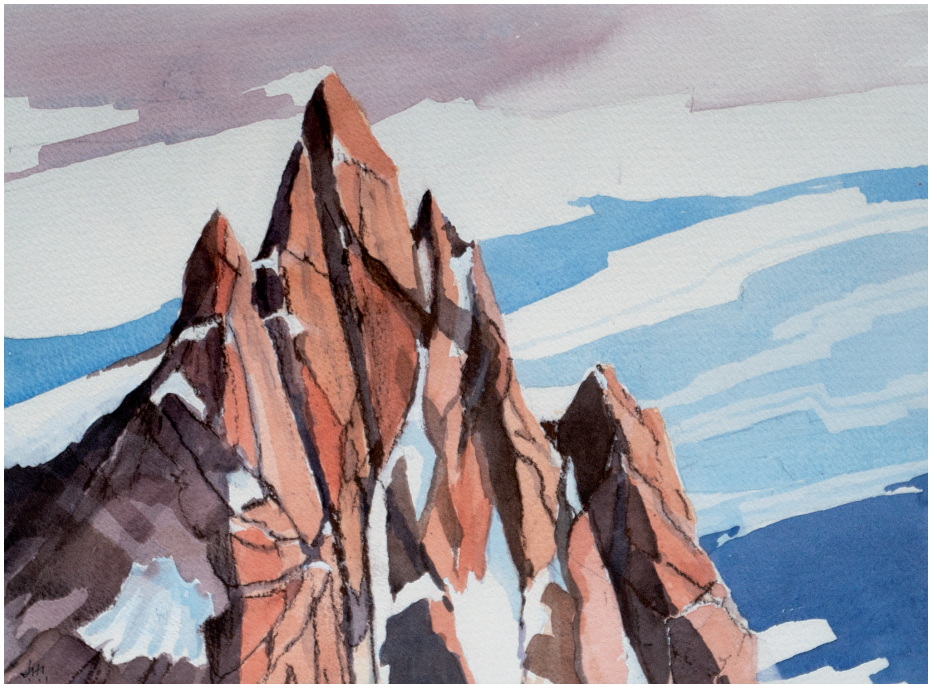
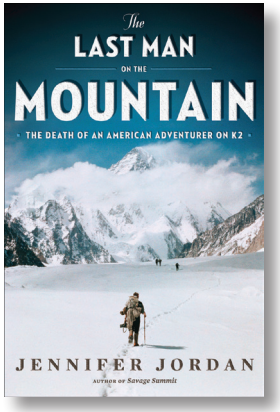
Reviews

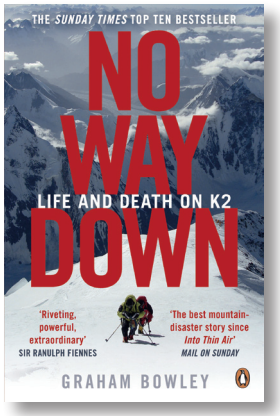


197. John Innerdale, *Rébuffat Route, Aiguille du Midi,* watercolour, 40 x 30cm, 2008.

Reviews



The Last Man on the Mountain:
The Death of An American Adventurer on K2
Jennifer Jordan
WW Norton and Company, 2010, pp320, £18.99

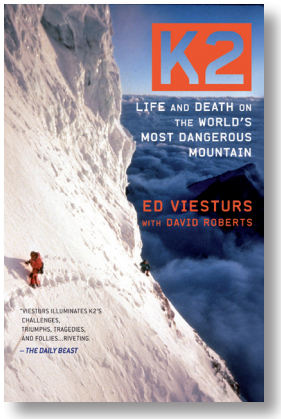


No Way Down:
Life and Death on K2
Graham Bowley
Viking/Penguin, 2010, pp280, £18.99

To misquote Oscar Wilde, to review one K2 book may be regarded as a misfortune, to review two looks like carelessness, and to review five together almost certifiable. But here goes.

Of the five, three deal more or less with the 2008 tragedy and two with events long gone. Let me take the earliest first. *The Last Man on The Mountain* by Jennifer Jordan is essentially a biography of Dudley Wolfe, who died on the infamous Fritz Wiessner expedition in 1939. Ms Jordan has written about K2 before in *The Women of K2*. I fear that, for all their good points, both books suffer from the same flaws. Some are quite inexplicable, given that the author has twice travelled the long, hard road to K2 Base Camp. She should know that, for instance, K2 is *not* composed of 'volcanic rubble', nor did Bill House lead his eponymous chimney 'without a rope or any fixed protection'. Wiessner and Pasang did not 'rappel each other down': from their high point they *rappelled*, and whenever they had to down-climb they would presumably have *belayed* each other. Wiessner, in his attempt to rock climb the mixed ground to the left of the Bottleneck Couloir, most certainly did not solve 'the last riddle of this confounding mountain that had eluded men for generations'. There had only been one serious attempt (Houston and Bates) the year before, and when the mountain *was* climbed in 1954, it was via the Bottleneck. Wiessner's exact route has, as far as we know, never been completed.

All this (and much more) does raise questions about the rest of the book, which is a shame. It is a detailed, and as far as I could tell, well researched account of Dudley Wolfe's 'Great Gatsby' lifestyle. Jennifer Jordan seems to be much more at home with the New York *glitterati* of the 1920s and '30s than she is with the harsh world of the Karakoram. If she had got a veteran of K2 to read the relevant chapters she would have corrected what at times



K2: Life and Death on the World's Most Dangerous Mountain
Ed Viesturs with David Roberts
Broadway Books, 2009, pp352, hardcover US$26, paperback US$14.99

can only be described as schoolboy howlers. Her analysis of the blame, if any, attached to Wiessner is probably the best section of a disjointed book.

The other history book has the off-putting title *K2: Lies and Treachery*, by Robert Marshall, an Australian surgeon obsessed with the treatment of Walter Bonatti during and after the summit climb by Compagnoni and Lacedelli in 1954. Marshall, a non-climber, learnt Italian to understand all the ramifications of statements, libel actions and court cases that have periodically erupted since the first ascent. This book claims to be the truth about the expedition. Unfortunately the very first sentence contains an error, referring to the 13 deaths on K2 in 1986 happening in the same week, not the whole summer. This, like Jordan's book, sets the antennae quivering for any other factual mistakes.

Marshall is a self-confessed devotee of Bonatti, who, in his eyes, can do no wrong. What I found worrying about the book is that he never refers to other expeditions, comparing events on the summit day, and I can't help wondering if he has ever read about them. It seems to me that Bonatti has long since been exonerated from the controversies centred on his attempt to carry oxygen cylinders to Lacedelli and Compagnoni, and the exact circumstances of his forced bivouac with the porter Mahdi.

Marshall spends page after page discussing how, when and where the summiteers' oxygen ran out, and postulates that it might have been on the descent. Even today oxygen regulation is not an exact science and it is quite likely that every bottle would have varying amounts of gas available. Exactly when it ran out can only be a matter of conjecture. The summiteers' accounts may or may not be accurate, but are almost certainly clouded by exhaustion, oxygen deprivation and the passage of time. To endlessly analyse their accounts half a century later seems to be self-defeating.

Bonatti was certainly treated unfairly by Compagnoni and the autocratic leader Ardito Desio, but the whole unpleasant affair had (I thought) been resolved. What Marshall calls 'lies and treachery' I would describe as yet another high-altitude cock-up, combined with extreme emotions of disappointment, jealousy and elation, all added to by the insidious effects of altitude. There *were* lies and treachery, but most of them came after the expedition.

That grand old veteran of K2, Charlie Houston, once told me that 50 years after his epic attempt on K2, he was amazed that on re-reading his own classic book *K2: The Savage Mountain,* how much he had forgotten, or worse, had got it wrong. I hate to say this, but without first-hand experience, in the strange, distorted world of high altitude, it is almost impossible

to have any real understanding of what goes on. Like a policeman interviewing two drunk drivers after a car crash, evidence has to be treated with a huge pinch of salt.

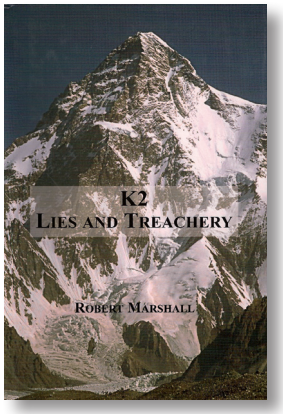
I say 'almost' but Graham Bowley, an English journalist working for the *New York Times*, is an exception. What started as an article for his paper turned into a fully fledged book – *No Way Down: Life and Death on K2,* in which Bowley tells, as far as possible, the whole story of the 2008 disaster, when 11 climbers died in 48 hours.

Graham Bowley treats the hugely complex series of events with great clarity and objectivity. Only occasionally does his self-confessed non-climber status show. (Apparently those unfortunate climbers killed in crevasse falls were 'mystified' and the Shoulder of K2 is not flat nor is it a mile long.)

Inevitably the book will be compared with Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air.* I think it is better: Bowley's 'outsider' status works in his favour. Having no (ice) axe to grind, he makes few judgements and sets down sometimes conflicting stories side by side. If his accounts are not 100 percent accurate, it is not for lack of trying: Bowley flew from the States to Ireland, Norway, Holland, France and Italy to interview survivors of the tragedy, and then completed a personal pilgrimage by trekking to K2 Base Camp to see for himself the magnetism and beauty of the mountain. His book was short-listed for the 2010 Boardman Tasker Award.

Another book dedicated to the events of K2 in 2008 is a personal account by Wilco van Rooijen. In *Surviving K2,* the Dutchman (who lost almost all his toes to frostbite) describes his previous attempts on K2 in 1995 and 2006 before describing in detail his own 2008 epic: a bivouac not far below the summit and above the sérac barrier that avalanched twice. Then, facing snow blindness, and losing the route, he descended well to the left of the Cesen route before being rescued after a second night out. Maybe it was because I read the book after Bowley's that, despite the ordeal that van Rooijen suffered, I was less impressed with the way he told his story, horrible though it undoubtedly was.

Inevitably there were controversies about how and where people died. The first Irishman to climb K2, Gerard McDonnell, shared the bivouac with van Rooijen then, on the descent, apparently tried to rescue two Koreans and a Sherpa, entangled in ropes and almost beyond help. The exact circumstances of McDonnell's death are not known; Bowley and the Italian Marco Confortola have different opinions but, like the endless arguments surrounding tragedies on K2 in 1986, it doesn't alter the facts. But, one chilling remark by van Rooijen to Bowley concerns the account of Confortola, about the death of McDonnell: 'Shame about Marco, though, that he gets it all wrong. He was exhausted. His mind had obviously gone. He may have ...exaggerated.' Yet this is coming from a man who spent two nights bivouacked, the first of these above 8000 metres. It reminded me of almost the same words spoken by Kurt Diemberger about Willi Bauer. Both men were seemingly oblivious to the fact that they themselves were



K2: Lies and Treachery
Robert Marshall
Carreg Publishers, 2009, pp232, £20

Surviving K2
Wilco van Rooijen
G & J Publishing CV, 2010, pp165, US$35 (signed, from author's website)

exhausted and their judgement and memory equally, if not more, impaired.

I am leaving the best until last. Ed Viesturs's *K2: Life and Death on the World's Most Dangerous Mountain,* written with David Roberts is by a country mile, the most accomplished book and, with Roberts at the helm, so it should be. Viesturs has one huge advantage over the rest of the field in that he has climbed all the 8000 metre peaks, and his opinions carry a lot more weight. He is not afraid to criticise from a position of strength, and the book does contain a lot of informed opinions. Before I go any further, I have to admit that the author frequently refers to my own two K2 books, which is very flattering. I have tried to ignore this and make the point that Viesturs is in a better position to comment on the K2 controversies than I ever was.

The book starts with the 2008 disaster, then gives an incisive potted history of the mountain, dealing only with major events and ignoring many of the expeditions that add little or nothing to K2's history. Viesturs is rightly scathing about some of the self-justifying actions of K2's would-be suitors, and has no hesitation in calling to task those climbers who don't know how to turn back. He admits that on his ascent in 1993 he made a mistake in pushing on for the top beyond his 2pm deadline. Climbers who don't summit until 6 or 7pm, or even later, are significantly stacking the odds against their survival, as well as putting others at risk.

Of the 2008 disaster, Viesturs retells the story with his own cryptic comments about the decision-making – or lack of it – on the fatal day. He bemoans the lack of humanitarian values in the last few years. Strangers thrown together by circumstance seem unable to act in any sort of caring way when things go wrong. He also makes the important point that, as so often happens in Himalayan history, the Sherpas are the real heroes, even laying down their lives for their employers.

Viesturs does occasionally reveal a strange attitude to European climbers. Of Aleister Crowley's absurd comment that '…the south face, perhaps possible theoretically, meant a complicated climb with no halfway house', Viesturs thinks that Crowley actually imagines that there should be an alpine hut halfway up! More important, but equally curious, is his assertion that, for European climbers, carrying marker wands is not 'chic'. He quotes Kurt Diemberger as saying 'they're no protection against avalanches', but omits to say that on the very next page of *The Endless Knot* Diemberger writes that both Al Rouse and Julie Tullis pick up a bundle of wands, which sadly were still not enough to help the pair extricate themselves from the Shoulder in the prolonged storm and whiteout of 1986. But these are minor criticisms.

Viesturs is at his best when he sums up the reasons behind the tragedies, making the point that climbing must always be deregulated and (rather pessimistically) there is no way that the events of 1986 or 2008 can be stopped. He makes the point that after the storm on Everest in 1996, about which Jon Krakauer wrote so vividly, instead of the deaths acting as a deterrent, the numbers of would-be clients willing to pay up to 75,000 dollars each actually increased. I fear it is inevitable that the same thing will happen on K2. It is worth saying that in 2008 all the climbers involved in the catastrophe were experienced. But, and it is a big 'but', none of them could be described as an outstanding mountaineer of the day.

If there is one image that sums up the tragedy of 2008 for me, it is a small photo in Rowley's book. It shows a long line of tiny figures on the traverse above the Bottleneck. With a magnifying glass I could count at least 18 people spread out under the sérac that was the cause of such carnage later that day. To see such congestion on a bank holiday on Striding Edge, or on a July day on the Hörnli Ridge of the Matterhorn would be fair enough I suppose, though I wouldn't want to be part of it. But at 8000 metres on K2? Have the lunatics taken over the asylum?

Old fossils like me were brought up to understand that before attempting Everest or K2 you had to have proved yourself in the world's great ranges first. Now it is not uncommon to claim to be the youngest (or indeed the oldest) successful summiteers, Everest has been ascended as a first (and possibly last) climb by people who have no experience whatsoever. Yet the more likely you are to die, the more alluring K2 and Everest become.

But I am straying away from these books. Reading them has been an absorbing, and occasionally a painful task, bringing back terrible memories of 1986. All five are well worth reading, but probably not all at once. If you can only read one, it has to be Ed Viesturs. If want to go to K2, think very carefully, then read them all – twice.

Jim Curran

Journal of the Italian Expedition to K2 - 1954
Pino Gallotti (Spedizione italiana al K2 - 1954 - Diario Alpinistico)
Family-produced edition, 2009

On 31 May 1954 at his base camp Ardito Desio, leader of the Italian expedition to K2, announced the names of the climbers chosen for the two teams who would attempt the summit. Members of the expedition voted unanimously not to communicate the names of the men who would reach the top before the release of the official report. They wished to avoid all the interest of the public being focused on two people rather than on the whole expedition. In the same spirit, when joining the expedition all had signed their agreement not to release any declaration, nor to publish any report or

journal concerning the expedition.

So it was that when Desio's book of the expedition appeared later in 1954, it reported the version of the two men who made the summit, Achille Compagnoni and Lino Lacedelli, and disregarded completely Walter Bonatti's account of what was to become a hot controversy in the following years. Desio had not even cared to listen to Bonatti's version.

The story has become well known. On 30 July, Bonatti and Erik Abram with Hunza Amir Mahdi had been charged with carrying spare oxygen bottles to Compagnoni and Lacedelli who had gone ahead the day before to set up Camp 9. After a few hours Abram gave up; Bonatti and Mahdi went ahead, but when they reached the point where their comrades and the camp where they planned to spend the night ought to have been, there was no tent and no living soul. Compagnoni and Lacedelli had unexpectedly chosen a higher place for the camp. There seemed no logical reason; however it later seemed likely that it was to prevent Bonatti from reaching them, in fear he would join their bid for the top.

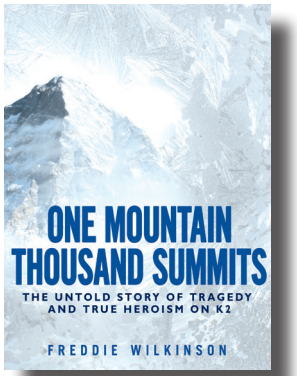
Bonatti called loudly; Lacedelli shouted back: 'It is too dangerous, leave the bottles and go back.' But it was already dark and Bonatti and Mahdi were compelled to bivouac above 8000m with no tent and no bivouac equipment. They survived, but Mahdi had his fingers and toes frostbitten and later amputated.

Of course the episode would be disturbing in the official book of the glorious expedition, so no wonder Desio left it out. But what was worse, in the following years Compagnoni, breaking the agreement signed when joining the expedition, declared that he and Lacedelli had run out of oxygen before reaching the top because Bonatti had sucked it from the bottles. This was impossible because Bonatti had neither mask nor regulator. However it took 53 years before justice was officially rendered to Bonatti in a definitive report by the Club Alpino Italiano.

Pino Gallotti was one of the members of the expedition. He died in 2008 and the following year his K2 journal was published by his family. It is a private journal and I set to read this newly disclosed account with much emotion and high expectations. Not one of the members of the expedition had backed Bonatti in his desperate want of rehabilitation. Perhaps all of them were intimidated by Desio's overwhelming personality and powerful position in society? Or they were inhibited by the agreement they had signed? But I thought it likely that in their journals they would have written what they had seen and heard, and what they had thought. I went through the journal excitedly, looking for clarifications from a first-hand witness... But nothing. It is a lovely, detailed day-by-day account of the expedition from its departure to its return, but there are no descriptions of what happened other than what Gallotti himself did. Bonatti and Mahdi's enforced bivouac is reported in a few lines and the ascent to the summit by Compagnoni and Lacedelli receives just a few paragraphs, with no comment. I did not find anything of what I was looking for.

But then I realised that I had started off reading the book on the wrong foot – or better, with the wrong eye. Basically when somebody keeps a diary he has no intention of publishing, he writes for himself, noting what he thinks he would like to remember in the future. From that perspective Gallotti's journal is the perfect record of all the emotions and the enthusiasm of a man called to take part in a great event, the greatest adventure of his life. Lacking the attention of a publisher and of an editor taking care of the text, the journal is not a masterpiece of literature, but it is enjoyable for its genuineness and total lack of rhetoric. Some episodes, such as the interment of Mario Puchoz who died of pneumonia at Camp 2, are particularly touching. And there are lots of charming small details. 'Here, on a ledge covered by debris, I find a book of English poems. It is all crumpled but still legible. I remember that at the second American camp, I found Chekov's *Cherry Orchard*…'

Mirella Tenderini



One Mountain Thousand Summits: The Untold Story of Tragedy and True Heroism on K2
Freddie Wilkinson
New American Library, 2010, pp352, $24.95

Four voices spoke in the night.
With this simple, yet evocative sentence, Wilkinson draws the reader into his white-knuckled climbing narrative with ease.

One Mountain Thousand Summits chronicles the 2008 climbing disaster on K2. When eleven men perished on its slopes in August of that year, it was one of the deadliest single events in Himalayan climbing. The story made headlines around the world. But media coverage of the event was contradictory and confusing, for it seemed that none of the surviving climbers could explain what had happened, their memories sheathed in a spider's web of exhaustion, hypoxia and grief.

Wilkinson, a New England-based climber, mountain guide and outdoor writer, had recently written a report of the accident for *Rock & Ice* magazine. He was headed to Nepal for a climbing expedition when he decided to stop in Kathmandu and personally meet Sherpas Chhiring Dorje and Pemba Gyalje, two of the climbers he had interviewed by email and phone. Based on the meeting, he realised that they were more reliable witnesses than most western climbers whose stories dominated the headlines. *One Mountain Thousand Summits* is his almost defiant response to those poorly researched media reports and suspect conclusions.

When Wilkinson decided to expand his research for the book, he didn't limit his research to the western climbers. Quite the opposite. He concentrates a large part of his book on the stories of the four Sherpa climbers who were largely ignored by the mainstream media in the aftermath of the

tragedy. Two of them lost their lives during the incident, and their heroic efforts saved the lives of at least four climbers. He makes a strong case that the Sherpas (both those who were guiding and those who were climbing as members of the expeditions) were not given adequate credit for their actions on the mountain.

