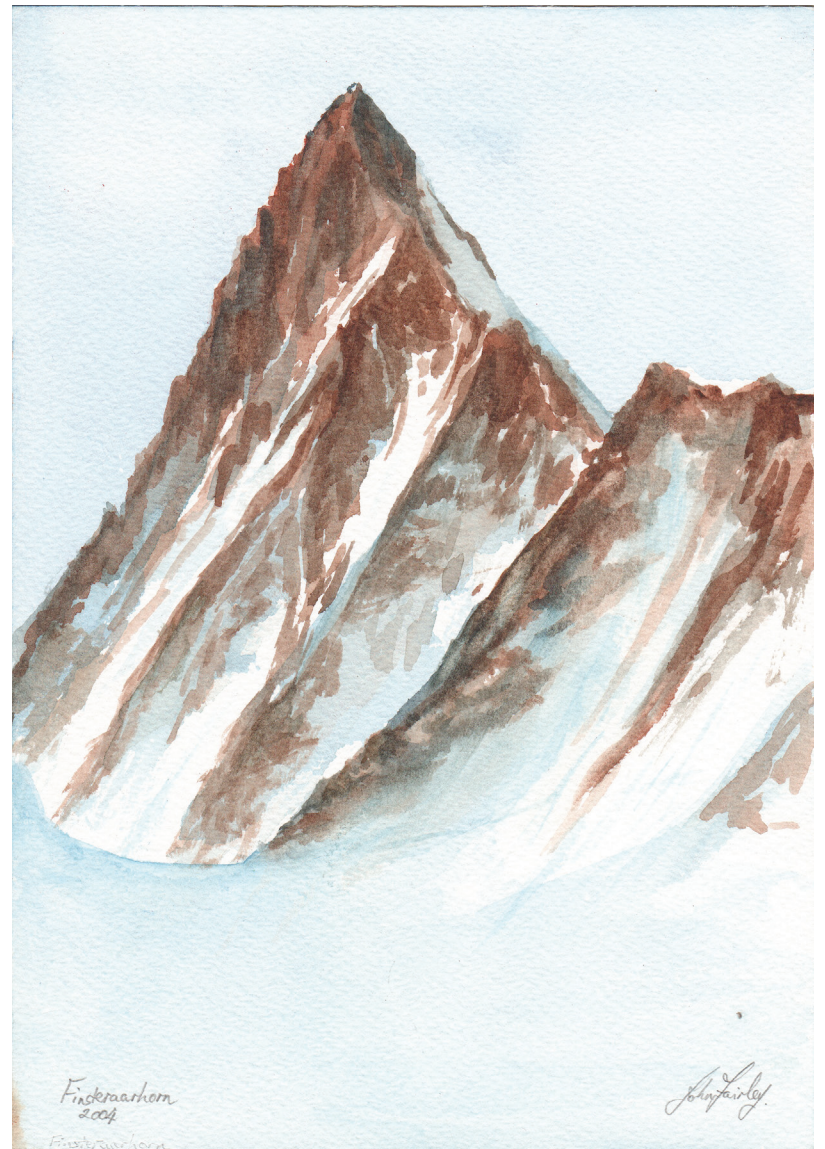


---

# Reviews

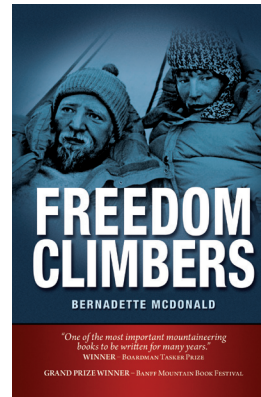
---



234. John Fairley, *Finsteraarhorn*, watercolour, 177x253mm, 2004

---

## Reviews



### **Freedom Climbers**

Bernadette McDonald

*First issued by Rocky Mountain Books, 2011.*

*Issued in the UK by Vertebrate Publishing, 2012,  
pp 256, £12.99*

Polish photographer David Seymour (born David Szymin) apparently once remarked that in great photography ‘...all you need is a little bit of luck, and enough muscle to click the shutter’. He was being modest, for clicking the shutter in the way that Seymour and his contemporaries did took considerable strength and vision. There are similarities between the

making of a photograph and the writing of history or biography. At their most effective and aesthetic, the photographer and the writer seek not only to collect facts and display them, but they also strive to give shape and meaning to an image or a story in a way that puts them at the very core of the thing being described. Simply ‘seeing’ something is not the same as photographing it; likewise, dry chronology and recitation of facts do not make for good history or biographical writing. To succeed demands *real* muscle.

It takes the reader only a few pages to realise that *Freedom Climbers*, the latest book by acclaimed Canadian mountain writer Bernadette McDonald has what it takes. *Freedom Climbers* is the ambitious and sweeping history of post-WWII Polish Himalayan alpinism, one that contains factual information and pulls it together into a great story. That it won both the Grand Prize at the 2011 Banff Mountain Book Festival and the 2011 Boardman Tasker Prize is in itself sufficient endorsement. A meaningful, must-read book, it follows the key members of a driven tribe of alpinists who occupied the forefront of a renaissance in climbing as they struggled and succeeded in pioneering routes on the world’s highest peaks in bold style. A good many of them lost their lives in the process, in the service of their dreams, their ambition, their search for a liberation from the oppression and limitations of their own country – and at times of themselves.

Simultaneously describing and capturing the zeitgeist of those days is not an easy task. As Churchill said: ‘History with its flickering lamp stumbles along the trail of the past, trying to reconstruct its scenes, to revive its echoes, and kindle with pale gleams the passion of former days.’ This was McDonald’s challenge, the seeds of a complex tale which were first

sown through her personal exposure to several of *Freedom Climbers* main characters during her years in the world of mountain culture and film/book festivals. One single event also served as principal catalyst, a festival gathering and after-party in Katowice. There she listened as the remaining members of that tribe reminisced and told their stories, many of which were unknown in the West. McDonald felt as though she was witness to the end of an era; a golden age had passed.

Any good drama, real or fiction, has a cast of lead and supporting characters. *Freedom Climbers* is no different. McDonald intentionally devotes most of her attention and spotlight to arguably the three most significant Polish climbers: Wanda Rutkiewicz, Jerzy Kukuczka, and Voytek Kurtyka. This is not just because they were among the most famous and accomplished, but also because of the contrasts and commonalities they represent, and how their individual stories also serve in telling the broader story of the community as a whole. And so in each life story, and throughout the book, McDonald subtly and effectively layers the themes of suffering, faith, pride and ingenuity that have defined the Polish nation and its people for hundreds of years.

