Book Reviews

COMPILED BY GEOFFREY TEMPLEMAN

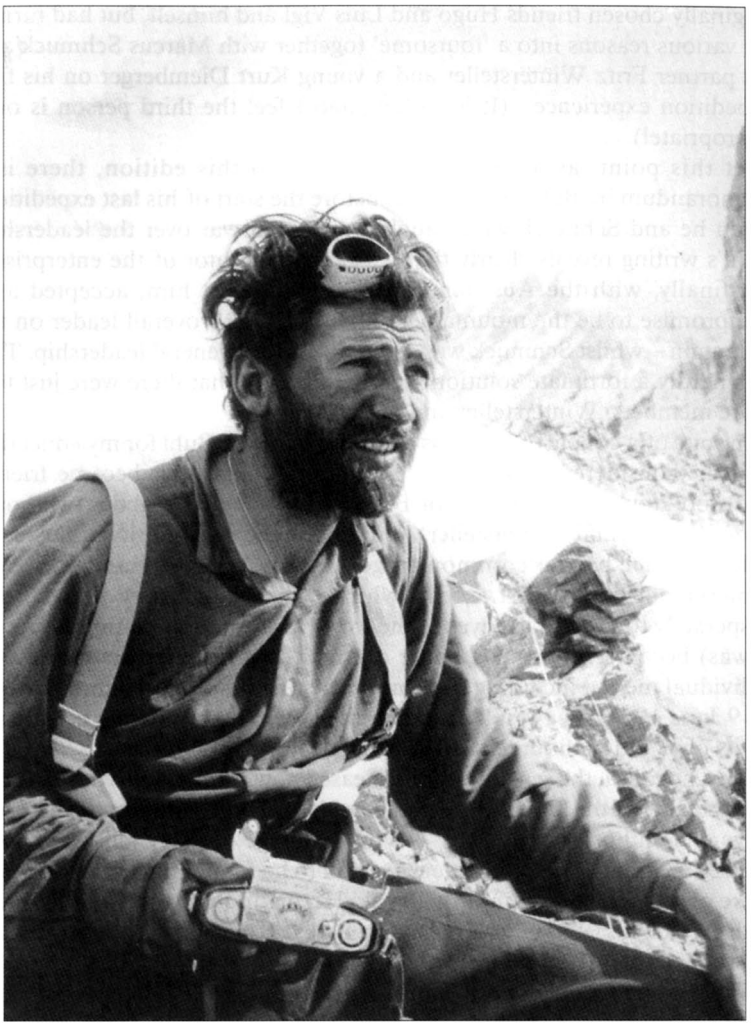
Achttausend drüber und drunter
Hermann Buhl
Piper-Malik, 2005, 360 pp, price Euros 22.90

Why should the *Alpine Journal* carry a review of Hermann Buhl's life-story published in German when English-speaking readers have long been familiar with its classic telling in *Nanga Parbat Pilgrimage*? The answer – for completeness. Readers of *Nanga Parbat Pilgrimage* can only follow Buhl's life up to his legendary solo first ascent of the 'Naked Mountain'. There the book ends and anyone who wants to know more has to grab my own *The Kurt Diemberger Omnibus* (Bâton Wicks 1999) or my old *Summits and Secrets*... unless, that is, the reader is content with a couple of short chapters in Höfler and Messner's *Hermann Buhl – Climbing without Compromise* or can track down a fine piece of psychological research in the first edition of Chris Bonington's *Quest for Adventure*.

Hermann Buhl fell to his death with a collapsing cornice on 27 June 1957 on Chogolisa's summit ridge. In Germany, after the tragedy, I, as his last companion, wrote an epilogue-report for a 1958 memorial edition of Buhl's own book on his life, telling of our common experience and making a couple of subtle corrections to the events as described in the official expedition book by Marcus Schmuck.[1] These pages by myself about the Broad Peak climb and the fatal attempt on Chogolisa have been retained in this latest edition of Buhl's story.

So what is it that has turned this old bestseller into such a 'hit' five decades after its first appearance – for a 'hit' indeed it is in German-speaking Europe. Since *Achttausend drüber und drunter* ('Eight thousand – above and below') appeared 'new born' last September, it has already sold out and has gone into its second print.

The 'cherries on the tart' are Hermann Buhl's complete expedition diaries, published worldwide for the first time in this new-old book – unfortunately so far only in German, but that will change. Now in his diaries, beyond any art of 'shading' by later interpretation,[2] the grand man speaks with his own voice about his impressions at the very moment, day after day, page after page, written on the spot with his own hand! Here he is on Nanga Parbat in 1953 and on Broad Peak and Chogolisa in 1957, till the day before the fatal attempt. One can follow the gruelling climb up the avalanche-prone Rakhiot-face of Nanga Parbat and get an idea of the



Hermann Buhl (*Kurt Diemberger*)

tensions between Herrligkoffer and Buhl's sworn-together crew on the mountain before Hermann's incredible solo ascent. He also deals with the difficulties with the high-altitude porters, a reason for his later adoption of *Westalpenstil* – the first form of Alpine style – for Broad Peak. He wished to dispense with the help of porters and oxygen for the climb and rely just on a small team of friends.

The pages of his diary for Broad Peak reveal a critical Hermann Buhl, aware of the difficulties within his team, which was not composed of his

originally chosen friends Hugo and Luis Vigl and himself, but had turned for various reasons into a 'foursome' together with Marcus Schmuck and his partner Fritz Wintersteller and a young Kurt Diemberger on his first expedition experience. (It is so long ago I feel the third person is only appropriate!)

At this point, as an additional 'cherry' to this edition, there is a memorandum by Buhl about events before the start of his last expedition, when he and Schmuck were caught in a tug-of-war over the leadership. Buhl's writing reveals clearly that he was the initiator of the enterprise – but finally, with the Austrian Alpenverein against him, accepted as a compromise to be the mountaineering leader – and overall leader on the mountain – whilst Schmuck was given the official general leadership. This was hardly a fortunate solution, bearing in mind that there were just two more members, Wintersteller and myself.

In spite of a couple of sermons delivered to me by Buhl for my education – for he considered himself my 'expedition-father' – we became friends and stood together on the top of Broad Peak at sunset – about two hours after Schmuck and Wintersteller. At this point the fragile unity of the team, held together by the common target, finally crumbled and the great achievement of this first ascent (which Buhl, as his diary shows, tried desperately to save for the eyes of the world as the unique common success it was) became split into a battle of small-minded considerations over individual merit – including the time of the first steps in the summit snows on 9 June 1957. As a result each pair then went for a separate peak, each on its own and without telling the others.

On Chogolisa, the sensitive Buhl, released now from the nervous tensions and pressure of the 'double leadership' with Schmuck, found again his great drive and enthusiasm. He was – as his last page of diary tells – 'in good shape', breaking trail in an enterprise where he found himself to be much more of a pioneer than on Broad Peak. Hermann Buhl enjoyed a spiritual high even on his last day, as if on Nanga Parbat. Then, in the fateful blizzard, he walked out of his life...

The first half of the 'new' book leads up to Nanga Parbat – telling of Buhl's multi-faceted experiences in the Alps; his youth in Tyrol, climbing the Dolomites and the western Alps, the Eiger, Walker Spur, his Badile solo and an involuntary bath in the Inn river when he fell asleep on his bicycle. And all written in great style, never boring. This is just as it was in the English language version, in a masterly translation by Hugh Merrick.

When Ken Wilson republished *Nanga Parbat Pilgrimage* in 1998 he looked back to its first appearance in English in 1956 when, as he said, the book 'struck an immediate chord with the ambitious young climbers of the day...Perhaps they were subconsciously preparing themselves for the obvious challenges of the Greater Ranges that were already beckoning as the first ascent phase drew to an end.' The book's present success confirms that for another generation nothing has changed.

And of Nanga Parbat, at the climax of Hermann Buhl's lonely pilgrimage? 'Buhl's solo... is now confirmed as one of the greatest mountaineering feats of all time,' says Wilson. But why does he wait to publish the second part of the book in English? At least the Buhl-diaries! Here, after Nanga Parbat, is the second high point of Buhl's life... one that even today is still exerting its influence on mountaineering in the Himalaya. 'Hermann Buhl has transferred the *Westalpenstil* into the Himalayas,' said Messner in his book *Die Herausforderung* (The Challenge), 1975, in a caption of a portrait of the great climber. In something of a contradiction, Messner, in another caption 25 years later, suggests that Buhl's 'rise to fame' ended with Nanga Parbat: 'His fall began, when he returned to Base Camp,' says Messner in *Climbing without Compromise*. Also in the German edition, below a picture of Buhl looking towards Chogolisa in the Höfler/Messner-book there is a comment, ascribed by Höfler to Messner, that 'Buhl's will of life was finished/emptied'. If that was so, how for Heaven's sake, could he have reached the summit of Broad Peak in spite of his frostbite?