The early part of the book gives a blow-by-blow description of the events on the mountain. One by one, the climbers straggle out of Camp 4, bound for the summit of K2. And one by one, they perish on the mountain. Some slip off its icy slopes and fall to their deaths; others are swept away by avalanches or falling séracs. While recounting the unfolding tragedy on the mountain, Wilkinson explores the mental stamina required, as well as the technical skills and physical endurance needed for a mountain like K2. Perhaps even more interesting is his close and unflinching look at the racial dynamics and communication landmines inherent in guided and professional climbing at 8000 metres and higher.

He doesn't limit himself to the events on the mountain. Wilkinson gives a detailed account of the experiences of teammates and loved ones at home, glued to their computers, desperately scouring the internet for news. This, more than anything, connects the almost otherworldly events on the mountain to real people back home whose lives are shattered by the unfolding tragedy.

The second part of the book examines the role of Sherpas and high-altitude porters in the climbing world. It is here that the voices of Sherpas Chhiring Dorje and Pemba Gyalje are clearest and most convincing. It is a welcome change to see equal attention paid to the Sherpa climbers, not only to their actions, but also to their thoughts and feelings and analysis of what happened.

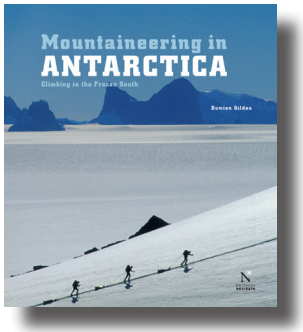
Later in the book, Wilkinson concentrates on one of the most compelling characters to emerge – Gerard McDonnell. McDonnell, who was well known in both the climbing and Irish music worlds, became the first Irishman to summit K2 on 1 August 2008. After an overnight bivouac on his descent, he and Italian climber Marco Confortola discovered three climbers trapped upside down in a tangle of ropes above the Bottleneck, the steep ice couloir above Camp 4. Confortola and McDonnell tried for several hours to free the men before Confortola decided that it was futile. He began to descend, and was confused to see McDonnell heading up instead of down.

McDonnell's partner, Annie Starkey, was devastated by early reports of the incident that suggested McDonnell had abandoned the stranded climbers who were near death. Based on hers and some of the survivors' interviews, combined with Wilkinson's painstaking minute-by-minute reconstruction of what *could* have happened, it appears that McDonnell probably stayed behind to assist the others – not abandon them. Confortola later recalled that it was while McDonnell was above them that the three stranded climbers managed to untangle themselves and begin their descent. He concluded that McDonnell had likely climbed up in order to release the tension on the ropes of the entangled climbers. After spending several hours working alone on the ropes, he managed to loosen them, finally allowing them to free themselves. Tragically, shortly after they began their descent, they were killed by the release of an avalanche. McDonnell was killed as well, by a falling sérac.

Wilkinson tries to do a lot in this book. In addition to recounting the events on K2, he gives a history of climbing on K2 and tackles the topics of climbing ethics and expedition politics. He educates on high-altitude physiology and Sherpa climbing traditions. He delves into the characters of both the climbers and those closest to them. And he tries to solve the mysteries of what really happened in the last hours of Gerard McDonnell's life as well as the courageous actions of Dorje and Gyalje. It's all extremely interesting, but the transitions from one theme to the other are sometimes confusing.

Although Wilkinson was not on K2 when tragedy struck, and has never even been to K2, his story is painstakingly researched. Wilkinson is a seasoned journalist and an experienced climber, but this is his first book. His meticulous research, passion for the subject matter and unique approach shine through. I say, bravo!

Bernadette McDonald



Mountaineering in Antarctica: Climbing in the Frozen South
Damien Gildea
Editions Nevicata, 2010, pp 192, £30

Many people, climbers included, envision Antarctica as a large, flat continent, covered by enormous ice sheets and glaciers. Whilst this is true for vast regions of Antarctica, it is also home to some of the remotest mountain ranges on earth, and they include a massive number of beautiful and unclimbed mountains.

Since publishing the *Antarctic Mountaineering Chronology* in 1998, which is regarded as the authoritative listing of ascents since the first explorers set foot on Antarctica, Damien Gildea has kept track of virtually all climbs that have been undertaken in Antarctica. As an active climber with 10 seasons of Antarctic mountaineering under his belt, Damien has been in a unique position to not just monitor climbing activity, but to meet and interview many of the climbers themselves. Readers of the *American Alpine Journal*, *Alpinist* and *Climb* magazine will be familiar with his reports, but this coffee-table book goes much further. Illustrated with stunning photographs and informative maps, it brings together a vast wealth of information, and accounts and stories of expeditions that have ventured south.

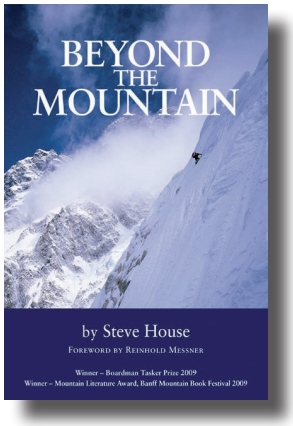
Mountaineering in Antarctica reads like a journey through these mountain ranges, detailing not only the climbs that have been attempted and completed,

but also the exploration and geography of the different ranges. It comprehensively summarises activity in each area, and in doing so exposes those areas that have not been explored by climbers, to the extent of giving tantalising hints of suitable objectives. Damien's enthusiasm for climbing in Antarctica is apparent throughout the book; in fact, it is so great that he can't even keep the unclimbed areas and mountains to himself.

The extent of mountain exploration and climbing revealed in this book is breathtaking, from that undertaken by those working for government research bodies, such as the British Antarctic Survey, to small private groups travelling to Antarctica by yacht or aircraft. In addition to ascents on the Antarctic continent, Damien also covers the sub-Antarctic islands, such as South Georgia and Peter I Island, making this a very comprehensive publication indeed.

This is a unique, well-researched and much-needed compendium on Antarctic mountains and the climbing that has been undertaken on them. It will be of interest to climbers, history lovers and armchair explorers alike, and is an invaluable resource to those hoping to climb on the great white continent.

Phil Wickens



Beyond the Mountain
Steve House
Patagonia Books, 2009 (USA), pp285,
republished in UK, 2010, by Vertebrate Publishing,
£12.99

In his prologue to *Beyond the Mountain* Steve House writes, 'When I stood on the greatest summit I've ever achieved, success vaporized.' There is, contained in those simple words, a truth and a melancholy that summarises this book, one of the best works in mountain literature to come along in a while. It's not by accident that it was the winner of both the 2009 Boardman Tasker Award and the 2009 Banff Mountain Book Award for Mountain Literature. It is a thoughtful book of remarkable insight.

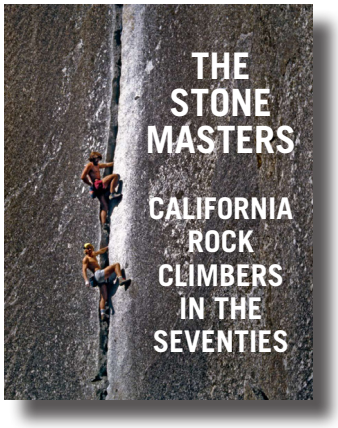
Beyond the Mountain successfully captures the truth, ambition, dedication, loneliness and also sadness present in the high-stakes and very deep play that is pure alpinism. The prologue – a single page that is complete, poetic and without drama or hyperbole – sets the stage and the tone for the whole book.

House uses his landmark alpine-style ascent of the Rupal Face of Nanga Parbat in 2005 as the vehicle and backdrop to describing his growth and development as a world-class alpinist and doesn't shy away from the selfishness that journey entails. In a first-person narrative style, House assembles nearly 20 years of climbing like a well-edited film, revealing first his current reality and then the paths and interruptions that led there. The writing is

cathartic, and the reader wonders if House isn't dissecting himself, his life, with the same surgical precision he would apply to his rucksack and gear rack before the hardest routes. While at times some of the content can appear elitist – indeed the core group of climbers who operate at this level has always been tightly knit, occupying a somewhat private sidewalk only a few tread – more often it is humble, reflective and passionate.

Alpinism is a demanding art painted on a demanding and often unforgiving canvas, one that is often full of dilemmas. That is where the biggest messages in *Beyond the Mountain* come through. Passion and drive lead to success, but we pay high hidden prices for our dreams, beyond the obvious threat to physical wellbeing. Success momentarily slakes ambition, then at once is a new empty hall echoing with the sounds of once was and is now gone. It is clear that the ascent of the Rupal Face, the highest wall, by a pure line, in the purest of style, was emblematic of a man whose life dream and inner compass is defined by such moments. Reinhold Messner wrote 'Each goal achieved is equally a dream destroyed.' Success is 'vaporized' as House puts it. Ultimately the tension that carries the reader through *Beyond the Mountain* comes not so much from the descriptions of gripping adventures, but from the descriptions of the voids that are left inside following such intense experiences.

Jon Popowich



The Stone Masters: California Rock Climbers in the Seventies
John Long (text) and
Dean Fidelman (photographs)
Stonemaster Press, 2009, pp196, US$60

The Stone Masters is an unashamedly romantic book. It describes a world with no boundaries, and a world where rules are dictated only by experiences. That fact that this world is limited to the rock walls of Yosemite and mountain walls wherever they exist helps to shape a clear and remarkable consistency of purpose for this generation of climbers. The characters who write stories for this compilation are the larger than life heroes of 1970s American rock climbing, men and women who conceived a world that transformed the great walls of Yosemite into canvases and pages on which to write the history of extreme rock climbing, and to discover who they were in the process.

At its best the writing is intense, revealing, inspiring and makes you want to be 20 again. That 'being 20 again' wish is important for this reason: What inspires people to climb? Before the advent of climbing walls, when seasoned climbers were asked, 'Whatever made you want to climb

a mountain?' most would shrug their shoulders and say something like, 'Well I read a book and got inspired'. Future generations may very well say, 'I read a book called *Stone Masters'*.

The Stone Masters is masterful both in the way it is put together and in recalling a bygone (but not long ago) age. An 'art' book in presentation, it has some terrific, vibrant writing, and wonderful images that capture the chaotic, out of focus nature of years characterised by the Vietnam war, Watergate, pipes full of weed and a climbing revolution that extended well beyond southern Cal', especially for anyone who shared even a small part of those years. It is the perfect 'heritage' book to carry forward the spirit of adventure and discovery of the Camp 4 heyday rock scene into the future.

The first 20 pages of pictures and captions set the scene for what follows, a montage of impressions in a book dedicated: *to all those with a restless spirit and a dream, who step into the unknown and find some thing miraculous, fun, and for keeps.*

The publishers quote Emerson's 'There is no history, only biography', and shape the book through the characters who shared 'common experiences but radically different histories'. The essays that provide the biographies and autobiographies are a mix of both the re-found and reworked. Interspaced is new material that reflects upon the historical pieces and helps weave them together into a whole and reflective work, both historical and current.

For this reviewer, the best and most consistent writing comes from John Long. Apart from the publisher's efforts, Long's inspired writing is in many ways the main driver of this book. I suspect the way this book came together was rather like a climbing project – if you are going to do it, work hard and do it with style. Long's writing is stunningly original and unashamedly romantic – hence my opening comment. When he had the inspiration for this book project he decided that rather than include old essays re-worked for magazines, he would search out the earliest possible drafts to get close to the true and raw essence of the age.

There are also excellent pieces from John Bachar, Lynn Hill, Mike Graham, Tobin Sorensen and other legends of that period. There is a well-worked short history by Roger Breedlove and a number of individual short biographies, such as Randy Vogel's portrait of Rick Accomazzo. Each writer seems to be able to capture the individual while simultaneously stirring them back into the great and complex stew-pot of emotions and experiences that were their common history.

The book is also beautifully conceived as a montage, a mix of images and words. Individual captions have a way of expanding a photo and of saying it all. The Valley walls in winter are captioned as, 'marvels to look at, miracles to climb'. That's why we do it. And the wonderfully captured photos of individuals in action – John Bachar, John Yablonski, Lynn Hill, et al – carry words that give a person, a climb, or an experience new perspective, and breathe life into individuals who are no longer here and places that have changed forever.

Jeff Jackson's introduction just about reviews the book as well as sets the scene:

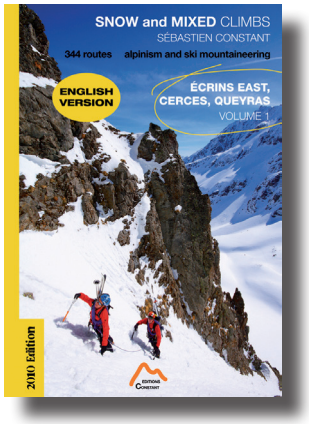
> *I'd known Long's work since 1977, when I was 13 years old, hunkered like a mage over a book of spells, completely entranced by the beauty and strangeness of climbing. There were no mountains or hills in Parker, Texas, and 'sports' consisted of slamming men and animals onto the ground and dominating them – in other words hunting, football and rodeo. The stories in the climbing magazines, on the other hand, were full of people climbing in the most beautiful places on earth – massive and sublime slabs of granite and sandstone and snow, and the object of the game was not to dominate but to meld with your adversary. The articles – and especially Long's essays – suggested climbing wasn't about victory. It was about style.*

The fact that style, like adventure, is an essential part of romanticism is one of the tricks that keeps Long's writing stimulating and enlivening without it becoming sentimental or self-centred. The romantic spirit that runs through this book is refreshing because it is always looking outward, always trying to see the essential value of action without trying to justify it or measure it. The book is almost completely without a grade. It is about the activity of climbing, what can be learned, how you work and help friends, have fun, survive difficulty and death, and use that unquantifiable mix as a creed by which to live. You become a rock athlete, a stone master, to find adventure, to survive and to meld and be human. And it also warns that to become obsessed is to lose the lessons.

The book carries a health warning: 'climbing is inherently dangerous – always climb with a rope.' Yet the absence of ropes is a feature of the book, as it was for many southern Cal' climbers of the 1970s. Unless you are prepared to allow your kids the freedom of adventure, the proximity of reality to death, and all the mind-bending experiences that are part of life's journey, don't let them read this. Death is 'part of the deal' as John Long's life-long, dying mentor Paul Gleason so poignantly reminds his pupil in one of the final essays in this book.

This book is the real deal if you believe that adventure should not be defined and that to risk all is not fatalism. *The Stone Masters* won the Grand Prize at the Banff Mountain Literature Festival in 2010 and also won the award for Best Historical Mountain Book. That is a good indication of its scope and quality. The book is beautifully conceived and portrayed by Dean Fidelman. He is one of the lesser-known spirits of that age, both as a climber and photographer of human beauty and frailty in a harsh world. Mike Graham apparently published the book, although there are no credits given. Some of us will remember Mike from our crossover days at Al Harris's during our shared period of inspired, nihilistic engagement with everything above the horizontal.

John Porter



Snow and Mixed Climbs:
Vol 1 Ecrins East, Cerces, Queyras
Sébastien Constant
Editions Constant, 2010, pp352, €35

Seb Constant is without doubt one of the Ecrins region's most prolific winter alpinists and ski mountaineers. A fully accredited IFMGA guide, he knows the area in winter as well as anyone and so it is not surprising that he has included here not only all of the classic lines but also plenty of the best of the new routes put up over the last 15 years. And several of these masterpieces are of Seb's own creation.

Gauging opinions on the guide, I found out that most if not all of the local 'alpine gods', including guides Francois Lombard, Stef Troussier, Seb Foissac and Tony Lamiche, agree that *Snow and Mixed Climbs* is a major step forward over existing publications such as the definitive GHM/Francois Labande *Guide du Haut-Dauphine*, and John Brailsford's *Ecrins Massif* Alpine Club guide (up till now the only English guide book to the area).

On the back cover of Constant's guide it says: 'The aim of this guide is to unveil the possibilities offered by this vast corner of the Alps and present all the normal (worthwhile) routes… (for) every keen mountaineer and ski mountaineer.' To put these words into perspective you have to understand first that this guide covers just three areas – the eastern side of the Ecrins Massif, the Massif Des Cerces, and the Queyras Massif. And just one of these three areas – the Ecrins Massif – is 30 times bigger than the entire Chamonix Valley. So with only 344 routes covered this guide is by no means definitive. It is the author's personal perspective and hence personal choice of routes.

So what is the book like to use? The first thing to say is that working out where the actual routes and ski descents are has been made incredibly easy thanks to the author's generous use of amazing full colour photos. And importantly it is all in English, so no problem for the linguistically challenged.

Seb is a professional mountain photographer and he has clearly used this expertise to great effect. The book is rich in glorious full colour shots that clearly and simply explain the layout of the various massifs, the approaches and descents and the routes themselves. As a 'local', having lived in the area since 2003, I find this an absolute godsend. The photos have been taken by a variety of approaches – on skis, on the routes, and whilst climbing on adjacent peaks. The result is very easy to use topos that get you quickly and efficiently to the right climb or ski on the right peak.

Moreover all the photos were taken within the last few years. Because of glacial retreat and the general effect of global warming, the southern Alps, like all other alpine areas, have changed drastically over the last 15 years. This has rendered the old guides pictorially out of date. And so again Seb's collection of mountain photos are all the more useful.

In terms of route descriptions the guide also scores highly. I compared the route descriptions for a number of lines in the Labande topos to Seb's work and found *Snow and Mixed Climbs* to be generally more accurate and detailed. The same was true in comparison to the Brailsford guide.

The guide aims to cater for the occasional alpinist, the dedicated ski mountaineer and the extreme climber in search of classic adventure and/or new gems. For alpinists, it's all that you will need. Though it is not definitive, with 344 listed routes there is more than enough for 99 percent of climbers' appetites. It is intended for summer use too, especially on normal routes and classics.

Ski mountaineers, however, may want to consider definitive ski guides such as Toponeige's *Ecrins Est* and *Ecrins Sud*, especially as many of the ski descents Seb includes are serious affairs requiring a higher level of skill than that generally possessed by the visiting Brit on a two-week winter foray. Even so, because the photo diagrams are so clear and easy to understand, ski mountaineers, like alpinists, will greatly benefit from this guide.

A big point that I feel Seb makes well is that mountaineering is about personal choice and judgement. As he says in his introduction, 'the days of pigeonholing routes and the style in which they should be done have passed'. Seb leaves it up to the climber and skier as to what can be climbed or skied or indeed how the itineraries are accomplished. He simply includes details of the approach, the climb and the descent. If a line has been skied he gives all the relevant info including a ski descent grade and then leaves it to individuals to make their own decision. Seb also subtly attempts to widen the motivated skier's horizons by making many references to the amazing exploits of his partner Hervé Dégonon; one of the Ecrins' great extreme skiers. Hervé is continually pushing the boundaries by descending on skis whenever he can. In this respect the guide is very encouraging for ski tourers and the sport is given a lot of space within the book, right from the front cover showing a couple making a rising traverse on an alpine route carrying skis.

Seb employs the same 'open' philosophy on 'when' to climb etc, following the modern view that there are no set seasons and the classic approach tools of snowshoe, ski, snowboard or boot are employed as conditions and the route that day dictate. This is especially relevant here in the southern Alps where ice and mixed gullies can be in condition as early as October or as late as May; 'winter' is a very relative and changeable season in the Ecrins.

The guide's modern and refreshing feel is further enhanced by some interesting additions. For instance, there's a hefty 15-page intro covering everything from the logistics of getting to this alpine paradise to grading charts, mountain risks unique to the region, survival techniques, a typical Ecrins gear rack, and how to modify gear such as ice-axe picks and shafts. Again all clearly explained using photo diagrams.

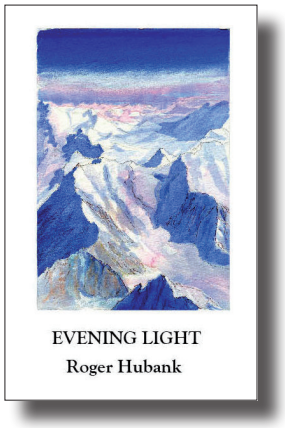
I also really love the 'Free Expression' essays dotted throughout. These are full-page anecdotal musings by well-known local mountaineers and skiers regularly operating in this area, including Patrick Gabarrou and Christophe Moulin. I particularly like Patrick's personal account of the classic 'Gabarrou/Marsigny' on the south face of Pic Lory. These are really inspiring pieces that in combination with some great thumbnails excite and motivate the reader – well they worked for me anyway.