Rutkiewicz, Kukuczka, and Kurtyka all describe the freedom they realised upon first discovering climbing. This is not uncommon for all of us, but set against the oppressive government system of the Iron Curtain and the slow recovery from WWII, it must have felt like revelation. Brilliant expedition organizers like Andrzej Zawada would come to play a critical role in recruiting talent, building national pride and recognition (which kept the state happy), and enabling the dreams of many climbers. Unlike in many Western countries, climbing in Poland was not some counter-culture escape; the state had successfully crushed most aspects of normal self-actualisation, and often wasn't even providing the basics, so the communal and structured climbing system in Poland became *the* place of social connection and fulfilment – something quite absent in a lot of other areas of Polish life at that time.

How this plays out with each character in McDonald's book makes for interesting reading and reflection. In Rutkiewicz, we have a life shaped by tragedy in the death of her brother while playing with a grenade in the rubble following WWII, and her father's brutal murder when she was a young woman. A study in contrasts, McDonald shows the duality of Rutkiewicz's simultaneous desire for love and acceptance, and in the same moment, desire to compete with and alienate many who tried to get close. She is a person who seems lost in life, everywhere except the fleeting moments on the heights. Her story is in some ways the loneliest, a national hero who was one of the best female alpinists in history, a dreamer whose search finally ended with her death on Kangchenjunga in 1992.

Kukuczka's determination and hard work were legendary in a culture where such qualities were already in abundance. He applied these traditional values to the problems at hand – whether negotiating contracts for chimney painting as a means of income for club expeditions, dealing with

the setbacks of the deaths of partners, or pushing past altitude illness and severe cold. One of the most impressive Himalayan climbers the world has ever known, Kukuczka was the second man to climb all 14 eight-thousand metre peaks, most by difficult new routes and several in winter. McDonald shows that if Rutkiewicz's faith was that of independence and acceptance, where many didn't know what to expect of her, Kukuczka's was a faith of dogged determination and adaptability. When adaptability didn't work, all-out suffering often did. Sadly, the continuous exposure to hard, high climbing caught up with him when a rope broke high on the south face of Lhotse in 1989.

Kurtyka would follow a different path than others. Elite, intuitive, and artistic, he would come to define his freedom not just by slipping past the Iron Curtain to pursue his climbs, but by the style and aesthetic qualities of the experiences he had. One of the principle architects of the Himalayan alpine-style movement, his bold ascents included the east face of Dhaulagiri, Shining Wall on Gasherbrum IV, Broad Peak traverse, the east face of Trango Tower, and many others. He's also known for the chances he didn't take, his cautionary sixth sense. The style and attitude of these climbs, including the specific nature of their partnerships (often with iconoclastic Western climbers such as Alex MacIntyre) defined the alpinist's art in their purity of line and rejection of large bureaucratic expeditions. McDonald shows how Kurtyka saw that the desire to climb at all costs contained a trap that could constrain. Ever the intellectual, he took freedom to another level, and is still alive today.

*Freedom Climbers* is a magnificent book. As Henri Cartier-Bresson did when he 'craved to seize the whole essence' in a single picture, Bernadette McDonald has managed likewise to trip the writer's shutter at the decisive moment when fact and art intersect, thus giving events their 'proper expression' as the master photographer would say. And ultimately as we witness the lightning that was the golden age of Polish Himalayan alpinism, we see a little bit of ourselves, our own motivations, and the freedom we all seek in the mountains.

Jon Popowich

### Wind From a Distant Summit

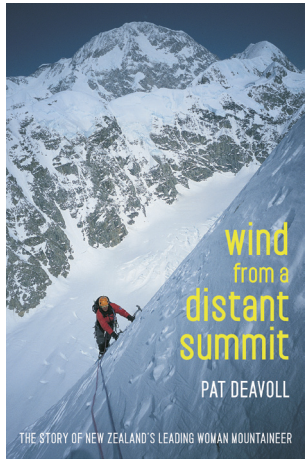
Pat Deavoll

2011, Craig Potton Publishing (NZ), 2011, pp 264, NZ\$39.99

Climbing difficult first ascents in the greater ranges, in alpine style, is generally considered the most committing and demanding form of mountaineering.

Those involved in this high-risk pursuit form a small elite, made up of mostly men. This makes Pat Deavoll's slick and candid memoir unique. Here is a book, not about Everest or being a celebrity, but a quiet, true climber's quest to pioneer new territory, told from a female perspective.

However, perhaps more impressive than her many difficult ascents, and



her flair as a writer, is this woman's courage in her battle with depression and her willingness to share these dark experiences with the reader. To tackle the peaks that she does is a huge test of self-belief, but considering her issues around lack of self-worth, they seem all the more impressive. Clearly, the respect she gains from the wider climbing community, particularly in New Zealand, is of huge importance, so much so that during her Karim Sar expedition of 2009 (*AJ* 115, 3-10) she is terrified of returning home with no summit.

Learning to climb in the New Zealand Alps, Deavoll develops resourcefulness and resilience. It is a world apart from much of today's western European Alps. On many of the adventures she recounts, she and her partner are often completely alone, the approaches long, the rock not always perfect, and the weather prone to quickly turning vicious. Certainly, the wildness and the solitude of her native mountains are perfect preparation for future expeditions to Pakistan, China and India.

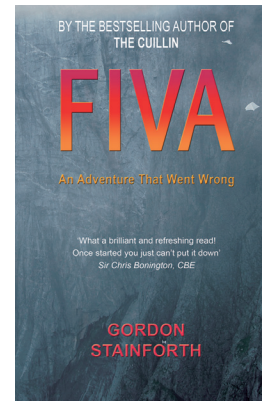
Deavoll clearly enjoys all disciplines of climbing and has dedicated more than 30 years to perfecting her art. This leads to what she describes as one of the 'happiest days of my life' after climbing *Deprivation* on the Moonflower Buttress of Mount Hunter, Alaska, with Marty Bear in 45 hours non-stop. Any route on this steep, 1500m wall – known as the 'E1 Cap of ice and mixed climbing' – has become a holy grail among top alpinists. To climb this route so quickly is simply world class.

Climbing in alpine-style and attempting unclimbed routes sometimes brings failure, but for Deavoll, following her ideals has been worth it. 'It's the journey and the trying that matter: the heart that goes into the attempt rather than the summit,' she says.

Deavoll is open about other darkness too; the impact of losing her friend Karen McNeill in Alaska; an artificial knee, the breakdown of personal relationships. She also weaves in fascinating ideas from the psychology of risk in an attempt to explain why some people are drawn to such a high-stakes game.

This prose is packed with drama – the narrow escapes, the storms, tension among partners – but it also contains wonderful contemplative descriptions of the natural world she travels through. By the end of the book Deavoll has learned to cope with depression. The self-esteem from other top climbers respecting her climbing achievements contributes to this, along with the self-recognition that for her, peace and serenity are gained from being in high places. It is a fine book.