Such contradictions, with Buhl's death on Chogolisa seeming to confirm the pessimists' view of Buhl's failing will, caused me to mount the barricades of the mind in a defence of my friend's memory. My case is set out in a six-page note or *Schlußbemerkungen* at the end of this book. Unfortunately my old Broad Peak companions, Schmuck and Wintersteller, felt cheated of their glory as first ascensionists – being a couple of hours ahead of Buhl and myself. Yet I, whom they branded a 'street urchin' and 'egomaniac', had reached the pair on the snow slope of the summit even before they left it. Handing their diaries to the writer Richard Sale[3] and his interpretation skills, they helped spin an account that is barely penetrable for anyone who wants to find out the historical truth about this expedition.[4]

Samantha Sacks from Toronto in an essay 'The Revision of History' published in *Alpinist* magazine (14) in 2005, after phone calls, interviews and having read *Summits and Secrets* as well as the 'treated' version of our companions, concluded: 'When I compare the two stories, it's hard to know whether the truth lies in one or in the other – or somewhere between them.' Greg Child, in the same article, points out that climbing histories are by their very nature personal accounts and therefore intrinsically subjective. This certainly is true – and gives the reader the possibility to live the climbers' experience, fears, happiness and fulfilment. It is that which counts in a book, not painstaking details like who was it that packed how many sandwiches in whose rucksack! It must be a certain type of writer, who loves to dig out the number of footsteps and weight of rucksacks of each climber as well as each word that was (perhaps) said, five decades earlier.

Far better then, to read a book like Hermann Buhl's *Nanga Parbat Pilgrimage*, whether the old or new version, that truly comes from the heart and the spirit of a climber. And let us hope that Buhl's diaries – his *Tagebücher* – are published in English soon.

Kurt Diemberger

NOTES

1 Marcus Schmuck died in August 2005, aged 80.

2 'Shading' is a reference to the 2005 International Festival of Mountaineering Literature (*AJ* 110, 414, 2005) when the theme was biographies and differing versions of climbing history. Jim Perrin remarked that the matter of shading had been crucial in his biography of Don Whillans. 'And the shading is as I wanted it to be,' said Perrin.

3 Also at the festival was Richard Sale whose *Broad Peak* (Carreg 2004) highlights Marcus Schmuck and Fritz Wintersteller as the driving force of the Austrian 1957 first ascent and casts Diemberger in a distinctly unflattering light. Diemberger, of course, has a strong personal interest in this latest version of Buhl's autobiography (as well as having written an accompanying commentary and provided many of the fine photographs) which makes him a slightly unusual choice as a reviewer. However, who better to comment on Buhl's Broad Peak and Chogolisa diaries than his rope mate on those climbs? The review also provides him an opportunity to respond to Sale's account.

4 Richard Sale's *Broad Peak* was reviewed in *AJ* 110, 369-371, 2005.

The Longest Climb - Back from the Abyss
Paul Pritchard
Robinson, 2005, £7.99

Paul Pritchard shot to climbing literary fame when his book *Deep Play*, published in 1977 by Ken Wilson's Bâton Wicks press, won the Boardman Tasker Award. In it he related a classic rags to riches story (I'm speaking metaphorically here – no one ever gets rich simply by climbing hard) of a talented British climbing bum, from humble beginnings in his local Lancashire quarry to mind-numbingly scary deeds on the likes of Gogarth and Sron Ulladale, then on to even more desperate adventures in Patagonia and the Himalaya. He excelled at every aspect of climbing and with the publication of his first book was hailed as the Joe Brown for our times. He famously blew the prize money on a round the world climbing trip and on the tick list was that fantastically improbable-looking Tasmanian sea stack – the Totem Pole. Here, his life was altered forever when his abseil rope dislodged a block that stove in his skull and left him paralysed down the right side. His second book *The Totem Pole* (Constable 1999) graphically related the horrendous story of the accident, heroic rescue by Celia Bull, and slow rehabilitation. It won him a second Boardman Tasker.

The Longest Climb takes up the story where *The Totem Pole* left off. Now married to his Australian nurse Jane, Pritchard has moved back to North Wales. A life that has been so besotted by climbing must be hard enough to

lead when for whatever reason one suddenly finds one can no longer climb, but couple this with an inability to control your erratic right leg or use your right arm, not to mention a myriad of other difficulties, and it is hard to understand why Pritchard does not come over as bitter and twisted. To be sure there is the occasional lapse into expecting special treatment because of his disabilities and then damning those who treat him differently, but such occurrences are rare and are totally overshadowed by his determination as he gathers 'together some semblance of a life again... It was never going to be my previous life, full of mountains and cliffs and high living, but a life nevertheless'.

Things had to change; as Pritchard says, 'Before my accident I was never much of anything except a climber.' Now the climbing gear is sold off and the Climbers' Club guidebook project for Gogarth – a crag he 'loved more than girlfriends' – abandoned. In place of climbing, Pritchard sets about a gruelling regime of pushing himself through what would have been, in his previous life, absurdly simple tasks. Walking up a local hill is transformed from a pleasant easy hour or two in the fresh air into a nightmare struggle of logistics and grim determination that (only just) succeeds in overcoming despair. The same dogged characteristics that once got him to the top of *The Super Calabrese*, a new E8 on Gogarth's suicidally loose Red Wall, see him to the summit of Moel Elio (all of 726m).

No longer able to get an adrenalin rush from climbing 15 metres of unprotected 6a from a single RP belay, he resorts to racing a recumbent tricycle down Llanberis Pass. It wasn't really a race, it was a charity ride, but such is his competitive nature that to Paul it was still a race, and a 45km one at that. More such milestones are passed, from walking up Snowdon to moving the little finger of his right hand, and gradually Pritchard ups the ante, pushing himself into everything going, cycling, hiking, swimming, bowling, photography, even golf. Attempting to climb a 4000m-plus peak, he finally succeeds on Mount Kenya (5199m) in the company of professional mountaineering minders and a film crew. The culmination of these ever increasing efforts (for now at least) is his ascent of Kilimanjaro, at 5895m the highest peak in Africa, and anything but a picnic. The climb was achieved in the company of fellow disabled mountaineers, Jamie Andrew, Pete Steane and David Lim, respectively a quadruple amputee, a partial paraplegic, and the victim of a paralysing nerve disorder respectively. Add in too a fair dose of bad weather. Paul has to battle with his own self-doubt that at one point sees him turning back only to change his mind and make the summit.

Comparisons with all-round nice guy Jamie Andrew are inevitable, but in his stubborn, bulldog-like personality Pritchard comes across as closer in attitude to Norman Croucher or even more, that legless hero of a previous generation, Douglas Bader. It seems a very tough way to learn to temper your arrogance with humility but Pritchard is facing this too: 'I cringed. It was painful to see how others must have seen me once. OK, so I was never

so rude but I still thought I was more important than many other people just because I could climb better than they could.'

Paul Pritchard has turned a personal tragedy into a personal triumph. He writes well and has produced a very readable story, full of odd twists of humour that lift up what could otherwise be a very dark tale indeed. A few silly proof-reading errors are irritating, and it seems odd to publish it in paperback without an initial hardback run, but this is a good book and is thoroughly recommended, as indeed are all his books.

Stephen Reid

Learning to Breathe
Andy Cave
Hutchinson, 2005, pp 276, £18.99

On Thin Ice
Alpine climbs in the Americas, Asia and the Himalaya
Mick Fowler
Bâton Wicks, 2005, pp 224, £18.99

I have known both Andy Cave and Mick Fowler for many years now and been fortunate enough to spend time with them both socially and in the mountains. For these reasons and out of respect for their climbing achievements, I eagerly awaited the publication of these two books. I am pleased to report that I have not been disappointed.

These are important works written by two of Britain's finest climbers. Coming as they do on the heels of titles by respected commentators who have chosen to focus on the more negative and dark sides of the sport, their appearance is doubly welcome. Here to restore the balance are books written by dedicated protagonists, who have managed to convey the challenge, adventure and sheer joy of our sport (admittedly, tinged with sadness at times) with few axes to grind. I for one would like to raise a glass to that.

It is a tough job to review these two books alongside each other, as, like their respective authors, they are markedly different in character. Each of the writers has set out with a different agenda, and while one is a first book, the other is a second. To the armchair reader, *On Thin Ice* will probably come across as the memoirs of an amateur enthusiast, and *Learning to Breathe* as a pit to the pinnacle tale of professional climbing self-development. However, the reality is somewhat more complex, as Mick does derive some income from climbing and Andy complements his professional climbing with academic work.

In *On Thin Ice* a more measured, mature and thoughtful Mick Fowler emerges than from his first book *Vertical Pleasure*. The format is essentially the same – a collection of climbing adventures snatched over weekends, short breaks and annual leave from his nine-to-five job with the Inland

Revenue. What has changed, however, are Mick's circumstances – he is now married with two children – forcing a reassessment of risks and absences.

For those readers who missed the first helping, Mick provides an introductory chapter, summarising earlier climbs, before going on to chronicle his climbing from 1988 to 2002. Visits to Wadi Rum in Jordan, the Lofoten Islands in Norway, Etratat in Normandy and Scotland in winter provide light entertaining interludes between expeditions. However, it is the series of trips to the greater ranges that are the historically most important and powerful passages. It is quite a list: Ak-su traverse, Taweche north-east buttress, north face of Changabang, Arwa Tower, north buttress of Mount Kennedy and Siguniang's north face). Most professional mountaineers would be happy to amass a series of such significant first ascents over an entire lifetime. The fact that they are the output of a little over 10 years and done while holding down a conventional job and tending the needs of a young family makes them incredible. Mick's enthusiasm, humour and understatement shine through the narrative, countered by more reflective passages as he tries to juggle his climbing with ever increasing commitments and responsibilities. This reflection gives balance to the book, makes it more accessible to the general reader and ultimately a much finer read than *Vertical Pleasure*.