The view from my bedroom widow looks straight out onto the Pic de Bonvoisin – a major 3000m peak in the Vallouise sector – and one that visiting Brit Mick Fowler commented on as looking 'particularly appealing and favourably challenging'. Now armed with this new guide I know exactly where all the recent lines have been added and more importantly what is still left to be tried. I for one can't wait to get stuck in and start using this guide in earnest.

Snow and Mixed Climbs is an essential tool for anyone contemplating winter alpinism and/or ski mountaineering in the southern French Alps. Grab a copy and book your flight today.

Jerry Gore

The guide is available from outdoor shops in the Ecrins and direct from the author's website: **www.sebastien-constant.com**



Evening Light
Roger Hubank
The Ernest Press, 2009, pp286, £12

George Hazard summarily abandoned his wife and child in order to continue to pursue his mountaineering ambitions. The marriage he had 'somehow blundered into' suffered the same demise as all his other personal relationships; he seemed unable to comprehend what was expected of him, off the rock. For him, nothing had ever compared with the exhilarating simplicity of devoting all his attention to a knife-edge traverse or the almost mystical experience of becoming aware of his absolute insignificance in the face of the power of Nature at her most furious and destructive – or at her most beautiful.

Then, whilst returning to England in old age in order to write the autobiography his publishers had commissioned, a truck accident puts him into a coma. When he finally awakes, it is his daughter, Calon, who he first sees. During the years of her father's absence she found emotional salvation both by creating her own large family and by becoming a member of her husband's – the populous Redfern 'tribe'. Hazard's initially reluctant involvement with these strangers draws him into the catastrophes which invade their lives and thus gives him an insight into the quiet power generated by the emotional support the 'flatlanders' provide, which he has so long scorned. This leads him to the gradual realisation that the love – of Nature, of wild places, of self-forgetting – which he drove himself to embrace in the mountains did not wholly afford him the truth he had sought, but that it also lay elsewhere, in sharing others' losses, triumphs and preoccupations.

Indeed, the Redfern family seem to endure more than their fair share of loss, and it is when considering this weight that the narrative feels somewhat overburdened. Nevertheless, there are careful and often illuminating parallels between Hazard's life and those of the stricken family members. Hugh Redfern, the handsome, genial patriarch is lost when a volcano he is exploring erupts, another consequence of risk, another casualty of obsession. Shortly after his death his widow, Philippa, discovers that his preoccupations were not confined to his vulcanology as she uncovers evidence of repeated infidelity while sorting through his private papers. Philippa's conviction that her innocence had facilitated Redfern's dalliances, later transmuting into feelings of failure and inadequacy, enables both Hazard and the reader to understand the depth of his betrayal in fleeing from his wife and baby daughter in order to pursue his self-centred ambitions.

The literary device of Hazard's memory loss ensures that he must research and evaluate the events of his climbing career in order to illuminate those that remain clouded. He slowly comes to feel some disdain, even disgust, for the man he was, the man who left two climbers to die on Mont Blanc in order to reach his own place of safety, the man who 'hardened himself... grew steely' and withdrew from others in order to find inner freedom for himself. His ruthlessness in pursuing his mountaineering ambitions and his subsequent emotional severance from the world others perceive as reality made him quite unable to comprehend that 'a man was forever what he had been at any time for others'. Hazard's life-long assertion had been that the mountains stripped one of self-delusion, allowed one to acquire self-knowledge, to live truthfully. Now, in frail old age, with accusations about his ambitions in the mountains blinding him to the safety of other climbers, this certainty is no longer clear-cut and he begins to question the emotional code which has governed his life.

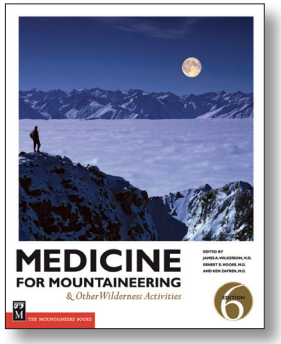
This realisation is embedded in the book's title: *Evening Light* was a new gritstone route Hazard wanted to put up to reassure himself that his prowess on rock was still intact. Faced with an intractable problem on the route he chipped a hold in order to surmount it. When his malpractice was exposed and the route subsequently climbed clean, he determined to prove himself by means of the ultimate challenge of climbing all the 8000-metre peaks. By disappearing into this endeavour he escaped both his critics and his own dishonesty. His life's premise, then, was built on a profound deception, the worm in the apple of his success, a denial of a basic truth.

Now, with his first real forays into family life, he realises that it is the things which limit us which make us what we are – most immediately, 'the solidarity with others'. Yet he does not attempt to annihilate the conviction his mountaineering career strengthened in him but, instead, to adjust his perspective, to find the worth in that 'different order of reality' of which

he had been such a prominent part. It, too, has its truths; the revelation for Hazard is that they are not the only signposts to a man's completeness. Love of his 'other world' did not exclude those other more socially integrated attachments of family and friends but added another dimension to the narrow road he had travelled.

Evening Light firmly grasps the mountaineering nettle: emotional detachment enables climbers to survive in high and hostile territory but can stifle the richness and complexity of attachments in the flatlands. The lines demarcating success and failure are far less starkly drawn in the shifting sands of marriage and family life and those who depend on clarity and view existence as a series of personal challenges which confirm identity and purpose may have no frame of reference in this emotionally cluttered life. What Hazard comes to realise is that the mountains did not contain the definitive code for existence; the mystery he saw embodied in them which he spent a lifetime's travail pursuing is part of a greater whole and it is the openness to that belief which ultimately sets a man free.

Val Randall



Medicine for Mountaineering & Other Wilderness Activities, 6th Edition
Edited by James Wilkerson, Contributors Ken Zafren and Ernest Moore
The Mountaineers Books, Seattle, 2010, pp 384, US$29.95

The *AJ* Editor lives down the road from my surgery so I suppose it was inevitable that one day a medical tome would arrive with the simple instruction to write a review for the journal.

Opening the used envelope revealed perhaps the most famous wilderness medicine book of them all – *Medicine for Mountaineering* – now in its 6th edition. The first edition in 1967 was revolutionary, pushing first aid beyond a couple of bandages into new fields such as diagnosis, prevention, planning and much more. Since then it has become established practice that the scope of mountain medicine, even for the non-health care professional, encompasses drugs, reductions of fractures, and treatment for shock and hypothermia. The reason was clear in the 1960s and to an extent remains so today: mountaineering is an activity with inherent risk that takes place away from roads. Participants therefore need to be self-reliant, resourceful and confident to manage injuries and illnesses for hours or even days. Here, though, we encounter the dilemma of what is safe and effective in the mountains when the operator has been instructed on paper and perhaps on a specialised first aid course but has never encountered the problem *in the flesh*.

This book, along with the myriad of competitors, has to draw a consistent line for its target audience over many topics, between educating the reader to think like a doctor or provide a protocol-driven, problem-based system of management. An example may help. I am climbing in northern Italy on one of those long remote icefalls. My partner momentarily has a lapse in concentration, slips on the ice, falls over and his ice-axe impacts onto his chest. It hurts but in a couple of minutes he can talk in short sentences and says he feels OK. An educated reader will consider the options – simple broken rib; traumatic pneumothorax, that may be simple or 'tension'; haemopneumothorax; left lower chest – spleen injury, right lower chest – liver injury, front of chest – cardiac injury etc, etc. Now experience will tell us what is common, what injuries go together, and what signs are reliable at ruling a diagnosis in or out. And so by the hypothetico-deductive method a working diagnosis is made and treatment given.

The critics of this approach will argue that our diagnosis is nevertheless inaccurate as the signs on which it is based are not as good as we think and neither are our treatments specific. Why not ask: Is the patient 'big sick or little sick'? 'Big sick' patients are deadly pale, cold and sweaty, anxious, restless and often the quiet one at the back; 'little sick' patients though in pain are none of the above. You manage 'big sick' in one way – usually by rapid evacuation, oxygen and supportive measures – and 'little sick' another way – reassurance, pain relief and a timely evacuation.

So returning to our casualty with his painful ribs, he is 'little sick' so benefits from a few painkillers and not having to carry his rucksack down. I don't have to worry about missing a tension pneumothorax; as long as his condition does not deteriorate he remains 'little sick' whether or not he has a pneumothorax.

Medicine for Mountaineering uses a doctor's approach, an approach that requires serious study and many pages of text if it is to be successful. These attributes are not ingrained in modern man, who prefers, to paraphrase Mark Twight[1], to go 'light, fast and high' by using pre-event training, minimal but the best equipment, and efficient techniques. *Medicine for Mountaineering*, as its odd title implies, is removed from the modern way, though the associated e-book will go some way to overcoming the 400 pages and 750 grams of the printed book.

Readers might reflect that this is the first book review of mountain medicine (despite many new publications) in the *Alpine Journal* since my book *Casualty Care in Mountain Rescue* featured in 2002. What chance then that lay readers will engage in the medical journey when the 'big sick, little sick' approach along with a satellite phone is an option? My colleague, Dr David Hillebrandt, describes instructing a urinary catheterisation remotely in such a way.

Does *Medicine for Mountaineering* fulfil its objectives? In general it does, and I enjoyed the chapters to which I, as a member of an organised rescue system, was drawn. These included the psychological responses to wilderness accidents, and rescue and evacuation. The section on eye disorders

1 Mark F. Twight. *Extreme Alpinism*. 1999 The Mountaineers, Seattle.

was particularly good and has important advice for persons having corrective surgery for short-sightedness. Detailed clear instruction is given for important life-saving techniques, such as cricothyroidectomy. It is easy to pick holes in the detail but this reflects my knowledge rather than errors. Most of the information is inevitably anecdotal rather than based on firm evidence and there is a lack of discussion when there are variances to accepted practice. For example, in a dramatic case report of an accident on the Western Breech of Kilimanjaro the authors 'speculate that wrapping the climber's pelvis and awaiting transport on a firm stretcher could have been life saving'. Perhaps, but the absence of the caveat that wrapping of the pelvis is a developing technique for which no evidence of survival benefit has been published as yet (October 2010) is regrettable in such a book. In other areas, clear advice is hard to find; for example, water disinfection techniques are well described but there is no drawing together of the information even if it is to say that no single method is superior and comparison studies are lacking.

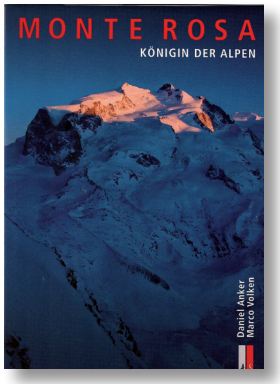
North American tones come through in many places reflecting that only two of 24 contributors are from outside that continent. For example, in the introduction we are advised that: 'All participants in wilderness activities should undergo regular examinations by a physician knowledgeable about and sympathetic to their interests.' A European text would stress more targeted advice and the use of the internet for knowledge of local illnesses, health services and emergency numbers.

So in conclusion, interesting for the well-read expedition medic and as a summary for the doctor, though Auerbach's reference book *Wilderness Medicine*,[2] at 2316 pages and 5kg (DVD enclosed) will keep the doctor happy for longer. But for a small trip of mates, an expedition leader who prefers Mark Twight's approach may want to check out *First Aid and Wilderness Medicine* by Jim Duff and Peter Gormly.[3] Here we have a *British* book in a concise bullet-point style; at 248 pages and 250g, it punches above its weight.

John Ellerton

John Ellerton is a GP in Penrith, Cumbria, medical officer with Patterdale Mountain Rescue Team and Mountain Rescue England and Wales, and a member of the International Commission for Alpine Emergency Medicine (ICAR MEDCOM).

2 Paul S. Auerbach. *Wilderness Medicine* 5th ed. 2007 Mosby Elsevier, Philadelphia
3 Jim Duff and Peter Gormly. *Pocket First Aid and Wilderness Medicine* 10th ed. 2007 Cicerone Press, Cumbria.



Monte Rosa: Königin der Alpen
Daniel Anker and Marco Volken
AS Verlag, Zurich, 2009, pp336, €39.80

The young Winston Churchill, visiting Zermatt in 1894, insisted on an ascent of Monte Rosa rather than the Matterhorn, not only because of its superior height but also because the guides' fee for Monte Rosa was substantially less than that for *Das Höre*. Then, as now, I presume it would also have been less crowded.

My own first taste of Monte Rosa remains indelible. It had been a very long day and the final climb along the summit ridge to the Dufourspitze, at 4634m the highest of Monte Rosa's tops, had been tricky in strong winds and with a lot of ice-glazed rock to negotiate. We'd wished we'd had more than one ice screw. Back on skis, legs soon became tired. The middle section of the descent is a long schuss down the Gorner glacier. For much of its length it was rutted sheet ice. My abiding memory is of struggling to keep control on wobbly legs while directly ahead the setting sun painted the sky with dark fire behind the silhouette of the Matterhorn. Pain, panic almost, and a deep pleasure all wrapped together.

This splendid monograph from the AC's Swiss friend Daniel Anker revives the pleasure without the pain. It also brings the realisation that despite my having approached Monte Rosa each time from the Zermatt or Saas valleys, it is much more than a *Swiss* mountain. In fact, whisper this since the Swiss revere it as their highest summit, Monte Rosa is best appreciated from Italy – '*la Regina delle Alpi*' might be a more appropriate sub-title.

There is a superb double page photograph at the front of this book, taken across the Lago di Varese on a crystal winter's day with the whole massif rising into a clear blue sky. Another remarkable photo taken in almost the reverse direction, at night from the Albergo Gugliermina, looks out over snowy ridges to the electric light sea of greater Milan. It really drives home the fact of the Alps as an island in the heart of urbanised Europe.

Monte Rosa is a feast of illustration, providing more than sufficient reason, I would say, to buy the book even if you don't read German. Archive photos, landscapes, modern climbing action and extreme skiing, sketches and paintings bring to life the story of the mountain told in chapters based on its four villages – Gressoney, Zermatt, Macugnaga and Alagna – and on the huts and bivouacs above them plus of course the multiple summits of the massif.

Members of the Alpine Club figure prominently in the Monte Rosa story and are well represented here. Edward Whymper's well-known engraving *The Club Room at Zermatt* is juxtaposed with a group photograph taken during the club's 150th anniversary gathering in the resort. The Monte Rosa hotel looks much the same in the background. Only one of the dozens of

people in the 2007 photo is named – our then president, Stephen Venables, seated cross-legged at the front, even though looming above him is the unmistakeable form of Kurt Diemberger. Lots of you are there – a magnifying glass helps.

Stephen Goodwin

New Monte Rosa Hut, SAC
Self-sufficient building in the high Alps
ETH Zurich, 2010, pp224, CHF65/€45

This fine monograph provides a detailed and fascinating account of the design and construction of the new Monte Rosa hut opened in September 2009.

This remarkable, futuristic eco-hut sits in a spectacular location 2883 metres high above the Gorner glacier, slightly above the site of the old hut, in the shadow of the Matterhorn, enjoying, some would say, an even better view. From a distance, the building has the appearance of a space station: the extraordinary shape, almost crystalline in form is based upon the cross section of an orange. Trapezoidal shaped segments create the plan form.

The project was launched in 2003 as a project of the Swiss Alpine Club (SAC) to mark the 150th anniversary of Zurich's Federal Institute of Technology. The SAC was founded in 1863 following a resolution which stated 'the Association, will erect huts at suitable locations in the High Alps so as to accommodate the growing ranks of pleasure seekers bound for the high mountains and glaciers'.

Today SAC membership exceeds 125,000 and remains faithful to this undertaking, currently maintaining 153 huts in the Swiss Alps.

The first hut in this location known as the Bétemps was completed in 1895 and comprised 25 beds plus warden's accommodation. The last hut, in which many AC members must have stayed, had a capacity of 160 beds and this was demolished in 2010.

So what has inspired the architects to create such a striking shape? Clearly there were major challenges, extreme climatic and topographical conditions combined with the search for a shape that would reflect this spectacular local landscape. Could they design a structure that acts as a point of reference in an environment in limitless scale, a building that shows approaching mountaineers the way over the glacier. The answer is clearly in the eye of the beholder for there is no doubt that the solution is controversial, admired by many, undeniably avant-garde in style.

The five storey prefabricated building is built on stainless steel foundations with a timber framed superstructure clad externally in shimmering silver aluminium. On the southern facade sits an integrated photovoltaic system; this generates more than 90% of the energy requirements making it the greenest hut in Europe.

But by far the biggest challenge the architects faced was the timing and method of construction. With construction only possible from mid May to September, the building had to be a prefabricated frame capable of transport by train and helicopter and being completed in five months. The solution was a computer-aided design (CAD) masterpiece, comprising a complex spatial puzzle of 420 elements delivered by train to Zermatt followed by 3000 helicopter trips to the site where 35 technicians lived throughout the summer.

The SAC has a limited history of commissioning visionary buildings that define the spirit of the age, but in tackling this unique project in such an innovative way has laid down a marker for mountain huts of the future.

Critics will say a low carbon technological integration of the photovoltaic system imposes an architectural vocabulary alien to the mountain landscape; I would disagree. The overall integrity of the design shines through, it sits comfortably in hostile surroundings, a beacon of futuristic architecture for the enjoyment of future generations of mountaineers.

John Innerdale

The Hut Builder
Laurence Fearnley
Penguin (NZ), 2010, pp246, NZ$40

Fiction which is based on mountaineering experience either uses it as foreground or background. This novel, which was short-listed for the Boardman Tasker Award 2010, is in the latter camp in that it is more about camping than mountaineering. Note that I have resisted suggesting that this is camp fiction, which it is definitely not, partly because it is a little limp-wristed about sex, and generally understated emotionally. But I also resist going so far as to say that it is frosty, although its crux is a long period spent in a snow cave when the central character Boden Black's taciturn male companion, Walter, Opens Up.

Walter had let slip the fact that he was in prison, which has disturbed the very conventional Boden Black, who can barely admit to himself that he has inclinations towards being A Poet. It turns out Walter was imprisoned for being a Conscientious Objector. But the real horror is that he was interned with Rex Hillary, the younger brother of the National Hero. Something of the Boden Black mentality is indicated by what the author presents as Black Thoughts:

> *This man, Edmund Hillary – a man who represented everything that was great about our country, a hero admired by everyone – had a brother who had been imprisoned for refusing to go to war. It was hard to believe. Two brothers: the hero and the shirker. I was equally disconcerted by the thoughts that started to force their way into my head.*

When a writer uses the phrase 'started to' about a character doing some-

thing, the reader would be right to get a little disconcerted too. But what would Boden Black have made of the fact that the later Sir Edmund himself registered as a conscientious objector at the beginning of the war, escaping prison since beekeeping was a 'reserved occupation'? (Rex Hillary spent four years in the detention camp at Strathmore, near Reporoa, one of 800 pacifists imprisoned by the New Zealand government.)

This novel is based on the building of the Empress Hut at 8000 feet on Mount Cook in the early 1950s. When the National Hero himself turns up at the snow hole camp and takes up a hammer to work alongside Boden Black, the latter has 'a sudden bout of nerves, a kind of stage fright, such as I had experienced at school when playing the Porter in *Macbeth*'. If only young Boden Black had learned something from the irreverence of the role. But light-hearted grumbling banter is not the mode of the aptly named Boden Black.

Nor is rocking the boat. At the conclusion of the novel he is suddenly an old man (as indicated by a reference to erectile dysfunction as the novel's only – and rather late – coy hint at any sexual activity) visiting the Mount Cook village where the Empress Hut is apparently now preserved as a historic relic outside the visitor centre. After living uncomfortably with his reputation as a poet having, for much of his later life, rested on a single anthologised poem, Boden Black has accepted a commission for a new poem to be read at the opening of the new museum and visitor centre. He considers, fleetingly, the opportunity to say something about the huge car park now built on very spot that inspired his original famous poem. But, of course, if you've read this far, you know that he'll chicken out – in final words of the novel, 'In the morning I would return and read my poem'. That's the climax of the book and that's as exciting as it gets.