*Andy Cave*



### **Fiva: An Adventure That Went Wrong**

Gordon Stainforth

*Golden Arrow Books, 2012, pp224, £9.95*

'So you had an epic then?' The question, delivered in a flat Lancastrian accent to the Stainforth twins, must have seemed a statement of the obvious taken to absurdity. The tattered pair were two days late back at camp, they'd hardly eaten in that time, had fallen hundreds of feet, been hopelessly lost, Gordon had smashed his left knee – it looked, he says, like a Jackson Pollack abstract done on the side of a beach ball, and worse still, it was turning gangrenous

and starting to smell. Yes, this is the story of an epic. A more pertinent question would have been, 'Why aren't you dead?'

*Fiva* (pronounced 'fever') is the name of a 6,000-foot route on Store Trolltind in the Romsdal region of Norway. Stainforth's subtitle, *An Adventure That Went Wrong*, speaks for itself; it also carries the flavour of laconic self-mockery that makes this book such a delight. The boys' plight – they were just teenagers at the time – was dire, yet in retelling it Stainforth cannot resist drollery. His attitude to life (and death) epitomises that quip about the difference between Americans and the English: to Americans life is serious but not hopeless; to the English life is hopeless but not serious.

The Stainforths are as English as they come, two former public school-boys from Knebworth in Hertfordshire; and, back in 1969, they were wonderfully naïve: 'We've climbed a couple of quite big mountains in the Alps with guides, and we've done dozens of rock climbs (last year) in North Wales and now we're going to tackle the biggest rock wall in Europe – OK?'

It's not a novel and both Stainforths are still alive and climbing so we know the book has a happy ending. However it unfolds as such a gripper that it would be churlish to go into detail over the plot.

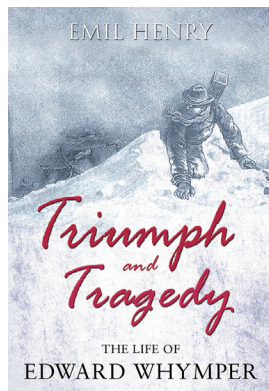
Epics, of course, are standard fare of mountaineering narratives; what elevates *Fiva* is the manner of Gordon Stainforth's telling of it. As with his superb photographic books – notably *The Cuillin* and *The Peak* – there is a sense of much careful forethought as to character of the final product. He didn't just sit down and trot out an account, dramatic though it would have been. The book is written in the first person present tense, a bold move that has been skilfully carried off, and employs a smaller type size for the voice of his brother John when distant at the far end of the rope. Echoes from the cliffs and voices in Gordon's head, spaced out with exhaustion, pain and hunger, are also cleverly conveyed.

For those of us of a similar age (the twins were born in 1949) there is also a good deal of gear nostalgia, Norwegian sweaters, Millarmitts, MOAC wedges and so on. Most glorious of all though is Stainforth's evocation of

the late 1960s through his zany use of song lines and titles. Looking over an abyss he turns a whiter shade of pale, without quote marks, which adds to the fun; Louis Armstrong, Del Shannon, the Beatles and more are drawn in. Gordon could be scripting a climbing version of *The Singing Detective*.

*Fiva* should, as publicists like to say, appeal to climber and non-climber alike. If there were any justice in the publishing world it would be a best seller, eclipsing *'the Void'*. But I can hear a doleful Gordon Stainforth adding, 'there isn't'. If so he'll have to settle for the accolade of 'a future cult classic'.

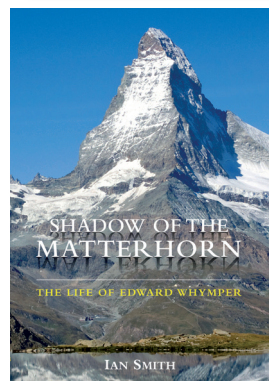
Stephen Goodwin



**Triumph and Tragedy**  
**The Life of Edward Whymper**  
 Emil Henry  
*Matador 2011, pp460, £17.99*

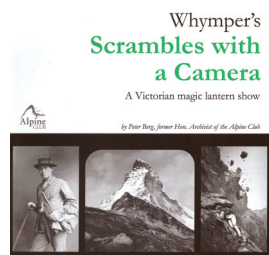
**Shadow of The Matterhorn**  
**The Life of Edward Whymper**  
 Ian Smith  
*Carreg Ltd 2011, pp 336, £25*

**Whymper's Scrambles With a Camera**  
**A Victorian Magic Lantern Show**  
 Peter Berg  
*Alpine Club 2011, pp148, £16.00*



The multi-faceted life of Edward Whymper has only been the subject of one serious biography in the English language, namely that by Frank Smythe, published as long ago as 1940 and never reprinted. Coinciding with the centenary of Whymper's death, two attempts to repair the situation arrived during 2011 and both have added usefully to Smythe's work. However, though they may have had similar aspirations, the two resulting works are very different.

Emil Henry is essentially both a non-mountaineer and a non-historian, though part of the stimulus to his interest in Whymper was a guided ascent of the Matterhorn back in 1984. In fulfilling what is clearly something of a passion for him, he has produced a successful historical biography here, albeit at the 'popular' end of the spectrum. Not that there is anything wrong with that: bringing Whymper's life to the attention of the modern generation in such a thoroughly engaging and well-written way is certainly no bad thing. However, his relative lack of contact with mountaineering history and European history more



generally has produced a book that would have benefited from a level of editorial input that was apparently not forthcoming.

To concentrate on the errors in the book to the detriment of its good side would be unfair. However, a couple of examples will perhaps help to encourage readers to do their own research if they have doubts at any point:

p xv Rather than the 14 cited, more than 30 peaks over 4000m were first climbed in the Golden Age and the Primus, far from being available for mountain bivouacs in this period, was not invented until 1892.

p 65 Mont Pelvoux is not the highest peak in the Dauphiné. Mr Henry himself correctly identifies it as the Pointe des Ecrins on page 126.

p 84 Val Tournanche was at one time in Savoy (Savoie refers to the French part of the region) but was only part of France from 1792 to 1815. Austria did not rule this area at the time of Carrel's birth (1829). It did control Lombardy, but Val Tournanche was not part of Lombardy. The 'King' (sic) of Sardinia was not in any sense self-appointed.

p 257 Mummery was not 'Alfred' and Haskett Smith, not Mummery, is generally regarded as the father of rock climbing.

On the plus side, Mr Henry has done much to improve the somewhat dismissive treatment given by Smythe to the last 10 years or so of Whymper's life, which included his marriage, the birth of his daughter, his divorce and no less than six trips to Canada, as well as his lonely death in Chamonix. As compared to some of the earlier ones, the final two chapters are notable for the limited references to Smythe and they are all the better for that, though one has to say that even when re-presenting Smythe, Mr Henry does it with his usual pace and style.

