersaerker Brae and, as a member of John Hunt's expedition, the traverse of the Hjornespids from Col Major with Ian McNaught-Davis.

Reverting to an earlier chapter on the British North Greenland Expedition, the map to illustrate Slesser's arduous journey, from Queen Louise Land to Kap Rink and back in the dark after the sun had set for the winter, is inadequate. Also, there are a number of factual errors relating to this expedition. For instance, on page 43, it was in 1950, not 1949, that Jim Simpson first saw Queen Louise Land; on page 44, Sunderland flying boats did not land on Britannia Lake until the main expedition in 1952; on page 151, Buck Taylor was not an Army telegraphist but a naval Petty Officer. Also on page 62, James Wordie was not a member of Bruce's expedition but of Shackleton's *Endurance* expedition of 1914-1916. On page 157, a southerly blizzard becomes, four lines later, a northerly gale. These errors

do not really affect the enjoyment of the reader and I mention them simply to make the point that the book is not history. Indeed, in his Introduction Slesser writes, 'It [the book] is not the story of my life as a mountain explorer, but of discovery with friends in high places.' And, I suspect, this discovery was not just of glaciers, peaks and passes but, amongst other things, of the truth that 'safety is awareness', a theme which runs through the book.

Slesser comes nearest to overstepping his own safety limits in a boat journey down the Greenland coast to reach a mountain described in a chapter with the apt title 'Pushing the Boat Out'. I imagine that most climbers would agree that, regardless of technical difficulty, they always want to be in control. Danger sets in when control is lost and they rely solely on good fortune. Taking a small boat down an inhospitable coast at the mercy of drifting pack ice seems to me to be perilously close to relying on good fortune – but oh for a map so that the reader can gain a better appreciation of the journey!

Despite these criticisms, the book is a good read. It reminded me of people and events now half-forgotten. Slesser expresses frank views about his companions, which may not be to everyone's taste though I have to admit I found the chapter 'The Tigers of Yesterday' most interesting. He also gives further accounts of high action, particularly in the ascent of the Peak of Communism, 24,584ft. I marvel at the perseverance and will-power that enabled his party, weak through insufficient food and upset stomachs, to carry their own loads and eventually to reach the top, especially when any pleasure must have been left behind at one of the lower camps.

The final chapters on skiing rough, expedition food, green issues and Crowberry Gully years later, are gentler, but no less enjoyable for that, as Slesser recounts and discusses some of the knowledge and wisdom accumulated from the mountain exeriences of a lifetime.

Richard Brooke

Oil, Sand and Politics.
Memoirs of a Middle East Doctor Mercenary and Mountaineer

Philip Horniblow
Hayloft Publishing Ltd, 2004, pp302, £25.00

The author is a regular attender of the Himalayan Club's annual dinner in London and a friend from several Himalayan expeditions but his book also reveals a completely different life of Buchanesque adventures from his days as a doctor in the Middle East. He alternates tales of intrigue in the Gulf States with periods of leave on expeditions to the mountains which will be of particular interest to readers of the *Alpine Journal.*

In 1959 Horniblow was recruited as expedition doctor on an army expedition to the Karakoram led by Tony Streather, near Haramosh, the

site of the Oxford University tragedy two years before. He gives a frank account of personal relationships between the team members, which complements the *AJ* account rather well. Several 20,000ft peaks were climbed and it was a rather good show. Three years later he was back with another service team, this time going for Khinyang Chish with Jimmy Mills in charge. He was to witness the avalanche that took Mills and Dick Jones off the long ridge to their deaths. It is a poignant tale told plainly; the Army Mountaineering Association did not mount another Himalayan expedition until Tirich Mir in 1969. On that climb we used some of the equipment that came back from Khinyang Chish.

A few years later he went to the Simien mountains of Ethiopia for a month with the John Hunt Exploration Group. In the company of Tony Streather he went on to discover some ancient Christian churches hewed in the rock; and supervised the casualty evacuation of Joe Brown who had put his back out teaching some youngsters rock climbing.