Terry Gifford

My Life, Volume One: To Be Brave
Royal Robbins
Pink Moment Productions, USA, 2009, pp218, $19.95

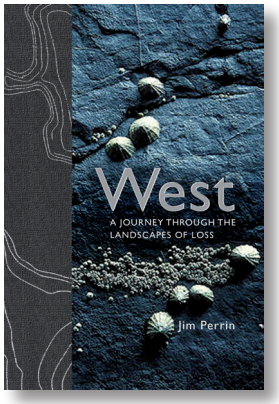
Royal Robbins is one of climbing's gentlemen. He will be forever associated with trying to set the standards of style in the development of climbing in Yosemite's golden age. At the back of this book Robbins graciously calls for support for 'two non-profit agencies very close to my heart', the Boy Scouts and the Yosemite Fund. But he begins with the story of a committing solo ascent of the west face of the Leaning Tower, partly chosen as a dry place during a period of rain in the Valley, more pointedly chosen as a second ascent statement about its first ascent by Warren Harding in a siege style that included six months with untouched ropes in place between efforts. Robbins admits that he was making 'another move on the Yosemite chessboard' by attempting to 'raise the style ante'. Yet he has the generosity to also admit 'we'd probably be buddies except for this thing about climbing. I don't attack you personally, only the way you do it. For me it's all philosophy. For you it's a big joke, like when you skewer me as a kind of preacher, a "Valley Christian".'

There's a lot going on in this passage. There's no way that Robbins and Harding would have been buddies, but for this climbing thing. Yet Robbins wrote a wonderfully warm obituary for Harding in *High* magazine, despite being 'skewered' by Harding in his time, as he can now boast, admitting that he was a bit of a preacher for style, a keeper of the faith against conquest by bolt and, in practice, an ethical policeman. But it is by no means clear that Robbins won the argument, as it is currently played out around the world's steep faces. Is there such a thing as 'upping the style ante' in a sport where styles have become distinct branches of the activity? Well, just look at the correspondence being played out by Alex Huber and Conrad Anker in the summer 2010 pages of *Alpinist 31* about their 1997 ascent of Latok II. Huber: 'The use of the power drill has nothing to do with an excessive use of bolts.' Anker: 'Power drills encourage a less thoughtful use of bolts.' The defence and regret being engaged here suggest that Robbins' manner of opening his autobiography is not just history, but heritage as continuity – the way past decisions of style define debates about the future. Because what Huber and Anker are arguing about is the future of our rock heritage around the world, just as Robbins' choices of action engaged with Harding's choices for the rock heritage of Yosemite that has been left for us and our children.

It is hard to accept the role of 'Valley Christian' without a certain righteousness, especially if you still believe yourself to have been in the right. So one might have some anxieties about the declaration that these seven volumes will be about conveying 'the message that life is an adventure and that character counts'. To be sure, there are in this first volume regrets as well as defences: the low self-esteem at school, 'young and foolish' dares in early adventures on freight trains, childhood nightmares, the disappearance of two fathers, an attempted robbery. Then his mother allowed him to choose his name – his step-father's with which he had grown up, or his birth name, Royal Shannon Robbins. After joining the Scouts and being introduced to the mountains, the character we know began to form.

The book ends with the final effort on Leaning Tower, when retreat from the overhanging rock is impossible. But the self-reliance that his mother had encouraged is nowhere more needed than *after* topping out, when a swollen Bridalveil Creek has to be crossed: 'I've never seen death so close. After all those wild things on rock – I never thought it would be water.' Perhaps the greatest test of character late in life is the style with which the self-examination of an autobiography is approached. Suffice it to say that I'm very much looking forward to the next volume.

Terry Gifford



West
Jim Perrin
Atlantic Books, 2010, pp336, £18.99

In *West*, writer and 70s climbing activist Jim Perrin tells of the deaths by suicide of his son William and from breast cancer of his wife Jacquetta, two events that happened within a year of each other.

Jim first meets Jacquetta in the early 70s, at the height of his life as a rock-climber, but loses contact when she, coming to meet him in Wales, sees him on the point of completing a solo ascent of *Cenotaph Corner*. This seems to flip her into a state of shock at the man's lack of responsibility; she drives away and disappears to the other side of the world. Jim is unable to trace her and for 28 years each feels the anguish of lost love – until, at a literary event, they meet again. They 'marry' in a Pagan ceremony on the shore of the Lleyn Peninsula and take up life together in Jim's recently acquired house in Llanrhaeadr, a small and archetypal Welsh village in the Tanat valley between Oswestry and the Berwyns, Jim having decided to leave his haunts around Llanberis for somewhere that has nothing to do with climbing. But within a very short time he sells the house, which he loves, and is once more on the move, this time to a caravan on the other side of the Berwyns, a step that enables him to pay off his new wife's not-inconsiderable debts.

Meanwhile, his son William has been carving out a name for himself as one of Britain's leading 'traditional' rock climbers – that is, an adventure climber very much in Jim's spirit, rather than a sport climber – and is invited on an expedition to the sea cliffs of Cape Farewell in Greenland. On the day of departure Will drives down to Heathrow, drops the rest of the team off at check-in, and then, instead of parking the car, drives back to his house near Llanberis, where he lives in isolation for four days before putting his head in a noose in his bedroom. He is not discovered for several days, by which time the body is already decomposing. A week after Will's funeral Jacquetta, who has never been entirely well, it is assumed because of the gross physical abuse suffered at the hands of a previous lover, is diagnosed with a particularly virulent form of breast cancer. The doctors' initial estimate of a survival time of several years is rapidly reduced to a few months. After her death Jim buys another house in Llanrhaeadr and moves there, but he too becomes increasingly ill. The doctors' prognosis that he also has cancer leaves Jim unconvinced. He thinks the problem psychosomatic, brought on by extreme grief. The memories associated with Llanrhaeadr – perhaps with the whole of North Wales – are too much, and he once again sells up and moves, this time to the Ariège, the eastern end of the Pyrenees, where he writes *West*.

One bows one's head in respect before this harrowing tale. Which is one reason it is a difficult book to review. Another is that over all hangs

Jim's commitment to a highly romantic style, and inseparable from this his insistence on the expression of all feeling and emotion, and all sensuality, however personal. When combined with the subject matter this makes much of *West* fairly extreme, and it will invite in some readers the criticism that the book makes public too much that should have remained in the privacy of Jim's mind. Perhaps the safest that can be said is that if you have read Jim before and admire his writing, you must read this. It is Jim on every page, his testament, his outlook and his mode of expression. Beyond that, so much is a matter of taste. There is, for example, the question of sex. Jim's had a lot of it, and he writes about it explicitly. I have a problem with this similar to that I had with *Cham*, a recent climbing novel. As Victor Saunders pointed out in his review in last year's *AJ*, *Cham* is full of explicit sexual descriptions. Are they necessary? Well, if the purpose is to show what a cold and ultimately unattractive milieu it is that the young protagonists of the novel inhabit, then 'yes'. And I think one can take the same view of Jim's writing when he is describing the wild and liberated climbing scene around Llanberis in the 1970s. The description of his betrayal by an Irish ex-lover immediately after he has lost the two people dearest to him in the world makes one grateful to have missed out on all that. The problem is that he employs the same literary devices when describing his new-found love, and I wish we had been left to use our own imagination over their intimacy. The book could have been – would have been – so much more a work of art. But then, I suppose that just wouldn't be Jim. It would also suppose that the book was written primarily for us, the readership, and it isn't. It is written for Jim himself, as a cathartic act. For me, this is at the heart of the weakness of overly-romantic writing. And it tends to make all such work – as is the case here – too drawn out.

In so many ways Jim is a combination of contradictory outlooks. He is a man of great sensitivity, and quite explicit in his view that this has contributed to his increasingly falling out of love with the climbing scene. He leaves Llanberis for Llanrhaeadr because the former now depresses him, and he feels the need to escape. More and more, climbers have come to seem little more than Ruskin's 'greased pole' merchants, rather unsophisticated people perhaps, who can't see, or experience, beyond the obvious. Part and parcel of this is his growing sympathy and belief in the feminine side of his own character, with all that implies about intuitive feeling as opposed to fact and argument:

> *I love the way that women are, their difference, the subtleties of their approach, the way they move through the world, …I see the men out on the fells, hurrying, hurrying, pressing through, acquisitive, eyes intent on goal and summit and the completion of lists, itineraries, records.*

He is the archetypal rationalist when he takes the view, throughout his suffering, that we just do not know what happens at death, or how consciousness is connected to the physical body, if at all. He is irritated by the Dawkins and Dennets of this world, who he sees as too full of certainty (though he knows their work well; there is no man better read.) He is equally

irritated by the certainties of well-meaning New-Age acquaintances who take it upon themselves to tell him what's what and how the world really is. He is surely right when he writes that 'there is nothing more ludicrous than pompous certainty in the face of what cannot be known.' And yet he is full of mysticism and the centrality of feeling – 'the tendency towards magical thinking has long been present in me' – and is more than capable of leaving the facts behind.

Jim is a very bright man, but that doesn't stop him indulging the romantic fantasy of the noble savage, slightly reworded as the spiritual superiority of the past. Possibly it was superior; but to use his own arguments, how can we be so sure? I would be with him on the spiritual superiority of the rural as opposed to the urban life, and perhaps most readers of the *Journal* would; but I'm uneasy about idealising the past. The brutality of the life of the rural poor has generally precluded those finer things of life about which Jim is so passionate, surely. I also find his political views too tribal. And allowing these prejudices to impinge does not improve the quality of his work.

West is infused with Jim's tenacity of spirit, but overall it is, as surely it must be, a sombre read. And it draws on the melancholia that suffuses his take on the world and his tastes in literature in general. Recalling his enthusiasm for 9th century Welsh poetry as a student, he writes:

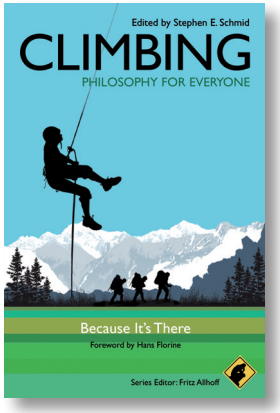
> *It strikes me as odd that I should have been attracted by such solemnity, such depth of sadness, in the spring years of my life. Though to scan back over the years seems to bring into focus a consistent thread of mourning.*

So it is not surprising that one of the achievements of this book is to convey so effectively an undercurrent of impending disaster. (It made me think of Gavin Maxwell's *Raven Seek Thy Brother*, and the best of the descriptive writing is as good as Maxwell's; perhaps as good as anyone's.) I barely smiled for the first 200 pages, except once, at the wonderful description of seeing off a specimen of the 'countryside police' whilst wild-camping on Harlech beach.

But then we come to the third section of the book, 'Chiaroscuro', and the move to Llanrhaeadr, and I found myself not just smiling but laughing. This is, if you like, the leavening, the relief and innocent joy in the book. And it is wonderfully written – Dylan Thomas all over again. The characters are larger than life, hugely colourful. Jim loves the place, and loves the people, who are of all political persuasions, giving the lie to his too simple analysis of our social ills. The references to sex – plenty of those, of course – are bawdy rather than pornographic. We want it all to last. And of course it cannot.

Jim rather divides opinion in the climbing world. I have always found him the most generous of men. Whether you like his writing must be, ultimately, a question of whether you feel his talents sufficiently outweigh the weaknesses. More than any contemporary writer from our sport, I find he forces me to think and re-evaluate. And for that reason alone I want to read him.

Phil Bartlett



Climbing – Philosophy for Everyone: Because It's There
Edited by Stephen E Schmid
Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pp242, £11.99

At the 2010 Kathmandu Mountain Film Festival I gave a slide show on the eccentricities of British climbing culture from the perspective of a weekend climber of modest ambitions and even more modest abilities. The audience questions began with one Nepali who said he had three questions: 'Can you smell the difference between rocks? What do you think about falling? What is harder to climb, a rock or a man?' If this had been in the UK I would have suspected the extraction of the Michael. But, whether this man was a Buddhist or not, I took his questions seriously and answered, 'Yes,' 'I try not to', and 'A man'. This book, written by climbers who are also professional philosophers, is an attempt to explore with clarity of thinking questions about climbing, most of them less interesting than those of my Kathmandu questioner.

Familiar questions about ethics, styles, environmentalism, risk and responsibilities tend to come to the familiar variety of conclusions via philosophical routes that you may or may not find interesting. Since most of the contributors are North American, the climbing contexts and examples tend to derive from there and it is mostly European philosophers of previous centuries who are drawn upon for structures of thought and constructions of the issues. It is fun to see some of these essays as in unarticulated dialogue with each other. Joe Fitchen, early partner of Royal Robbins, observes that climbing, in his experience, has not produced 'significantly better people', but a stage for the acting out of already formed personalities. For Paul Charlton, on the other hand, the demands of climbing can 'leave us better equipped to contribute to our societies'. Note that the latter is argument and the former personal observation. Such distinctions are important to philosophers who regularly complain of sloppy and erroneous thinking whilst selecting quite narrow philosophical frames with which to pursue questions of their own precise definition. It turns out from the footnotes that the games philosophers play here render as the single most quoted text *The Games Climbers Play* by Lito Tejada-Flores.

Ben Levey uses Hegel's argument that the slave's restrictions produce more 'self-realization' than in the master to conclude that the trad climbing game demands 'an instinctive questioning and redressing of a deeply held presupposition, as part and parcel of its rules, while the sport climbing game does not'. Nevertheless, a depressing number of other contributors take sport climbing as their model. Debora Halbert argues that climbing is a gift economy in which 'route setters' give their bolted routes to others. Her supreme example is of Rick and Liz Webster's gift to the climbing

community of seven miles of crags which they bought in Kentucky's Muir Valley in the late 1990s, building roads and trails so that route setters could bolt the rocks to hell 'while the Websters monitor who can set routes and the procedures for doing so'. Elsewhere Dale Murray asks, 'Is it rational for me to contribute by not climbing?' This is a rather different kind of gift that leaves him free from the gift of those monitoring Websters.

Perhaps the most challenging essay is that in justification of 'hold manufacture', or chipping. William Ramsey makes a cleverly written, clearly argued case that I suspect is more convincing in an American context where 'if you are a serious climber who regularly climbs relatively hard sport routes there is a very good chance that at some point you have done a route with at least a few manufactured holds'. Already guilty? Then manufacture a few more in that forever-I-mean-forever unclimbable blank section, you route setter.

Oh these philosophers! Their internal consistencies can take you to places you never thought you'd be. As one of them says a few pages later, this book is 'an appropriate area for chiselling out some of the common arguments involved in the ethical discussion'. And it's no good squirming in your apparently innocent boots feeling indignant and injured. These philosophers *are* the Moral Mountain Rescue Squad. Take me back to Kathmandu where the answers can be 'Yes,' 'I try not to', 'A man', and the questioner a philosopher from a less 'rational' tradition.

Terry Gifford

In the Footsteps of Mallory and Irvine: The Wildest Dream
Mark Mackenzie
John Murray, 2009, pp 248, £20

So who had the wilder dream: George Mallory in his obsessive bid to be first on the summit of Everest, or Conrad Anker in his search for evidence that Mallory and Irvine had succeeded? Mark Mackenzie's account *In the Footsteps of Mallory and Irvine – The Wildest Dream* is more than the book of Anthony Giffen's drama documentary film, it is a stalwart sifting of the evidence contained in more than 30 books devoted to mountaineering's most famous mystery.

It was Conrad Anker who found Mallory's remains clinging to the flanks of Everest, a discovery that offered no positive answer to the question. But the find was sensational and turned the romantic myth, of two dots high on Everest somehow evaporating into the mist, into an awful reality; Mallory reduced to a cluster of broken bones and tattered cloth, his shoulder smooth as marble in the refrigerating cold.

Mackenzie traces the background to the 1924 expedition leading to the disappearance of the two climbers and Conrad Anker's career in mountaineering, from apprentice to professional climber on the 1999 team hoping to solve the Mallory-Irvine mystery. After the discovery of Mallory's body Anker went on to reach the summit, attempting the famous second step without using the metal ladder put there by the Chinese. The 90ft pitch, which is topped by an overhang, prompts the critical question of whether Mallory, probably the best rock climber of his generation, could have succeeded given the thin air, freezing wind and the clothing and equipment then available. Anker failed when his foot touched the ladder.

Eight years later he was back on Everest with the Altitude Everest Expedition to recreate on film Mallory and Irvine's fateful attempt. With him was Leo Houlding, leading light among today's generation of rock climbers but like Sandy Irvine a relatively inexperienced high altitude mountaineer. Irvine is portrayed as a live wire from the roaring twenties, an all-round athlete, Oxford rowing blue with a liking for theatre, fast cars and women. His affair with the stepmother of a good friend involved making love four times before breakfast. More usefully he proved to be a practical wizard at servicing the oxygen equipment that provided 'English air' to the 1924 mountaineers.

Mackenzie's narrative switches between the 1924 and the 2007 expeditions as Anker and Houlding don period clothing, identical to that worn by Mallory and Irvine, to recreate the climb. They promptly abandoned this nod at authenticity on the North Col when cold, wind and altitude began to bite. Indeed, of the 10 westerners in the film team, five failed to make it on to the mountain and one cameraman developed serious altitude sickness.

When Anker and Houlding reached the second step at 28,000ft the metal ladder that has eased the path of climbers for some 40 years was temporarily removed and Anker, after one spectacular fall, eventually 'pulled himself into the fog created by his own breathing' and he and Houlding plodded to the summit.

Technically the second step would probably have been within Mallory's known capabilities. But the thin air at 28,000ft, deteriorating weather late in the day with the summit still some way ahead and a relatively inexperienced partner, all weighed against success. Mackenzie points out that Mallory's injuries, the lack of frostbite on his fingers and the broken rope suggest he died from a fall lower down the mountain. Conrad Anker was far from convinced that Mallory would have chosen a death-or-glory finale. Although Mallory was obsessed by a desire to reach the summit and knew that subsequent success and status as a great explorer would bring great rewards, claiming the prize meant getting back in one piece.

Ronald Faux

Deep Powder and Steep Rock:
The Life of Mountain Guide Hans Gmoser
Chic Scott
Assiniboine Publishing Limited, 2009, pp384 plus DVD, $50

Writing a biography can be extremely challenging. It contains a kind of duality that can play itself out for better or worse. On the one side, the writer works within the context of the known history, gathering together existing facts and perhaps forming new lines of inquiry that will give the basic shape and structure to the biography. The other side is trickier, for how we write about the past can, and often does, redefine it. The written interpretation of the past therefore becomes the new remembrance, and the new history. The biography writer is therefore both retrospective, and sometimes unknowingly prospective.

The first biography of a recently deceased and esteemed member of a community – in this case the Canadian mountain community – brings its own additional gravity. It is the weight of expectation. Canadian mountain historian Chic Scott moves carefully and purposefully into this terrain with this biography of the guide and heli-ski entrepreneur Hans Gmoser.

When Gmoser died in 2006 at age 73 from injuries sustained in a cycling accident, few could believe it. Gmoser had been such a significant force, played a pivotal role in putting the Canadian Rockies on the world stage, and shaped the lives of numerous guides and clients. His accomplishments would include the adventurous second ascent of the east ridge of Mount Logan in the St Elias Range in the late 1950s and the first ascent of Denali's huge Wickersham Wall in the early 1960s. But it was for his adventures in and around the Canadian Rockies that he became best known. First for the difficult new rock climbs that Gmoser, often in the company of fellow expatriate Austrians, established on the then-virgin walls of Yamnuska. And secondly for his love of skiing – adventures throughout the winter in search of the best snow, often undertaking groundbreaking multi-day ski tours that traversed and connected huge tracts of glaciated terrain.

Gmoser travelled throughout the North American continent, sharing his stories through charming films and speaking engagements. And his invention and development of the sport of heli-skiing, which grew from humble roots into a leading adventure holiday company, was to launch Gmoser into the world of high-pressure business.

Written by Scott at the request of Gmoser's widow, Margaret, *Deep Powder and Steep Rock* makes an admirable job of capturing the chronological essence of Gmoser's life. I use the term chronological with intent because where the book excels is in its comprehensiveness, covering the breadth of Gmoser's life from its austere beginnings in Austria, his move to Canada as a young immigrant, the early, hungry and ambitious years as a climber and skier, to his eventual marriage, family and the growth of his business, Canadian Mountain Holidays.

As evidenced by his other books such as *Pushing the Limits* (a comprehensive history of mountaineering in Canada) and his ski-touring guides, Scott does his research. In writing this book, he was granted full access to Gmoser's personal diaries and letters. One gets the sense, at times, that Scott is treating some of the material with caution – I don't think this coyness was entirely his own, rather it speaks to the circumstances of the book's development and Gmoser's stature as the elder statesman of Canadian mountaineering. That being said, he works effectively with what he has and what is already known. As a result, the best of the book is contained within the first sections. Here are the stories and writing – much of it Gmoser's – that speak to a true love of the mountains and the camaraderie that fuels the spirit. These are the stories of Gmoser's early life as a climber.