In general production terms the book looks good, though some of the illustrations could have done more justice to Whymper's wonderful originals. The author has rightly included maps of the key areas, as aids to orientation for the lay reader. However, they should either have been rendered in more legible form or replaced by modern maps.

All in all, with the caveat noted above, this is a very enjoyable, non-specialist account of Whymper's life. However, the more demanding reader will have to turn elsewhere for a more reliable work.

In contrast to the life of Whymper reviewed above, Ian Smith has provided a biography that takes us some way beyond Smythe and stands as a worthy tribute to the memory of the great, if flawed, man 100 years after his death in Chamonix in 1911.

Although of course not of itself any kind of quality assurance, the sheer comprehensiveness of references (more than 1000) and bibliography (more than 300) is extremely impressive. More impressive still is the fact that Mr Smith's researches have not only covered the more obvious sources, such as the ACL, BL, NLS, RGS and the Scott Polar Research Institute, but have also uncovered relevant material in such diverse places as Leeds, Zurich, St Andrews University, the Bodleian and the Greenland National Museum in Nuuk. If for no other reason, we are in Mr Smith's debt for

identifying and collating this vast wealth of information. However, his contribution is much more than that.

One particular area where Smythe's biography is weak is in Whymper's activities in Greenland. While Smythe may well have decided more or less to ignore these expeditions because of their relative lack of success, Mr Smith has covered them in some detail, thereby providing further insights into his subject's personality following the traumatic events of 1865. In this connection, it is surprising that neither Smythe, nor indeed Henry, even mention one of the key figures in the first expedition, namely Robert Brown. Mr Smith ably puts this to rights by pointing out Whymper's doubtless very frustrating relationship with this rather odd man.

While recognising that *Travels Amongst the Great Andes of the Equator* was Whymper's *magnum opus*, Smythe spent very little time covering the issues involved in its production and that of the supplementary appendix, familiarly known as 'Whymper's bug book'. This has considerable importance from a scientific point of view, as well as representing a high point in the wood-engraver's art. Again, Mr Smith's biography gives due prominence to the importance of this book, both externally and as a part of Whymper's life over a period of no less than a decade.

The other area where Smith's book fills a useful gap is in his treatment of wood-engraving, the Whymper family's importance in the art during the better part of half a century and the part played by Whymper in the transition from wood-engraving to photography as the preferred mode of book illustration in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Having said that, it is unfortunate that the publishers could not find a way of coming closer to the originals in the renderings of Whymper's engravings. Most of the fine detail in Whymper's work is lost and the modern reader will gain very little impression of the extraordinary quality that will be found either in *Scrambles* or *Travels Amongst the Great Andes*. (Much the same comment could be made about Emil Henry's book, though not about Peter Berg's: see below.)

A limited number of photographs could probably have been usefully included to illustrate key points, but the 26 deployed are arguably too many and some, such as those in Greenland and the two from Ecuador add little to the proceedings.

The comments on illustration are, however, minor blemishes and Mr Smith's book should stand the test of time as the best biography thus far of one of the great figures in mountaineering history.

In 1945, two boxes of Victorian lantern slides were donated to the Alpine Club by a certain Mrs Barron of St Albans. They were recognised as a set of the original slides used by Edward Whymper in a lecture first given in Davos in August 1896, possibly the very same set. The slides remained in the care of the Library until the former honorary archivist, Peter Berg, started his investigations in the mid 1990s. This led to an article in the 1997 *AJ* and to a re-creation of Whymper's lecture, which Peter first gave at the Alpine Club in 1998 and which he has repeated in various venues, notably at the AC 150<sup>th</sup> celebrations in Zermatt in 2007.

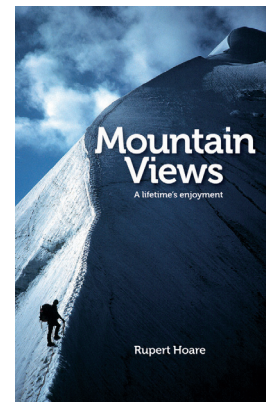
As his personal contribution to the celebration of the centenary of Whymper's death, Peter has now converted the lecture into book form, using primarily Whymper's own writings for the accompanying text, supplemented by extracts from the books of contemporaries and the works of more recent writers. The reconstruction uses the majority of the slides in the boxes donated by Mrs Barron, as well as a number of reproductions of engravings from *Scrambles amongst the Alps*. The whole 'performance' is linked by Peter Berg's own explanatory text.

Apart from being congratulated for having the very idea of doing this, Peter is also to be complimented on its execution, both in terms of the text and the book itself. The quality of the paper chosen has made a major contribution to the excellent reproduction values, not only of the photographic slides but also of Whymper's own engravings, the quality of which can be easily compromised if due attention is not paid to the printing process.

The fact that the photographs are so well reproduced allows the reader to appreciate the standard that Whymper was achieving in the 'new' medium. Far from allowing himself to become stuck in the traditions of engraving, which had formed such a major part of his life, he clearly embraced photography and became something of an artist in this medium too. Although some of the photographs in his lecture were sourced from other photographers, most are Whymper's and one only needs to look at classic views such as slide 29 of the Matterhorn and slide 54 of the Chamonix valley and Mont Blanc to see the sort of standards he was achieving. However, his skill was not restricted to mountain views, as slides 58 'Boulders on the Montagne de la Côte' and 74 'Dr Janssen ascending' show.

Peter Berg has done us all a favour by bringing another piece of the AC archive to our attention in such an informative and entertaining way.

Jerry Lovatt



### Mountain Views: A lifetime's enjoyment

Rupert Hoare

Vertebrate Publishing, 2011, pp212, £22

Although it has famously been said that 'I chose to climb', when faced with the choice between a career in high level mountaineering or 'nine to five', this inspirational book from a former president of both the Alpine Ski Club and London Mountaineering Club exemplifies the ideal for many of the rest of us of maximising opportunities for time in the mountains in the context of a successful non-alpine vocation, to achieve 'a lifetime's enjoyment'.

In *Mountain Views*, Rupert Hoare provides a lucid chronological description of his 38-year evolving relationship with the mountain, in all its myriad

guises. The preface makes clear Rupert had not planned to write this book at this time. Yet diary entries over nearly four decades and impressive archived photographs document his mountaineering experiences with a menagerie of AC, ASC and Eagle Ski Club companions in meticulous detail, allowing us to share the range and scope of his development as climber and ski-tourer.

