Reviews

Chris Smith

BOARDMAN TASKER AWARD 2007

Chairman of the judges for the Boardman Tasker Award for Mountain Literature in 2007 was AC honorary member Lord (Chris) Smith of Finsbury. Announcing the winner at a packed event at the Kendal Mountain Festival last November, Chris gave such a comprehensive and thoughtful summary of the best of 2007's books, that it seemed appropriate and a pleasure for the journal to reproduce his speech in full:

Judging the Boardman Tasker Award this year has been a real delight. This has partly arisen because of the sheer quality of much of the writing that we had to consider, but it has also resulted from the commitment, insight and assiduousness of my two fellow judges, Alison Fell and Tim Noble. Alison is a Scottish poet and novelist, whose novel *Mer de Glace* was a joint winner of the Award in 1991; Tim is a life-long climber, writer and teacher of English, author of *Great VS Climbs in the Lake District*, and has just completed 10 distinguished years as editor of the *Climbers' Club Journal*. I want to pay tribute to both of them. I couldn't have wished for better colleagues. The fact that we were unanimous not only in our choice of winner, but in our selection for second and third places too, speaks volumes.

As usual we have been ably served by Maggie Body, the Administrator of the Award, whose hounding of publishers, treks to the Post Office, production of information and wisdom when needed, and cheerfulness throughout, have been exemplary. It is a fitting tribute that Maggie plays a near-starring role in one of our short-listed books, Stephen Venables' *Higher than the Eagle Soars*.

Before I turn to the six short-listed books, I want to mention with honour three that didn't quite make it to the list. Owen Sheers' *Resistance* (Faber) is a first novel that anyone would be proud to have written. As befits a poet of huge talent and integrity, Owen has brought to his novel set in an imaginary period of German occupation in the Welsh hills – full of the stresses, tensions, turmoils and attractions that throws up – an intimate sense of the strength of the living landscape. The land of the Black Mountains becomes almost an actor itself in the story, a brooding and powerful presence. It is a wonderful book, but we felt we couldn't really put it on the Boardman Tasker list because it didn't quite fall into our remit of 'mountain literature'. Go and read it, though.

A F Whyte's *A Cairngorm Chronicle* (review, p382) was in fact written some 60 years ago, but Fred Whyte had buried it in a drawer and his daughter only discovered the manuscript after his death, and then again long after that it has been published by her in a very handsome small volume. Because of the posthumous nature of the publication, we didn't feel we could include it on our short-list, but we found it full of flowing and enthusiastic, if slightly dated, writing. Rich phrases such as 'a coign of vantage' emerge that take us back to a bygone and better time. And the sheer rollicking fun of the 24-hour walk over the four four-thousanders comes shining through.

And Mike Cawthorne's *Wilderness Dreams* (Neil Wilson Publishing £14.99) takes us romping through some of Scotland's wildest places: a canoe trip down the River Dee, a blizzard in the Monadhliath, the dangers facing the Flow Country in Sutherland. The heart of the book, though, is the story of an expedition across the Munros in 1986, accomplished on no money and with falling-apart boots, and despite an occasional over-excitement in the landscape description, this is exciting stuff, and it's written with humanity, passion and a touch of anger. For anyone who loves the Scottish hills, this is a book to read.

So, to our short-list of six books. I will, if I may, keep the three best to last. I say 'best', but that belies the value of the others. All six were worthy contenders. I'd recommend all of them to you. It's invidious to have to choose.

Judith Brown's *Happy Climbing Tells No Tales* (Troubadour Publishing Ltd, £5.95) is a compendium of well-told short stories, capturing the fun, the excitement, and occasionally the terror of climbing. Some of the stories here are gloriously surreal. *Troll Climb*, for example, speeds along for six pages with a brilliant description of a difficult climb on a big wall, and then for the final two suddenly turns into a nightmare where the cliff engulfs the climber and turns him into stone. This is no stuff for the faint-hearted. But some of these tales are subversive and funny, and told with real verve.

Bernadette McDonald's *The Brotherhood of the Rope* (reviewed *AJ* 2007, p344-346) is an excellent biography of the great American climber, explorer and scientist Charles Houston. It's well written, but it's the subject of the book that glows through its pages. It charts Houston's early expeditions with his father, with Bradford Washburn, and with Bill Tilman. It tells the 1938 story of the attempt on K2, and then again in 1953, when eight climbers had to retreat and miraculously seven survived. And it describes how Houston went on to become a leading expert in high-altitude science and to lead President Kennedy's Peace Corps in India. And throughout it all shines the honesty, the courage, and the commitment to his climbing companions – the true 'brotherhood of the rope' – that is deep at the core of Houston's being. He is a real hero, and this book shows why.

I first came to Hamish Brown's writing as a youngster, exploring Scotland's hills, and regarding *Hamish's Mountain Walk* as something of a bible. What's more, it was written with a mixture of wisdom, humour, informative fact, and total irreverence that captured the spirit of wayward-

ness and exploration that brought us out into the hills and glens we loved. Hamish has recaptured all of that same spirit in writing now about the Atlas Mountains in Morocco, in *The Mountains Look on Marrakech* (Whittles Publishing, £25). Few Europeans know the Atlas Mountains as intimately as does Hamish, and there's no-one else could have written this book. It describes a 96-day, 900-mile traverse of the Atlas in 1996, by Hamish, Charles Knowles, and two Berber muleteers. The description of the mountains is threaded through the narrative of the trek; it is both a story and an inspirational guidebook; it is packed with anecdotes and stories and history and moments of pathos and of humour. There are moments of poetry, too. It is imbued with an affection and respect for the Berber people. It makes you want to go there.

And now to our three finalists. All three are experienced and published writers with honed and polished styles; and they have provided us here with three distinctly different genres of mountain writing, about critically important issues and climbs. The quality and range of their writing is formidable.

In third position we placed Stephen Venables' *Higher than the Eagle Soars* (review, p375). This autobiography of an extraordinary climbing and exploring life is surely appropriately high up on our list, in this important year of the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Alpine Club. This book is a classic of mountain autobiography. It fleshes out the life left unrecorded in three successful expedition books including the Boardman Tasker winner *The Painted Mountains*. Stephen delights the reader with the depth of his – sometimes painful – self-awareness. A classical music buff but poor team player at public school and university, and self-confessed emotional hesitant all his life, he nonetheless finds in and from climbing – particularly solo climbing – the inner resolve and strength to devote his life to high-standard mountaineering: culminating in the outstanding and highly dangerous ascent of Everest's Kangshung Face, when he summited without oxygen and alone, and was lucky to return alive.

We found ourselves wishing for a fuller analysis of the thoughts and feelings and inner struggles about selfishness and companionship when serious decisions are taken at extreme moments like this. And there is perhaps too much hesitation in the book about his placing his life and achievements in the full context of changing social and mountaineering *mores*. Stephen's life, after all, is contemporaneous with many readers' experiences: one of the judges was in Chamonix at exactly the same time as, and emotionally caught up with, a climbing tragedy that Stephen records with real feeling. But the writing about the ascents sparkles with iridescence and immediacy. You are there with him, battling with the external elements and sharing the internal anxiety. And you follow this remarkably told journey through suffering and adversity to a modest acceptance of world-wide acclaim, always rooted in a passion for the mountains and the almost superhuman effort they call forth from those who venture to them.

(This is the moment where I give everything away, but please bear with me nonetheless!)

Our second place goes to James Tabor's *Forever on the Mountain* (review, p372). This book re-examines the worst disaster in American climbing history, when in 1967 seven young, idealistic, fit and experienced climbers died in a freak storm somewhere under the summit of Denali. This is a forensic and densely-researched book, but is startlingly fresh in both style and narrative drive. It engrosses from start to finish. It has impact and immediacy, being written largely in the present tense. James Tabor examines the evidence rigorously, he looks at contemporaneous accounts, extant writing, and considers the participants dispassionately. He turns over all stones, theories, received opinions and reputations. That one of the most revered figures of international mountaineering, map-making and scientific research, Bradford Washburn, comes out with a dented reputation, but with the writer's integrity intact, is a measure of the stature of this book. And it is very hard to avoid ending the book in a state of huge rage at the bureaucratic incompetence of the then National Park Service.