The final expeditions he writes about, I was on too. He has some hilarious tales of life on the Army Everest Expedition 1976 that were not in the official report. He and Ronnie Faux from *The Times* were a breath of fresh air and gave us all a lift – not least by carrying loads through the icefall day after day. The contribution every member made comes through, which is not always the case in more heroic accounts. Brummie Stokes and Bronco Lane, who reached the top but suffered from snow blindness and frostbite leading to amputations, have Philip to thank for their treatment.

The final expedition he joined as Medical Officer was in 1978 with a team of Sappers to Trisul II in Garhwal. He writes that this expedition was a happy one. At the close Philip and three of the team took a diversion over the Ronti Saddle in the footsteps of Eric Shipton into the Rishi Ganga with the special aim of viewing Nanda Devi. They were delighted when they were successful; the photos were shown at the AC later in the year when the author lectured there.

There are 13 maps hand drawn by the author and 33 photos printed amongst the text. On several pages some lines of text have disappeared off the bottom of a page, sometimes popping up later in some other place which spoils an otherwise well turned out book.

Henry Day

The Alps of Tibet
Tamotsu Nakamura
Yamakei Publishers Co. Tokyo, 2005, 384pp

The many admirers of Tamotsu Nakamura's photographs from the borderlands of eastern Tibet and China are advised to take a look at this beautifully produced book – which I hope is in the AC library. I say 'take a look' because reading will be more difficult, except for members familiar

with Japanese. Thankfully the all-important photo captions are in English as well as Japanese, and hopefully one day there will be a text in English too. Tamotsu's photographs of mountains, monasteries and people are superb and an inspiration to explore, particularly those peaks which he usefully marks as 'unclimbed'.

Stephen Goodwin

The Silent Traveller in Lakeland
Chiang Lee
With forward by Da Zhang
Mercat Press, 2004, pp82, £9.99
(first published in 1937 as *The Silent Traveller*)

As Herbert Read says in his preface, it is disconcerting when a Chinese artist turns his attention to a subject we know as ours, rather than a Chinese subject. It brings home that it is the vision and sensibility that counts, rather than the landscape; the ostensible subject. In this book we see that Chiang Lee's repertoire of marks is ready to deal with any subject including our beloved Lake District, and in this welcome re-publication of the original 1937 edition the illustrations are all there, but not quite as well reproduced, and not dispersed throughout the text as in the original.

On the plus side, however, there is a new and informative foreword by Da Zheng which is a useful addition, explaining just who Chiang was. Born in 1903 in Jiangxi Province at the foot of Mt. Lu, he trained as a chemist, served as a soldier as part of the Chinese Northern Expedition to fight the warlords, and following that was a magistrate, before leaving for England to study politics at the University of London in 1933.

After three years, weary of London, he went on a trip to North Wales, but he travelled as part of a group, thus being forced into conversation, which he did not like. The next year he decided to try the Lakes. It was not a warm welcome; he alighted from the train at Seascale at 8pm on a rainy August evening and had to somehow hire a car to drive to Wasdale Head where he was to lodge at Bowderdale Farm. His 'landlady' there, who was not expecting him that day, was the formidable Mrs Naylor, the mother of Joss the fell-runner.

Chiang spends the next few days wandering around Wasdale, where he paints the Screes, and the rain and mist, and he meets a keen fell-walker whom he asks permission to accompany up Scafell. Still in ordinary town clothes, Chiang gets a third of the way up and is content. He has a near-visionary experience on the way down, looking over the lake at the clearing mist. This prompts him to talk about the Chinese phrase *ling lueh*, which he says is a good one for expressing one's reaction if one is trying to analyse one's enjoyment of nature. *Ling* means to perceive or to receive an impression, and *Lueh* means a sketch. These two words together have the

arbitrary meaning 'to accept into the understanding'.

The last time I was at Wasdale I tried to imagine how it all looked to Chiang. In the paintings he seems to use generic mountains and lakes from his stock of stereotypes, and it is only when reading the caption that one knows the topography. The small green fields with high walls did begin to look like paddy fields, from some angles.

After three days he decides to go to Keswick. He walks over Sty Head Pass to Borrowdale, aware of the surprised looks of walkers he encounters, admires Taylor Ghyll Force on the other side and catches the bus to Keswick, where, following some people, he comes across Friar's Crag. He returns there several times, making a painting of the whole panorama which has some sharply observed and recognisable mountain profiles.