Six months prior to the publication of this book, Rupert was diagnosed with terminal pancreatic cancer. He was just 55 (*obituary p418*). There is a wide range of reaction to such shattering news. Entirely in character, Rupert's response was to devote his remarkable energies to writing his mountain autobiography to share with as wide an audience as possible. His journey is perhaps classic, from reading mountain adventure books as a boy, through adolescent exploration of local landscapes, to growing confidence in his abilities on rock and ice faces, extensive ski-touring and climbing around the world and latterly Munro'ing closer to home.

Embedded in accounts of his day job as a seismic geologist across four continents, the acquisition of mountain skills and the development of lasting friendships, the book charts Rupert's love affair with all things pertaining to the mountain. It is a remarkable itinerary with chapters devoted to most areas of Britain and the Alps, as well as Arctic Norway, Greece, the Pyrenees and the first British ski traverse of the Corsican High Level Route in 1994. Additional exploits include climbs in South Africa, the Karakoram, Indonesia and Japan, and ski-tours in Iran, New Zealand and Greenland. Each experience is illustrated by accomplished photography with vivid descriptions of challenges and triumphs, occasions of failure to achieve objectives and the often damp, uncomfortable realities, but always rescued by awe-inspiring scenery and the many natural wonders encountered. The book's sense of purpose to inspire others to connect with mountains by mapping his own relationship with high places is delivered with honesty and fervour, and often enhanced with dry humour. The contemporaneous diary and reflections with added geological, historical and architectural detail further enrich the book and make it appealing to all. The chapters set in the Scottish hills and in the Alps are typical, seemingly capturing each strenuous but gleeful step, with vibrant succinct observations to create scenarios easily appreciated by those who have been there, as well as those who have yet to venture beyond the ski lifts or even the armchair.

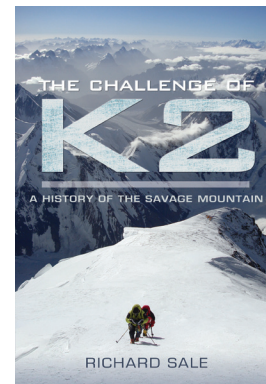
Despite Rupert's renowned enthusiasm to get 'onward and upward', almost bouncing from the page at times; his deep curiosity and ability to reflect on and evoke his surroundings, whether wonder at a rock formation, its texture and smell, snow crystal subtype, rare alpine flower or lengthening shadows, enables the reader to join his many companions in reliving, with vivid immediacy, times shared in the hills. The decision on an early Alps trip, that 'the others had different objectives' so he would continue alone, provides insight into his 'own man' approach. At times self effacing, at others increasingly aware of his own impatience and well able to 'say it as it is', particularly if he felt slowed down or worse if there was 'faffing'

with kit, Rupert demonstrates an infectious enthusiasm which friends and companions came to expect and enjoy. It was not all plain sailing and we are gripped during his 1984 Greenland expedition by his epic return to camp in very cold blizzard conditions whilst helping his frostbitten companion. The book also describes the development of many lifetime friends, including his evolving relationship with Jay, culminating in their marriage and enduring partnership when climbing and touring together.

There is poignancy to Rupert's focus on his earlier mountaineering accomplishments as being 'most memorable' and they are the most thoroughly detailed. Nicely paced with unpretentious and relaxed style, the book has a sense of gathering momentum with greater brevity in the descriptions of trips towards the end of the book, perhaps suggesting Rupert's determination to complete his story. His candid approach to communication, relationships, and both flatland and mountain life, are particularly evident in his moving epilogue, where he reflects on spirituality and meaning, while struggling with the certainties inherent in conventional beliefs. That he chose to channel the last of his energies into documenting his experiences is what is most uplifting and moving about this book, particularly for those of us privileged to have joined Rupert at altitude on one or more occasions.

Rupert writes of the Dolomite hotelier remarking that he and Jay have 'returned much richer through experience' from their trip and this can also be said of the experience of reading Rupert's account of his life and times in the hills.

Rodney Franklin



### **The Challenge of K2: A History of the Savage Mountain**

Richard Sale

*Pen & Sword Discovery, 2011, 256pp, £19.99*

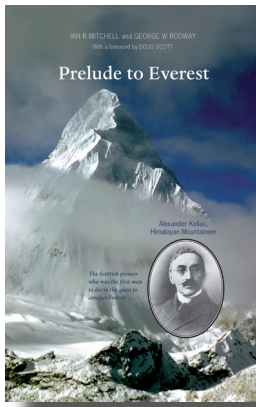
An extraordinary number of books have recently appeared on the subject of K2, but the phenomenally well-read Richard Sale has possibly produced the best-researched history to date with *The Challenge of K2*. The last comprehensive biography of the world's second highest is now more than 15 years old, and in the intervening time there have been significant incidents both on and off the mountain, the latter best exemplified by formal acceptance of Walter Bonatti's version of events on the first ascent in 1954.

Previous omissions have come to light and no stone seems left unturned. For example, take the fascinating story of Italian Roberto Lerro, who in 1890, two years before Conway's expedition to the mountain, may well have climbed the Abruzzi Spur as far as House's Chimney, though was far too modest to speak about 'such a humble attempt'. Details of his Baltoro

journey have been pieced together from letters to a German friend, which are now housed in the National Library of Israel.

The book continues from those early escapades, with prodigious detail through the years, to the claimed ascent by Christian Stangl in 2010. Then there are pages of the inevitable K2 statistics; all ascents, deaths and comparisons with other 8000ers etc. More than 30 pages of comprehensive notes, forming part of the appendix, are interesting reading in their own right. The text has an academic feel, but for those interested in a comprehensive history to (almost) the present day, *The Challenge of K2* is indispensable.

Lindsay Griffin



### Prelude to Everest

Ian R Mitchell & George W Rodway  
Luath Press, 2011, pp285, £20

This timely collaboration between a mountaineer with a grasp of neglected history and a scientist with a keenness for climbing deserves to re-establish Alexander Kellas, the Scottish scientist and Himalayan pioneer, among the great high altitude mountaineers. *Prelude to Everest* by Ian Mitchell and George Rodway lifts Kellas out of obscurity and puts his achievements into proper focus. It is a memorial to an exceptional mountaineer.

Kellas died in 1921 while taking part in the first reconnaissance expedition to Everest after at least 10 first ascents in Sikkim and the Garhwal and adding significantly to the sum of knowledge surrounding the effects of high altitude on human performance. He emerges from this biography as a solitary, unheroic individual, unsung and overshadowed by his contemporaries but who, as a climber aged 40 and despite poor health, discovered a natural ability and obsession for high altitude mountaineering.