This is a book with a very American flavour, but for British mountaineers – used perhaps to the more intimate post-Hunt approaches to expedition selection and execution – it is nevertheless an essential and compelling read. It lays bare some of the crucial issues facing serious mountain expeditions, then and now: exuberance, incompatibility or mutual support, blame, error, or accident, and the relentless nature of the mountain, its weather and its wilderness. James Tabor's resolve and sustained engagement, his determination to uncover the truth, and his lucid and consistent style of writing whilst exploring and including a wide range of source material, make this book, we believe, a touchstone for the future.

Which brings me to our winner. Robert Macfarlane's *The Wild Places* (review, p371) is neither a book of forensic investigation, nor autobiography, but it would be impossible to say that elements of both styles are not vibrantly present in this moving, challenging, luminously written book. A few years ago Robert's *Mountains of the Mind* was shortlisted for the Boardman Tasker Award, and narrowly missed winning. *The Wild Places* is even better. He wants to search for, and find 'wildness' – noticeably, he never uses the term 'wilderness' – but not only to find it: to sense it, feel it, understand it, capture something of its soul. This is a magical book, written in the finest evocative prose, in which hedgerow, summit, crag, tree, storm, shingle beach, bivouac and solo exploration are discovered and described anew.

Robert writes with a poet's eye and mind, but without ego. His evocations of the ordinary are extraordinary. A spurt of birds driven down the wind; a tall bright sky; a flash of the sea grass; a shrapnel-blast of shingle. And alongside the arresting words, there are the quiet and moving meetings with extraordinary people, first among whom is the late, great Roger Deakin. Indeed, part of the true delight and revelation of this book is the integration he achieves, melding disparate sources, observations, facts and first-hand

experience; he leads us to see and think the way he does. He seeks to find and to feel the nature of Nature itself, and it is after all our only true context. He shows us how wildness exists just round the corner, as well as in the remote mountain peaks and vistas. That we can be moved to visit our own little pieces of wildness and come to terms with our real responsibility to preserve them for others to discover anew, is gloriously celebrated in this book. As TS Eliot wrote in *Little Gidding*,

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.

Robert Macfarlane's *The Wild Places* is an outstanding winner of the Boardman Tasker Award for 2007.

Classic Rock
Compiled by Ken Wilson
Second Edition 2007 Bâton Wicks 300pp £32

A long time ago in a distant part of the Galaxy (East Finchley actually), a long-haired climbing youth laboured long in a garden shed. No ordinary garden shed this, but a darkroom. No ordinary darkroom either, but the hallowed home to the enlarger of one Ken Wilson who, back then in the autumn of 1973, stood astride the climbing world as the colossus editor of *Mountain* magazine. I, the long haired youth, was working out my notice as Assistant Editor (don't ask), having let slip that I could print – at which point Ken marched me out into the garden, locked me in the shed with a arm-load of negatives and commanded me to print. Two weeks later I emerged blinking into the daylight, reeking of hypo, but having printed up a vast selection of images that would become very familiar to the climbing world over the next decades. What I didn't know was that Ken was planning a series of climbing books and it turned out that these pictures would grace the pages, not only of subsequent issues of *Mountain*, but *Hard Rock*, *Classic Rock*, *Cold Climbs* and *South West Climbs*.

I had been working closely with Ken over the previous months, following a learning curve of Ceüsean steepness. His energy was, and is, legendary and limitless, so once a plan was laid nothing: the weather, people, God, fellow road users, would or could interfere. For example, in that fine September of '73, Ken decided he needed to fill in some photographic gaps in the 'Rock' books, so we'd go to Scotland, via the Lakes, to get crag and action shots for *North Crag Eliminate*, *Shibboleth*, *Raven's Gully*, Craig a' Banchair, *Clachaig Gully*, and *Centurion*. In four days, mid-week, he got the lot: good light, dry rock, people. (My subsequent efforts to emulate this

feat during the assembly of *Extreme Rock* met with dismal and repeated failure, but that's another story.)

So the various books were produced and became part of the furniture of British climbing literature. A whole generation of climbers grew up with the images and words of *Hard Rock* and *Classic Rock* hard-wired into their climbing psyche. At the time they were published, trad' climbing in Britain had reached its high water mark: the ethos was set in stone and subsequent advances during the Eighties and Nineties were only of degree, doomed to share the limelight with the *bête noire* of bolted sport climbing.

Of all the books, *Classic Rock* was perhaps the most inspirational and accessible, for it encompassed not only climbs that were do-able by the majority, but also the wealth of history and anecdote that came with them. Accessible also because most, if not all, of the routes included were done prior to 'modern protection' the application of which could render them a safe-ish introduction to leading.

Fast forward the decades: of bolting, sport climbing, bouldering and indoor walls and all the while this collection of ageing black and white photos and fine essays waited in the wings, selling steadily, it must be said, enough to justify a couple of slightly tweaked reprints. However the routes didn't fall into obscurity – far from it. These classics remained popular with grassroots climbers from beginners to seasoned veterans. Contrary to popular belief amongst climbing feature writers, 95 per cent of us only climb to VS, a point which I have tried to ram home to contributors throughout my stewardship of various magazines.

So, at a time of glitz and glamour and the pursuit of big numbers it was time to redress the balance. Arise the once and future king in our time of need: Ken decides to produce a second edition of *Classic Rock*. Three years of trawling photos and a series of his by now legendary photographic *enchaînements* later, the deed is done.

Now this hardly qualifies as a second edition, more like a completely new book: larger format, nearly all new photos, mostly colour (I struggle to find examples of my lovingly crafted shed period black & whites), all augmented with new historical perspectives and profiles woven around archive photos. This last feature was the real winner for me: having read most of the essays several times over the years (Alan Austin's *Clachaig Gully* is still the best), I savoured the new extended captions and historical box-outs. The front and back of the book are crammed with new lists and tables and charts and time lines which can easily convert a quick dip into a lost hour.

There are of course a few technical problems with the book; he was at times not best served by either Kodachrome 200 or his colour scanners (tell me about it ...) but this doesn't detract from the wealth of brilliant new pictures. Which brings me at last to a rather unsettling conclusion. All the images in this book are from slides and black & white prints with insignificant input from digital cameras. I have a horrible suspicion that here we see the end of the photographic history of climbing. Digital photography

is so vulnerable and ephemeral that in a few years time there will be no accessible record of climbing from the point where people abandoned their film cameras.

Previously, lackadaisical climbing photographers (is there any other kind?) would consign prints and slides to a shoebox to languish in attic or drawer. Twenty years down the line they'd be re-discovered with joy and amazement (or embarrassment) as part of climbing history. No problem, I'm often berated, you just update your storage media. Sorry, this is just not going to happen and whole climbing lives will be consigned to landfill along with their obsolete PCs. But hey, digital is so quick and convenient and you can spray them to the news web sites! And when their servers go down? No old magazines to trawl or journals to thumb through ...

And what of Ken? What if he ever decides to retire (though he might not get the chance if he continues to solo about on crags with his Leica trying to get action shots like some suicidal paparazzi)? Will anyone come along with anything approaching his obsessive, almost brutal attention to publishing rigour and detail? I doubt it.

This latest edition of *Classic Rock* is a great book: absorbing, informative, inspirational – you stand back from it and think 'blimey!' and this is only *part* of climbing.