All the time he thinks about the news of the Spanish Civil War which has just started, and of the Sino-Japanese War, because his homeland has been invaded and his family have had to flee from the Japanese. He says that he tries to paint the nature in his mind, not the nature in nature, not an exact resemblance.

In Keswick he meets another Chinaman in the street and has the first real conversation of his trip. They wander around together, causing a stir at the boat-landing by rowing out into the lake the 'wrong' way round, but Chiang prefers it that way as he can see where he is going. They are shocked at the profusion of 'private' signs on pieces of land. In China he says everyone has free access to scenery. He is very impressed with Lodore Falls and goes there twice, doing a painting of it which, disappointingly, is not reproduced.

After a coach trip (in the rain) to Bowness, he stays a night in Ambleside and walks to Grasmere, where he visits Dove Cottage and is deeply sceptical of the tourist's impression of Wordsworth, though an admirer himself. He quotes De Quincey's words that: 'Wordsworth came to his love of nature through physical activity in the fells, angling, snaring, swimming, hunting, so the growth of his thoughts combined with his eye and ear.' Chiang himself prefers to read the writings and look at the surroundings, which he constantly compares to commonplace scenes in the Yangtze Valley, though he misses China's dykes, bridges, and ornamental pavilions.

The original book had Chiang's poems in Chinese script on the same page as the pictures; this points up how closely related script and image are compared to the Western equivalent. A traditional painter in China is trained to use and memorize hundreds of slightly different inflexions of the brush which give subtly variant takes on whatever is being depicted. It is like learning an alphabet and then the words of a language. They pre-exist to a certain extent in a unitary form and it is a matter of selecting the right stroke at the appropriate time for whatever is being dealt with. There is an attitude that expects maximum integrity and visibility to the constitutive strokes of the brush, being the work of the brush in 'real time' and an extension of the painter's own body.

Chinese painting's value is in its 'facture', and touch, the marks of the brush-in-hand. The aim is not to do something particularly original or new but to follow the appropriate path that brings out the subjective mood of the painter towards the scene itself, not imposing a stringent law on representation. As Chinese painting became more sophisticated the view of it changed from a picture of something else to being an object for aesthetic contemplation in itself.

This attitude is now familiar to us in the West but like a lot of things it happened earlier in China. Rocks, mountain-peaks, streams, and waterfalls everywhere have a common character, a melancholy strangeness, and this is brought to a supreme level in Fan K'uan's painting *Travellers among Streams and Mountains* painted around 1000 AD. I think there is something evocative and rather timely about the centuries-old Chinese concern with depicting 'mountains and rivers without end'.

This is a delightfully written book, in which I rate the writing higher than the paintings. But the paintings do show what could be done with the familiar Lake District landscape by means of a certain shift of perception and way of working; a lesson that I am learning from Chinese painting myself.

Julian Cooper

Taking Leave
Roger Hubank
The Ernest Press, 2004, pp269, £10

The prescience of the Larkin lines which preface the first chapter of *Taking Leave* will be wryly acknowledged by all those in the autumn of their lives:

> It is too late to start
> For destinations not of the heart.

Anthony Hardwick, eminent university lecturer in English literature, is weary of the 'cleverness' which has built him his reputation and imprisoned him in his unfulfilling job. He flees to the open skies of a Derbyshire moor, deserting his job and his stricken marriage to starve the sour cynicism which has so firmly and finally closed the door to self-realisation.

The lyrical evocations of place urge on the reader a sense of a living presence, akin to the omnipresent landscape in the work of Thomas Hardy and, by turn, crushing and reviving those who live in its environs:

> Under that sloping light the dark moor resembled a hazy upland desert: a baked,brown waste of shadowy folds and glowing copper hollows.

This entity then, is both benign and malevolent: just as it begins to heal Hardwick's wounds it annihilates those who wander in it unprepared or

unaware, whether friend or foe, native or stranger.

The Ashe family, local farmers with whom Hardwick strikes up a shy aquaintance, are victims of this sometimes brutal duality. They have farmed for generations, developing an intimacy with the land which Hardwick envies but are also at its mercy, unprotected despite their arcane knowledge. Sheep are lost in huge and crippling numbers in severe winters and the modern plague of foot and mouth disease trails financial ruin and incarceration in the sterility of town life in its vicious wake. The family's feral child, Tommy, inheritor of his grandfather's primal and instinctive empathy with the land, is claimed by a brutal storm as he runs desperately from the trials of his new existence: a telling dichotomy.