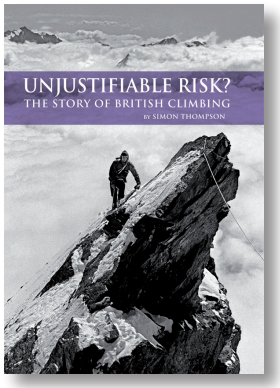
There is a marked lack of writing from Gmoser in the later sections of the book. This is when he became busier and, some felt, consumed by business pursuits. When I spoke with Scott about this, he indicated that indeed Gmoser's writing and descriptions of his own experiences had become less frequent. This is a shame, for Gmoser's writing was often simple and beautiful, and along with his films, was an important element of his message about the mountain experience as he saw it. After his landmark first ascent of Yamnuska's *Direttissima*, Gmoser wrote:

> *This mountain to us is not a sports arena. To us it is a symbol of truth and a symbol of life as it should be. This mountain teaches us that we should endure hardships and that we should encounter the difficulties and not drift along the easy way, which always leads down.*

Scott alludes to some of the tensions that existed in the second half of Gmoser's life – the business pressures and the divisiveness that occurred at times when Gmoser was perhaps seen more as an entrepreneur than the young Austrian immigrant who had been so charmed by the mountains. During these times, Gmoser himself seemed more detached and Scott's own writing of that period is more chronological in nature. The DVD of some of Gmoser's own skiing and climbing films from the early days that is included with the book emphasises the joy, adventure and passion of those earlier times.

So in the end, does Scott move into the terrain where a biographer negatively changes our collective memory through stretching of facts? Thankfully not – Scott has captured the history effectively. But nor do we get a full insight into all of Gmoser's character; there is just a start here. This isn't entirely Scott's fault as he was writing this book at the request of Gmoser's widow, something that was no doubt an honour but also came with limitations. Perhaps one day Scott will gather together more of Gmoser's story, and we will get an even deeper understanding of the life of the man who was to change the face of Canadian mountaineering.

Jon Popowich



Unjustifiable Risk? The Story of British Climbing
Simon Thompson
Cicerone, 2010, 388pp, £20

This is an ambitious book. Simon Thompson, an Alpine Club member, has aimed to produce a comprehensive history of British climbing, starting with the early British visitors to the Alps in the mid-18th century and ending in the present day: the last new route he records is *Echo Wall* on Ben Nevis, climbed by Dave Macleod in 2008. In the space of 340 pages he thus moves through the entire gamut of British climbing in the British Isles, the Alps and the greater ranges. It is the first such book to be published in at least 50 years. Its closest precedent is R L G Irving's *History of British Mountaineering* (1955). *A Brief History of British Mountaineering* by Colin Wells (2001) is exactly what is says: brief. Wells's *Who's Who in British Mountaineering* (2008) is very readable but is an encyclopaedia of climbers rather than the narrative that Thompson has attempted.

Thompson sets out his stall in his introduction: this book is about the social, cultural and economic conditions that gave rise to the sport in Britain, and the achievements and motives of those who took part. He also boldly takes on the perennial question of why people climb, using as his template the five motives cited by James (Jan) Morris in *Coronation Everest*. Thompson succeeds in some respects and fails in others; he is also often highly contentious, and he set himself some curious limits in the way he conducted his research, with some resultant flaws. The best parts of the book for me are his biographical portraits of a large number of climbers, which are usually entertaining and informative. The index contains hundreds of names, from the Abraham brothers to Geoffrey Winthrop Young, via Bonington, Coolidge, Freshfield, Longstaff, Mallory, Tasker, Whillans, Whymper and many more. It is an impressive distillation of information, much of it taken from obituaries in the *Alpine Journal*.

In between the narrative come historical passages that present Thompson's views of the ideological and sociological roots of climbing. Thompson, in his non-climbing life a successful businessman, is keen to demonstrate the link between social trends and the development of climbing. In Victorian times it was the preserve of the professional and leisured classes, spreading in the 20th century through the classes, thanks to such factors as improved transport, long school holidays, and the dole.

At the same time, Thompson's own biases become clear. He espouses the romantic version of mountaineering, where free spirits pursue their aims devoid of commercial taint. He prefers light, alpine-style ventures to large-scale expeditions. These are reasonable preferences, but his perceptions have led him to devalue some of the most important mountaineering events of his narrative. While he decries the feats of organisation that lay behind the British ascents of the south face of Annapurna in 1970 and the south-west face of Everest in 1975, he does not give sufficient credit to their technical achievement and the extent to which they advanced Himalayan mountaineering to new levels. He also displays a persistent animus towards Chris Bonington in his role as climber-manager which underrates Bonington's record as both climber and expedition leader.

What is strange is how far Thompson has formed these judgments without talking to any of the participants. His approach is that of a historian, using written accounts as his evidence and thus not testing his observations in any conversations with those involved, which seems a wasted opportunity since so many in the latter parts of the book are still alive. All his quotes are recycled from other publications and he fell into the trap of lifting disparaging remarks by Bonington about George Mallory from a book by the jolly thespian (but seemingly less-than-reliable reporter) Brian Blessed, which Bonington now vigorously disputes. Thompson thanks seven people for 'help and advice' in his introduction but the help was mostly practical rather than heeded in shaping his ideas. He is given to making sweeping and often dismissive judgments on topics such as Munro climbers, asserting that most are driven masochists who take part primarily for a sense of achievement and are rarely interested in beauty or adventure. He contends that elite climbers are obsessed and self-absorbed, and that many have unhappy or unfulfilling personal relations.

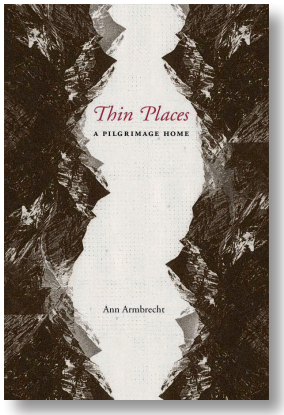
As author, Thompson is entitled to his judgments. But a problem arises where they are divorced from the known facts. As a Mallory biographer, I was keen to read what Thompson writes about him. For Thompson, Mallory is tarred with the same brush as Bonington, driven by commercial aims. He declares that Mallory thought that his life would be transformed by success on Everest and was prepared to leave behind his wife and children for the chance of fame and glory; and suggests that Mallory chose Irvine for the final summit attempt rather than the more experienced Odell so that he could take most of the glory for himself. There is no evidence for these assertions and Mallory did not voice such thoughts in any of his letters. Mallory's previous attempts to earn a living as a writer and lecturer after the 1922 expedition had ended in failure and he was enjoying his work as an extramural lecturer at Cambridge. Nor was Everest an obsession for him, as Thompson glibly asserts. Mallory had no thought of climbing it until he was invited to join the 1921 expedition. He was less than happy at returning so soon in 1922 and profoundly ambivalent over whether to go in 1924.

I was also interested to see what Thompson made of Dougal Haston. In general, he has Haston right: a dark and driven soul, brooding and flawed. But Thompson writes that during the 37 days that the 1967 British Cerro Torre expedition spent pinned in its base camp by Patagonian storms, 'while the others swore and cursed, Haston simply switched off, displaying no outwards signs of boredom or frustration'. I was in base camp with the expedition and do not recognise this description. I checked the two

sources cited by Thompson: Haston's *In High Places* and the biography by Jeff Connor, *The Philosophy of Risk* (2002). Haston writes that base camp was surprisingly peaceful during the storms, and Connor has nothing to contribute. Thompson also writes that Haston 'almost invariably led' the climbing when in fact Haston himself reports that the leading was shared by Boysen, Burke and himself.

These may appear inconsequential details. The problem is that they weaken trust in Thompson's use of evidence to make his judgments, leaving you wondering how much is actually true. The book remains an engaging read, and Thompson's arguments set out points of view that deserve consideration, even if many will disagree with them. It will also be a useful resource and reference work and as such a worthwhile addition to mountaineering bookshelves.

Peter Gillman



Thin Places: A Pilgrimage Home
Ann Armbrecht
Columbia University Press, 2009, pp290, £24 hard cover, £15.50 soft

The 'thin places' of the title are those places where gods have made their mark upon the land, a place to hear the voice of ancestors, or perhaps of the land itself. This is a difficult concept to get over in the English language without coming over as a New Age mystic. Ann Armbrecht succeeds partly because she is an anthropologist with a writer's gift, and partly because, with the Yamphu Rai villagers of Nepal, she shares wholeheartedly in a way of life where thin places exist without need of didactic proof.

If you've hiked up the Arun valley, perhaps en route for Makalu base camp, or higher, you've probably met Yamphu Rai, but you are most unlikely to have gained the insights Armbrecht offers here.

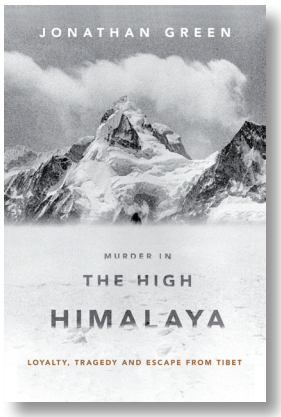
Thin Places was the first book I picked off the stack when lured on to the judging panel for the 2009 Banff Mountain Festival book awards. Nepal and the aid industry are familiar territory and Armbrecht's mix of intimately engaged study and search for connection with people and land looked right up my street, even though it probably raised the eyebrows of her professional colleagues. It's certainly not a work of academic detachment.

I wasn't disappointed – at least for the first two-thirds of the book, and then it started to fall apart, along with the author. For all the personal baggage she eventually unloads on the reader, Armbrecht the anthropologist is a questioning and clear-eyed observer. The Nepal section was genuinely insightful, particularly the portrayal of the hard and often lonely lives of the women in these hill villages; the role of the shamans and their spirit journeying is told in fascinating and affecting detail.

However, the second theme of the book, Armbrecht's personal search (does even she really know for what?) becomes increasingly distant from the first. We're back in the USA now, Armbrecht's marriage is falling apart and the narrative descends into a kind of desperate road trip. 'Home is not a place we ever reach.' It's a pretty bleak conclusion, unless you can shrug it off in Blind Boy Fuller/Robert Crumb style as 'Keep on Truckin'.

For all its faults, I still think *Thin Places* was the most original of the works before the 2009 Banff book jury. It's one of the few entries that I could happily pick up again, though I know that eventually Armbrecht's self-absorption would become too much.

Stephen Goodwin



Murder in the High Himalaya
Jonathan Green
Public Affairs, 2010, pp271, £15.99

Murder in the High Himalaya tells the story of the killing of 17-year-old Kelsang Namtso, a novice nun who was shot dead by Chinese border guards in 2006. There was a lot of publicity surrounding her death, much of it contradictory. This book is an attempt to give a factual account of those events.

For most of the Tibetans who attempt the journey to India, the 'escape' is a pilgrimage to see the Dalai Lama. Many return to Tibet afterwards. In late September 2006 a group attempted to cross the Nangpa La near Cho Oyu. Some made the brutal traverse, others were captured by the PAP, the Chinese border guards, and one, Kelsang, was shot dead. Unusually all this was witnessed by several climbers from the base camp at Cho Oyu.

Green adopts the structure that worked so well in Galen Rowell's *In the Throne Room of the Mountain Gods*, alternating chapters from the westerners' point of view with those from the Tibetans'.

The 'Tibetan' chapters lead up to the escape and give us a swift overview of Tibetan life under the Chinese. By the time we reach the route over the Nangpa La we have become familiar with the main characters. So it is rather moving when, in a passage reminiscent of Younghusband's 1905 military expedition, there is the account of the nuns using pills which had been blessed and pictures of the Dalai Lama to ward off the Chinese bullets. We follow the harrowing tale of the survivors' descent into Nepal and the sickening torture of the captured refugee Jamyang. The errors of

topography or orientation slightly impede the flow of the story; Green has the refugees re-crossing the Nangpa La while fleeing, as the captives are dragged off from the climbers' base camp to idling trucks nearby. (In 2006 there was no road closer than several hours' walk from the camp.) These are probably editorial oversights.

In the alternate chapters Green maps the growing paranoia of Luis Benitez, the western guide who sent the story by satellite before he thought through the consequences and how he was going to leave Tibet should the Chinese connect him with the story. This part too is well told, though Green does seem rather down on the commercial operators who exhibit 'the great evil of our age, cynicism... they secretly disdain their Chinese hosts but outwardly act as apologists for them'. (And I thought that it was only journalists who were like that!)

Unfortunately for a supposedly factual account, one detects an underlying Sinophobia paired with a romantic attachment to all things ancient, especially ancient Tibetan. Examples of the former: the new railway to Lhasa is 'a brazen statement of China's will…'; 'The Chinese are fed a steady diet of propaganda'; the Chinese 'appeal to greed over human rights'; their Olympic propaganda recalls that of the Nazis. Meanwhile the Tibetans are imbued with an ancient sagacity: Westerners call it Everest, but the 'Tibetans, without measuring instruments, already knew the peak's dominant status, they simply called it Qomolangma, Goddess Mother of the World'. Yes, that is what you see if you do an undiscerning internet trawl. Actually a little further investigation would have suggested the original meaning of Chomolungma (Green uses the Chinese spelling for this Tibetan word) has been debated for decades if not longer, and may actually be irretrievably lost. My favourite translation is Gary McCue's (*Trekking in Tibet*, 1999) quoting Asian studies scholar Edwin Bernbaum's interesting 'Lady Immovable Good Cow'.

In other passages those historic folks are just better than the modern ones; for example Messner's 'spiritual quest' and Hillary and Tenzing's 'quiet nobility' are contrasted with modern 'rampant egoism'. A little more study might take some of the gloss off his characters. When the Chinese opened up the north side of Cho Oyu in 1987, Green says this led directly to the commercialisation of the peak and violence. The example he gives of this in 1989 concerned two teams that were, a) not commercial expeditions (i.e. those with guides and clients), and b) were operating on the Nepalese side of the hill, not the Tibetan. He seems to have been reading Ed Hillary's intemperate rant about modern commercial trips, and doing so uncritically. According to Green, commercial guiding outfits are known as the 'brotherhood of the rope'... and they watch out for each other in the lawless frontier governed by the almighty dollar. This is news to me, and rather begs the question just how much does Green actually know about the mountains? And in what way does this develop the story of Kelsang?

I think the relevance of these passages to Kelsang is the implied culpability of the Westerners, who are accused of appeasement in the face of the human rights tragedy unfolding in Tibet, of which Kelsang's story is one small but highly visible part. But if we are to trust Green's judgment, we need to believe the accuracy of his reporting. Here I have a problem.

Green likes to attribute to his characters states of mind that cannot be known: she 'was overcome with a greying melancholy... half-formed memories of her family'; …the water felt silky and comforting in the darkness'. I don't much care for that kind of assumption in a factual account, unless it is a direct quotation. But while not provable, these statements may not be actually untrue. One can even excuse hyperbole on grounds of cultural difference: 'On the high passes... there is no law or morality' and the east face of Everest 'knifed up into the jet stream more defiant and lawless than ever'. Green is fond of his lawlessness.

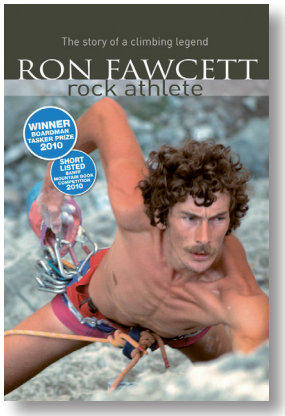
There are however, several statements that are precisely incorrect. Here is a small selection of the factual errors: Green says that 'the only Westerner to have successfully crossed the Nangpa La is the Swiss photographer Manuel Bauer', in 1995, (The Cho Oyu first ascensionists crossed the pass in 1954); and about Russell Brice's climb of the North East Ridge, he says: 'No one had attempted the route before.' (Oh please DO read some history). 'The Nangpa La is a keyhole pass between two 8000m peaks.' (And some geography too.) 'The crevasses on the Nangpa La are a thousand feet deep.' (And some glaciology while you are at it.)

In the final pages Green at last discloses the aim of his book: after a meeting with the Dalai Lama, he takes the great man's advice to 'simply tell the truth'. Actually I quite like that, unpacking the hidden agenda at the end. It recalls Jim Perrin and his moral coercion trick; telling his readers they have wasted their time reading so far if they disagree with him. I don't disagree with Jonathan Green, it is important to tell the truth, and in parts his book works well. But is it the simple truth?

As with all things Tibetan, telling the truth is anything but simple. There are more than two sides to this story, and everyone seems to have a vested interest, and their own version of the story to propagate. So, perhaps a little inaccuracy here doesn't affect the main line of the story, or, does it? I would like to say this is an important book, it is just that if the fact checking on the easy things is so slack, what about the hard things? Has he made as many mistakes about China and Tibet as he has about mountains? I don't know, because that is not an area I know much about, but I don't trust his accuracy.

Verdict? What should be an important book is marred by sloppy regard for the facts.

Victor Saunders



Ron Fawcett: Rock Athlete
Ron Fawcett with Ed Douglas
Vertebrate Publishing, 2010, 240pp, £20

As my old friend and climbing partner Sean Smith puts it, 'I've had two lives. A busy one and a not so busy one.' Back in the days when my own life was not so busy I became a teenage rock climber, obsessed with the sport with an intensity I now find bewildering. So much so, that when it came to make choices about where to go to university, I went to Sheffield. Much of my abundant free time was spent out on the gritstone edges and limestone of the Peak District, with similarly afflicted individuals. It was a different era, with few purpose-built climbing walls, no sports climbing, minimal specialist gear or even clothing. Entry into the sport usually came through some chance meeting with a climber, or on a trip through school or the Scouts. It still felt like a counter-culture activity and you would know by name many of the people on a crag at any given time. All that was set to change.

Arguably, no one individual did more to bring about that change than Ron Fawcett. He was quite simply a climbing phenomenon and for a number of years through the late 70s and early 80s was everywhere, putting up new routes and adorning the pages of the world's climbing media. He even starred in a TV series, entitled, of course, *Rock Athlete*.

Now, many years after his climbing heyday Ron and the journalist Ed Douglas have teamed up to produce a biography detailing his incredible life. From humble beginnings in Embsay, near Skipton, to becoming one of the best rock climbers in the world is quite a journey and Ed has done a great job in capturing Ron's voice. It is a gentle and warm read that comes across like listening to someone reminiscing over a pint in front of a roaring pub fire. Quite rightly, *Rock Athlete* was the winner of the 2010 Boardman Tasker Award for Mountain Literature.

Within a couple of years of starting climbing Ron was putting up difficult new routes and soon began a significant climbing partnership with Pete Livesey. Livesey is widely credited with bringing scientific training techniques to climbing in the UK and was obviously a huge influence on Ron and the way he pursued the sport. His approach is best described as seriously hard graft. While he was obviously very talented, it was his drive, dedication and determination that set him apart. The sheer volume of training and difficult climbing he undertook at his peak is simply staggering.

It was all too much in the end – the obsession ran its course – Ron dropped from the public-eye and for a while became involved in the then rapidly evolving sport of paragliding. Later he became a dad and more recently a veteran fell runner. By the end of the narrative he has come full circle and his love of climbing is rekindled.

It has not all been plain sailing, as you would imagine. Ron was a pivotal figure in enabling athlete-climbers to make a living from the sport, but he made no fortune himself, as rock climbing was then merely on the cusp of becoming the consumer-driven activity it is today. At times money was tight. Nor has Ron been lucky in love, and with two marriages behind him has had his share of heartache. The separation from his second wife – who left him for another woman – resulting in them sharing custody of their children for a time was obviously particularly painful. However, the girls ultimately moved back with Ron full-time and he has been a devoted father to them. Not unexpectedly, a few mates die climbing on the way and others succumb to illness. His own list of falls, fractures and injuries are hardly insignificant either. However, there are few traces of bitterness about any of these misfortunes.

Ultimately, what I took away from this book was something I had already realised when as a shy young man I would say 'hello' at the crag and then watch with a mixture of awe and admiration as Ron did what he does best. Here is a decent, ordinary, down-to-earth man with an extraordinary talent who has led a remarkable life. Thanks to Ron, Ed and the people at Vertebrate for sharing it all with us.

Simon Yates

Thirty Men and a Girl
Elizabeth Parry
*Allegra, 2010, pp423, £18**

Music dominated the life of Elizabeth Parry but mountains and memories of her adventures in the Alps became a lasting backdrop to her life as a singer and opera impresario. *Thirty Men and a Girl* is less radical than the title suggests; the name was chosen to introduce the forces concert party that toured the Middle East during World War II. As the girl in question and soprano soloist with the staff band of the Royal Army Medical Corps, Parry was voted a Forces Sweetheart. After the war she launched and ran the Wigmore Hall Lunch Hour Concerts and had a distinguished career with the English Opera Group formed by Benjamin Britten. She then established her own touring company, the London Opera Players, taking live opera on tour to schools and audiences with more than 3000 performances over half a century.