Bernard Newman

Albert Steiner: The Photographic Work
Edited by Peter Pfrunder and Beat Stutzer
Steidl, 2006, pp239, 136 colour illustrations, £45

Albert Steiner, born in 1877, managed his parents' bakery in Thun for some years before setting out to make a living as a self-employed photographer. In 1904 he opened his own photography studio in Geneva and later lived and worked in St Moritz. Steiner was one of the outstanding Swiss photographers of the 20th century. Like Ansel Adams, he translated his artistic vision of mountains into black and white to reveal all its majesty. Steiner's photographic work spans the period before World War I, with its pictorially inspired images that look like oil paintings, to the straightforward and elegantly modern photography of the 1930s. Unlike other Swiss photographers of his generation, Steiner considered himself to be an artist. He saw photography as a completely appropriate means of creating works of art.

This is a very fine coffee table book that captures the atmosphere of the times in Switzerland. As a member of the SAC, Steiner ventured into the high mountains and produced beautiful images of the Alps in their pristine state at the turn of the 20th century. Interestingly enough I was able to buy his other book *Engadiner Landschaften*, published in 1929, on the internet. Remarkably, the printing in this 80-year old book is on a par with this contemporary offering.

The narrative explores his contribution to Swiss and European photography and compares him to the British and American masters of the time like Frank Smythe and Ansel Adams. It places Steiner in context with modern masters like Balthasar Burkhard and with his Italian predecessor Vittorio Sella.

I recommend this book to all connoisseurs of fine mountain photography and for its history. For me, it is all the more fascinating as Steiner was my uncle's uncle.

Alex Milne

The Wild Places
Robert Macfarlane
Granta, 2007, pp340, £18.99

Presumably, one of the reasons we go to the mountains is to reconnect with wild places, leaving behind domesticated lowlands, agricultural and urban spaces in hopes of reviving that wild spark in ourselves by negotiating our journeys in the unpeopled, uplifting, wild places. So, in Robert Macfarlane's Boardman Tasker-winning account of his tour of the wild places of Britain and Ireland (after first climbing a beech tree close to a road and the hospital, airport and housing estates of Cambridge where he lives), he heads to the far north and the far west of the archipelago for more satisfying encounters with wildness. Bivvying out is one of his modes of reconnection in these places, each rendered generic by his chapter titles: 'Island', 'Valley', 'Moor', 'Forest', 'Cape', 'Ridge', etc. But on the summit of Ben Hope Macfarlane makes a strange discovery for the author of *Mountains of the Mind* (2003). He cannot connect. During his winter night on the single summit of these journeys, he experiences, not the hostility, but the indifference of this wild place: 'Here, there was no question of relation. This place refused any imputation of meaning.'

Much could be written about these two sentences, and perhaps already has been, for example, by Menlove Edwards in his poem 'You rock, you heaviness'. Jim Perrin's deft discussion of this poem in his biography *Menlove* (1985: 156-7) concludes that the alienating 'feelinglessness' of rock is either desirable or annihilating according to the inner mind of the climber at the moment of contact. 'Relationship', or even more demanding 'meaning', might seem 'refused' by a mind trying too hard. To some readers this will be a shortcoming of the book, resulting in too earnest a temptation to significance, like folding the wings over the body of a dead seagull, or taking back a symbolic item from each journey that really needs poetry such as Seamus Heaney's 'Shelf Life' sequence to explore its significance. I regard it as a strength of Macfarlane's book – the mind trying hard to understand experience, to read around it and to reflect upon it, in the richest resources that language can muster.

The key to this book's success is its honest self-criticism, its capacity to learn from its earnest endeavours and its clear, imaginative, at times stunning language that impressed the Boardman Tasker judges in what has been another bold judges' decision. Bold because the result of Macfarlane's enquiry is that little places, often in the lowlands, often close to habitation, offer insights into the nature of wildness: 'It seemed to me that these nameless places might in fact be more important than the grander wild lands that for so many years had gripped my imagination'. In the chapter following the summit experience, the epiphany comes when looking down into a gryke in the Burren at the jungle of miniature, complex, wild life. Thus the following chapters of journeys engaging with a holloway (sunken track), storm-beach, saltmarsh and tor, connect with wildness through new eyes and mindset, leading back to a new experience of wildness in the almost urban beechwood with which the book began.

Early for my meeting with Robert Macfarlane yesterday, I wandered about Lime Kiln Hill, above his Cambridge suburb. I struggled on our weekly winter school cross-country runs up here 50 years ago. Brambles, mud and a slippery slope beside the old chalk quarry are what I remember. I was shocked to find that it now carries the designation 'Nature Reserve' – still brambles, mud and a slippery slope, but apparently one of Macfarlane's designated local wild places. As we talked about his recent skinning up Ben Alder from Culra bothy we noticed a crow disturbing the display encirclement of two sparrowhawks above us. Suddenly a heron flew low over the hedge. His small children went on playing wildly with soil, grass, beans and the bubbles I'd brought. 'Aren't children natural tree-climbers?' he said. We were in town, at his home, in the wild, as this book leads the reader to appreciate.

Terry Gifford

Forever on the Mountain
James M Tabor
W W Norton and Company, New York, 2007, pp374, US$26.95

When seven climbers died on Mt McKinley in July 1967, engulfed by the mountain, their bodies never recovered, the tragedy ranked as the worst disaster in North American mountaineering history. Two books by survivors of the doomed Joseph F Wilcox expedition and reports of the inquiries left many questions unanswered over the conduct of the climb and the subsequent search and rescue operation. Forty years on we now have a third book, *Forever on the Mountain* by James M Tabor, which cuts through the acrimony, blame shifting and contradictions to weigh the hard evidence and set a distorted record straight. Grand tragedies, he points out, require a singular confluence of time, fate, circumstances, will and mishap. What he identifies in a painstakingly thorough evaluation of the facts is a trail of

wrong decisions, financial pressures, bruised egos, personality clashes and bureaucratic delay compounded by the worst weather that this crucible of storms can generate.

Mt McKinley (6194m) was first climbed in 1913 by Hudson Stuck, Episcopal Archdeacon of the Yukon, who was a hardy, Scottish-trained mountaineer. Measured from base to summit the mountain ranks as the highest climb on earth, exceeding Everest's bottom to top elevation by more than a vertical mile. Its status as the highest summit in North America, its Arctic isolation and thin air has created an iconic challenge for aspiring mountaineers. Among them in 1967 was Joseph F Wilcox, whose nine-man eponymous expedition began planning at the same time as a group of three 'alpha male' mountaineers from Colorado had McKinley as their goal. National Park rules did not allow attempts by fewer than four climbers, the Wilcox expedition was struggling to raise funds, and so joining forces offered an obvious but uneasy all-round solution.

Seeking funds to attempt a mountain first climbed half a century ago was a problem for Joe Wilcox. His innocent proposal to attract publicity and media interest by climbing and camping out on the north and south summits of McKinley simultaneously brought a caustic response from Bradford Washburn, doyen of McKinley pioneers and fountain head of the mountain's history, when he was approached by Wilcox for guidance. 'For your information, according to our records,' Washburn replied, 'McKinley has not yet been climbed blindfold or backwards, nor has any party of nine persons yet fallen simultaneously into the same crevasse. We hope that you may wish to rise to one of these compelling challenges. Sincerely, Bradford Washburn.'

His letter ignited a searing response from Wilcox who accused Washburn, his 'childhood idol', of hypocrisy considering the amount of publicity Washburn's own climbs on McKinley had received.

Thus began 30 years of smouldering dislike between the two men with Washburn actively attempting to frustrate the expedition, advising the head of the National Park Authority: 'Don't let those stupid asses on the mountain,' before the climbers had even set foot on McKinley.

When they did, it was quickly apparent that the two groups were ill-matched with the Coloradoans proving faster and able to acclimatise more easily than some members of the Wilcox team. The climb began on 18 June and after weeks of gruelling load carrying seven camps were established on the Muldrow glacier and the icefalls above, culminating on 15 July when Wilcox with Coloradoans, Paul Schlichter and Jerry Lewis, reached the summit. Behind them, a second group was gathering at the high camp ready for their own attempt the following day.