All is not entirely lost – the Ashe family may have taken enforced leave but Hubank, winner of the Boardman Tasker Award with *Hazard's Way* (2001), allows a continuity built on necessity and respect for the land. The farm survives under a new stewardship – altered, but with the capacity to renew the acquaintance with the natural energies which sustain the rural community.

And so Hardwick is not alone in taking leave, though his flight is chosen, not forced – as it is for the Ashe family. His wife Elizabeth has also slipped from the maelstrom of suffering inflicted by the hammer-blows of her repeated miscarriages and the couple's eventual childlessness. She envelops herself in her work – ironically in the field of psychotherapy – freezing the memories of the foetal deaths until they have iced over her ability to resume the perilous task of living again with her estranged husband.

Hubank gives us hope: the Hardwicks' marriage takes its first tentative steps towards revival; the past provides illumination as well as despair and the human spirit survives despite the griefs and bereavements: in the words of St. Augustine: 'a dim glimmering of light yet un-put-out in men.'

Val Randall

Prealpi Bresciane
Fausto Camerini
CAI-TCI 2004 463pp 36.50 Euros

The last in the CAI guides co-ordinated by our late member Gino Buscaini, the Bresciane is the area west of Lake Garda, between Brescia and Trento. Here the mountains are more for the summer and winter walker, and never too far from a road. They will also be unknown to the huge number of climbers who annually flock to the World famous crags of Arco in the valley below. However, hidden up in the hills are some impressive limestone faces such as the Cima Capi, where there are routes up to 750m in height, giving nearly 1000m of climbing up to UIAA VIII–. Under winter conditions the 2064m Dosso Alto has couloirs up to TD– in standard.

Lindsay Griffin

Life and Limb
Jamie Andrew
Portrait, 2003, 306pp, £17.99

A Test of Will
Warren Macdonald
Greystone Books, 2004, 198pp, $14.95 US

Climbing for Seasoned Gentlefolk
Norman Croucher
St Ives Painting and Publishing Co, 2004, 84pp £9

You can't keep good men down; like the Black Knight in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, loss of limbs is no deterrent. Reading these books – three further examples of the triumph of the human spirit – inspires us all to get up and do what we all know our bodies can still do if the effort is made. These stories are especially instructive for those of us who, like me, have worn out our knees and had them replaced with steel and plastic. There's no excuse for getting maudlin. Check out *Life and Limb* and the photo of author Jamie Andrew on page 210 climbing *Christmas Curry* without hands or feet. However does he do it?

Jamie is very much the regular, committed mountaineer in the early part of this book, conveying with conviction all the ups and downs, fear and excitement of alpine climbing. All committed alpinists will readily identify with the preparations for his climb on Les Droites north face with Jamie Fisher: the 'electric charge of apprehension was building inside me...I suffered it before every major route...until the moment I first swung my ice axe...then the electricity would discharge and all that nervous energy would flow out and drive me up the mountain.'

The pair achieve their climb, finishing in bad weather that only gets worse, turning into a major, prolonged and fearfully cold storm. The book grips your emotions as Jamie tells of their remorseless deterioration and the eventual death of his companion. It is told with a powerful honesty, the slow awakening in hospital to the awful nature of his injuries and an agonised self-questioning – did they make basic mistakes, why did he survive and not the other Jamie? I recognised this; it was just how I felt when Nick Estcourt was avalanched on K2. Why the hell hadn't I gone down with him? It was the only time I have ever had a rope break.

There is a parallel here with Warren Macdonald's story – Warren had both legs amputated after having them trapped beneath a giant boulder – in that both men come to accept that what happened to them was, in effect, an act of nature. As Warren says: 'I was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time.' I don't know why it is important, but it is interesting that both needed to feel that for their own peace of mind.

Warren, an activist in the environmental movement in Australia, was out scrambling on Mount Bowen on Hinchinbrook Island off the North Queensland coast. He and his friend were exploring a streambed, Warren wanted a pee, and, being an environmentalist, starting scrambling away from the watercourse. That's when the boulder slipped, trapping him across the thighs.