Her memoirs are detailed, largely drawn from her diaries, and mountains have hardly a mention before page 328 when Parry, then aged 40, developed a passion for climbing them.

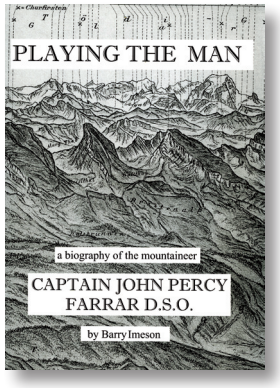
Now approaching her nineties she looks back on the time her family spent 21 successive years on holiday in Zermatt, staying at the Monte Rosa Hotel. Mountains were there to admire or to ski down and when friends invited her to climb the rocks of the Riffelhorn she hesitated, claiming she had 'no head for heights'. Parry soon developed one and began studying

the sport at a Mountaineering Association evening class in St John's Wood. A rock climbing apprenticeship in the Dolomites with the guide Celso Desgasper, 'heels down, stand well away from the rock', and she graduated to a traverse of the Matterhorn, up the Hörnli and down the Italian ridge. A late starter to the sport, she went through several seasons 'in a sort of climbing frenzy', always modest about her achievements; holding her guide when a hold broke and he plunged into space, a tight rope on the Knubel Crack, robbed by bandits in the Hakkari mountains of south-east Turkey and, as confidence grew, her amazement at including a traverse of the Weisshorn and both the Peuterey and Innominata ridges of Mont Blanc in her list of successes. In 1961, Parry joined the Ladies Alpine Club and is still an AC member.

It has clearly been a rich and fulfilled life but, for the girl with 30 men, there came a poignant wartime truth; the only man she had ever wanted to marry, a soldier in the Parachute Regiment, was killed at Arnhem.

Ronald Faux

* Allegra, Broadmeade Copse, Westwood Lane, Wanborough, Guildford, Surrey, GU3 2JN



Playing the Man: a biography of the mountaineer Captain John Percy Farrar D.S.O.
Barry Imeson
*Loose Scree, 2010, pp245**

When Percy Farrar died in February 1929, Julius Kugy described him as 'a true servant of the highest mountaineering ideals' while Geoffrey Winthrop Young said Farrar's was probably the strongest single influence modern mountaineering had known, and as editor of the *Alpine Journal* he had 'kept it at a level of literary and scholarly excellence that could challenge comparison with any more celebrated quarterly'.

Young may have been showing some of the fulsome generosity that was a hallmark of the many obituaries Farrar himself wrote for the *AJ*, but even so he cannot have been far off the mark. Farrar was not only one of the leading climbers of his day, with the ascent of more than 170 mountains to his name, but his energy, enthusiasm and cosmopolitan touch were at the service of the Alpine Club for two decades, including as president (1917-19) and joint editor.

If you are only vaguely aware – or worse, totally unaware – of Percy Farrar's contribution to the AC and the mountaineering world, the good captain would not have been surprised at such historical ignorance. In correspondence with one loyal contributor, he noted how 'very few' used the Club's 'superb library' and added: 'You would be astonished to find what a thundering 'mute pack' the bulk of the members are.'

Barry Imeson, who produces the idiosyncratic *Loose Scree* free magazine, has written *Playing the Man* as a modest attempt to restore Farrar to his rightful place in our collective memory. That Imeson felt the need is demonstrated by his decision to self-publish, however his caution in going for an initial print run of only 250 copies suggests he does not feel the 'mute pack' is over eager for a Farrar biography. And that's a pity; it is potentially an interesting story.

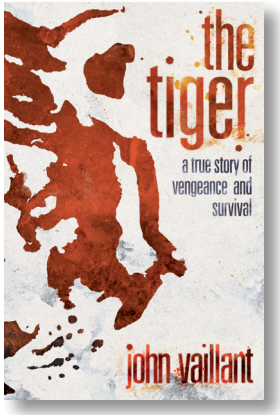
Percy Farrar was born in the same year that the AC was founded; made a fortune in South Africa; fought in the Boer War; locked horns with Arthur Hinks of the Royal Geographical Society in planning the 1920s Everest expeditions; handled complicated family affairs and wayward nieces; all the while cramming his seasons in the Alps from 1881 to 1926, including many first or early ascents.

In 1909 Farrar became Assistant Editor to George Yeld and was elevated to Joint Editor in 1919, the pair retiring together in 1926. As T S Blakeney observed in his study of 'The "Alpine Journal" and its Editors', it was an open secret that Farrar was 'the real editor' for much of this time (*AJ*80, p120). Forceful and dogmatic, Farrar could also be wonderfully droll and his sparring, recorded here, with former editor William Coolidge, the 'Sage of Grindelwald', and with Hinks is a delight. While Farrar hoped that Everest could be climbed without bottled oxygen, he rejected Hinks's assertion that oxygen was for 'rotters' and noted that: 'Strictly speaking, I do not think that oxygen is any more of an artificial aid than food.'

Playing the Man is not an easy, flowing read; it's a monograph with lengthy quotes in small type and lots of endnotes. At times, particularly when mired in the politics of South Africa or the affairs of the Farrar family, it can be hard going. But for this reviewer at least the toil was amply repaid by insights into the character and editorial tribulations of an illustrious predecessor. With what fellow feeling I read such ostensibly dry lines as: 'The economics of publishing the Journal continued to concern the Club Committee…'

Stephen Goodwin

* *Playing the Man* is available direct from Barry Imeson at his address in the AC Members' Handbook. There is no charge for the book, but recipients are asked to refund the cost of postage.



The Tiger: A True Story of Vengeance and Survival
John Vaillant
Alfred A Knopf, USA, 2010, pp329, published in the UK by Sceptre, £18.99

John Vaillant's true tale of a man-eating tiger prowling the snow-wrapped forests of Russia's Far East and the men hunting the killer down contains all the elements of a timeless story of man against the wild. From *Beowulf* to *Jaws*, monsters have besieged human towns, and heroes have killed those monsters. In *The Tiger: A True Story of Vengeance and Survival* Vaillant's monster is the Siberian, or Amur, tiger, the largest of all the big cats. In the final years of the exhausted 20th century this animal stalks a post-Soviet landscape whose inhabitants need no introduction to suffering and struggle.

There is no mountaineering in *The Tiger*, but as with his previous book, *The Golden Spruce*, Vaillant inhabits the close-to-the-bone frontier lands that enthral adventure climbers. The connections were acknowledged at the 2010 Banff Mountain Festival where *The Tiger* received a Special Jury Award. John Porter, one of the book judges, described it as 'a book that explores the many levels on which man is losing the natural balance that once existed with human society and the animal kingdom.' As the pages of the *AJ* testify – this volume included – mountaineers know themselves privileged when they come upon the tracks of a snow leopard and are ever hopeful of seeing the beast itself. In the case of Vaillant's big cat, seeing the tracks would be more than enough.

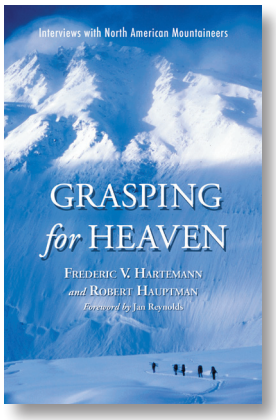
The book tells the story of an animal that appears to be motivated by fury against men. Normally tigers avoid contact with people in Russia: they have learnt that men carry guns. But this creature patiently stalked his victims. By eating his kills, the tiger eradicated their remains. He even demolished several buildings with rabid ferocity. Vaillant's thesis is that the tiger was maddened by persecution. Its corpse, when eventually examined, bore witness in wounds to a lifetime's pain: he 'had been shot with literally dozens of bullets, balls, and birdshot'.

Post-perestroika, the collapse of the area's state-run logging industry led to a steep increase in poaching. A tiger corpse could fetch a high price across the border in China. In the 1990s Inspection Tiger was set up to control the poaching, and it is the unit's senior inspector, Yuri Trush, who is charged with the task of hunting down the rogue man-eating tiger. Trush makes an impressive hero and Vaillant doesn't disguise his admiration for this principled and brave man. He describes Trush in similar terms to the tiger itself: 'Trush's physicality is intense and often barely suppressed... His fists are knuckled mallets, and he can break bricks with them.' Trush takes his team of men and dogs into the mid-winter forest to track the animal on foot. The reader knows a showdown has to be coming and neither the facts of what happened nor Vaillant's narrative disappoint.

By this stage the animal Trush was tracking was wounded, harassed and hungry. It may have been in trouble, but it was still dangerous. Vaillant wants to remind his readers how to feel real fear for an animal in the wilderness. Like so much that was once wild and terrifying, tigers have been tamed in the western imagination. We are most likely to see them caged by zoos or our television screens. Vaillant goes all out in his efforts to make us tremble before this predator: he compares the creature and its body parts to no less than a pit bull, meat hooks, stilettos, an industrial refrigerator, a velociraptor, maces, a boxer, surgical tools, the tail fin of an airplane, a saltwater crocodile and a basketball team. While the reader has to share his 'wonder at our strange fortune to coexist with such a creature', there's a point at which this blazon, unfolding in the space of two pages, ceases to evoke the sublime and instead becomes funny. More effective is the image of tigers hunting along the Russian seashore under cover of fog, swimming into the Bikin River and crawling into fishermen's boats.

Vaillant delivers a heroic conflict, and yet the tiger is not top predator in the Russian forests. Only 450 of these animals remain. Knowing this, we have to ask, between the townspeople and the big cats, who is really under siege? The true success of Vaillant's story lies in its nuance. Trush is a reluctant tiger hunter. He currently works to protect wildlife within a newly created federal park. Though his park is under-funded and surrounded by lawlessness, Trush remains determined: 'Nature has decided there should be a tiger here,' he declares. 'Hope dies last.' For the space of Vaillant's story the tiger is the monster threatening the townspeople's lives. It's a story that makes sense to us on a mythic, visceral level, but reality is darker: not tigers but political upheavals have made life in the Russian wilderness a fight for survival.

Kathleen Palti



Grasping for Heaven: Interviews with North American Mountaineers
Frederic V Hartemann and Robert Hauptman
McFarland, 2010, pp264, US$35

This book is exactly what the subtitle says; the interviewees include Pete Athans, the late Christine Boskoff, Carlos Buhler, the late Charles Houston, Jim Wickwire, Sharon Wood and a dozen more. Interestingly the authors have included three historians, Elizabeth Hawley, Maurice Isserman, and Audrey Salkeld – Audrey being the only real 'foreigner' in the pack, given that Jamling Tenzing Norgay lived for 10 years in New Jersey.

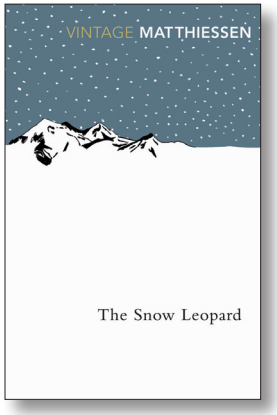
The question-and-answer interviews have been only lightly edited, betraying the interviewee's voice and manner in a way that is often lost in the more interpretative, selective quotes style of most newspaper or magazine interviews and biographies. Climbers who have been interrogated by Hawley in Kathmandu will certainly recognise her sharp tone as she parries Hauptman's occasionally ill-informed questions.

The most interesting interviews were of those climbers I knew least about, such as Christine Boskoff who took over the company Mountain Madness after founder Scott Fischer perished on Everest in 1996. Christine herself was killed in an avalanche in China in 2006 along with Charlie Fowler.

Maybe it's a transatlantic divide, but the downside of this book for me was the ingratiating style of Hauptman's questioning, finding it 'an extremely rewarding privilege to speak with these glorious people'. Steady on, they're only climbers!

That apart, the answers do a good job in fleshing out the lives of 15 significant mountaineers and three 'historians' – though Elizabeth Hawley prefers to be known as a 'chronicler'.

Stephen Goodwin



The Snow Leopard
Peter Matthiessen (new introduction by Richard Mabey)
Vintage 2010 (first published in UK by Chatto & Windus 1979) pp328, £8.99

Curiosity drew me to this re-issue of Peter Matthiessen's 1970s' classic. What would Richard Mabey, the UK's pre-eminent 'nature writer' of today make of the work of an American writer in a similar field a generation or more ago? I ended up reading not just Mabey's perceptive new introduction but the whole book once again.

Matthiessen's earnest attempts at self-analysis in the course of his odyssey to the Crystal Mountain in Nepal leave Mabey feeling in need of some spiritual porters. He cannot follow the author through his 'convolutions of Buddhist theory'. And in this Mabey cannot be alone. 'I understand the words, though not always their meaning,' he says.

My guess is that most of the many thousands who have read *The Snow Leopard* – often in the first flush of a love affair with Nepal – treated Matthiessen's deeper philosophical passages as they would, say, the exotic detail of a Mandala or a Persian miniature. Appreciation of the beauty of the whole does not require precise comprehension of each component. Well, that's my excuse.

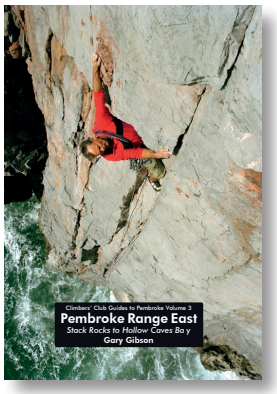
What carries the book is the sheer luminosity of Matthiessen's description of journeying in the Himalaya. Ten years since I first read it, *The Snow Leopard* still retains a magical, dreamlike quality, punctuated by George Schaller's blunt deflators. (Schaller was the biologist Matthiessen accompanied.) The 'dream' is actually accentuated by the passing of time. Matthiessen's observations of 1973 are no longer the reality of Nepal, at least not in the social sphere. Landscape is relatively constant, though viewed from within greater insulation by today's traveller. And is there about the whole cast of Matthiessen's masterpiece an innocence now lost? Have we, as mountain tourists, destroyed that which we profess to love?

As for the snow leopard, the earthly part of this quest, Matthiessen doesn't get so much as a glimpse of one. 'Have you seen one? No, isn't that wonderful!' he answers his own rhetorical question. The pilgrim has made peace with his demon of desire. As Mabey says: 'Even a materialist can take comfort in this negation of hubris, in its acceptance of the world-as-it-is.'

Thirty-five years ago the snow leopard was an almost mythical beast. Today it is a staple of BBC documentaries and magazine photo spreads (though numbers continue to decline perilously). We think we know this cat. But the magic of the snow leopard, as Matthiessen experienced on the cold hills above Shey Gompa is more elusive than ever. For the last three years I have been pencilled in to the programme of Mountain Kingdoms to lead a trek to Upper Dolpo and Shey Gompa. Long and expensive, the trek has not attracted enough clients to be viable. Not only have I not had a chance to watch for a snow leopard, I haven't even had an opportunity to tread in Peter Matthiessen's footsteps.

'Isn't that wonderful!'

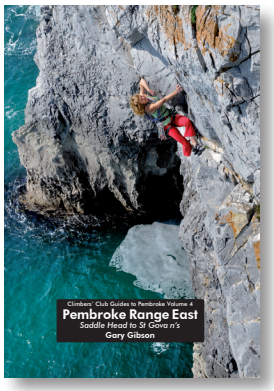
Stephen Goodwin



Climbers' Club Guides to Pembroke
Vol 3 Range East: Stack Rocks to Hollow Caves Bay by Gary Gibson,
Vol 4 Range East: Saddle Head to St Govan's by Gary Gibson, *Climbers' Club, 2011, pp334,342, £20*

Now, I must declare an interest at the outset. I am a member of the Climbers' Club. (I would like to say a long standing member, but smutty *double entendres* aside and given the miracles of modern medicine that would be a far-fetched claim.) In fact I have been recently elevated to vice president (with responsibility for communications). That's one hell of an interest. So, with nepotism oozing from every pore I shall proceed with this 'review' and endeavour not to make it read like promo blurb.

In my defence, I'll claim to have been out of the loop as far as the CC is concerned for some years. Years in which the world of guidebook design



and production has been through a major revolution complete with upheaval, turmoil and casualties and the CC has had its fair share of woes. The catalyst for this cataclysm was the advent of desktop publishing (DTP) which unleashed the power of computing on a printing and design world little changed since the Middle Ages.

At the forefront of this revolution were, of course, the Rockfax team and for years it seemed the rest of the guidebook fraternity either buried their heads in the sand or were playing catch-up. Having said that, perhaps comparing Rockfax to the traditional club guidebook setup was always unfair given the latter's total reliance on large-scale voluntary contributions of time and effort. And as we all know trying to organise climbers is like herding cats.

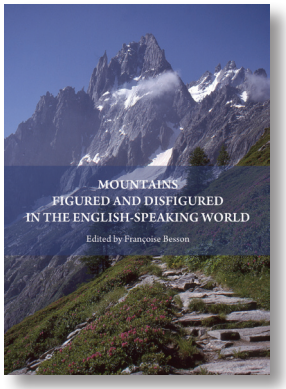
These days of course, Rockfax is mainstream, almost traditional and it's the conventional guidebooks that are looking radical and nowhere more so than the latest series of guidebooks from the Climbers' Club. Typical of the new-look guides was the magnificent *Lundy* by Paul Harrison in 2008 which helped set the scene for the rest of the series. The latest books, a five-volume definitive guide to the sea cliffs of Pembroke follow suit: superb colour crag shots, detailed maps and inspiring action shots make these 'must-have' guides. Beware when you open them up – it's so easy to lose an hour among the zawns and sun-baked limestone. . . sigh!

If, like me, you're a sucker for climbing history the introduction section is a winner. It's hard to believe that up to 1974 there was only a relative handful of routes on these miles of cliffs. Lakeland heroes Armstrong and Whillance had put up a few gems, Jim Perrin and Colin Mortlock had done a bit and Pat Littlejohn had 'dissed' the place as early as 1970.

This was all to change one Easter weekend in 1980 when the BMC called for an informal meet to Pembroke. Remarkably a whole host of stars turned up as did I – chauffeur and rope-holder to one Steve Bancroft. The group shot on page 32 shows most of the line-up (predictably Pat Littlejohn and Henry Barber were already at the crag) and certainly those young, beaming, slightly hung-over faces would break into ironic laughter if you'd told them that many would go on to become the great and the good of the British climbing establishment! During that long weekend over 150 new climbs were put up, the tide had turned for Pembroke, a handful of routes became thousands.

These latest Pembroke guides showcase the modern trad revolution in British climbing just as the early guides to North Wales and the Lakes proclaimed the talents of Jones, Pigott, Longland, Kirkus, Edwards, Brown and Whillans. The delivery is different of course: the in-your-face colour and youth and flesh of 'now' versus understated good chaps and tweed of 'then'. But no less commitment at the top end, no less risk.

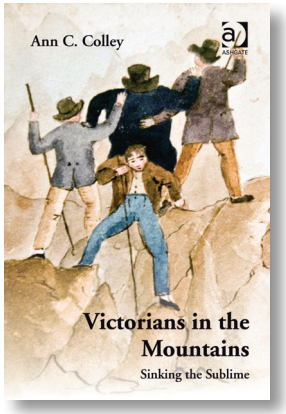
Bernard Newman



Mountains Figured and Disfigured in the English-speaking World
Edited by Françoise Besson
Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010, pp770, £64.99

Victorians in the Mountains: Sinking the Sublime
Ann C Colley
Ashgate, 2010, pp265, £55

Living Waves:
Form & Rhythm in the Art of John Ruskin
An exhibition at Brantwood, Coniston, Aug 2010-January 2011



The first two of the titles above are scholarly works; the third is of a modest exhibition at John Ruskin's home in the Lake District, a selection of paintings and drawings celebrating a more impressionistic side to Ruskin the artist than his familiar, precisely observed studies of Venice or Rouen cathedral.

I've grouped the three because Ruskin forms a common link. He could hardly be left out of '*Figured and Disfigured*', a vast work that evokes the representation of mountains in the English-speaking world by poets, painters, philosophers and climbers from the 16th to the 21st centuries. And in *Victorians in the Mountains*, which examines the way the 19th century invasion of tourists and climbers undermined the sense of mountains as sublime landscapes, Ann Colley devotes a lengthy chapter to the influence of climbing on Ruskin's theories of perception.

Ruskin (1819-1900) was an Alpine Club member from 1869 to 1882 when, as his *AJ* obituary put it: 'illness overcame him and shut him off from the outer world' (*vol 20*, p127). Over the years his distaste for AC's 'vanity' and competitive spirit in the mountains softened and he joined after being a guest at a jolly winter dinner in 1868, his qualification being 'Author of the Fourth Volume of *Modern Painters*'. There was certainly no long list of first ascents.