But even as the successful climbers were descending from the summit, following a route marked by wands planted earlier, the weather began to deteriorate. Poor visibility and increasing wind delayed the second team for two days. Leaving one man ill in the high camp, six others set out into

cream-thick whiteout, following a sparse line of wands towards the summit ridge some 650m above. Progress was slow and the climbers chose to dig snow caves to bivouac the night below the summit. The following day they called the park headquarters by radio to say they were healthy, uninjured and had linked arms on McKinley's summit. The wind was 15 miles an hour but there was no view and they were about to descend. Shortly after this call, ominous lenticular clouds gathered around the summit signalling a storm of violent wind and heavy snow that was to last 10 days, stranding seven men high on the mountain.

Overflights by light aircraft or an air force C-130 to check on the climbers or to drop emergency food and equipment were impossible in the storm which dumped unprecedented amounts of rain that washed away roads and bridges and winds that disrupted radio and telephone services. Meanwhile, at camp 6 on the mountain, Wilcox and the Coloradoans had spent 11 days at 5000m, storm-bound and in no condition to climb through deep fresh snow to reach the climbers higher on the mountain.

Tabor graphically describes the frustrated attempts to coordinate a rescue, the heroic efforts of the climbers who survived and the search team who did eventually climb beyond the high camp and discover the bodies of three of the climbers. No trace was found of the other four.

The tragedy has already been described in *White Winds* by Joe Wilcox and *The Hall of the Mountain King* by Howard Snyder, both with their individual slant on the expedition and the succeeding furore. What Tabor does in the final one-third of *Forever on the Mountain* is give close scrutiny to the reports, statements, excuses and press coverage that emerged as the mountaineering world sought for reasons for the disaster and as blame circled looking for somewhere to land. A conference in Anchorage some six weeks after the event had a Who's Who of Alaskan mountaineering, among them Washburn acting as a National Park Service consultant. The Wilcox tragedy's five survivors were conspicuous 'not for their illuminating testimony but for their absence'. The conference's leitmotif was 'tactical errors' with the spotlight on Wilcox, allowing the National Park Service bureaucrats to slip quietly from the stage.

The next report, an anonymous account in the annual compendium of accidents by the AAC and Canadian Alpine Club, equally contained false statements and assumptions according to Tabor who attempted unsuccessfully to discover the author. He concluded: 'after all the wild geese had been chased...it appeared likely that Brad Washburn had written the report himself or, if not, had strongly influenced the person who did.' Tabor then tracked down the precise meteorological records for July 1967 around McKinley. They showed all the ingredients for winds of extreme strength and turbulence with jet streaks deflecting the energy and velocity of the jet stream down to McKinley's summit area. He also interviewed the remaining survivors of the tragedy and recorded their recollections and recalled how, in 1997, Wilcox had presented a slide show about the 1967 tragedy to a

conference of McKinley personalities, among them Bradford Washburn. The show ended in absolute silence with pictures of seven dead young men and Wilcox saying: 'These were my friends.' At this point Washburn rose from the front row, shook Wilcox by the hand and said softly: 'You did everything as well as it could be done.' Much has since changed in the organisation and the emergency services guarding Mt McKinley, and Tabor's forensic examination of how the tragedy happened may have at last brought closure.

Ronald Faux

Higher Than The Eagle Soars: A Path to Everest
Stephen Venables
Hutchinson, 2007, pp370, £18.99

In this his latest book, Stephen Venables presents the reader with a standard format autobiography covering his early years, climbing initiation and a huge variety of mountaineering experiences around the world leading up to his historic mask-less ascent of Everest in 1988.

Stephen is an accomplished writer (as one would expect from an Oxford English graduate) whose work I always look forward to reading. Although some of the expeditions have been covered in previous books (*Painted Mountains* and *Everest: Alone At The Summit*) I did not find that this detracted unduly from the story he has chosen to tell – a personal, physical and spiritual journey from childhood to reaching the summit of the world's highest mountain, alone by a new route.

I could have left the childhood memories, but they are there for those who find these things compelling. As a reader your attention has already been grabbed by the summit day prologue on the South Col of Everest, and Stephen soon returns to the meat of the book – climbing. On this theme he writes as well as anyone. On numerous occasions I found his eye for detail of the intricate beauty of the mountain environment struck particular chords, transporting me back through time and space to some of the places we have both been fortunate enough to visit. Stephen's love of these places and his chosen sport is very evident.

This book does not carry the same narrative drive of *A Slender Thread* or *Ollie*, the previous two titles of Stephen's that I sampled, but as a climber I was pleased to find it a more comfortable read that allowed my delusions to remain intact.

Ultimately, *Higher than the Eagle Soars* is a joyful celebration of our unique and special pastime, the strange bunch of misfits who pursue it and the truly magical places it takes them to. In summary: a piece of timeless mountaineering literature that will sit very comfortably on any AC member's bookshelf.

Simon Yates

On My Own Two Feet
Norman Hardie
University of Canterbury Press, 2006, pp324, Aus$37.95

New Zealander, honorary member of the Alpine Club and one of the four summiteers on the first ascent of Kangchenjunga in 1955, Norman Hardie has written an absorbing and at times inspiring account of his life. The book is written in an unpretentious style that carries one along on an increasing wave of respect for a man who, as he puts it, would like to put the record straight.

His accounts of boyhood and early manhood are fascinating; an unhealthy child who was excused from sports at school, he grew up in a strict rural family and, with regular chores on the farm from an early age, he learnt that life can be hard. By 16 he was deer-culling in the New Zealand bush and packing out vast loads of skins on his back and had made a 260km cycle trip on a bike with no gears, on dirt roads – and in one day. Those experiences stood him in good stead for the privations of the war for which he was just too young to be actively involved in but which saw his brother shot down on a raid over Germany.

A largely unmapped South Island was on his doorstep and, learning technique from experience and friends, he explored vast areas of unpenetrated country. His accounts of journeys in the Landsborough area south-west of Mt Cook are typically understated and one needs first-hand experience of New Zealand bush to understand what was involved. It's hard to imagine a climbing expedition these days in which you carry a rifle and live off deer! But here lies a minor criticism: for non-Kiwi readers, Maori names are a bit like characters in a Russian novel – they may be pronounceable but they all sound the same. A large-scale map early on would be a great asset. I didn't find the two less than adequate maps of New Zealand until I stumbled upon them attached to the block of plates in the centre of the book.

It was during those early explorations amidst the mountains of the South Island (and the good fortune of being influenced by the big names of New Zealand mountaineering at the time) that he acquired his formidable skill on ice. And it was here, on a rescue on Mt Perousse that he first met Ed Hillary. The rescue took seven days and underlines the toughness of New Zealand mountaineers. The carry first went upwards almost to the summit and then down the valley of the Cook River – untravelled by man for the previous 10 years. At the end the professionals drove home by car while Hardie tuned round and marched non-stop across the divide to Pukaki where he was working on an hydro-electric project, had a quick breakfast and went to work.

Hardie qualified as a civil engineer, and engineers will enjoy the glimpses of his professional career; all will appreciate his skill in surveying in the

Himalaya in previously uncharted country and his insights into dam construction.

1951 saw Hardie arrive in England. Typically, he worked his passage as a tourist-class steward on a cargo liner and his picture of Britain in those bleak post war years is a sharp reminder of a world almost forgotten. Three months after his arrival, Norman married Enid Hurst, a girl he had met through the tramping club while at university in Christchurch. It seems to have been a happy and successful union and it is clear that she brought to his considerable intellect a broader appreciation of music, literature and the arts. To me she is the unsung heroine of the piece – the perfect wife who accompanies her husband on some expeditions (she was the first woman to reach Everest base camp) or, apparently uncomplaining, guards home and hearth while he is away on others: three seasons in the Antarctic including one as base commander of New Zealand's Scott Base when he managed to get to the South Pole and, famously, to Kangchenjunga.