Another parallel in Jamie and Warren's stories is the emotional first meetings with friends and family and the support and love as they rebuild their lives – Jamie with Anna, his girlfriend at the time of the accident, and Warren with Margot, whom he meets at a party in Banff. Jamie's first visits in the Chamonix hospital from Stu' Fisher (Jamie Fisher's father) and Anna are perhaps the most moving episodes in *Life and Limb*. The equivalent in *A Test of Will* is the concern and care of Warren's father, wheeling his son out of the ward. 'It must be 30 years since he pushed me like this in a stroller,' says Warren.

Like Jamie, Warren continued his life in the outdoors and in 2003 reached the summit of Kilimanjaro. Both men are an inspiration, and there are others of course; I think of Norman Croucher, David Lim, John Hawkridge and Paul Pritchard. Our hearts go out to them. And you know you just don't want to go through what they've gone through. Whilst they are not pushing at the frontiers of mountaineering, Jamie, Warren and Norman (who climbed Cho Oyu on his tin legs) are our equivalent of para-Olympians, pushing at mental barriers, their courage revealing the extraordinary capacity of the human spirit. *Climbing for Seasoned Gentlefolk* is a kind of 'how to do it' book for the elderly, halt and lame. In all Norman's writing his impish sense of humour shines through, such as his observation that there are now 475 climbing walls in Britain, then adding: 'As I said in 1973, "They won't catch on".'

These three books deserve to be read widely, inspire us all and earn their authors a lot of money. However, I have in mind a comment by Arthur Lees from Bristol who, though severely handicapped by cerebral palsy, walked all the way to Makalu base camp. Paralysed down one side, he arrived late every night. We were sitting round the fire discussing other disabled climbers when I mention how well Norman Croucher had done, achieving many good routes on his tin legs. Arthur agreed, then added: 'Aye, but he's gone commercial, writing and lecturing about it.' Whatever our infirmities, we're all the same with our prejudices and ethical dichotomies.

Doug Scott

Emilius - Rosa dei Banchi
Giulio Berutto and Lino Forelli
CAI-TCI 2005 415pp 36.50 Euros

The area of wild mountains south-east of Aosta and east of the Gran Paradiso National Park Boundary provide little technical Alpine climbing

but no shortage of interesting walking, scrambling and ski-mountaineering. Most well-known is Mt Emilius, a 3559m magnificent rocky pyramid that dominates the town of Aosta and famous for its truly splendid panorama of the Alps from Mt Blanc to Monte Rosa (and on a clear day the Maritime Alps). The rock is generally poor but there are some big faces that would provide mixed climbing under the right conditions. However, to date there has been little development of winter climbing. Several classic ridge scrambles have recently been equipped and the area is well-served by a series of rifugios and bivouac huts.

Lindsay Griffin

Nanda Devi: A Journey to the Last Sanctuary
Hugh Thomson
Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004, ppxviii+126, £18.99

The story of Shipton's and Tilman's expedition through the Rishi Ganges gorge and their attainment of the Inner Sanctuary of Nanda Devi in 1934 is well known; as is the subsequent first ascent of the mountain two years later by Tilman and Noel Odell, in a team which included Charles Houston and T Graham Brown. A number of successful ascents followed, by the French, Indians, Japanese and Americans, but which also included some shady 'goings-on' in which nuclear-powered spying devices were apparently placed near the top of Nanda Devi and Nanda Kot. It was surely no coincidence that when these were publicised in 1978, the Sanctuary was closed shortly afterwards by the Indian Government, although the reason given was environmental.

The Sanctuary has remained almost inviolate but, in 2000, permission was given for a party led by 'Bull' Kumar and John Shipton to go throught the Gorge and into the Sanctuary with the aim of producing a report on the feasibility of its reopening. This book is a report on the trek through the gorge and back, but it is made very readable by the author's easy style and by the fact that it is also a history of the mountain, together with character studies of many of the members of the party which included Ian McNaught-Davis, George Band and Steve Berry. The photographs, both historical and of the trek itself, are excellent and the author finishes by saying:

> Ian McNaught-Davis produced a report for the International Mountaineering and Climbing Federation, recommending that the Sanctuary be opened under strict controls for a few limited expeditions. A small official Indian team visited it in 2001 on behalf of the Indian Mountaineering Federation, and reported likewise. At the time of writing, the Sanctuary is still closed and the Indian Government shows no desire to open it. Personally I am only too happy if it remains closed. But then I've been there.