Kellas was born in Aberdeen in 1868 and attended Heriot Watt College, Edinburgh, before graduating in chemistry at University College, London, where a study of inert gases saw him measuring the argon contained in peas and mice. A shy young man, he was already contemplating the possibility that he would not emerge among the front ranks of scientific research. But an early love of the Scottish mountain country made him a strong and determined Munro bagger, extending his expeditions from the Cairngorms to the Alps where, in 1905, he climbed Mont Blanc with his brother, Henry.

A series of visits to Sikkim followed; small, lightweight expeditions with only the local Sherpas for company. He dismissed the idea of employing alpine guides in the Himalaya where, he believed, they would probably be useless. On Pauhunri (7125m) he unwittingly broke the world summit altitude record and produced an academic paper entitled 'A consideration of the possibility of ascending the loftier Himalayas'. Unlike such contem-

poraries as Mummery, Collie, Younghusband and Longstaff, Kellas left no detailed accounts of his adventures but he was probably the first climber to provide scientific evidence of the positive effects of using supplementary oxygen at high altitude, thereby opening the way to Everest.

The authors trace Kellas's mountaineering and scientific life in a comprehensive and well-researched way. George Mallory's first impression of him was unheroic but affectionate. 'Kellas I love already,' he wrote to his wife. 'He is beyond description Scotch and uncouth in his speech... He is very slight in build, short, thin, stooping and narrow-chested, his head made grotesque by veritable gig-lamps of spectacles and a long, pointed moustache. He is an absolutely devoted and disinterested person.'

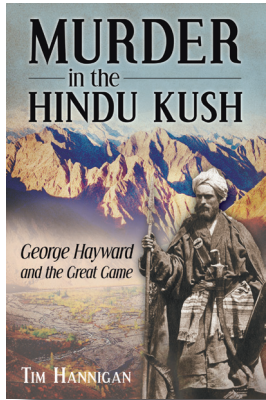
John Noel, the expedition photographer, paid fulsome tribute to Kellas as 'a pioneer in every sense' who with the help of the Sherpa people conquered virgin peaks one after another with an ease and rapidity that astonished the world. 'He would emerge each year from his chemical research work at the hospital. He did not tell the newspapers when he set out to climb a mountain higher than any climber had ever tackled before. He just went unobserved...'

Kellas was a natural choice for inclusion into the 1921 Everest reconnaissance although he was strongly opposed by Percy Farrar, president of the Alpine Club, who had earlier criticised the Scotsman's climbing abilities, insisting, 'Kellas has never climbed a mountain, but has only walked about in deep snow with a lot of coolies, and the only time they got on a very steep place they all tumbled down and ought to have been killed.'

Although Kellas wrote very little about his expeditions, he did create an impressive photographic record as his ambitions to climb even higher summits progressed. Three times he explored the possibility of a route up Kamet (7756m) in the Garhwal, frustrated when the delivery of oxygen cylinders intended for the climb was delayed after they were classified as explosives. As Kellas became more obsessed by the prospect of Everest, physical illness was added to a fragile mental state; he suffered from aural hallucinations and was already exhausted when he began the long trek to the mountain. Mallory wrote that he died 'without one of us anywhere near him' after insisting that everyone should go ahead. Two summits were named after him and one, Kellas Rock Peak (7071m), a near neighbour of Everest, still bears his name.

Ian Mitchell, an award-winning mountaineering author long aware of the historical importance of Alexander Kellas, and George Rodway, an active mountaineer and Honorary Research Fellow at University College London's Centre for Altitude, Space and Environment Medicine, have combined to produce a fascinating and important account of Kellas's life with a 60-page appendix covering his work on high altitude physiology. Kellas concluded that Mount Everest could be ascended by a man of excellent physical and mental constitution in first rate training, without 'adventitious aids'. Some 58 years later, Reinhold Messner and Peter Habeler proved him right.

Ronald Faux



**Murder in the Hindu Kush: George Hayward and the Great Game**

Tim Hannigan

*The History Press, 2011, pp254, £18.99*

What a pity Richard Sale didn't have the benefit of this fascinating book when he was writing *The Challenge of K2*, reviewed in this same *AJ*. Lindsay Griffin describes *The Challenge* as 'possibly' the best-researched book on K2, but it seems that when researching the early exploration of the savage mountain, Sale either did not look in quite the same places as Tim Hannigan or did not rate what he found there. Perhaps the two authors should confer.

Sale credits Francis Younghusband with the being 'the first European known to have seen K2 from the north', on his extraordinary 1887 journey from Peking to Srinagar via Kashgar and Yarkand. However, to be fair, Sale is far from categorical about this and does wonder if there might be a precedent. Hannigan supplies one (and perhaps there are more).

On a freezing (-15C) morning in November 1868, the RGS-sponsored explorer George Hayward scrambled to the top of a crag near the source of the Yarkand river in what was then known as Eastern Turkestan (today's Xinjiang) and from 19,000ft looked upon 'a dizzying expanse of mountains'. Far to the south stretched the Karakoram where one mountain towered above all. Hayward tilted his artificial horizon, directed his compass, and calculated it was 28,278ft tall.

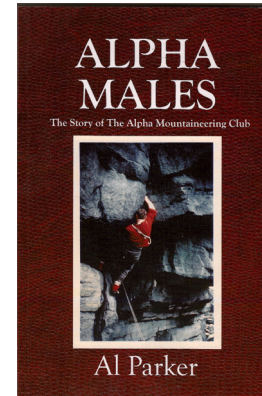
Surveyors in western Kashmir had already spotted the mountain that would become known as K2 and Hayward had no way of knowing he was looking at the same peak. In his notebook he recorded it simply as 'Snowy Peak', however he had the height right to within 30 feet – a remarkable achievement given his immediate vicissitudes as a fugitive in wild and lawless mountains in the grip of winter. Younghusband could of course be described as the first European to *know* he was looking at the north face of K2.

Hayward was a pawn in the 'Great Game' between the Raj and the Russian Empire. True, he mapped the source of the Yarkand and spotted K2 from the north, but he was pipped into Yarkand and Kashgar by Robert Shaw, and kept under house arrest there, and in July 1870 was murdered, still short of his primary objective, the High Pamirs.

*Murder in the Hindu Kush* was rightly shortlisted for the Boardman Tasker Award in 2011. It is Hannigan's first book – borne of a visit to the western Himalaya as an 18-year old with his climber father Des Hannigan – and he has done well grappling with the ethnic and political complexities of the region, every bit as tangled and brutal in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as they are today. Comprehending the geography of 'Hayward country' would have benefited from some far better maps than the naïve sketches included here.

The odds were always against George Hayward but that, in large part, is what must have endeared the increasingly suicidally obsessive to Tim Hannigan and makes his story such an engaging read.