Hardie must have been a strong contender for a place on the 1953 Everest expedition but the powers that be thought two Kiwis were enough, although he acted as one of the secretaries at the RGS for the expedition. He was in the Himalaya in 1954 (his book *In Highest Nepal: Our Life Among the Sherpas*, 1957, provides a record of a way of life now almost disappeared under mass tourism) and he was a natural for selection for the 1955 expedition to Kangchenjunga – which it is worth remembering was intended to be a reconnaissance rather than a full-scale assault. Hardie's account of that successful attempt indicates a deep friendship with Charles Evans and paints a portrait of a very happy group and a strong feeling that success had been a team effort.

It is clear that Evans was concerned that upon their return to civilisation they might experience the 'who was first?' problem experienced by the 1953 returning Everest party and one suspects that Hardie, evidently not keen on celebrity, may have had this in mind when he decided to stay in the Himalaya and explore with three Sherpa friends rather than return to Britain immediately. That the expedition's return was greeted with something of a yawn by a population sated on Everest, the coronation and the 'New Elizabethan Age' must have been anticlimactic and that none of the successful party has been honoured seems, to say the least, churlish.

Between the lines one gains the impression of a polymath who, never having sought the limelight, deserves greater recognition than he has received. He reminds us, in the days when people queue at the Hillary Step and the Chinese take the Olympic Flame to the summit of Everest, of a time when exploration was exploration and when a Himalayan attempt meant a commitment of six months without pay. This book provides a valuable record of a pioneering age in mountain history and the story of a life lived to the full.

Nigel Peacock

Beyond Seven Years in Tibet
My life before, during and after
Heinrich Harrer
Translated by Tim Carruthers
Labyrinth Press, 2007, pp512, £25

John Lennon put it pithily in an interview for *Rolling Stone* magazine. 'You have to be a bastard to make it,' he said, then added, 'and the Beatles were the biggest bastards on Earth.' Doubtless there have been exceptions to the Lennon rule of bastards, but Heinrich Harrer was probably not one of them. He was certainly a tough bastard. The Austrian mountaineer-explorer weathered avalanches on the Eiger, imprisonment in India, a bone-shattering fall into rapids in New Guinea, a near-fatal bout of malaria and a whole lot more. I was going to say a lucky 'b' too. But Harrer made his own luck. He was a ruthless opportunist, and that, together with his iron constitution, carried him through a lifetime of adventure.

Tim Carruthers warned me, as he was engrossed in the translation, not to expect any surprises or confessions. This, we should remember, is the work of a man in his late eighties and unless there are hidden letters or diaries it represents his last testimony. It is Harrer's life as he wants to be remembered, told in his direct style. He is centre stage and the seismic changes he witnessed in pre-war Austria and in Tibet are merely backdrops.

One photograph in this marathon of a book epitomizes Harrer's life post-Tibet. He is seated, shirt off, in a dug-out canoe on a river in French Guyana, peering at the jungly bank, cradling a cine-camera, sun hat and camera cases to hand, while an Indian paddles the craft. Filming and writing, he had embarked on another half century of globetrotting. He also chalked up some notable first ascents, including Ausangate (6384m) in Peru, Mounts Hunter (4442m) and Deborah (3822m) in Alaska with the prolific Fred Beckey, and Carstensz Pyramid (4833m) in New Guinea.

Harrer – an AC honorary member – died in January 2006, aged 93. This autobiography first appeared in German in 2002 under title *Mein Leben* – My Life. Publishers Labyrinth Press clearly thought English language readers might be less familiar with Herr Harrer (remember, this book is not primarily aimed at mountaineers) and went for a more portmanteau title: *Beyond Seven Years in Tibet: My life before, during and after.*

Carruthers, a climber himself, has deftly caught Harrer's voice. One can easily imagine the old man seated at his desk at home in the Carinthia hills, the journals and clutter of his travels spread about him, recalling with evident satisfaction his glory days on the Eiger and escape from the Raj, then a wounded tone as he excuses his 'mistakes' in the Nazi era, and a touch of melancholy pervading the later journeys as he sees the modern world encroaching on tribes who had lived in harmony with nature. Not only was Harrer one of the last westerners to witness the old lamaist Tibet, he was also one of the few to experience life as it was in the Palaeolithic

and Neolithic eras – the former in New Guinea and the latter among the Xingu Indians. In one poignant passage, he illustrates the corrosive effect of outside contact on the Indians of the Xingu River in Brazil – despite the area being designated a reservation and national park. Along with new diseases had come an erosion of traditional skills:

'For example, in order to collect the splendid coloured feathers of the toucan, the Indians used to entice the birds closer by imitating their calls, whereupon they would shoot them from the tree branches with arrows dipped in a mild poison, pluck a few of the bright red and yellow feathers and set the birds free again. Now the Indians were proud possessors of rifles, with which the birds could be killed outright from a great distance, and their bows and arrows had become redundant, but they had lost the ability to imitate birdsong and other animal sounds.'

This is Harrer the ethnologist. But frustratingly such observations come as isolated vignettes between the jungle bashing and the endless name-dropping as he meets and basks in the reflected celebrity of an oddly varied cast from his hero Sven Hedin, pioneer explorer of central Asia, to golfer Jack Nicklaus, Bing Crosby, the Duke of Windsor and the artist Balthus.

Harrer was born in July 1912 and paints a warm picture of his upbringing in a former miner's cottage in the hills of Carinthia, southern Austria. (The first of three fine sections of photographs capture this long gone period in a backwater of the collapsed Austro-Hungarian Empire.) His father worked for the Post Office on mail trains and was a member of the Socialist Party. As such, Dad was angered when 'Heini' left the Children's Friends Association, who would hike in the hills behind a red banner, and switched to the German Gymnastics Club.

In 1927, when the family moved to Graz, provincial capital of Styria, Harrer joined the junior section of the Austrian Alpine Club (ÖAV) and soon began climbing and skiing. He was chosen for the Austrian national ski squad for the 1936 Winter Olympic Games in Bavaria, but never got to race as the Austrian government withdrew the team in protest at the politics of Hitler's National Socialists.

This is the shadow time for Harrer and an area for further potential disclosure. The ÖAV was a hotbed of anti-Semitism and Graz, where Harrer studied geography and athletics at university, was the scene of Nazi demonstrations with the right-wing students to the fore. Harrer does not touch on this but gallops on through climbs in the Dolomites to his limelight moment as a mountaineer – the first ascent of the north face of the Eiger in July 1938 with his fellow Austrian Kasparek and the Germans Heckmair and Vörg.

We know Heinrich Harrer from two best-sellers – *The White Spider*, recounting that ascent of the Eiger *Nordwand* with a verve that made the book an inspiration to post-war climbers, and *Seven Years in Tibet*. Confident of his place in history, Harrer was cruising along comfortably into old age, when in 1997, as his Tibetan adventure was being turned into a film starring

Brad Pitt, his dalliance with National Socialism came to public attention. There are documents stating he joined the thuggish *Sturmabteilung* (SA) in 1933, but Harrer says he had been advised to make this 'false' claim in order to speed up his marriage to Lotte Wegener, from a family well-connected to the Nazi elite, and that he only applied for membership of the Nazi party in 1938 in order to take up a teaching post. At this time he was also working as a sports and ski instructor for the Syrian SS, though we're told he only wore the SS uniform once, on the day of his marriage to Lotte.

It was a difficult time for a proud old man, seeing the golden sunset he believed was his due clouded by a 'smear campaign' by journalists and others who, he complained, had not been born at the time. Harrer says he has thought 'long and hard' about his behaviour in 1938. 'Maybe it was youthful opportunism or maybe it was blind determination to subordinate everything in order to achieve my sporting objectives. Whatever it was, it was a mistake.'

At the close of the book, Harrer engages in a rambling valediction, taking another swipe at the duplicity of the journalists who beat it to his door following the disclosures of the late 1990s, engaging in a Desert Island books diversion – he would take the Bible, *Don Quixote*, Ovid's *Metamorphosis* and *Kim* – and declaring his abhorrence of violence.