However Colley contends that Ruskin's climbing – 'his physical and kinetic relationship to the mountains over a long period of time' – was essential to his understanding of mountains. She highlights some of his scrambles and glacier excursions around Chamonix and his long day traversing Mont Buet in worsening weather. At 3099m, the Buet was Ruskin's mountaineering high point; his hitherto unpublished account of the 1844 ascent appeared in an article entitled 'Ruskin and the Alps' by A L Mumm in *AJ 32* (328-43). Colley quotes the same diary entry as evidence of Ruskin's immersion in the climb itself, with only a peripheral painterly

response. At the summit he found himself in position 'which I did not altogether like – a ledge of snow overhanging a cliff of three thousand feet down'. (Was he standing on a cornice?)

Colley, like Mumm, is trying to make the point that Ruskin was more of an alpinist than we give him credit for. But do they strain too hard? While it is likely Ruskin would have become more of an adventurous pioneer, like his Victorian contemporaries, had he not been held back by over-protective parents, would it really have enhanced his already keen gift for mountain observation? He needed to 'grasp the boulders' in order to study the close detail essential to his way of seeing, but he did not need to set any records to achieve that.

Colley also argues that Ruskin's mountain excursions made him more aware of a weakness in his eyes that caused floaters to interfere with his vision, an imperfection that in a sense gave physical effect to his stated belief that 'nothing is ever seen perfectly, but only by fragments'. This 'vulnerable eye' was paradoxically a privilege for Ruskin for it is an imperfection, says Colley, that 'opens up a space for the imagination and leads one into the spiritual mystery of the landscape'.

The *Living Waves* exhibition at Brantwood demonstrated both the close up intensity of Ruskin's vision and the quality of mystery: a marbled cone shell depicted from above to show its spiral form becomes an abstract suffused with movement, so too does a rendering of snow forms in a pair of mountain studies, probably made in Mornex, Switzerland, in 1862. (Mumm reckoned Ruskin to be first Englishman to draw attention to the beauty of the Alps in winter.)

Living Waves was the subtitle that Ruskin gave to *Deucalion*, his book on geology, and it reflects his conviction that all things are perpetually in motion, with mountains the most dramatic example of that movement. In pencil and watercolour he is able to express this with a fluidity and economy that leave words labouring.

Mountains Figured and Disfigured… is not a book many climbers will be packing to the Himalaya, not unless they can afford an extra porter and expect to spend a month snow-bound. Its 770 pages comprise 56 essays and papers, most of them presented at a conference at the University of Toulouse-Le Mirail and Gavarnie in October 2007. Not surprisingly, French pyreneists have a strong showing among the poets, novelists, academics and mountaineers who have contributed to this multi-faceted work.

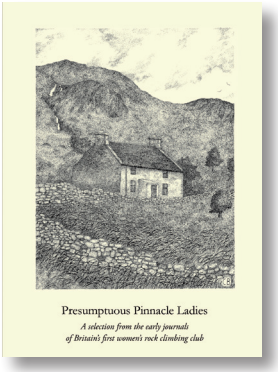
Ruskin is the sole subject of an essay by Laurence Roussillion-Constanty, a lecturer in English at Toulouse, who tells us that during the time Ruskin spent in sight of Mont Blanc he did not just look at the mountain. He used his observation of it to build a rigorous appreciation of nature, art and religion, finding inspiration for his philosophy of art and giving it its original shape.

He is also one of three English artists – along with William Gilpin and J M W Turner – deployed by Malcolm Andrews, professor of Victorian and visual studies at the University of Kent, in an essay entitled 'The Emotional Truth of Mountains' – a far higher truth of mental vision beyond the physical facts, as Ruskin contended. Ruskin was championing Turner; for me that 'emotional truth' today is exemplified by the work of Julian Cooper, in paintings of Jannu, the Eiger north face, Kailash and the quarries of Lakeland that go way beyond topography to evoke an interwoven history of man and nature, mystery and, always, movement, those 'living waves' again.

The breadth of *Figured and Disfigured* is too great to be encapsulated here. Some of the essays are in the rarefied realm of the literary theorist, but there is much for anyone interested in literature, art, history or philosophy as inspired or informed by mountains. AC members Robert Macfarlane and Kev Reynolds are among the contributors.

In her introduction, Françoise Besson writes that 'modern man sometimes reads in the mountains' resources, in their mines and parks, a page to be torn off, whereas poets read an alphabet and mountaineers try to meet a dream'. She urges us to listen to the mountains and 'participate no longer in the destruction of wild nature but to be actors in its preservation' – Ruskinian to a fault.

Stephen Goodwin



Presumptuous Pinnacle Ladies:
A selection from the early journals of Britain's first women's rock climbing club
With a history of the Pinnacle Club and notes on the authors by Margaret Clennett
Millrace, 2009, pp176, £13.50

A copy of this book was given to me for Christmas 2009. I already had a full set of the Club's journals, acquired in the early days of my membership during the late 1970s, plus a copy of the Club's history, (*Pinnacle Club: A History of Women Climbing*, Shirley Angell, 1988). Despite having these records of the Club library, I was particularly delighted with my Christmas present. This book is a treasure trove in its own right. It contains around 20 of some of the best pieces of writing from the journals covering the early years of the Pinnacle Club, published in the 1920s and early 1930s.

The Club has been very important to me personally for more than half my life. Until the early 1990s, most of my rock climbing and mountaineering, both in Britain and further afield, was with Club members, who all remain very good friends. It was lovely to re-read the varying pieces after many decades and realise, afresh, that since its foundation, Club members have been doing just what we still do now and recording their experiences for posterity. The invaluable ethos of companionship and shared experiences that comes through in the writing will be familiar to many longstanding

members of mountaineering clubs everywhere, not least the Alpine Club.

Each of the articles included in this small and beautifully produced book is highly readable. Some taken from the first journal look back to the years just before the Club was founded and help explain why it was needed by the few enthusiastic women rock climbers of those days. There are articles by the founder, Pat Kelly, and also about her. The pieces range across the British Isles, from the Club's 'home' in Wales, to the Lakes and include some important articles on women's firsts in Scotland. Two stories of the first woman's lead of Crowberry Ridge by *Abraham's Direct Route* and the first traverse of the Cuillin by a party of women are both excellent reads. Another essay discusses and questions the custom for climbers and explorers to claim and record first ascents of various kinds. Some tales in the book are straight narrative and others are in different styles, for example one is like a fairy story and others are satirical pieces, where fun is made of the author herself and other participants in the climbs portrayed. It was also interesting to read the notes on each of the authors, together with the useful concise history of the Club, which sets the overall context very well.

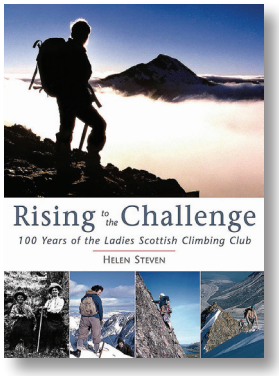
I particularly enjoyed re-reading the description of the 1932 opening of the Emily Kelly Hut in Cwm Dyli under Snowdon, still much loved and cared for by members. Fifty years later, in my first year as Club Secretary, I had great fun coordinating another party to celebrate the half century of our occupation of our Welsh home. All too soon my fellow members will be planning the centenary celebrations for 2021 and I hope they will take on responsibility for producing a second volume of the Club's history, to record activities during the 40 years spanning either side of the turn of the last century.

Meanwhile the Club continues to write and edit a new journal every three years. Perhaps the publishers of this little volume will be producing further editions of the best pieces from the many decades following the extracts in this first book of early tales about the Presumptuous Pinnacle Ladies. There is certainly plenty of material that could be selected from the later journals and re-published for today's readers to enjoy.

Jacqueline Turner

Rising to the Challenge: 100 years of the Ladies Scottish Climbing Club
Helen Steven
Scottish Mountaineering Trust, 2010, pp176, £24

The third of recent SMT history publications, *Rising to the Challenge* is the history of a group of people rather than of a mountain (as seen in the Ben Nevis and Cairngorms books). As with the other national Scottish clubs, the LSCC formed under a boulder, and the intent of long-serving member Helen Steven's book is to bring together the stories that make up the history of the club since its birth in 1908. The compilation of this book



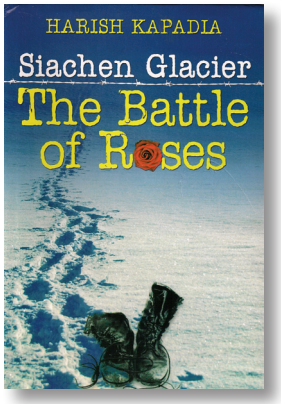
being very much a personal project, she quotes from a variety of sources including newspapers, diary material, journal articles, oral history and her own experience to illustrate the club's first century of activity. The format is similar to that of the other SMT books with copious photos, both historical and contemporary.

Rather than a strict chronology from the club's inception, the chapters of *Rising to the Challenge* are based on activities of the club (walking, skiing, the huts, alpine activity and so on), and within the chapters the anecdotes follow a loose chronology. This structure is both its strength and its weakness: it allows the book to avoid the format of 'this happened, then this happened', but it does not provide a strong narrative linking the within-chapter anecdotes together. The general impression is that the author had a lot of bits and pieces that she thought would be of interest and stitched them in.

Written in the style of an extended journal article and with a small print run, the book has a feel of being written for a specific group rather than a wider audience. The tone of the writing is very much a selected celebration of the club rather than a definitive history, complete with comments intended for insiders to recognise themselves or each other. There is even a recounting of how charades were played out at Hogmanay celebrations. But then there are explanations of mountaineering terms such as 'moving together', which would presumably be unnecessary for members of the mountaineering club.

That doesn't detract from the fact that many strong mountaineers founded and have been members of the LSCC, and fortunately many have left good diaries from which some of the most interesting information has been extracted. An extraordinary number of firsts, including the first all-female expeditions to the Himalaya (1955) and Greenland (1970), and the first female to complete a self-propelled round of the Munros, were accomplished by LSCC members. The current membership, while ageing as much as the other national clubs, is still very active in Scotland, the Alps and Greater Ranges. The book will certainly be a source of inspiration to budding female mountaineers, and of information for researchers looking to add the second X-chromosome to round out their mountaineering histories.

Susan Jensen



Siachen Glacier: The Battle of Roses
Harish Kapadia
Rupa, New Delhi, 2010, pp254, US$25

When thinking back over the history of exploration of the Himalaya, I sometimes imagine a dinner hosted by Harish Kapadia with the spirits of Younghusband, Tom Longstaff, Fanny Bullock Workman and her husband William Hunter, Eric Shipton and Bill Tilman, and a few other select individuals from the Great Game all sat around the table. These guests are among the greatest of the early explorers of the Himalaya and Karakoram. Harish Kapadia, like the famous Belgium detective Hercule Poirot, has called them together to solve a mystery. Like Poirot, Kapadia is rather short, plump and exact, but toughened from years of unexcelled exploration of the region. At this dinner, Kapadia unravels all the mysteries of the 'blanks on the map' that these great explorers had not quite solved. Needless to say, it is a damn jolly evening for like-minded adventurers.

To say that Harish Kapadia is one of the leading authorities on the Indian Himalaya and Karakoram is truly an understatement. For more than three decades through his own books and articles, and as editor of the *Himalayan Journal*, he has provided essential information to anyone hoping to visit the more remote corners of the great ranges in India. For many climbers, the information generates only frustration since so many regions described lie in areas that are restricted or forbidden to foreigners, unless part of a joint expedition with the Indians. His latest book is essential reading for anyone interested in the history of exploration and mountaineering in the Eastern Karakoram of Ladakh, both past and recent, and seeking a fair and comprehensive explanation of the tragic, woeful and costly Siachen War (Siachen means rose in Ladakhi).

There is no aspect of geography, natural history, culture, art, religion, local customs and languages that does not interest Kapadia. However, a new dimension has increased in importance in the past 10 years – conflict and warfare. In November 2000, his son – Lt Nawang Kapadia – was killed in a fire-fight with insurgents in Kashmir. *Siachen Glacier – The Battle of Roses* is dedicated both to his son Narwang and to the soldiers of the Indian Army at Siachen. It is a patriot book, and the arguments set out for the retention of the Siachen with Indian territory are carefully and accurately defended. But for Kapadia, the rights and wrongs are another story, and he is not one to easily allocate blame.

The history of conflict in the region is long and goes back into the times of myth and the great kingdoms of central and southern Asia. Kapadia relates legends from local oral history passed down the Balti inhabitants of invaders from Yarkand. But for many centuries Ladakh was a place for rest and respite for traders before crossing the series of high and dangerous passes linking central Asia to the North, and the rich plains of India to the South. As with many trading centres, tolerance of all religions was a feature of the culture, as it remains today with Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists living together in many areas. But Ladakh is an island in a sea of conflict. To the west is Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK), and insurgency in the south and west in the Muslim majority areas of Kashmir is ever likely to flare up. To the north and north-east, there are unresolved border issues with China. Today Ladakh has difficulty concealing its status as a frontier military outpost. There has scarcely been a year over the past six decades when there has been no fighting, hence restricted access to many areas.

> *The Greeks have the perfect word to describe the turmoil in Kashmir, Ladakh and the Siachen – 'oro-politics as Oro means mountains. The armies and the people involved in this are fighting with mountains, about mountains for mountains and in the mountains.*

The 25-year war for the world's longest glacier is rooted in a number of missed opportunities to set boundaries on the true watershed for the Nubra valley. This is the Indian interpretation of an infamous and often repeated phrase that in 1947 set the border from grid point NJ9842 'thence north to the glacier.' At the time of partition in 1946, the geography of the area was still unclear, and no one conceived of a time when it might be fought over. The chance to fix the border at the end of the first Indo-Pak war in 1946-47 and again at the Simla Agreement was missed by Indira Gandhi and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

Ironically, climbing and trekking expeditions were the immediate cause for the start of the war in 1985. The ease with which the Siachen could be reached from the Baltoro (compared to the much longer journey from Leh – itself a long journey from central India) meant that climbing expeditions sought permission to go there through Pakistan even after partition. They were actively encouraged by Islamabad to do so and India was slow to protest. Successive expeditions from America, Japan and Austria in the 1970s and early 80s crossed the Bilafond La onto the Siachen, and climbed many of the peaks on both sides of the glacier. The US Defence Mapping agency placed the Siachen with POK in the mid 1970s and thereafter many major atlases accepted 'de facto' that that with so many expeditions travelling into the area through Pakistan, it had become part of Pakistan. Even the air traffic control lines were shown as running from NJ9842 across the Siachen to the East. The point is that this is clearly 'east,' not 'north' as per the agreement in 1947. When Pakistan gave permission to a Japanese Expedition to climb Rimo 1 in 1984, it was 'a peak too far'. It overlooked China and the Karakoram Pass. If this border line was accepted, the road to the Nubra and all of Ladakh was open on two sides.

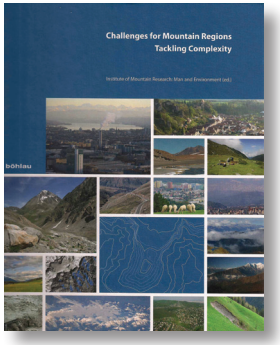
It is not until late in the book that Kapadia reveals the true theme of the book. It is a subject that has been close to his heart for a number of years, and one that the mountaineering community worldwide would hope to see – the creation of an International Peace Park to encompass all of the Siachen and surrounding area. He is working closely with the Pakistani

mountaineering authorities and all of us should join in support. Kapadia summed up the dilemma in his acceptance speech on being awarded the 'Patron's Medal' at the Royal Geographical Society in 2003:

> *We are nations linked by Himalayan geography. Nations, which do not understand and respect geography, are condemned by history. Governments and people of both countries should realise that there is a humanity that binds us together.*

So he concludes with words of hope – almost. When a group of Indian and Pakistani climbers unfurled their flags together on the summit of the Mönch a few years ago, Kapadia comments that one of his companions whispered: 'Raise our Indian flag a little higher.'

John Porter



Challenges for Mountain Regions: Tackling Complexity
Institute of Mountain Research: Man and Environment (ed.)
Böhlau Verlag, Vienna, 2010, pp223, €49

Cruising down sunny Stubaital in a Post bus after a satisfying week's ski touring last spring I was struck by how much this Tyrol valley has changed in the 30 years I've known it. When the kids were small we'd camp beneath old fruit trees on a dairy farm in Neustift; we were there 25 years ago when catastrophic floods forced a night-time evacuation of the site; returning a few years later, the dreamy orchard site had become a swish holiday park with a Billa supermarket on what was once an adjoining meadow; today Stubaital looks like a brash suburb of Innsbruck.

'Tackling Complexity' is the sub-head of this academic book, edited by Axel Borsdorf, Georg Grabherr, Kati Heinrich, Brigitte Scott and Johann Stötter, and the Stubai range exemplifies the tangle of pressures on mountain areas and how we regard and exploit them. At the head of the valley the Stubai glacier is a thriving year-round ski resort (though on the neighbouring Sulztal glacier – separated from the Stubai by the Daunkopf peaks – we'd encountered nobody); both glaciers are retreating and the valley communities have to dam and channel to protect themselves against flash floods and mud slides (old risks perhaps but now seemingly more potent in a warmer climate); then there is all the building in the valley bottom – hotels, holiday homes, commuter homes and all the attendant roads and services. 'Tackling complexity' indeed. On top of all that of course is the effect on the social fabric of Stubaital of so much change and apparent prosperity.

Most mountain inhabitants are not as fortunate as those of the Stubai. Poverty and war is the lot of too many elsewhere – yet more complexity.

Mountains make up a third of the surface area of the world, and while they are home to only a tenth of the world's population they provide more than a third of our resources, from the life-giving rivers that water the plains of India and China, to playgrounds for climbers and skiers. Global warming in the mountains is occurring up to three times faster than elsewhere with all manner of little understood consequences. And since we're too wedded to consumption to make any meaningful attempt at reversing that warming process – even assuming it were possible – we had better get up to speed on understanding change in the mountains, how to adapt to it and mitigate its worst effects.

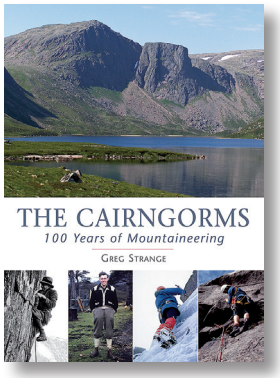
This is the job of the contributors to *Challenges for Mountain Regions* – their aim being to provide the research data necessary for action to maintain the vital functions of mountains, preserve their rich biodiversity and introduce sustainable economic development to keep communities alive. It is not a book that offers solutions – except in the sense that the search for reliable evidence is an essential precursor to effective action – but a record of the work done by leading research institutes based in Innsbruck. This does, unfortunately, give it a sniff of the self-serving.

Contributors include Harald Pauli, the botantist who took part in the Alpine Club's 'Summits of Learning' conference in 2007, explaining then, as he does here, the work of the Global Observation Research Initiative in Alpine Environments (GLORIA) in tracking the upward migration of plants as the mountains get warmer.

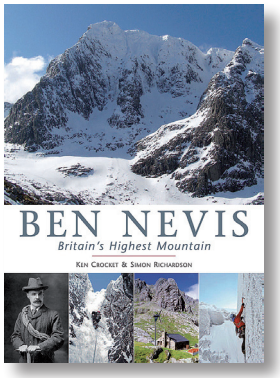
The 'Afterword' goes to Bruno Messerli of the Geographical Institute of the University of Berne. The professor is something of an outsider among the predominately Innsbruck folk, and it is interesting that it is he, who after recounting the decades of effort spent pushing mountains up the international agenda, broaches the dirty business of politics. Preserving the common (i.e. cross-border) goods of the mountains and overcoming common concerns is both a scientific and a political challenge, Messerli points out. 'For us, this means that science will one day be held responsible for both what it did and what it did not do.'

I wouldn't want to misinterpret the professor, who is after all an AC honorary member, but this apparent injunction to his peers to stand up and be counted, put me in mind of the NASA climate scientist James Hansen who giving evidence to the Ratcliffe coal trial in 2010 said he wouldn't want his grandchildren to say to him: 'Pa, you understood what was happening, but you never made it clear.'

Stephen Goodwin



The Cairngorms: 100 Years of Mountaineering
Greg Strange
Scottish Mountaineering Trust, 2010, pp400, £27.50



Ben Nevis: Britain's Highest Mountain
Ken Crocket & Simon Richardson
Scottish Mountaineering Trust, 2009, pp416, £27.50

At first glance these two handsome productions from the Scottish Mountaineering Trust appear to be companion volumes – histories of the two most testing winter climbing grounds in Britain. But although, spine-on, they make a good-looking pair on the bookshelf, in the authors' approaches to their mountainous subjects, the books are of a different flavour.