Geoffrey Templeman

Casimiro Ferrari
L'ultimo Re della Patagonia
Alberto Benini
Baldini Castoldi Dalai 2004 220pp

This is the long awaited biography of a legendary Italian climber, the most prolific Patagonia activist of all time and perhaps most famous for being the first to stand on the summit of Cerro Torre. Ferrari's determination was renowned, as was his difficult personality and complete inability to get on with most of his climbing partners. He was diagnosed with stomach cancer in 1983 and given between three and six months to live. Instead he went to the Patagonian ice cap, chain-smoked his way through weeks of bad weather while sat in an ice cave below Cerro Murallon, before finally making a very bold first ascent via a technical line. This is a book that surely should be translated to English but in the meantime can be ordered at www.ibs.it

Lindsay Griffin

In the Ghost Country. A Lifetime Spent on the Edge
Peter Hillary and John E Elder
Mainstream, 2004, pp (8)+344, £15.99

This book recounts Peter Hillary's three-month-long expedition skiing across Antarctica to the South Pole with two companions – companions with whom he became increasingly disenchanted, ending in an acrimonious dispute which continued after the expedition had finished. Partly because of this, Hillary found himself alone with his own thoughts for much of the journey, and the book therefore turns into more of an autobiography, as he recalls family life, travels with his father, the death of his mother and sister, two ascents of Everest, K2, the North Pole and other travels. The basic narrative is written by the Australian journalist John Elder, interpersed throughout by the personal thoughts of Peter Hillary.

Federation, Australia's Adventure Peak
Kevin Doran
Desdichado Publishing, 2004, pp128, $15.00

Our member Dr Kevin Doran emigrated with his family to Tasmania over 30 years ago. In his early years he had been introduced to climbing whilst in the Scouts, and then continued in the London Hospital Ski and Mountaineering Club, walking and climbing all over Britain, before spending three years in the Navy. After emigrating, he made six trips to the Himalaya, including being MO to the AC's Annapurna Circuit meet in 1981. (See *AJ* 1982)

Since being in Tasmania, however, the author's love affair has been with Federation Peak. First climbed by John Bechervise and party only in 1949, this 1225m peak lies in the south of the island, due south-west of Hobart, and is the highest point of the Arthur Range, with a very Chamonix Aiguille-like summit. The author has now reached the summit a record 21 times, and describes in detail the many attempts and ascents he has made, together with the bush trekking that is involved. 32 pages of colour plates complete a fascinating description of this little-known area.

The Pyrenees
The High Pyrenees from the Cirque de Lescun to the Carlit Massif
Kev Reynolds
Cicerone, 2004, pp464, £18.00

This is the first in a proposed 'World Mountain Ranges' series by Cicerone Press. The author, Kev Reynolds, is a well-known guidebook writer and an acknowledged expert on the Pyrenees. His *Walks and Climbs in the Pyrenees*, published more than 25 years ago, has been the major source of information in English to the area – until now. This book packs into its 464 pages all you could wish to know for walking and climbing in the High Pyrenees, and it is copiously illustrated throughout. A bit heavy to carry about with you, but a must for anyone with an interest in the area.

Norway: The Northern Playground
W Cecil Slingsby
Ripping Yarns, 2003, pp 234

From the Himalaya to Skye
J Norman Collie
Ripping Yarns, 2003, pp 186

Let's Go Climbing
Colin Kirkus
Ripping Yarns, 2004, pp 164

Ripping Yarns.com was established by Ian Robertson in 2002 to publish out of print adventure books on the internet, with the more popular ones being republished in soft-back book form. These are the first three titles, the Collie being originally published in 1902 as *Climbing in the Himalaya and other Mountain Ranges*. Each volume has brief additional material; Kirkus's book has an introduction by Steve Dean, and the Slingsby has one by Tony Howard and a chapter on mountaineering in Norway today by David Durkan.