Of the hack pack, Harrer says that by the summer of 1998 he and Carina, his third wife, had got to know the correspondents of all the newspapers and magazines in the world, or so it seemed. 'The journalists' expressions of gratitude and respect filled 22 pages of our guest book, but unfortunately their kind words only rarely matched those that subsequently appeared in print.' Knowing the tactics of my trade, I have to say that this rings painfully true. I guess we all have our place on that Lennon scale.

Stephen Goodwin

When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty: The Samding Dorje Phagmo of Tibet
Hildegard Diemberger
Columbia University Press, 2007, pp. xx+394, £32

Samding monastery stands on a hillside within a vast plain south-west of Lhasa, overlooking a lake known as 'demoness lake'. The monastery's name means 'Soaring Meditation' and it is the seat of the Samding Dorje Phagmo, the most famous female incarnation lineage in Tibet. According to popular legend it is only through Dorje Phagmo's power that the lake's waters are restrained from bursting out to flood the whole of Tibet. Stories of the austere and beautiful Tibetan landscape are one with its religion and the history of its people, as Hildegard Diemberger's book demonstrates in exploring the lives of the remarkable women who together form a dynasty of female leaders in religion and politics.

Diemberger provides extraordinary insight into the life of the very first woman in this lineage, Chokyi Dronma, through a recently discovered 15th century biography. We learn that Chokyi Dronma was born a Tibetan princess in 1422 and, although early in her life she felt the desire to renounce worldly status and become a nun, political obligations compelled her to marry into a neighbouring royal family. Following the death of her baby daughter, however, she resolved to leave her marriage and take religious vows. Her husband, family and the local people opposed her decision but she was determined to dedicate herself to a spiritual life, and ultimately achieved ordination, an extremely unusual attainment within Tibetan Buddhism for a woman. Chokyi Dronma's spiritual masters recognised her as the emanation of the tantric deity Dorje Phagmo.

The book opens with introduction to the life of Chokyi Dronma and her historical and cultural contexts, followed by Diemberger's translation of the biography. Armed with the information from the previous chapters, this text is fascinating reading, delivered in a fluid, engaging style, mixing drama with pursuit of spiritual ideals. In one memorable scene Chokyi Dronma learns that her religious master, the great scholar Bodong Chogle Namgyal is approaching death and she races to him across high mountain passes, 'riding fast with snowflakes hitting her eyes, hurting like thorns'. These passes appear throughout the story as places of meeting and departure.

The biography is followed by chapters on the later incarnations of the Samding Dorje Phagmo and detailed explorations of the meaning of reincarnation and the role of women in Buddhism. The last chapters explore the life of the current twelfth incarnation, a woman who has lived through a period of extreme change. Born in 1938, she saw the Chinese annexation of Tibet in 1951 and fled to India during the uprising seven years later. She chose to return, was fêted by Mao and appointed to various government positions, used for her symbolic value against Tibetans who chose exile. Even so, Samding monastery was destroyed in the Cultural Revolution. Since then Samding has been rebuilt and is now physically impressive, if spiritually malnourished. The Dorje Phagmo remains a high government cadre in the Tibet Autonomous Region. Diemberger delivers a nuanced account of these events and it is typical of her careful presentation of Tibetan voices that this section is largely made up of and structured around the recollections of the Dorje Phagmo's sister.

The book combines scholarly analysis with occasional anecdotes of personal encounters. In the last of these, Diemberger meets a cheerful young nun on a dirt lane wearing monastic robes but with her hair long and a mobile phone in her hand, who gives her name as Dorje Phagmo. Diemberger learns that the woman is thought by some to be an emanation of the deity, said to be 'just one of the many new incarnations and oracles that are emerging these days'. The resilient Tibetan women portrayed in this book evidently inspire this tentative but hopeful conclusion.

Kathleen Palti

The Cairngorms
Andy Nisbet *et al*
Scottish Mountaineering Trust, 2007, pp492, £23.00

The SMC's latest compilation of mountain routes lying east of the A9 continues their modern tradition of fabulous looking, highly articulate climbers' guides. After a brief experimentation with a two-volume approach covering the climbs of this area, the SMC have, despite the significant increase in recorded routes, reverted to a single-seater design for the latest model. Strictly speaking, its title tells only a fraction of the story, for this data-stoked tome covers not just the Cairngorms/Am Monadh Ruadh proper, but also everything recorded in the Mounth. As a consequence, the guide is quite chunky but still manageable – think of it as a slightly overweight but fit and happy labrador, rather than a run-yourself-ragged border collie. The guide 'modernises' the presentation of Cairngorm data with many of the old crag line drawings done away with and replaced by the now-familiar and attractively clear panoramic colour photo-topos. However, given the fact that the prevailing weather conditions in these parts 'occasionally' renders these beautiful depictions largely irrelevant (as a character-building maelstrom of cloud, rain or snow engulfs the land), a useful innovation might have been the judicious mention of grid co-ordinates to aid navigation to and from climbs (especially given the fact that these days most people with a healthy survival instinct carry a GPS in the 'Gorms, especially in winter).

This is a minor gripe however. The crag and route information, as expected from a publication with Andy Nisbet leading the writing team behind it, is authoritative and enthusiastic – while the numerous photographs of often remote and exciting climbs sharpen the exploratory urge in the reader. It's a combination that both informs and inspires. Who needs the Alps when we've got one of the best wilderness climbing areas in Europe within our own borders? *The Cairngorms* provides a compelling argument to support this view.

Colin Wells

A Cairngorm Chronicle
A F Whyte, illustrated by Rose Shaw-Taylor
Millrace, 2007, pp158 £14.95 list/£13.50 website

To the polymath A F Whyte, politician, journalist and lecturer, the Cairngorms were 'the home of the spirit, the shrine to which the wanderer returns to recapture that which he dare not lose'. In his long career, travelling widely in India and the Far East, he often turned to his journal as a means of revisiting his beloved mountains. It is this journal, written for his own

pleasure and discovered by his daughter after his death, which appears in a beautifully compact offering from the excellent Millrace list.

The centrepiece of the book is a remarkable day's foray in 1904 when Whyte and two companions set out from the Shelter Stone before dawn and completed a circuit of 38 miles, climbing 9300ft including nine Munros. Although the physical exertion is remarkable, it is the innocent pleasure of companionship and the historical and linguistic digressions which most entertain the reader. Whyte's discussion of the subtleties of interpretation of the Gaelic names of the mountains and the natural features around them form a scholarly yet absorbing strand of the narrative.

However, this gently anachronistic book does much more than record, though it charts more than 50 years of outings in Whyte's beloved mountains. It contains a wealth of curious detail, such as instructions for the preparation of the Herring Bap and on the necessity of soaping one's socks to ensure comfort on a long walk, a wry sense of self-mockery when an anonymous stream is named Allt Eggie after an eggshell race down its course. As Whyte puts it, with eloquent cheerfulness, 'matters of great moment have sometimes turned on trifles.'

At its best, it gives us writing which lights up the landscape – 'Loch Avon has ... a flavour of claret, too indeterminate to be called purple, too cloudy to be called violet, yet somewhere in the spectrum near indigo, with an olive-green shadow shot through it' – and a clear and sturdy sense of place, reinforced by Whyte's wide-ranging and apposite literary allusions.
Perhaps most seductively of all, it affords us a glimpse into a world long-gone and innocent pleasures now too rarely appreciated – a world which is not a literary or historical construct but the very centre of one man's lifelong passion.

Val Randall

Darkening Peaks
Glacier Retreat, Science and Society
Edited by Ben Orlove, Ellen Wiegandt and Brian H Luckman
University of California Press, 2008, pp296, £26.95

It is as if heralds had been sent with a warning. First there was 'Ötzi – the Ice Man' – discovered by two hikers in the Ötztaler Alps in 1991. The Bronze Age fellow had emerged from the melting Similaun glacier after 5000 years. But perhaps we were all too focused on what he had in his pockets and whether he was Austrian or Italian property and so we missed his most important message. Anyway, global warming was not an issue we were receptive to back then.