Ben Nevis was trailed in the last *AJ*. It is the second edition of Ken Crocket's authoritative 1986 history of 'man's interaction with the mountain which is not only the highest in Britain but one of the most ferocious in Europe for weather changes'. For the much revamped 2009 edition, Crocket's research and storytelling is augmented by the expertise of Simon Richardson, author of the 2002 SMC climbing guide to the Ben, *AJ* Area Notes correspondent and insatiable new route activist.

The Cairngorms is an exhaustive – some might say 'exhausting' – history of climbing in the massif, from its beginnings in March 1893 when William Douglas (he of the Douglas Boulder at the foot of Tower Ridge on the Ben) and John Gibson reached the summit plateau of Lochnagar via *Black Spout Left Hand Branch* to the end of January 1993 and second ascents of *Pinnacle Grooves* (VI, 7) and *Winter Face* (VI, 6) on the same mountain. It has the feeling of a monumental labour of love by Greg Strange, also a veteran of SMC climbing guides, and runs to a similar 400-page length as the Ben book. But Strange has not ranged quite so wide.

Crocket begins the Ben book with a chapter on 'early travellers', including John Keates who after his 1818 ascent declared: 'It was not so cold as I expected – yet cold enough for a glass of Whiskey (sic) now and then.' There are sections on the summit Observatory, the SMC hut, whisky distilling, fell running, geology, mapping, natural history and Gaelic place names, though the climbing still dominates. The impression is of a lot more going on in this book; it's concentrated, just as it is on the mountain itself, and more cosmopolitan.

Common to both books is a wonderful range of photos: black and whites of the likes of Tom Patey, Bill Brooker, Jimmy Marshall et al, through to colour of Andy Nisbet, Dave MacLeod, Andy Turner, and so on. Also both make clever use of page margins for portraits, pullout quotes and diverting nuggets such as the progression of ice-axe design to today's acutely bent, leashless tools.

The margins are less busy in *The Cairngorms*. The ice-axes, for example, are one of the bonuses of the Ben book and have no equivalent in the other. Perhaps it is just as well, for a weakness of *The Cairngorms* is that it ends – except for a brief postscript – in 1993. That makes a tidy century for Strange, but it misses almost two decades of development, not merely of tools themselves, but of the evolution of technically extreme climbing so well documented by Richardson in respect of Ben Nevis.

Strange's narrative though has a different appeal, immersing the reader in a world of long walk-ins, bothy weekends and exploration of lonely granite crags. What? 'Long walk-ins… lonely crags? This isn't the Cairngorms scene familiar to most climbers today – the hordes that do the quick trot in to the Northern Corries from the ski resort carpark. No, for Strange the 'Golden Years' were 1950 to 1960, with Malcolm 'Mac' Smith as the central motivator.

Back then, most exploration was still from the Braemar side of the range. However, as Strange explains, in 1960 a new road was built to the foot of Coire Cas. 'At a stroke the Northern Corries of Cairngorm had become the most accessible high mountain terrain in the country.' Although 20 years later Strange would be active in the campaign to halt the spread of ski infrastructure on Cairngorm, at the time the ski road did not rankle that much ' since most skiers… had, by necessity, been hill-walkers and climbers anyway'.

Strange tells the Cairngorms story with great affection; it may not be compartmentalised as in the Ben book, and require a little more reader application, but from the moment you arrive, metaphorically, with Strange at Derry Gates you sense the magic that has drawn him again and again to the deep glens, dark corries and granite cliffs of the 'Gorms.

Stephen Goodwin

Flakes, Jugs & Splitters:
A Rock Climber's Guide to Geology
Sarah Garlick
Falcon Guides, 2009, pp212, US$17.95

'Why does Hueco Tanks have so many huecos?… Why can't you climb at Red Rocks after it rains, even if it's dry?… Why is the Eiger falling down?' Questions, questions… And Sarah Garlick has the answers. *Flakes, Jugs & Splitters* won the 'Mountain Exposition' award at the Banff Mountain Festival in 2009 (the title alone was worth some kind of prize.) As jury member Jon Popowich put it: ' This innovative new book sheds light on the science behind the stone that supports our fingertips.'

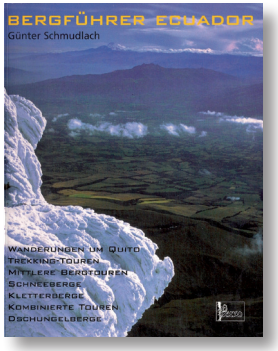
Garlick, rock climber and research geologist, has tapped into a new vein

here. So far as I know this is the first practical guide devoted to the stuff we climb on. After taking us through plate tectonics and a climbers' guide to geological time (Baffin Island's granite emerged 1,800 million years ago, FitzRoy's pluton a mere 18 million years ago, not so long before first humans at 5 million, and so on) the meat of the book is in Q&A format.

I wish I'd had this book when I visited Utah four years ago. Then I could have looked up: 'Why is Indian Creek so splitter?' The answer is nowhere near as snappy as the question unfortunately, and there is no room for it here. Suffice to say I would have been wiser, though no more able to climb those perfect crack lines.

The downside of the book for most *AJ* readers is that it is primarily focused on rock climbing areas in North America – 114 pages compared to 31 for the rest of the world. The UK gets one paragraph, on the mysteries of gritstone. Garlick expresses the hope that her example will be followed with similar guides for Europe, Asia and South America. It's a nice idea. Rock is our medium yet how much do we really know about it? Can you answer those first three questions even? Me neither. Want to know the answers? Buy the book.

Stephen Goodwin



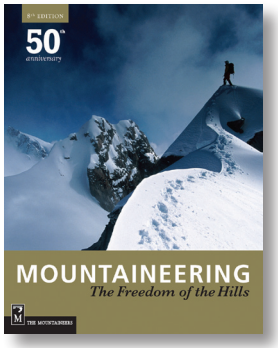
Bergführer Ecuador
Günter Schmudlach
Panico Alpinverlag, 2009, pp328, npq

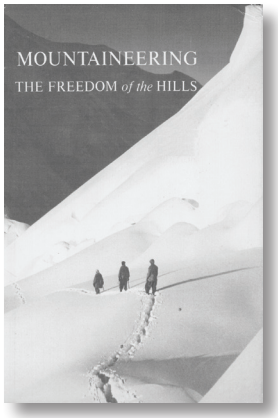
Edward Whymper, through his famous book *Travels among the Great Andes of the Equator* (1891) lured mountaineers and travellers to fresh territory. Since then the high Andes of Ecuador have been visited by climbers from everywhere. Now, with the latest edition of Günter Schmudlach's *Bergführer*, visitors have one of the most comprehensive guidebooks ever written. The text is complemented by 23 b&w photos and line drawings, 32 sketch maps and 107 colour illustrations.

The Swiss author set himself an ambitious programme for the book: hiking, rock-climbing, trekking, glacier tours, mountain tours and jungle tours. He has methodically covered each of the 80-odd peaks of Ecuador, from peaks of 2900m to 6310m Chimborazo, including history, access, transportation, charts, gear and also a difficulty rating (*schwierigkeit*) attached to each climb or hike. The wealth of text is rounded out by appendices, notes and indexes.

The German text is not difficult to follow. With this third edition, this a guidebook destined to be immensely useful and, one hopes, to command imitation – in English and other languages.

Evelio Echevarría





Mountaineering: The Freedom of the Hills, 8th edition
Mountaineers Books, 2010, pp600, US$39.95 hardbound, US$29.95 paperbound

The first time I came across this book, it was the 'Freedom' sub-title that caught my eye in a second-hand store in Carlisle. I was expecting some literary musings on the lines of *Ascent* and was a bit disappointed when it turned out to be the mammoth instructional tome. A wiser man would have acknowledged he had much to learn and not so quickly pushed it back on the shelf.

Ask any North American about *Freedom* and they'll tell you it's their 'bible'. This 8th edition marks 50 years of one the most comprehensive of all mountaineering manuals (1960 first edition cover shown lower left).

It was conceived to meet the needs of climbers in the Pacific North-west who had found the advice of European texts hardly adequate to their wild and complex terrain, where even getting to the mountains required a full set of backcountry skills.

Five years after publication of the first edition of *Freedom*, came its nearest UK equivalent, *Mountaineering: From Hill Walking to Alpine Climbing*, by Alan Blackshaw. For many of us, 'Blackshaw' became *our* 'bible', and anything we've learnt since has been picked up 'on the job' as it were. But *Freedom* has lived on as a general instructional work whereas 'Blackshaw' has been succeeded in the UK by more specific training guides, directed at particularly skills and/or obtaining qualifications.

In the 1960s, when we didn't travel so much, large chunks of *Freedom* would have been irrelevant to most UK climbers; much less so today. It is impossible to summarise this deep well of knowledge, there's everything from how to choose your socks, through the merits of racking gear on harness or bandolier, to snow science. There's a certain American earnestness to the text, particularly in the exhortatory 'Leave No Trace' chapter, but also flashes of droll humour, such as:

> *Good navigators are never truly lost – but, having learnt humility from years of experience, they always carry enough food, clothing, and bivouac gear to get them through a few days of temporary confusion.*

More than 600,000 copies of *Freedom* have been sold since 1960 and it has been translated into 10 different languages. It has always been a collegiate production and this 8th edition is the work of a team of 30 active climbers

and 'educators'. I can't help but think part of its continuing success lies in that sub-title – added by Harvey Manning, chief editor of the first two editions. It certainly seems to have been the bait for the free spirits who have endorsed this 8th edition, including Timmy O'Neill, John Harlin III and Will Gadd.

Steve House apparently devoured his parent's 3rd edition not long after he learnt to read. Most important was its promise of freedom, says House: Freedom to explore who I am. Freedom afforded by learned skills to explore any mountain wilderness. Freedom to move, to climb.'

Stephen Goodwin

CD: The Bar Room Mountaineers and other climbing songs from Dennis Gray and friends

When Tom Patey died abseiling from a Sutherland sea stack in 1970, mountaineering lost not only one its leading practitioners but also one of its most inspiring balladeers. I saw him several times at the Rowenlea Hotel in Carrbridge, where landlord Jimmy Ross would lock the doors at closing time and allow the proceedings to continue far into the night. Those occasions usually followed exhilarating days on the hill, the two experiences merging into one glorious composite memory.

Those scintillating evenings are now recalled on a CD produced from a tape of a session at the Clachaig Inn in the late 1960s. The tape belonged to Bill Brooker, Patey's long-standing climbing partner and friend, and was retrieved by Dennis Gray who has produced the CD with recording expert Paul Cherry. It's a priceless recording, Patey accompanying himself on accordion and singing no fewer than nine of his songs. He's at exuberant full pitch, combining brilliantly inventive rhymes with a subversive irreverence and unflinching gallows humour.

Patey is mountaineering's Fool, mocking the luminaries of the climbing world without fear or favour, disarming criticism with the brilliance of his wit, while confronting his audiences with climbing's dark side, its readiness to embrace risk and death. He parodies climbing's representation in the media too – there's a song about Joe Brown, the so-called 'Human Fly'; and since I was the butt of several jokes in Tom's climbing articles, I feel relieved to have been spared mention in his lyrics.

Those who do not escape include friends and climbing partners such as Hamish MacInnes, Ian McNaught-Davis, Peter 'Motley' Crew, and the Alpine Club in its entirety, represented by Patey as irredeemably posh and remote from the demotic strands of mountaineering. Singled out for special mention is Chris Bonington, whose early attempts to earn a living from mountaineering are scrutinised in lyrics too scurrilous to be repeated in a family publication like the *AJ*. (The determined reader can find them in Patey's wonderful anthology, *One Man's Mountains*.) In an aside captured on the CD, a voice sounding remarkably like that of our former president is heard to enquire whether one of the songs is libellous. An unmistakeable Hamish MacInnes reassures him: 'Oh no, that's not libel – it's a good one that.'

The quality of the recording can best be described as mixed, since the original was captured on a cassette recorder against the cacophony of a packed house at the Clachaig. Several of the songs are incomplete and one is marred by a tuneless voice singing along close to the tape recorder. Paul Cherry, who re-mastered the recording at his Cotswold Studio, has nonetheless performed a miracle in retrieving the nine songs from a battered C90 cassette, and the rapture of the evening shines through. Patey's family were consulted throughout and gave their consent; his youngest son Michael wrote expressing his delight at hearing his father's voice again for the first time since 1970.

The magic of the Patey recordings is complemented by other songs on the CD, principally performed by Dennis Gray himself at Paul Cherry's studio. Gray has provenance, as he comes from a musical family and sang at the Rowanlea with Patey on several occasions. He is an aficionado of climbing songs – he gave a knowledgeable presentation at the AC in 2009 – and sings numbers by C Douglas Milner, Showell Styles and John Hirst. He also sings several of his own compositions. In short, it's an irresistible package.

Peter Gillman

The CD is obtainable from Paul Cherry, Delly Breach Farm, Whitings Lane, Hailey, Witney OX29 9XG. Email: riffraff@cherry-consulting.co.uk Phone 01993 868087. Cost £11 to UK addresses.

What Goes Around Comes Around
Paintings by Jim Curran, Alpine Club exhibition, 2009

I was going to call this article 'The Recent Art of Jim Curran' but anyone who knows Jim would leap to my defence as the double entendres came howling their way from Sheffield. Or perhaps they wouldn't, which might be worse. Therefore the title refers not only to the exhibition of Jim Curran's paintings, watercolours and prints exhibited at the Alpine Club in late 2009 but also to the whole subject of Jim's art.

In 1959, at the age of 16, Jim entered Ealing College of Art. How did he get there? That he does not know. Nor, apparently, did his friend and fellow student, Adrian Mallett. They just got there in the autumn of 1959 and it all began. Jim is a bit more forthcoming about how he got to Harrison's Rocks at about the same time. He went by car. The two events may seem remote in the extreme but they are inextricably linked as each has informed the other throughout Jim's long and varied career as a painter,

climber, mountaineer, writer and film-maker.

To come back to the exhibition (or should it be around?) the paintings exhibited in the Club's gallery were all created within the preceding two years, so they represent a snap shot of Jim's recent artistic activity, rather than a full retrospective display (which is long overdue). The two main series were Harrison's Rocks on the longest wall of the gallery and the Millstone series, based on a few discarded millstones close to Stanage in the Peak District. In both series stone dominates the canvas. It is deeply, reassuringly stony. It has depth and form, not superficial surface colour on blocks and shapes, and that works. Step back from the stone, and forms hold the viewer's eye. It is the shape of the stones, boulders and crags rather than the landscape they occupy that is striking. I know some works have human figures in them but I cannot recall which ones – they are not of importance, the stones are.

The Millstone series is in some way the most successful because it addresses the tension between the natural and the man made, a tension that exists in our landscape to a greater degree than one might appreciate. I made the trip to see Jim's millstones when I spent a weekend with him in Sheffield in October 2009 and was amused to see, just 10 metres away, two lads happily bouldering on the crag. I don't think for a minute they were aware of the millstones on the ground just a stretch from their packs. But Jim is. Jim the artist that is. He misses nothing and the glorious symmetry of the perfectly circular, heavy stones, that no one man could ever lift, stand both in contrast to and in harmony with the gritty crags out of which they were carved and to which they will in the future return. It is the dialogue between what man makes out of nature and what natures does with man's creation that is the underlying subject matter in this series.

Thousands of hours on the gritstone of Derbyshire and the sandstone of Kent breed a familiarity of routes, shapes, holds but also, to the artist, a pattern of intriguing shapes. Jim does not paint what he sees at a glance, but what he scrutinises, draws, criticises. 'Drawing is the basis for everything I do, even writing,' he says, 'Every few years I draw my surroundings at home as an exercise. It's proof of what a good, long, hard stare can do for you.' Painting is an illusion, like film making on one level, but to be a good illusionist you have to be expert in the art of creating your illusion. To be a good artist, in Jim's mind, you have to be able to create and shape your painting to look like what you want it to look like. He cites Rembrandt and Cezanne as examples: 'close up a Rembrandt hand or a Cezanne rock can be a matter of a series of seemingly random brushstrokes. Stand back and examine the effect on the whole and it is a hand, a rock, a face, a sky.' For Jim, Cezanne was the most inspirational of all the artists he has studied and admired since his first lectures at Ealing, and it is not hard to see why. Cezanne broke away from the Impressionists world of diffused light and colour; he explored form and structure in his paintings. Not in a realistic way but in a way that interpreted the landscape and created an illusion of, for example, the Mont St Victoire, which was a subject that absorbed and

198. Jim Curran's *Millstones at Stanage, 2008* (oil on canvas 30ins by 40ins) at his Alpine Club exhibition in autumn 2009.

obsessed him for 40 years.

Cezanne worked critically, he was never entirely satisfied with what he was creating, and to this extent at least Jim mirrors his artistic hero. He too is seldom satisfied with what he has created and works away at a subject again and again, ever more critical, trying to perfect on canvas an illusion of the sandstone of Harrison's or the gritstone crags of Stanage.

The result in the two series of paintings at the Alpine Club was a visiting and revisiting from different angles, in different lights and from differing perspectives the forms and shapes of the stones. That is the power of these canvases. The intensity and density of the stones. And that is why I didn't like so much the watercolours from Spain, not because they are bad but because they have not been subjected to the same, rigorous, critical, even zealous working that have the stones. I'd even go as far as to say that even the millstones did not get such grinding attention to form during their creation.

Anyone who has not seen Jim Curran's recent work should do so. His art is born out of 50 years' experience of the looking, painting, climbing on stone and staring at it with the equipment he learned at Ealing.

Julie Summers

The Boardman Tasker Prize for Mountain Literature

Space constraints in this two-year volume of the *AJ* prevent us following recent practice and reproducing the speeches of jury chairmen for 2009 or 2010, however most of the books shortlisted have been reviewed in either this volume or 2009. The prize of £3000 commemorates the lives of Peter Boardman and Joe Tasker and is given to the author or co-authors of an original work that has made an outstanding contribution to mountain literature. On 17 May 1982 Boardman and Tasker were last seen on Mount Everest attempting to traverse The Pinnacles on the unclimbed north-east ridge at around 8250m. Their deaths marked the end of a remarkable era in British mountaineering.
The winners, shortlists and judges for 2009 and 2010 were as follows:

2009

Winner: **Beyond the Mountain** by Steve House, *Patagonia Books, USA* (*Vertebrate Publishing in UK*)

Others shortlisted:
Cairngorm John by John Allen, *Sandstone Press*
Hooker & Brown by Jerry Auld, *Brindle & Glass, Canada*
The Longest Climb by Dominic Faulkner, *Virgin Books*
Revelations by Jerry Moffatt, *Vertebrate Publishing*
Deep Powder and Steep Rock by Chic Scott, *Assiniboine Publishing, Canada*

Judges: Phil Bartlett, Kym Martindale and Ian Smith

2010

Winner: **Ron Fawcett: Rock Athlete** by Ron Fawcett with Ed Douglas, *Vertebrate Publishing*

Others shortlisted:
No Way Down by Graham Bowley, *Viking Penguin*
The Hut Builder by Laurence Fearnley, *Penguin Books, New Zealand*
Climbing Philosophy for Everyone by Stephen E Schmid, ed, *Wiley-Blackwell*
Unjustifiable Risk? by Simon Thompson, *Cicerone Press*

Judges: Ian Smith, Kym Martindale and Barry Imeson

In Memoriam

The Alpine Club Obituary	**Year of Election** (including to ACG)
Chris Astill	1985
Patrick (Paddy) Boulter	1972
Roger Childs	1997
Robert (Bob) Creswell	2007
Robin Day	1968
John Edwards	1982
Nawang Gombu	Hon 1998
Alistair Gordon	1993
Alfred Gregory	1952 (Hon 2004)
Eileen Healey	LAC 1947
Mike Hewson	1994
Frederick Hill	1975
Peter Hodgkiss	1988
John Kempe	1952
Erhard Loretan	Hon 2010
James (Joss) Lynam	1970
John Moss	1972
Margaret Munro	LAC 1956
Mary Noake	LAC 1965
Charles (Hamish) Pelham-Burn	1950
Frederick Robert (Bob) Robinson	1968
Balwant Singh Sandhu	2001
Peter Stone	1970
Pat Vaughan	1954
Chris Walker	2006
Alan Wright	1962

As usual, the Editor will be pleased to receive tributes for any of those not included in the following pages.