In *Learning to Breathe*, Andy Cave has set out with great ambition to tell us a number of complementary stories. At its heart lies a classic 'rags to riches' theme. A boy from Royston born into a mining family follows in his father and grandfather's footsteps into the local pit. Soon he is on strike with time on his hands. What had been a weekend passion becomes an obsession. Climbing acts as a catalyst and broadens Andy's horizons, empowering him to leave the world he was born into and to educate himself academically. It is an extraordinary personal journey and in the telling admirably and amusingly describes two very different worlds and the people who inhabit them.

Learning to Breathe is also a piece of social history detailing the miners' strike of 1984-1985 and its effect on the communities involved. As it turned out the strike, its end and the ensuing pit closures were a pivotal moment in recent British history, ushering in a decline in union power and heavy industry, followed by a shift to a service-based economy. Andy's life has mirrored this time of momentous change, which together with his gifts as a writer placed him in a great position to document it and its effect on pit communities. Moving on, well-described climbs at home and abroad become increasingly difficult and demanding, driving the book to a powerful conclusion on Changabang.

By far the most telling chapters of both books deal with the ascent and epic descent of Changabang's north face in 1997. This is hardly surprising. The difficulty, effort, time and suffering involved during the ascent of the face itself were considerable enough, yet were eclipsed by what followed.

Steve Sustad took a tumble near the top, plucking Mick with him. The fall nearly cost them their lives and injured both climbers (Sustad sustaining a number of painfully broken ribs, Fowler a gashed nose). Then, on the descent Brendan Murphy, Andy's partner, was swept to his death by an avalanche. The rest of the descent and protracted trudge back to the safety of base camp over several high passes stretched the remaining climbers to their limits of physical and mental endurance. Their very survival hung in the balance, starkly illustrated by Andy abandoning his tent before crossing the final pass. Sheer will-power wins through in the end, leaving both authors to reflect movingly on the price paid. Obviously this expedition and its aftermath was difficult for everyone involved, but one gets the impression that as Brendan's climbing partner it was particularly hard on Andy.

I expect and look forward to further works from both authors. Andy has quite wisely been selective of the material used in his book, leaving many more adventures from his climbing career to date to be documented should he wish to do so. Mick is showing no signs of slowing his output of world-class first ascents in the greater ranges, and in a few years' time will doubtless have amassed enough new experiences for another instalment to share with us.

To conclude; two of Britain's finest climbers have produced two of the most notable pieces of recent British mountaineering literature. Personally, I feel that *Learning to Breathe* is a finer work of literature, but as a record of contemporary mountaineering achievement *On Thin Ice* is unparalleled. Both books have rightly won mountain literature prizes and therefore hardly require my endorsement, but for those of you who have somehow overlooked one or both of these titles, I recommend you make amends with a trip to your local bookstore.

Simon Yates

Mountain Rescue
Chamonix – Mont Blanc
Anne Sauvy
Bâton Wicks, 2005, pp 368 £14.99

When I saw the red rescue helicopter homing in to me (broken legged below the Glacier du Tour on the AC's 2005 Chamonix ice meet) I knew I would write the review for this book. I had gone out to Chamonix intent on press-ganging a Valley resident, or at least a regular visitor, into the task. However, a boulder beneath soft snow and a ski binding that failed to release dictated otherwise. The mountain rescue service – the PGHM – had suddenly shot up greatly in my estimation and during the coming weeks, with my right leg immobilised, I would have time to digest this intense and lengthy tome.

Anne Sauvy is respected as the author of finely crafted short stories set in, or more usually above, her beloved Chamonix. In 1997 she spent the

summer at the helipad of the rescue service at Les Bois, near Les Praz, watching, listening to the gendarmes and doctors as they returned from missions, sometimes hazardous, often routine, and gradually becoming a part of the helipad family. This book is the chronicle of that season.

In bald statistics, it was a 'normal' season for the busiest rescue service in the world – 415 rescues, 36 deaths (three more than the previous year), 1 missing, 84 ill, 281 wounded and 183 unhurt. Sauvy is careful to emphasise how relatively few this is compared to the hundreds of thousands who have found joy in Chamonix's mountains during those same three months (June, July and August).

Thankfully, though, Sauvy is rarely concerned with statistics and for all the bureaucratic plainness of her title, this is the most human of books, both in its portrayal of the rescue crews, whom she invests with a quiet grandeur, and of the pain, physical or emotional, suffered by those whose fun in the mountains has been dashed so abruptly. Layered between the call-outs, for example, to pick up a victim of altitude sickness from Mont Blanc or pluck an injured climber from overhanging slabs on the Aiguille Pierre Allain, is the banter of crews, their fixation with the Tour de France on the TV, and Sauvy's progress reports on the redstarts that nest in the roof of the helipad chalet.

While Sauvy's short stories have a polished elegance, a veneer almost, her observations here have, at times, a harrowing nakedness, most particularly when the helicopter brings back the body of one of the rescuers, Régis Michoux, killed while descending the Whymper Couloir after a training ascent of Grand Montets Arête with fellow team members. As the tragedies mount, Sauvy resolves to abandon the book, but is persuaded that rescuers' story must be told.

There are one or two oddities in the translation, most irritating of which is the word 'mechanician' for the second member (besides the pilot) of the helicopter crew. Maybe the word 'mechanic' was thought to have too much of the oily rag about it (there is an unconvincing footnote that hints at this) but it would have made more sense, as would 'flight engineer' or possibly 'winch-man'.

Much more distracting, though, is Sauvy's tendency, as the modern phrase has it, 'to go off on one', railing against the madness of this 'dismembered and crudely savage world' – politicians, television, taxes, permissiveness, second home owners, architects and (endlessly) journalists. Sauvy is incensed by the media's regular invasions of the helipad, their intrusive behaviour in trying to film bodies, and their focus on death and the sensational. There is a certain irony then, when on 10 August, Sauvy decides to dispense with the sprains and minor cases of altitude sickness etc and keep to 'dramatic, novel or significant events'. What is sauce for the goose becomes sauce for the gander.

Yet it is the personal nature of the book (for all the digressions that implies) that is its strength. There are several extraordinary pages where

the body of a young Russian woman climber is being transported, suspended way beneath the helicopter on a rope, that are among the most beautiful I have read. The victim of rockfall on the Dru, Elena performs an aerial ballet, seeming to come back to life through mysterious grace. It is as if her body, 'for the space of a moment, wanted to appear in its full beauty, before leaving us for ever,' says rescuer Olivier Fernandez. Whether the poetry of this passage is really Fernandez or Sauvy exercising licence, it is surely born of the bond of trust and friendship the author had won with the team.

And after all the sniping at the journalists (I am, of course, sensitive in this matter) it is interesting to find buried in the appendices the admission, in the words of Captain Jean-Claude Gin, then commander of the PGMH, that: 'If the PG has survived, it is thanks to the press coverage.' Good or ill, the media keep the service in the eye of the politicians who allocate the funds. And I for one have reason to be profoundly grateful to all concerned. Even as I was being winched from the slope in a maelstrom of spindrift whipped up by the helicopter rotors, the words were beginning to form: 'Thanks guys!'

Stephen Goodwin

Mountain Rescue
Bob Sharp and Judy Whiteside
Hayloft, 2005, pp 264, £20

The year 2005 has brought a classic example of the immutable law of public buses: you wait for ages for a good book on mountain rescue and then two come along together.

It was my pleasure to introduce authors Bob Sharp and Judy Whiteside at the launch of this book last November during the Kendal Mountain Book Festival. The pair were surrounded by smiling friends and colleagues, fellow rescuers mainly I think, a cheerful group that somehow exemplified what is special about the rescue service in the UK. They could have been the parents of a junior football club or charity fundraisers; that is, 'ordinary' people (no one really is) prepared to turn out and help others for no material reward at all.

Sharp and Whiteside start from a similar premise to Anne Sauvy, that the press and TV frequently sensationalise or misreport the business of mountain rescues. However their approach to correcting the record is entirely different. While Sauvy opts for reportage and digressive opinion, Sharp and Whiteside have gone for straight completeness, telling the story 'from the inside out', explaining how the service in the UK is organised, how it is trained, the wide variety of call-outs, the hardships, risk and subtle rewards. Rescuers, casualties and family members all have their say. 'When that bloody bleeper goes off – so does he...' tells of another dinner gone cold.

Both the authors speak from experience – Sharp is team leader of the Lomond MRT and a veteran of some 250 rescues – and have clearly taken great pains to present an accurate, readable and well-illustrated account of the UK service. When the pager bleeps, off they go, not knowing for how long or at what cost. Why? A challenge, an adrenalin high, a chance to test one's mettle, banter and camaraderie; all play their part. The common thread is a willingness to help others, often fellow climbers or walkers.