So another herald was despatched. Kwaday Dan Ts'inchi emerged from the edge of a retreating glacier in Canada in 1999. The name was bestowed

on this second ice man by the indigenous people of the region and translates as 'long ago person found'. By this time we were waking up to the message. These chaps were turning up because glaciers around the world were melting, and maybe human activity was a part of the cause.

I suppose I have lit upon these two particular exemplifiers of glacier retreat because I am a scientific illiterate and symbolism is easier to absorb than the mass of data presented in this authoritative study. However even I can see where the figures are leading; many of the glaciers that have seemed permanent features for millennia will be gone in decades.

Academic, yet accessible, *Darkening Peaks* provides an integrated, multi-disciplinary, global exploration of the scientific, social, and economic dimensions of the phenomenon of glacier retreat. It brings together contributors from five continents to discuss the ways that scientists have observed and modelled glaciers, tells how climate change is altering their size and distribution, and looks closely at their effect on human life.

Of thought-provoking interest is the attention given to the cultural significance of mountain glaciers. For many there is a spiritual connection, and for particular communities – such as the people of Seattle looking up to Mt Rainier or those of Yerevan in sight of Mt Ararat – the glaciated peak is part of their idea of home. Even among the majority of us, without a specific connection, there is a deep response to glittering white peaks as one of great treasures of the world. The idea that this purity should dissolve to leave dark, crumbling rock is somehow shocking.

Orlove, Wiegandt and Luckman suggest that hope may lie as much with this cultural attachment to glaciers as much as our reckoning of the downstream hazards and economic consequences of their retreat. They posit two scenarios: waves lapping the lower stories of skyscrapers of former coastal cities due to the shrinkage of polar ice caps, first signalled by the reduction of mountain glaciers to small fragments; or new technologies and new patterns of consumption (surely that can be summarized as 'a lot less'?) averting such catastrophic change.

'If the world does address the great challenge of global warming, it will be in part because of the way that glaciers serve as icons to make this change visible,' the authors conclude. But how big is that 'If'?

Stephen Goodwin

Thin White Line
Andy Cave
Hutchinson, 2008, pp.186, £18.99

Andy Cave is truly a Renaissance Man. In one month he climbed Fitzroy, saw Marc Almond perform live at the Buxton Opera House and watched his beloved Barnsley FC beat Liverpool in the FA Cup. And, somehow, in between, he finished writing his latest collection of mountaineering

reminiscences, *Thin White Line*. It's a book that reflects Cave's eclectic interests and his voracious curiosity about the world by describing expeditions and first ascents in Patagonia, Norway, Scotland and Alaska, touching along the way on history, geology, triumph and tragedy, as well as providing plenty of dry, understated humour.

A sequel to his award-gobbling first volume of autobiography *Learning to Breathe* (lauded by non-climbing and climbing critics alike for mixing vivid depictions of elite mountaineering and life underground as one of the last generation of British coal miners), *Thin White Line* continues the story of Cave's adventures in the aftermath of his bitter-sweet triumph on the north face of Changabang when, after successfully making the first ascent, his good friend Brendan Murphy was swept to his death in an avalanche. It is an account of how Cave gradually came to terms with the emotional scars left by the tragedy, and how he learnt to fall back in love with the big mountains and expeditionary alpinism after a period of wariness.

Although relatively short, *Thin White Line* packs the punch of a far weightier tome thanks to the condensed quality of Cave's writing. His voice is a welcome and much-needed addition to mountain literature in a decade in which the genre has been eclipsed by spectacular climbing films. Cave has been one of the few writers to make an impact and advance mountain writing; indeed there are few interpreters of the climbing experience who are both as eloquent and as active in cutting-edge and multi-faceted aspects of the sport. As Cave himself concedes: 'Being a mountain guide doesn't help; just because you're quite good with an ice-axe, it doesn't necessarily follow you'll be as good with a pen'. Luckily for the rest of us, Cave is pretty handy with both, deploying a deft prose style that is as efficiently spare and carefully considered as a climber negotiating an overhang of chandelier ice, each stroke of the pen, like an axe blow, having been weighed first and used for a specific purpose. In the same way that his first book, *Learning to Breathe*, was characterised by being as much about non-climbing subjects as climbing, so *Thin White Line* is elevated above mere mountaineering narrative – although there's certainly plenty of action. This comprises gripping first-person accounts of battling anorexic ice lines in Patagonia (the eponymous 'Thin White Line' of the title), a vivid account of the pursuit of a hard first ascent in the depths of a Scottish winter (*Genesis* on Beinn Bhan), the excitement of hard, big wall climbing in remote Norwegian fjords and the huge adventure of climbing a new alpine-style route on Mount Kennedy in remotest Alaska. Linking and threading the climbing action are insightful observations on the landscapes Cave has travelled through, their history, parallels between the bush pilots of Alaska and South America and mountaineers, and pithy character portraits of many of his travelling companions, especially the contrasting personalities of a young Leo Houlding and Mick Fowler.

It is clear from the latter vignettes that climbing partnerships are important to Cave, perhaps even more than the climbing itself. 'It is firstly about

choosing the companions – and then the place, the adventure,' he has said. 'Fun' is always the main motivation, although Cave's idea of fun – which often seems to involve terrible suffering in inhospitable weather – is perhaps not one that might be recognised universally. After reading *Thin White Line* however, even the most cautious and wary mountaineer cannot fail to appreciate the motivations that drive the best climbers to such extremes, and to gain an insight into the thin line separating their perceptions of fun and fear.

Colin Wells

Tomaz Humar
Bernadette McDonald
Hutchinson, 2008, pp258, £18.99

For her third book in as many years, the industrious Bernadette MacDonald, former director of the Banff festival, has skipped a couple of generations after her biographies of Himalayan record keeper Elizabeth Hawley and K2 veteran Charles Houston to tell the story of Tomaz Humar. While Humar may lack the hinterland that comes with age and gives any biography an added dimension, the Slovenian *uber*-alpinist rather makes up for this with the emotions he excites in his contemporaries and among commentators. Humar's media-event rescue by helicopter from the Rupal Face of Nanga Parbat in 2005 seemed to confirm his reputation in the eyes of critics as an arrant self-publicist, yet two years later he made a stunning solo ascent of the south face of Annapurna – no rope, no harness, no helmet, *and no cameras*. It had been done without fanfare, though, consciously or otherwise, success would only heighten interest in the enigma. Humar's quotes here often seem to come from the Eric Cantona school of cod philosophy, but the deeds speak louder. *SG*

Los 6000s de Chile. Ascent routes for the summits over 6000m
Edited by Rodrigo Jordán
Banco de Chile, Santiago, 2006, pp284, npq

Planeta Antártica. Antarctica Planet
Rodrigo Jordán
Vertical S.A., Santiago, 2004, pp126, npq

Bilingual and even trilingual mountaineering books are becoming common in South America. One Andean author who, in his several books and videos, has consistently been putting bilingualism to good use is Rodrigo Jordán, a Chilean member of the AC, an Oxford graduate and at present a mountaineer who ranks as one of the foremost in South America. His forte

includes expeditionary leadership as well as writing about his expeditions. He has climbed on four continents; in 1992 he led the Chilean expedition that made the second ascent of the Kangshung face of Everest.

Edited by Jordán, *Los 6000s de Chile* is a massive picture book describing the ascents of 38 major peaks on the Chilean northern and central Andes that were the goals of national climbers enlisted for the project. It took two years to complete. For each mountain peak the accompanying text covers a number of related topics: access, routes, local or regional characteristics, registered waypoints, acclimatization and the use of vehicles in the desert of Atacama. There are no maps but readers are referred to the 1:250 000 and 1:50 000 charts of the Instituto Geográfico Militar of Chile. Photographs of the peaks and their surroundings are good and numerous.

Jordán's book *Planeta Antartica* relates the story of a 403km crossing along the east side of the Ellsworth mountains that took place during the last eight weeks of 2003 (see *AJ* 109, p123-131, 2004). Jordán and his three companions explored 9 mountain passes and 17 glaciers and made the first ascent of Mount Segers (2460m) plus an attempt on Mount Giovinetto (4089m).