*Stephen Goodwin*



**Alpha Males:**

**The story of the Alpha Mountaineering Club**  
Al Parker

*Fastprint, 2010, pp 274; available in hardback or paperback (£16.99 or £10.99) direct from Al Parker  
Tel: 01457 855240*

*Richard's climbing improved week by week and pretty soon he and I were climbing at the same standard. Around this time we got to know a group of climbers from the Rotherham area, some of whom were coal miners. They were a tough bunch with some good climbers in the group. One climber who was outstanding was Len Millsom who later did the first ascent of Millsom's Minion at Stanage. When we first met them Len climbed all manner of things in pit boots with metal studs in the soles. I remember he once traversed from Robin Hood's Cave to the Balcony Cave wearing pit boots and with a lighted primus in one hand!*

*Al Parker recalling early days at Stanage.*

All climbers thrive on stories and this lovingly produced volume is chock full of them. Al Parker was a founder member of the Alpha in 1956 and has put together an enjoyable and often very funny account of the history of the club's heyday from 1956 to 1970. The role of the Alpha in the development of British climbing at this time is of great significance, and Parker recounts all the deeds and misdeeds, all the triumphs and not a little loss and tragedy. Within these pages are to be found all the usual suspects; Al Parker himself, Richard McHardy, Pete Bamfield, Bob Brayshaw, Les Brown, Paul Nunn, Pete Crew, Barry Ingle, Martin Boysen, Tanky Stokes, Gerry Rogan, Paul Ross and Clive Rowland to name but a few. The Alpha was never a large club, normally having only 20 to 30 members at any one time. Membership was by invitation only and was desired by many, but not everyone got invited, not even the famous. The organisation of the club was kept to a minimum and usually only extended as far as a riotous annual dinner and a small and widely respected badge.

The Alpha began with a small group of lads getting together in a barn at Edale in November 1956. All in their mid to late teens, they set about forming what would soon become a huge element in the development not only of gritstone, but of climbing in both Wales and the Lakes over the next decade. Sterling deeds were also done in Scotland, the Alps and further afield. By the mid-60s the Alpha was a byword for excellence in climbing,

with a reputation the envy of many. Particularly interesting here are the accounts of the club's early years, as this group of keen youngsters found their way towards becoming a group of highly competent mountaineers. Not all the early members were naturally talented, a good example being Richard McHardy. From an unpromising beginning with a serious fear of heights, Richard was destined over the next decade to become one of the boldest rock climbers and accomplished alpinists of his generation. In truth, the club became a 'who's who' of top British climbing talent, from both the Manchester and Sheffield sides of the Peak. The overall improvement and development of ability within the club was impressively rapid; many of the members were soon in the vanguard of British climbing both at home and abroad, particularly in the Alps. Parker relates adventures, punch-ups and accidents from Chamonix, Zermatt, the Dolomites and the Bregaglia. The sixties was a period of huge consolidation for British climbers in the Alps and much of that story is told here. The alpine tales are not without sadness and are a reminder of the price paid by some at this time.

Al Parker's book belongs on your bookshelf alongside Don Roscoe's wonderful *Llanberis North*, Hugh Banner and Pete Crew's 1963 Cloggy guide and the now revered (and rare) *The Black Cliff*. More than anything this book goes some way to recording the heartbeat of Peak and Welsh climbing in particular in the period 1959-1966 when modern rock climbing in Britain really arrived. It is a valuable comment on the social context of climbing at that time: the privations of the 1950s were past; young, energetic, ambitious men were busting out of the northern cities and the economic and social constraints of the postwar period were no longer going to hold sway. A whole new climbing scene emerged, of which the Alpha were key players, whereby the sport became democratic and far more welcoming. Just as the verve, energy and lust of the music of the Beatles (a soundtrack of the great years of the Alpha) was the result of hopes, expectations and cravings that had built up in the social straitjacket of Harold Macmillan's Britain, so the drive, ability and ambition of the Alpha's members were central to defining the character of climbing in Britain as we understand it today. Those of us who have come later have stood on the shoulders of groups like the Alpha and have greatly benefited from the knowledge both of their triumphs and misfortunes.

In some quarters the sixties is a much maligned period in our climbing history, but some very hard and bold things were done back then, long before modern footwear, chalk, reliable protection and the huge benefits of indoor training all winter. It was not only a period of healthy consolidation of ability but also a time when a lot of myths and shibboleths were laid to rest and when British climbers stopped being also-rans in the Western Alps.

Humour is never far from the surface in Al Parker's writing, but this is balanced with tales of hard lessons learned on the mountains and the loss of friends by illness or accident as the years have passed.

*Alpha Males* puts you right there, whether it's a sunny Friday night and you're bombing down to Wales on the back of someone's borrowed

motorbike en route for the delights of The Pass, Cloggy or Gogarth, or in describing the majesty of the Mont Blanc range as seen for the first time by skinny young lads from Manchester with their precious fortnight's holiday ahead of them. Hugely enjoyable, this book is essential reading for anyone who wants to understand the core of our climbing culture and how it has evolved over the past 50 years.

Steve Dean



### Itching To Climb

Barbara James

*Matador*, 2009, pp 204, £8.99

The combination of compunction and physical disability is perfectly suggested by the title of this book, in which Barbara James describes the impact of debilitating eczema and allergies on a determinedly active and adventurous life. From her early introduction to the strenuous delights of Snowdonia, instigated by a thoughtful and inspirational teacher, James 'found the route to a lifetime pursuing – or being dropped into – work and play that was mainly the prerogative of men.' This double challenge – her rebellious body and the rigid social demarcation of the late 1950s – served only to spur her on to achieve remarkable and varied ambitions.

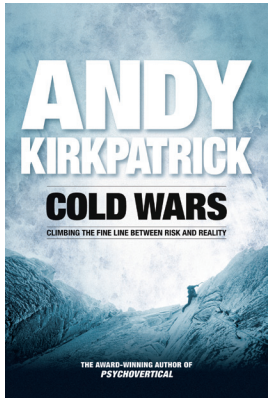
A brief teaching career, cheerfully abandoned for the energetic outdoor life she so enjoyed, paved the way to James's immersion in climbing, instructing and outdoor centre management in Snowdonia, principally at Ogwen Cottage and Plas y Brenin. Her accounts of these pursuits are leavened both with an unobtrusive but wryly enlightening examination of the social mores which permeated them and uncomplaining accounts of the physical discomforts she was forced to endure as a result of severe allergic reactions to pollens, synthetic fabrics, animals and her own sweat. James was always doubly disabled – by her sex and by her health – but, in turn, these factors made her doubly determined to succeed.

James's singlemindedness is woven through every facet of her private and working life: her interests and abilities in the field of outdoor education were furthered by the acquisition of new skills and qualifications in skiing and mountain rescue and the emotional and financial damage of a traumatic divorce was resolutely overcome when she began work as possibly the only woman civilian to be employed by the MoD to train soldiers. Even her holidays were often groundbreaking; she was captivated by the Falkland Islands when she visited them soon after the conflict and it was after this visit that she celebrated her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday by getting her Private Pilot's Licence.