But don't let any of this scare you off the hills. Apparently slips are more common around the house than in the mountains. As the authors observe, if you want to slip and bang your head on something, then stay at home.

Stephen Goodwin

Breaking Trail: A Climbing Life
Arlene Blum
Scribner, 2005, pp 330, US$27.50

Breaking trail is what Arlene Blum does. Not just as a Himalayan climber, for which she is well known, but also as a scientist, explorer and speaker. Her first book, *Annapurna: A Woman's Place*, like the 1987 Annapurna expedition she led, brought her immediate and well-deserved acclaim. But writing a memoir is also a high-risk activity, and Blum doesn't shrink from this challenge either. This volume offers a much broader context of her adventures, as well as a tantalizing glimpse of her motivations, some of which are surprising.

The surprising bits open each chapter, with deeply personal flashbacks to her childhood, revealing a vulnerability that is startling in such a formidable woman. Blum admits that in writing the book, more than 90 per cent of her time was concentrated on the early family research. Having grown up in such an overly protective family, she could almost be expected to title her book *Breaking Free*.

But *Breaking Trail* it is: from the American Pacific North-west to Denali, from Africa to the Pamirs, from Afghanistan to Everest, from Bhutan to Ladakh. She treks and skis and climbs her way onto an impressive number of expeditions and adventures around the world, many of which are described as nail-biting page-turners.

Some of Blum's most impressive achievements are her all-female ascents: Denali, Annapurna and Bhrigupanth. Her reasons for mounting all-women expeditions spring from her experiences of discrimination as a climber, be they real or perceived. Her story is written firmly from the position of an 'outsider', at least relative to the established American climbing fraternity of that time. Undoubtedly, there was a certain amount of chauvinism in the '60s and '70s, and Blum often felt the brunt of it. A common criticism she heard was that she, and other women like her, were attempting to overstep their bounds in order to prove themselves. But we also know that

other women climbers were not having quite so tough a time. The close-knit climbing communities loosely associated with Harvard, the American Alpine Club and the Pacific North-west treated other leading female climbers such as Molly Higgins and Marty Hoey a little more gently. Why? It's hard to say conclusively, but this book is clearly an attempt by Blum to unearth some of those demons.

Her explanations of these situations are necessarily one-sided. As she explained on a memoir panel at the Banff Mountain Book Festival in 2005, an autobiography is only one 'take' on the truth – one's own. And although she stresses that her main goal was to provide some good personal storytelling, much of the book is also an apologia on the history of climbing attitudes towards women climbers – quite a convincing one. Ironically, in the process of defending her perspective to readers – and, in person, to some whom she perceives as the worst offenders of the time – she breaks new ground, this time within herself. Freely admitting the cathartic value of writing about her personal mountaineering history, she equally freely admits the therapeutic value of finally confronting some of the characters she has resented for so many years, and having an honest conversation.

Blum is a high achiever, in everything she does. While training and apprenticing hard as a mountaineer, she was also successfully pursuing a PhD in biochemistry at top American universities. And here too she breaks trail; her research results in the banning of two cancer-causing chemicals and opens up an entirely new area of biophysical research. She's also a charismatic leader and successful motivational speaker.

Blum's style is compelling in its juxtapositions: the worlds of academe and high-altitude camps; her amazing self-confidence accompanied by a sense of victimization; her triumphs and tragedies. Her style is very personal, as Chris Bonington notes in his foreword: 'Arlene ... is courageously open about her private life.' The reader cannot help but be absorbed by her family struggles, her humiliations, her deeply felt losses of death in the mountains, and her unabashed pride at success. Arlene Blum bares her soul.

The fact that she doesn't quite solve all her personal problems in this volume leaves the impression of a memoir of *this* part of her life, not her *entire* life. That life is still a work in progress and I, for one, hope to see the next memoir instalment in another few years. Not according to Blum, who says that this book was terribly difficult to write, and swears that there will not be another one: '*Annapurna* took me one year to write. I've been working on this one ever since – almost twenty years!' Let's hope she changes her mind.

The book is well illustrated with black-and-white photographs throughout. Its lack of an index makes it less valuable as a research tool, which is unfortunate since there is an impressive amount of material on a great number of significant expeditions that took place at an interesting point in the history of mountaineering. Perhaps in the next edition – or the next instalment.

Bernadette McDonald

Kangchenjunga
Imaging a Himalayan Mountain
Simon Pierse
School of Art, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, 2005, pp 128

Kangchenjunga has long fascinated not only climbers but tourists, botanist and plant-hunters, artists, photographers and travellers generally. Lying on the border of Sikkim and Nepal, the mountain is clearly visible from the hill station of Darjeeling. Indeed it seems to dominate the view from there, drawing all eyes towards it. As such it was the subject of intense scrutiny and speculation long before it was first climbed in 1955.

Believed to be the highest mountain in the world until the mid-19th century (at 8586m it is in fact the third highest) it is a distinctive presence; instead of the classical pointed peak of popular imagination, the massif appears as a vast castellated and crenulated fortress. Such is the difference in height between the peak and the viewpoints in Darjeeling that it sometimes appears to float above the clouds or mist, a seemingly disembodied and enchanted kingdom. Joe Brown was awestruck when he first saw it:

> The sky was steaming with vapours and I could just discern the outline... I was looking at a gigantic unearthly shape, boiling inside a tissue-thin bank of cloud. This was truly an incredible sight. I seemed to be looking up at an angle of 45 degrees at the mountain, yet it was nearly 50 miles away....

Simon Pierse has not set out to write a conventional history of mountaineering on Kangchenjunga but to attempt something more interesting and ambitious – an account of the ways in which the mountain has been perceived and subsequently depicted in prose, photography, paintings and prints. As he suggests, Kangchenjunga 'has been a topographical feature to be sketched, mapped and surveyed; it has been seen as an embodiment of the sublime, a picturesque motif, a mountaineering challenge, a peak conquered but left untrodden; and recurrently throughout all of these, a sacred mountain and symbol of the spiritual. Added to all of these is the religious significance of the mountain to the Nepalese and Sikkimese people who live in its shadow, and to whom the mountain is symbolically the residence of a god.' The name Kangchenjunga can be translated as *The Five Treasuries of Great Snow*, referring to the five principal peaks of the massif. Not only intensely poetic and evocative, it seems particularly appropriate, suggesting not just size and majesty, but something sacred and otherworldly.

The breadth of Pierse's enquiry is thus apparent. This is a potentially enormous subject, given that probably no other Himalayan mountain apart from Everest has attracted such attention over such an extended period,

and Pierse navigates his way through a complex and fascinating narrative with admirable clarity and concision.

In the event, he does get sidetracked by the mountaineering history of the mountain, retelling the fascinating stories of the various expeditions; including Sir Douglas Freshfield's circumnavigation of 1899, the ill-starred 1905 expedition that included Aleister Crowley, the self-styled 'Great Beast 666', the German expeditions of 1929 and 1931, and the International Expedition of 1930 that included Frank Smythe.

While it can seem, as his narrative develops, that his stated purpose has been somewhat lost in the desire to account for the exploration of the area around the mountain and the many different attempts on it prior to 1955, what actually emerges is a realisation of just how important a role mountaineering has played in defining the image of the mountain, especially in the 20th century. What also becomes apparent is the way that mountaineering and mountain travel are just one aspect of a complex matrix of creativity; plant-hunting expeditions yield wonderful topographical paintings, exploration produces ground-breaking and astonishing photography, climbers bring back from high altitude subtly different ways of seeing the world.

The question of the degree to which mountaineering might itself be designated an art is a fascinating notion and one that we continue to debate. To a mind conditioned by contemporary art – in particular its conceptual manifestations – Freshfield's circumnavigation of the massif seems now to recall the carefully structured walks of contemporary artists such as Richard Long and Hamish Fulton, and vice versa; one might suggest parallels between the process of climbing the peak and conceptual projects involving journeys by younger artists such as Pierre Huyghe, who recently travelled to Antarctica, or Tacita Dean. On the mountain decisions about the route are both practical and creative; one yearns not only to create an achievable route to the peak, but one that is also aesthetically pleasing. Climbers are creative people. Climbing is creative.

I would have welcomed further discussion of such ideas, which lurk in the background of Pierse's account, for when he does hypothesise his analyses are both interesting and convincing. For example, of the phenomenon of the disembodied mountain, in which the peak hovers above a sea of clouds or mist, he suggests: 'This, along with Kangchenjunga's name, which when freely interpreted, can be taken to mean a kind of sacred space, has helped to fix in the imaginations of generations of westerners the idea of the mountain as an ethereal realm, disembodied from the world and periodically revealed in the same manner as a vision.' Are Himalayan climbers then visionaries, seeking the purity, the sanctity, the cold brightness of the high altitude world?