Considering how scarce the literature is pertaining to purely Antarctic mountaineering, this work deserves close study. Travellers and climbers planning to operate in polar conditions stand to benefit from several appendix-like chapters, found between pages 92 and 109, on health, diet, photography, communications, gear, possible scientific research and flights. Along with the text and excellent illustrations, the characteristics of Antarctic mountaineering are clearly revealed.

Evelio Echevarría

Wielka Encyklopedia gor i Alpinizmu

Jan and Malgorzata Kielkowski

Vol I Wprowadzenie, Stapis, Katowice, 2003, pp535, npq

Vol II Gory Azji, Stapis, Katowice, 2005, pp808, npq

Vol III, Gory Europy, Stapis, Katowice, 2007, pp848, npq

I hasten to confess that I know no Polish, but I can unhesitantly declare that the publication of the projected seven volumes of this 'Great Encyclopaedia of Mountains and Mountaineering' will rank as a major event in the history of our sport. For the first time we will have within our reach a comprehensive encyclopaedia with international scope.

The first volume, published in 2003, covered the subjects of mountains and mountaineering in all their diverse aspects, including paintings, postcards and stamps. The second, issued in 2005, surveyed the immense mountain world of all of Asia, reviewing not only the major peaks but also the lesser ones. The statistics of Soviet and Russian ascents in Asia alone would justify the purchase of this great volume. The third volume deals with the mountains of Europe. Western Europeans will find this particularly

attractive because of its massive amount of data and illustrations, a large number of the latter belonging to traveller-geologist Jan Kielkowski himself. Included are numerous reproductions of 19th century mountain paintings, those of Edward T Compton clearly being particular favourites of the author.

All three volumes so far published are rich in both text and illustrations. There are sketch or ridge maps and bibliography for every area treated. There are photographs in both colour and black & white, and line-drawings and logos are so numerous that it is safe to say that there is at least one on every page – and these three volumes contain a total of almost 2,200 pages! Volumes IV to VII will cover mountaineering in other continents and will include biographies, supplements and indices.

The great appeal of this massive collection, currently being published in Poland, is the overwhelming amount of information it contains. But in addition to quantity there is accuracy. One has to ask: how did authors Jan and Malgorzata Kielkowski accumulate so much data and thousands of illustrations and how long did it take them to prepare a single volume for publication? The answers to these questions alone would be a story well worth recording. Within the realm of world mountaineering literature, I know of no similar enterprise. Editions in other languages are needed.

Evelio Echevarría

Gable & Pillar – FRCC Guide
Phil Rigby and Stephen Reid
FRCC, 2007, pp402, £16 (AC members £12)

The FRCC have begun their latest series of definitive climbing guides to rock climbing in the Lake District appropriately enough with the two mountain crags that form the cradle of the sport in Britain – Great Gable, at the head of Wasdale, and Pillar, the 'grand stone' of Ennerdale.

There is a wonderful hark back to those early days in a frontispiece photo of the first ascent of North West Climb (MVS) in 1906. Both LJ Oppenheimer and Dr JH Taylor carried cameras on the climb. Indeed from the historical photos interspersed in the guide, it is clear the pioneers were as keen on self-advertisement as their modern counterparts. And cameras cannot have been too diminutive a century ago. What with manhandling the camera, a hemp rope, and the essential pipe and tobacco, it perhaps as well they weren't further encumbered by cams, nuts or anything else in the way of protective hardware.

Part of the pleasure of the new guides, under the direction of series editor (and AC member) Stephen Reid, is the combination of clear direction to every known route in the area together with endlessly browse-able history, including snippets inserted into the first ascents list. For example, 1980 brought the first 'new wave' route on Pillar – Tapestry E4 – with 6a crux negotiated by Tony Stephenson, watched ashen faced by his three

companions. Stephenson recalls the moves, then adds: 'We join on the ledge – four friends, all aware of just how close this one has been, and summed up by Chris (Sice) in typical fashion – "That should send the price of diarrhoea crashing!"'

The great innovation for the FRCC is the introduction of colour photo-diagrams, beautifully clear, a boon to first time visitors, particularly to the remoter corners of Ennerdale, or for picking out routes that somehow one had overlooked. There are routes from moderate to E9, with more than 150 new ones added since the last guide to the area 16 years ago, many of them by Reid and friends in Ennerdale.

Gable & Pillar sets a high standard and generates a sense of anticipation for the rest of the series to come. Taken together, the new routes, photo-diagrams, history and a mass of associated info and ephemera, skilfully compressed into 400-pages, amounts to a resounding re-affirmation by Reid and his team of the case for good, well-produced, definitive guidebooks.

Stephen Goodwin

Buttermere & St Bees
FRCC Guide
Colin Read and Paul Jennings
FRCC, 2008, pp356, £16 (AC members £12)

'If you have not savoured the delights of *Eagle Front* or *Oxford and Cambridge Direct* in Buttermere then in climbing terms you have not lived,' says Stephen Reid in his introduction, as series editor. I'd guess that a respectable percentage of AC members have ticked at least the second of those two climbs, and for most of the remainder of you, well, surely there's still time. And here's the inspiration.

This is the second in the series of new definitive guides from the FRCC and embodies much the same features – photo-diagrams etc – that distinguished the *Gable & Pillar* offering. Amazingly for such a relatively quiet corner of Lakeland – certainly on its crags – the 15 years since the last Buttermere guide have seen the greatest number of new climbs recorded in any edition of the guidebook for the two valleys of Buttermere and Newlands. And they kept coming right up to copy deadline, with one of the final routes added being *Bathsheba* (E1***) on Miners' Crag, reckoned by co-author Colin Read to be one the best climbs in Newlands – but then Read was also one of its first ascensionists, partnered by Philip Fleming.

This bonnie guide also marks the end of the forced marriage of Buttermere with the 'Eastern Crags', a curious coupling by the FRCC that persisted through three series from 1970. Buttermere lies in the north-west corner of the Lakes, and so the two areas were not contiguous at all. Next year should see publication of *Eastern Crags and Outcrops*, which will also include the Eden Valley and South Lakes Limestone.

Buttermere, now, is linked much more logically with the sandstone sea cliffs of St Bees – for sunny afternoons of boulders, bolts, sea birds, and multi-pitch routes the seriousness of which carry red ink warnings from Paul Jennings.

Stephen Goodwin

The Kaçkar
Trekking in Turkey's Black Sea Mountains
Kate Clow with Terry Richardson
Upcountry (Turkey) Ltd, 2008, pp176 +map, £13.99

Kate Clow is the redoubtable mother of trekking in Turkey, ebullient on the trail, as I can testify, and enthusiastic in her detail-packed guidebooks, of which this is the third – a lover of Turkey's mountains, its yaylas and sheperding families, wildlife and wild flowers. An Antalya resident, with this book she and Terry Richardson have left the scorched limestone of Taurus range (guidebooks *The Lycian Way* and *St Paul Trail*) for the cooler granite massif of the Kaçkar, close to the Black Sea.

Contained here are 32 trekking routes ranging from half-day walks to multi-day treks, plus the first map to the old, often-paved trails of the range. Unlike Kate's previous routes in the south, which she waymarked herself, sometimes in defiance of official ire, the Kaçkar walks are not signposted. Instead, both as a downloadable file on www.trekkingturkey.com and in the book, there are GPS points for the routes.

Kate and Terry hope the guide will encourage the expansion of environmentally-responsible tourism in an area which in terms of population and cultural diversity is dying. Many of the stone and timber summer sheilings have been abandoned as villagers have given up trying to wring a living from the mountain pastures and moved to the cities in search of employment. The EU and UNDP, among others, have projects to protect the old-growth forests with their rich bio-diversity and Kate hopes the guide will play a complementary role, helping locals earn a living by providing accommodation, services and food to visitors and thus stemming the flight from these beautiful mountains.

Stephen Goodwin