Pierse's assessments of the value of the images of the mountain he discusses are also convincing. The painter Edward Lear (perhaps better known today as the writer of nonsense verse) visited Darjeeling in 1874

and on his return to Europe produced a series of large oil paintings. These are fascinating and impressive pictures – and possibly the only examples of a major European painter of the 19th century working on Himalayan subjects. But Pierse is correct in identifying an awkwardness, a contrivance to them, which one does not seem to find in Lear's wonderful topographical watercolour sketches, made before the subject. Pierse also rightly praises Vittorio Sella's exquisite photographs, made during the 1899 circumnavigation with Freshfield, which set an extraordinarily high standard for high mountain photography. Pierse suggests that 'the term that Sella himself used to describe his rigorous technical and aesthetic standards: *la realta severa* (severe reality) might also be used to sum up the quality of rare beauty that is found in the images themselves.' He rightly calls Norman Hardie's photograph, *The Untrodden Summit of Kangchenjunga, 26 May 1955* 'an outstanding image of mountaineering history.'

Kangchenjunga was, of course, first climbed in 1955 by Charles Evans' British expedition, and the mountain has continued to occupy a special place in British mountaineering. That expedition was exemplary in so many ways, not least for the due respect accorded to the beliefs of local people, which meant that Band and Brown stopped short, just 20 feet or so away from the final summit. One wonders how many subsequent ascensionists (almost 200 are listed in *AJ* 2005) have acted with such due care and attention to the culture of the region in which the mountain lies.

Pierse's book is a valuable addition to the literature of both mountaineering and the art of the mountains. It is essential reading for anyone interested in the position that mountaineering occupies in the interface between culture and nature, and the products of that interface. It serves to remind us that while, as far as the general public goes, Everest has inevitably become the focus of attention, Kangchenjunga is absolutely key both to the development of mountaineering in the greater ranges and to the meaning that such places occupy in our imaginations.

Ben Tufnell

Mount Everest: The Reconnaissance 1935. The Forgotten Adventure
Tony Astill
With foreword by Lord Hunt
and introduction by Sir Edmund Hillary
Published by the author, 2005, pp 359, £30
email: alpes@supanet.com tel: 0044 (0) 23 80293767

The fact this book has a foreword by John Hunt, who died in 1998, is a good illustration of just how long this project has absorbed Tony Astill. His task was to fill the front-tooth gap on the shelves of Everest literature that left Eric Shipton's 1935 reconnaissance as the only pre-war expedition without a full account and also, I would guess, the only expedition without

a book well into the 1980s. Such a monumental effort deserves serious consideration.

There's no doubt that this book is very welcome, which is more than can be said for several recent Everest books by modern climbers who seem to gather up the richest material and convert it to dirt. Astill has made a strenuous effort to weave together the contrasting, often delightfully so, diaries and recollections of the different protagonists. He was quite right to delay publication when he gained access, at a late stage, to Michael Spender's glorious diaries, since these add a literary richness that is often absent from the other diaries.

They all have their own voice, however, and Astill lets them speak in their own words. New Zealand climber Dan Bryant's likeability shines through; Tilman's miniaturist entries offer a stark integrity in comparison with Spender, and are often more revealing than their brevity might suggest. There is one entry in particular from Spender, for 20 June, which he spent alone at the village of Phuru. Woken at midnight by conch shells and oboes, he gives the musical notation for the racket, and a description of his terror at hearing it. Early that morning, trying to leave the village, he is struck down with a stomach illness and has to return, but completes his survey work first as best he can. 'Fetched by Dzongpen [the local official],' he writes, 'to his best couch where I spent some crazy hours thinking I was a Chinese puzzle. The Dzongpen was charming. His room was clean, he burned tapers and incense, fetched me water and showed the greatest concern, keeping the house quiet and the room empty of the curious.'

The doctor, the inestimable Charles Warren, is brought to the village, and the two men agree on a diagnosis of malaria. Spender takes sleeping powders and collapses into sleep. 'Dreamt very vividly that E. [his wife, Erika] brought forth an incredibly healthy child of indeterminate sex and was immediately afterwards enormously healthy and we went out together the same evening.'

Here in one brief diary entry is the surreal intensity of mountain exploration: the determination to work despite illness, the exoticism he revels in despite his misery, the acknowledgement of human kindness from a stranger, the interjection of powerful and hallucinatory imaginings of home. It is intoxicating stuff.

Astill's book is studded with revelatory moments like this, reminding me of what an epic encounter it was for the first humans coming against such a remote and inhospitable terrain. 'This 1935 expedition,' Astill writes, 'was to experience some of the same romance of the reconnaissance of 1921.' I adored references to tents made of 'aero-canvas' and baths taken at the Tollygunge Club. The comprehensive detail of the book does not make it an effortless read, and at times I found myself wishing Astill had pushed his analysis further at the expense of sometimes repetitive narrative. But the sheer weight of evidence made me rethink several things.

Dan Bryant, the rugged New Zealander whose inclusion led to Ed

Hillary's inclusion in Shipton's 1951 reconnaissance, and H W Tilman were dropped for the 1936 expedition to Everest. The nature and scale of Bryant's afflictions – boils, carbuncles and rope-burns that became badly infected – suggest to me that he was suffering some systemic problem other than chronic altitude sickness. Tilman too, who had previous experience at altitude and would climb Nanda Devi the following year, could also have been suffering from another illness. Ironically, it seems, his poor performance ultimately proved to his benefit.

The exhaustive descriptions of what people ate on the expedition also made me wonder. It clearly fascinated the team itself. My medical knowledge is protozoic, but Astill offers the raw material for an interesting analysis by an expert of how well or ill-prepared the pre-war expeditions were. As it happens, no amount of good food or tough New Zealanders would have made any difference in 1936, when the expedition met an early monsoon.

You could argue that such questions are now dryly academic but I don't think so. As Shipton's biographer Peter Steele acknowledges, Shipton is a pin-up for the modern generation of lightweight Himalayan mountaineers, particularly in America. If climbers know one thing about him, and it often is one thing, it's his 'back-of-an-envelope' planning style. Astill calls Shipton's lightweight approach 'slightly obsessive'. All my climbing life I have found it inspirational, without ever examining why that should be. This book made me feel a re-evaluation is overdue. Shipton was after all sacked from the 1953 show because his organisational skills were slapdash. But I don't think, on the evidence of this book, that the allegation is fair. Not that he didn't inflict organisational hiccups on his co-campaigners. Bryant and Tilman, in Darjeeling days before the rest of the team, had no idea exactly who was coming to join them.

Modern climbers should revere Shipton, I believe, not for some putative alpine-style guru status, but for his philosophical approach to mountaineering. After all, their equipment and knowledge base, along with fast approaches, make this world profoundly different from Shipton's. It is his restless passion for unexplored terrain, his need to cut away the cultish waffle that he could see surrounding Everest like afternoon cloud, that is so appealing.

There are occasional blips in Astill's research. He recounts the story, first told in Tenzing's autobiography, that his father Mingmar crossed the Nangpa La to give his son a surprise visit. While it's true that Tenzing's father traded across the Nangpa La in the 1920s, he never left Tibet and was living in 1935 at Tsa, where his wife was a servant. In fact, Astill recounts how the expedition stopped here, and bought food. (Tenzing would bring Earl Denman to the same house in 1947.) This is not a major error but it did provoke in me thoughts about the relationship between Sahibs and Sherpas. I think largely the expedition members were curious, often paternalistic, sometimes patronising. They didn't, however, have the means to understand intimately the tensions and concerns of their Sherpa friends. I sometimes

wonder if the Italians, who seemed to have combined exploration with cultural academic enquiry in the shape of Fosco Maraini, had attempted Everest, they might have packed an anthropologist instead of, or more likely alongside, a surveyor. I suppose the RGS wasn't like that in those days.

No matter, the care, thought and effort of this book deserve great credit. It is fabulously illustrated, with some wonderfully eccentric shots. Here is Kempson, clearly bouldering en route for Everest, a pad person to his fingertips. We see Tilman in his Homburg and Rinzing propping an umbrella over Kempson's head. Warren's portrait, all raffish charm, put me in mind of the North Wales rock climber Noel Craine. Nothing, it seems, changes much, perhaps not even Everest.

Ed Douglas

I'll Call You in Kathmandu. The Elizabeth Hawley Story
Bernadette McDonald
The Mountaineers Books, 2005, pp 25, US$24.95

The Hawley Story is fascinating stuff for anyone with an interest in the chronicling of Himalayan mountaineering and that perennial favourite, climbers' gossip. So what does this acid-tongued interrogator really think of the procession of climbing big shots, quiet achievers, and dissembling pretenders who have trooped through Kathmandu this past 40 years?

That Elizabeth Hawley's opinion came to matter is without doubt. After the Russian ace Anatoli Boukreev (subsequently killed in an avalanche on Annapurna I) reached only the secondary summit on Shisha Pangma, he lamented to a friend: 'I've got to go back – Elizabeth says I didn't really climb it.'

A serious-minded, middle-class girl from the American Midwest, Hawley reached Kathmandu in February 1959 by way of Baghdad, Tehran, Karachi and Delhi at the end of a two-year round-the-world tour, having quit *Fortune* magazine at the age of 34. It was only a short visit but she was captivated by the place – then still very much in its mediæval time warp – and in September 1960 returned for good, working as a part-time newswire reporter, though 'journalist' was only one of several hats she wore.

Hawley's worldwide reputation rests largely on her role as a reporter on mountaineering in the Nepal Himalaya, with particular emphasis on ascents and failures on Everest. Over the decades a vast archive has accumulated – thankfully published on disc in 2004 by the American Alpine Club as *The Himalayan Database: The Expedition Archives of Elizabeth Hawley*. The data has been extracted from a process better described as 'interrogation' than 'interview'. A team would barely have settled into their Kathmandu hotel when there would be a message that 'Miss Hawley' had arrived in reception. AC president Stephen Venables likened it to being called to see the headmistress.

Ironically, 'Liz' Hawley has no direct experience of climbing at all and has never even trekked as far as Everest Base Camp. But analysis has not been her intention. Hawley prides herself on reporting facts rather than opinion – a chronicler rather than an historian. However for *I'll Call You in Kathmandu* McDonald has skilfully drawn her out on generations of mountaineers. Bonington she judges the 'most outstanding climber of the seventies' and Messner in the 1980s 'the supreme star of the Himalayas'.

Others she is less charitable about, but I wouldn't want to blunt your sense of anticipation by naming names here. Nor will I reveal the answer to McDonald's probings over rumoured affairs with, among others, Jimmy Roberts, Eric Shipton, Andrzej Zawada and Don Whillans (the mind boggles!). Hawley declares she is 'not the marrying type', but one senses she would have said 'yes' to Ed Hillary whom she regards as the finest person she has ever met. Hawley has been a tireless worker for Hillary's Himalayan Trust and the pair became close following the death of Hillary's first wife and daughter Belinda in a light aircraft in the Khumbu.

McDonald's 'Hawley Story' is comparable to Ed Douglas's biography of Tenzing and Jim Perrin's of Don Whillans in that it tells the story not just of one individual but of a whole milieu. In her chronicler's role, Liz Hawley must have quizzed thousands of climbers – myself among them – yet she herself has remained, to most, something of an enigma. McDonald has succeeded in turning the tables on the inquisitor. When, at the end of their conversations, Bernadette pinned Elizabeth on the affairs and marriage stuff, Hawley couldn't duck it. 'You cunning vixen,' she chided McDonald. But the biographer's job was done and the result is this sympathetic and insightful portrait.

Stephen Goodwin

Recollections 1915-2005
Edward H Peck
Published privately, 2006, pp 315

The Alpine Journal may not seem an appropriate place to consider the privately published memoirs of a diplomat. But Sir Edward Peck's distinguished career, culminating in his appointment as High Commissioner to post-colonial Kenya, Chair of the Joint Intelligence Committee and, finally, the UK Permanent Representative to Nato, was embroidered throughout by his deep passion for mountains and mountaineering. *Recollections* is peppered with accounts of small-scale expeditions to mountain ranges made available to Peck during postings and official visits abroad, particularly in Turkey and during his time in Africa.

Not all readers will necessarily be interested in all the diplomatic detail, but most of this is readable and entertaining. Peck's attendance or involvement in some key moments in recent British history – the Cicero

spy scandal, for example, during the war, or his experiences in Berlin – are told well and offered this reader at least a leg-up in his learning. The cast list of his contemporaries includes the former Foreign Secretary Denis Healey, and the current US Secretary for Defence, Donald Rumsfeld.

Perhaps the most engaging passages are about his childhood, particularly those early years spent in Switzerland where his love for mountains developed. He recalls meeting Charles Bruce on the Dents du Midi in 1924, and the affection for what seems now a distant age is matched with a keen eye for the revelatory detail. I almost laughed out loud as he remembered the clacking of mating tortoises that enlivened his walk to work in Ankara.

He was a friend of Robin Hodgkin, and they climbed together in the Ala Dag, Peck recovering a swastika flag from the summit of Demirkazik which was presented to the AC's archives. He skied with John Hunt in Greece in 1947, and long into retirement he was still travelling around the globe, while enjoying his relocation from Kent to the Cairngorms.

I doubt all those awarded the GCMG – 'God Calls Me God', as the joke has it – are quite so good-humoured and down-to-earth, and I couldn't help wondering whether a lifetime contemplating the enormity of nature on Peck's days off had a beneficial influence during sticky negotiations at the office; a likeable book from a remarkable man.

Ed Douglas

High Endeavours
The Life and Legend of Robin Smith
Jimmy Cruickshank
Canongate, 2005, pp 384, £16.99

It is 44 years since Robin Smith died at the age of 23, but for those who knew him the memory of his life is fresh. Jimmy Cruickshank's biography, *High Endeavours: The Life and Legend of Robin Smith* is a testament to an extraordinary life and talent and to the lasting impression he left on Scottish climbing and climbers.

The account is in three parts. The first is devoted to Smith's early life from his birth in Calcutta, the second son of emigrant Scots, to his separation from his parents aged eight to be educated at boarding school in Scotland, and his growing exposure to and love of the hills. The second part covers his rapidly maturing talent both academically and on steep rock and ice in Scotland, the Lakes and Wales, and the Alps. The last section covers the ill-fated joint Russian British expedition to the Pamir and Robin's death in a fall with Wilfrid Noyce.

The book draws heavily on the accounts of those who climbed with him in winter and summer on Scottish cliffs, Alpine faces and ridges and finally, tragically, on Pik Garmo. Unusually for a work of this nature, the author is not a mountaineer, but a childhood friend. Cruickshank met Robin at

George Watson's school in Edinburgh, and over the next few years the pair began to explore the hills through the tutelage of Archie Hendry, their French teacher. Cruikshank's direct climbing involvement with Robin only lasts as far as a trip to Skye, after which he decides that cricket is more to his liking and gives up climbing.

One would think that this would be a considerable bar to writing such a biography, and certainly there is an air in the book of the author observing exploits with which he has a diminishing understanding and sympathy. Countering this lack of direct knowledge of Robin's later career, he has drawn on the accounts of many of Robin's later climbing companions and on extracts from Smith's diary and his writing, particularly from the journals of the Scottish Mountaineering Club and Edinburgh University Mountaineering Club. This gives the book a rather disjointed progress and at times it takes on the feel of an anthology with little attempt to explore psychology and motivation or to deal critically with others' contributions. Nonetheless, the biography covers the main events of Smith's short life and his rise to climbing superstar and one has to admire the author's perseverance in drawing together written sources from most aspects of Robin's career. In this he had the advantage of earlier work done by an SMC member, John Inglis, who was killed in a fall from *Parallel Buttress* Lochnagar in February1994. Inglis's article was published posthumously in the 2002 SMC journal.

Smith was a complex character, as becomes clear from the contrasting accounts in this book. Some, such as Malcolm Slesser who led the Scottish contingent on the Pamir expedition, found him intolerable while recognising his talent. And it is hard to sympathise with Smith's reported behaviour, at one time holding Slesser underwater until he nearly drowned and later pissing into his tent; though on a later occasion he delighted Slesser by bringing him breakfast in his tent on a cold and miserable morning. Others, particularly women, thought him a most courteous and sensitive individual.

My own dealings with Robin were wholly pleasurable. We climbed together on a number of occasions, some of which are covered in the book. Like many of us, he delighted in scruffiness and the inadequacy of our equipment and provisions. He had a rather cavalier attitude to danger, but then most of us had at an age when we believed ourselves immortal. Early in our acquaintance we sat at the top of Rannoch Wall on Buachaille Etive Mor after a hard climb. It had started to drizzle and I coiled the rope while Robin told me of falling solo from the crux of *White Ghyll Chimney* and only crushing an orange in his pocket after the one hundred foot drop. I was impressed but even more so when instead of slanting off to descend the easy *Curved Ridge*, he strolled to the edge of the wall and started down *Agag's Groove* with me a reluctant follower on the steep greasy rock. With Robin, the day was always tending towards the epic, especially in winter when a struggle back to the hut down ice-glazed rock lit by a failing torch while the driving snow blinded the eyes, would be the highlight of the climb.

He could occasionally appear distant, especially when in the company of Dougal Haston, who was frequently unpleasantly arrogant to lesser mortals. And at times, perhaps in an attempt to prove himself to Haston, he was a rebellious hellraiser. Of course, these traits are not uncommon in the climbing fraternity. There are enough examples of Robin's sensitivity and courteousness in the book to counterbalance his other side. Certainly, my experience, as a little bit of a hellraiser myself, was that Robin was more thoughtful than most of my contemporaries. Letters he wrote to me include an apology for completing with Haston a first ascent we had explored together, and an account of the crux pitch on *Point Five* in which he explained how the conditions had made it so easy compared to my five-hour struggle. Nowhere did he allude to the truth that his talent far exceeded mine. A lesser man would have crowed.

So I'm sure that this book for all its faults of style, for all its taking of others' reminiscences and reworking their writing, will be welcomed both by those who knew him and by those who have come across his original writing and his magnificent routes. Rock climbs such as *Shibboleth*, *The Big Top* and *The Bat*, even with modern gear, are serious while his winter routes on the Comb and Orion face of Ben Nevis in the days of step-cutting were truly wonderful. In the Alps as a member of the Alpine Climbing Group he was responsible for the first British ascent of the Walker Spur and the north spur of the Fiescherhorn. The fall on Pik Garmo cut short a talent which would have shone for many years in world mountaineering .

Jimmy Marshall, in his obituary for Robin in the 1963 SMC Journal, quoted at length by Cruickshank, captured both his spirit and our sense of loss. 'He delighted in impromptu, unexpected incidents which would carry the adventure far into the night, to impress one's memory indelibly with a sense of satisfying fulfilment and a wild belonging to the mountain world. ... He is, and always shall be, greatly missed by his friends and can certainly never be forgotten by the climbing world.'

High Endeavours is by no means an objective book. It is an affectionate account by a schooldays friend and as such has flaws of selection and interpretation. However, it is redeemed by the first-hand tales of Smith's contemporaries and by Robin's own writing in journals and his diary. The result is an enjoyable and important biography, capturing the anarchic excitement of an era before advances in protection and equipment that have transformed the pursuit of mountaineering.

Robin Shaw

Todhra
Dennis Gray
Flux Gallery Press, 2005, £9.95

Dennis Gray's novel mingles hard mountaineering with the perils and compulsions of being gay. An uneasy mixture you might think, even though

public attitudes towards homosexual relationships have surely moved on from the harsh experiences suffered by John Firth, the central character in this saga set in the days before gay pride and more tolerant public attitudes.

Todhra is a challenging gorge in Morocco where Firth emerges as a hard man among the climbing fraternity but also as an individual coming to terms with his true sexuality and the impact this has on those who know him or admire his prowess as a mountaineer.The story moves through a variety of climbing locations ranging from Otley Chevin to Nanga Parbat. Gray builds his characters well, describing the high tension of moving among the top extremes of rock in masterly style, although occasionally in language that would have bewildered Whymper and his generation. For example, Firth tackles a particularly testing stretch of rock: 'with an almost one-arm front lever, he locked over and pushed hard, brought his right toe to his left hand and stood up.' As you do.

To cries of 'Vive le Rosbif' he triumphs on the most difficult problems on the Fontainebleau boulders. A winter route on the Grandes Jorasses and new routes on Nanga Parbat and the Ben secure his place as a mountaineering celebrity. But in contrast to all this macho action are the guilt-ridden promiscuous encounters with rent boys and cruising gays, an urgent visit to a clinic for sexually transmitted diseases, the taunts and violence of Big Ernie, an archetypal homophobe, the trauma of being outed and the culminating humiliation of being sodomised by a bi-sexual Berber and being asked to pay for the privilege.

Throughout all this travail Firth maintains rapt admiration for his own sex. Of one encounter he recalled: 'The kid was truly beautiful with a fine athletic body, skin like fired porcelain and hair straight and black as strands of coal. His dark eyes were child-like and trusting'. So off he goes again with many an embrace and much fumbling in the boxer shorts. By contrast with his climbing descriptions, Gray spares us most of the physical detail and Todhra is no more sexually explicit than a Rubens nude upon which a wisp of gauze has strategically landed. For which we can only be thankful.

Ronnie Faux

Playing. Robin Hodgkin's Mountaineering Letters 1937–47

Ed. Adam Hodgkin

Published privately by Adam & Christopher Hodgkin, 2005, pp.x+100

It is good to have all Robin Hodgkin's writings on 'playing' – as he termed mountaineering – assembled in one book, instead of being scattered through articles in the *Alpine Journal*, *Climbers' Club Journal* and letters to his mother and others. These have been put together, with a masterly introduction, by his son Adam, with glimpses of Robin's early days and illustrated by some of Robin's own photographs.

Robin's early promise of being a first-class climber and mountaineer was

justified when, on the 1938 expedition of young graduates to the Caucasus, he cracked a new route on the south ridge of Ushba by making use of a sensational ledge. The subsequent expedition to Masherbrum ended in near-disaster – when only 600ft short of the summit of what would have been the highest mountain climbed at that date. Robin lost most of his fingers and toes after spending a night in a crevasse after their tent had been blown away. But the experience did not diminish his ability to climb well despite this handicap.

Appointed to the Sudan Education Service, perhaps in the mistaken belief of his relatives that this flat country would offer few temptations, Robin nonetheless sought out the few mountains available on the edges and made a successful first ascent of Jebel Kassala. His wartime leaves were spent in neighbouring mountainous countries. In 1941 he was in Uganda and Kenya making an inevitably damp way into the Ruwenzori and successfully beating a way up the overhanging corniches of Margherita. He was disappointed a few hundred feet from the Nelion summit of Mount Kenya, which he reckoned to be a 'real' (ie difficult) mountain. In 1943 Robin looked for mountains in Turkey and I introduced him to the Ala Dag, where we made a number of second ascents following a pre-war German party, removing a swastika pennant from the summit of Demirkazik.

Returning to the Alps in 1947, Robin saw his friends John Jenkins and Nully Kretschmer fall to their deaths on the Brenva side of Mont Blanc. This, followed closely by his marriage to Elizabeth and a growing family, quenched his enthusiasm for more adventurous climbs, but he never lost his love for the mountains which he was able to share with his friends and impart to his pupils when headmaster at Abbotsholme.

Edward Peck

Danger on Peaks
Gary Snyder
Shoemaker & Hoard, 2004, pp 112, US$22

In case you don't read any further than this, let me offer you a conclusion first. The further we get away from our earliest mountain climbs, the more we realise how much they were actually embedded in the very life they might have been apparently escaping. When the poet Gary Snyder first climbed Mount St Helens in August 1945 he read of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on the morning of his descent in a newspaper at the forestry office on the slopes of the mountain, 'my heart still one with the snowpeak mountain at my back'. Standing on a volcano, the young Snyder was so shocked at the 'cruel destructive power' unleashed in the volcano of the newspaper photographs that he vowed to fight against such cruelty for the rest of his life. But the young Snyder vows 'by the purity and beauty and permanence of Mount St Helens'. At 8.32am on

18 May 1980, volunteer geologist David Johnston reports from Coldwater II Observation Post that Mount St Helens is erupting, before being vaporized with his station. This viewpoint is now known as Johnston Ridge, Snyder tells us in his footnote to '1980: Letting Go'. Know the nature of your mountain, he is suggesting, but also, know the meaning of its language.

Gary Snyder believes not only that metaphors are real, but that every tiny bit of reality can be a metaphor. The problem with this is that many of the poems in this collection are expected to carry a significance that is less than obvious. 'Honour the dust' is a fine imperative with which Snyder has chosen to inscribe my copy of this book, but some bits of dust are more interesting than others, just as some metaphors are more powerful, insightful and more accurate than others. Different dust: different dangers. Different peaks: different dust. Different girls: different legs. Actually the title of this book is taken from a poem about Snyder first seeing his future wife, Carole, and his memory of 'her lithe leg' that has, he knows, been trained as 'proud, sceptical, passionate' by 'the danger on peaks'. Many of these poems are about dangers and joys below and beyond the peaks. Any book by Snyder is about the whole world and its specific signs. Politics, passion and peaks are embedded in each other in this thought-provoking collection of very material metaphors from the mountaineering Buddhist master-poet of America. At the reading in Oregon where Snyder signed my book, he began by saying that these were not actually his mountaineering poems because they would be too intimate. I'm still pondering what he meant by that.

Terry Gifford

Durchs Jahrhundert: Mein Leben als Arzt und Bergsteiger
(Through the Century: My Life as a Doctor and Mountaineer)
Lutz Chicken
Edition Raetia, Bozen, Italy, 2003, pp135, 15 Euros

Born in Bozen, South Tyrol, at the start of the First World War, Ludwig 'Lutz' Chicken was the son of an English father and an Austrian mother. Bozen was then a part of the decaying Austrian empire, but South Tyrol was ceded to Italy in 1919 and its prosperous provincial capital is today better known as Bolzano. Beautifully illustrated, *Durchs Jahrhundert* charts (in German) Lutz's life through a turbulent century.

Lutz's early love for nature determined his two passions of medicine and mountaineering. As a member of the Himalayan Foundation, he was unexpectedly chosen to take part in the Nanga Parbat exhibition of 1939 together with Peter Aufschnaiter, Heinrich Harrer and Hans Lobenhoffer. The outbreak of the Second World War turned this abortive adventure into years of internment in India. At Dehra Dun, Lutz was able to use his medical knowledge in the camp hospital. His passion to heal proved stronger than

his wish to escape. When Harrer and others fled, he declined to join them and continued his hospital work.

Returning to northern Italy, Lutz finished his studies within the year and, after some difficulties, started a private clinic, devoting his life to his patients and his newly wed English wife, Ursula. He never lost his enthusiasm for climbing and *Durchs Jahrhundert* combines vivid descriptions of Lutz Chicken's experiences on mountains around the world with stories of internment, post-war reconstruction and his way out of the Germanic nationalist lure towards an enthusiastic pan-Europeanism.

Bettina von Reden

The Ice Maiden.
Inca Mummies, Mountain Gods and Sacred Sites in the Andes
Johan Reinhard
National Geographic, Washington, 2005, pp 384, US$26

Llullaillaco. Sacrificios y ofrendas
en un santuario inca de alta montana
Constanza Ceruti
Ediciones Universidad Católica de Salta, 2003, pp 347, npq

In the last three or four decades a number of publications have occasionally appeared, offering the incredible information that the Incas were some 500 or 600 years ahead of contemporary climbers and, furthermore, that those stalwart hill peoples conducted a systematic form of mountaineering that would enable them easily to claim the first ascent of no less than 120 Andean peaks between 4000m and 6739m. Nearly all these publications had hitherto appeared in Spanish. Now, after his very successful expeditions in Peru and northern Argentina, American archaeologist Johan Reinhard has poured into a single work all his first-hand knowledge and research accumulated in 20 years of dedication to this form of archæological mountaineering. The title of his work sounds like a counter to the several *Ice Man* books that have been appearing in Europe. Reinhard's contains 12 chapters, systematically covering his findings on elevated mountains such as Copiapo (6052m), Ampato (6288m) and Llullaillaco (6739m). Among the descriptions of his many climbs he inserts veritable debates on related topics such as the meaning of mountains for hill people everywhere and human sacrifices on mountains in many places.

For a number of years before Reinhard began his activity, several Argentinian mountaineers were busy climbing and inspecting Andean summits, aiming to locate some lofty shrines. In 1973 they founded CIADAM, initials for Centro de Investigaciones Arqueológicas de Alta Montana. Its present Director is a young woman who has recently gained her doctorate, Constanza Ceruti, who was co-leader on several of Reinhard's

expeditions. Her volume, *Llullaillaco*, is the published form of her doctoral dissertation. The book contains seven chapters about Llullaillaco (the highest archæological site in the world), minutely detailing all findings, including the discovery in 1999 on its summit of three Inca subjects and some 100 diverse burial objects. Ceruti, like Reinhard, takes pains to explain the peculiar form of sustained mountaineering that the Inca practised. Both suggest that 'mountains and ancestors' and 'mountains and fertility' were, among others, the main reasons for the existence of Andean summit shrines. Both works contain numerous illustrations in colour and black and white, line drawings and sketch-maps.

The old and well-ingrained belief that the ascent of mountains everywhere – for whatever reasons – began with and evolved from a 1492 spectacular rock climb or the deeds of some eccentrics two centuries ago is slowly being set aside. With their solid contribution, sportive scientists like Johan Reinhard and Constanza Ceruti have laid a firm foundation for the new endeavour of summit archæology.

Evelio Echevarría

Key Issues for Mountain Areas
Editors: Martin F Price, Libor Jansky and Andrei A Iatsenia
United Nations University Press, 2004, pp 280, US$32

I have a new and somewhat dubious label. According to this enlightening work of reference I, and thousands of others who have concluded that life is better in Cumbria, am an 'amenity migrant'. By the same token, I suppose when I went south to the big city decades ago in search of fame and fortune (failed on both counts) I was an 'economic migrant'.

Amenity migration is defined as 'the movement of people to a particular region for the vision of life in a quieter, more pristine environment and/or distinct cultural attributes'. Its effect cuts both ways, putting pressure on local resources, pushing up land and house prices, eroding cultural diversity, while also, hopefully, bringing in capital and fresh entrepreneurial initiative, creating jobs. The phenomenon is being felt in mountain areas in both developing and industrialised countries, according to one of the papers included here, concluding that the cultural effect of this new class of mountain resident and their role in conservation and sustainable development deserve future attention.

'Further study', the cynics might say, is the academics' answer to every problem. In fact what is impressive about this series of papers on preserving mountain ecosystems while improving the lives of those who live there, is not just how much study has gone into these complex issues but how much has been done on the ground since mountains sidled on to the agenda of policy makers at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

At the time I wrote a feature for *The Independent* headlined by an enthusiastic sub-editor, 'Man's abuse of the giants'. That abuse had been highlighted in a 400-page report *The State of the World's Mountains* edited by AC member Peter Stone. Another, Roger Payne, at the time national officer of the BMC, urged climbers not to view native people as 'just an ethnic backdrop for our adventures'. It was, as the phrase goes, 'a wake up call' and although the snooze button is an ever-tempting option, there is no doubt we are all now much more aware of the impact of our actions – whether on a personal mountain holiday level or as part of society generally – on environments and communities far away.

At a fairly local level this book offers plenty of heartening case studies, from the revival of the native Hutsul horse in the Carpathians for transport and trekking to numerous kerosene depots and self-help conservation and income generating schemes in the Himalaya. However as principal editor, Martin Price – yet another AC member doing good works – emphasises in his introduction, the future of mountain regions is inextricably woven into the global fabric of interlinked markets, institutions and policies within a biosphere that is experiencing rapid change. One thinks immediately of global warming and glacier retreat. The Chinese Academy of Science, for example, predicts that Tibet's 60,000 square miles of glaciers will halve in size every decade at current rates, turning yak pasture to desert.

The evidence is abundant, indeed for TV and newspapers eco-warnings have become a daily staple, but the bold political steps to address this most fundamental 'Key Issue' are still awaited. Keep banging the drum.

Stephen Goodwin

100 Jahre AACB

Akademischer Alpenclub Bern, Bern 2005, pp 307

This fine volume, which has been presented to the Alpine Club by the Akademischer Alpenclub Bern, provides a detailed and fascinating account of this small but very active University Club since it was formed in October 1905.

In addition to a general historical review the reader finds information on every aspect of the members' activities including ski mountaineering and hut management: the Bietschhorn, Engelhorn and Schmadri huts are owned by the Club. Another section contains biographies of prominent members such as Hans Lauper of Eiger fame and Albert Eggler, the leader of the successful Everest-Lhotse Expedition in 1956. It is pleasant to note that two members of the Alpine Club – Captain J P Farrar and Sir Arnold Lunn – were elected to honorary membership of the AACB.

This comprehensive and well illustrated work is a worthy record of the Club's history and achievements.

Christopher Russell

Memories of Surveying in India 1919-1939
Gordon Osmaston
T G Osmaston
91 Windermere Park, Windermere, Cumbria LA23 2ND, 2005, pp56, £5

Gordon Osmaston, a founder member of the Himalayan Club and formerly Director of the Survey of India, was born in India in 1898. He was commissioned into the Royal Engineers at 18, winning the MC in France, before being ordered out to India with the Third Sappers and Miners. After two years he obtained a position with the Survey of India, hoping for lots of work in the Himalaya, his interest in climbing having been aroused in the Lake District by climbs with Heaton Cooper.

Many years were to pass before this aspiration was fulfilled, however, and the early chapters of this short memoir recount surveys in Burma, India and Assam. Osmaston's chance came in 1936 when he took charge of a new survey in northern Tehri Garhwal, exploring the Gangotri and Chaturangi glaciers. The most interesting section for AC members, however, will be the description of his surveys in the Nanda Devi Sanctuary in the autumn of 1936 when he persuaded Eric Shpton to act as his guide into the area. Young Tensing was one of the party, and they met Peter Lloyd and other members of the first ascent party returning from the mountain. The advent of the Second World War brings to an end this fascinating personal account of surveying in India.

Geoffrey Templeman

Travels Amongst the Great Andes of the Equator
Edward Whymper
Ripping Yarns.com, 2005, pp 394+xviii

The latest offering from Ripping Yarns differs from its predecessors in that it is in hard covers and printed in facsimile. Apart from its overall size, the book is identical to the 1891 edition but with the scientific appendices and fold-out maps omitted. The latter are available on-line, however. Whymper's main interest was in studying the effects of altitude on climbers, but as there was unrest in the Himalaya and troubles in Peru, Chile and Bolivia, he decided to go to Ecuador and climb Chimborazo and Cotopaxi. Accordingly, he set off in 1870 accompanied by his old colleague/adversary Jean Antoine Carrel and the latter's cousin Louis Carrel.

This book, complete with the many excellent sketches and drawings reproduced here, is a classic of mountaineering literature, although I would imagine that the number of people who have read it right through, compared with *Scrambles*, is probably comparatively few. This reissue gives you the chance.

Geoffrey Templeman

Walking in the Alps
Kev Reynolds
Cicerone, 2005, 500 + xii, £20

A revised edition of Kev Reynolds's invaluable 1998 hardback, with updated information, revised maps and many more superb illustrations.

Classic Norway. Climbs, Scrambles and Walks in Romsdal
Tony Howard
Cordee, 2005, pp144, npq

It is 35 years since *Walks and Climbs in Romsdal, Norway* first appeared, this being the fourth revised edition, produced in response to continued public demand for up-to-date information. The opportunity has been taken to include more walks and many more colour illustrations.

Seton Gordon's Scotland. An Anthology
Compiled by Hamish Brown
Whittles, 2005, pp330 + xviii, £25

Seton Gordon (1886-1977) was one of Scotland's most prolific writers on natural history subjects, publishing a total of 27 books. Hamish Brown has undertaken the Herculean task of sifting through them and extracting the most interesing and worthwhile pieces.

Thailand. A Climbing Guide
Sam Lightner Jnr.
The Mountaineers Books, 2005, pp 336, $21.95

The latest climbing guide from The Mountaineers is also a travel guide to Thailand, giving comprehensive information on accommodation, sightseeing, history, ecology, etc, as well as details of over 350 climbs. It is fully illustrated with topos and action shots.

The Andes. A Guide for Climbers
John Biggar
Andes (Castle Douglas), 2005, pp 304, npq

The third edition of John Biggar's comprehensive guide to the Andes for 'the average mountaineer'. All 102 6000m peaks are included, plus over 210 lower peaks. In full colour. An indispensable guide.