She has left a thoughtful and indelible imprint on whichever environ-

ment she has found herself living and working in, from Snowdonia to Tenerife; alive to local needs and issues, led by a combination of common sense and pragmatism, energetic and resolute in overcoming her own difficulties and urging manufacturers to come up with practical solutions for those similarly afflicted. *Itching To Climb* provides readers with meticulously detailed descriptions of the development of outdoor education, unquenchable enthusiasm for conveying knowledge and understanding of mountaineering history – celebrated in her involvement in the Rheged ‘History of Mountaineering’ Exhibition – and an opportunity to become acquainted with a remarkable woman who has reacted with self-effacing humour and quiet resilience to the problems and opportunities with which life has presented her.

Val Randall



**Cold Wars: Climbing the fine line between risk and reality**

Andy Kirkpatrick

Vertebrate Publishing, 2011, pp 276, £20

*Cold Wars* is the second volume of autobiography from Andy Kirkpatrick, whose first, *Psychovertical*, won the Boardman Tasker prize in 2008. Title apart, (and the subtitle of this latest is no better), *Psychovertical* was a tremendous book, chronicling the author's climbing escapades through his 20s, and formed around a series of chapters describing his ascent of *Reticent Wall*, one of Yosemite's hardest multi-day aid climbs.

'But you are so young', comments a German lady at a publicity event for *Psychovertical*, clearly unconvinced that at such a tender age there can yet be enough to say. Andy hasn't got the nerve to inform her that he plans not only a volume two but a trilogy.

Andy has the ability to conjure up a character in a couple of lines. This is something that did not strike me so forcefully with *Psychovertical*. On the other hand, what's missing here is the awareness of place, the sense of wonder at the natural world that was so well conveyed there. Reading his chapters on *Reticent Wall* one could feel the grainy texture of the granite, the fine detail of the exfoliations up which he hooks, the mind concentrated and focused in the most microscopic way by his fear.

It is inevitable, as Andy well knows, that *Cold Wars* will be compared to its predecessor. Something that I don't recall in the first volume, but that irritated me here, is his impressionability vis-à-vis 'names'. This may be a technique of course. The book dovetails seamlessly with *Psychovertical*, beginning with Andy back in camp hours after topping out on El Cap, where he is now deemed enough of a success to hang out with the other top dudes. And so it continues, sporadically, throughout the book; a social

climbing which, given Andy's hair-raising performances, is no more than his just deserts and which introduces us to a succession of apparently celebrity climbers – 'apparently', because this reviewer had never heard of half of them, and none came over as nearly as interesting as the author.

As I say, this may be technique, as may Andy's supposed dire incompetence – forgetting things, dropping things, getting in a mess generally. There is no doubt that this makes the book more gripping and entertaining than it might otherwise be, just as it has always struck me that climbing films would be so much better if the stars weren't all so damned good. Mild VS (just, for a few feet) climbers on E4; now, there's entertainment. But I was on the Boardman Tasker panel when *Psychovertical* was discussed, and we all wondered whether, the book's structure being so brilliant, it mightn't have had significant input from a very experienced editor. Andy has since assured me that this was not so, that he did it all himself. We must believe him, of course, and do the same here: assume the incompetence is genuine. In any case, if it is not exaggerated that only makes his climbing successes all the more remarkable, and his cleverness as a writer all the more impressive.

Not only does this volume follow *Psychovertical* seamlessly in time, but the climbing is also much the same. Here is a series of adventures, each of which contains at least one epic, that are geographically quite narrow-minded – mainly the Dru and Patagonia – and always played out in winter. Andy is driven by an urge to reach the top of the game that requires him to attempt the hardest climbs in the most punishing conditions that is reminiscent of Joe Tasker. He does not succeed in conveying just how hard his climbing escapades are, and perhaps this is the drawback of the stand-up comedian that he is, the slap-stick humour that infuses every page – it just becomes impossible to credit that things are really as serious as they appear to be. But he does convey the sheer cold. I found myself shivering on several occasions – a remarkable achievement. And the man is genuinely funny.

Andy loves to play the clown, but though I suppose even here I'm open to his formidable persuasive talents, I don't believe he's in any way the dimwit he likes to portray. The whole book just smells too strongly of talent. It is wonderfully entertaining, almost un-put-down-able.

Even so, if it was just a book of climbing adventures I would have been satiated well before the end. After all, we've all done these sorts of things, felt these sorts of things, if at a less exalted level. What raises it into a different league is that it's not ultimately about hard climbing at all – it's about escaping from it. Andy is a father and husband, and gradually the psychological forces at war in his head – and this, not climbing, is the real cold war of the book – begin to turn in favour of his children. This was all there in embryo in volume one, so there is nothing entirely new here, but that is precisely why it's so effective, and why *Psychovertical* and *Cold Wars* really form a single piece of work. What we are seeing over the course of both volumes is a gradual realignment of competing forces. The meta-

morphosis takes several years – for Andy to climb down gracefully – but something of its inevitability infuses every chapter. Perhaps the best, the most poignant, describes his ascent of the *Lesueur Route* on the Dru with a partner he doesn't know but who comes strongly recommended. And the man's a guide, after all. After a shaky start, this stranger – who seems not to have quite the right gear, to be oddly lacking in confidence, to have weird gaps in his expertise – just gets stronger and stronger, and has emerged well before the top as the climbing hero, with Andy very much the junior partner. The writing is almost frighteningly honest here.

'I can't do it,' I said, looking back at him. 'I can't do it. Please will you lead it?' I felt shame saying those words but they came easily enough. I'd have given everything I had not to lead that pitch.

Not only that, but Andy has by this time discovered a misunderstanding, and the explanation for those weird gaps: the stranger – who's never named – is indeed a qualified guide, but a walking guide. Andy has taken him onto a route way beyond anything he's ever done. 'On paper he was going to die. In reality he had found his calling.'

Whilst for Andy, by this time, in the end, the children have won, and soon he's skiing the sun-kissed slopes, not slogging up to the Dru for yet another epic. The vignettes of his family are without exception moving. There are others too that have nothing directly to do with climbing but paint a picture wonderfully – that of being a film-set extra brings the glamour of that world nicely down to earth. And anyone who thinks being a professional speaker is glamorous should perhaps read his description of the *Alpinist* magazine party in Colorado, which came over as a yearningly empty, lonely experience.

This notion that as a well-known climber Kirkpatrick would always disappoint is so wrong. He should forget – perhaps he already has – those celeb climbers who so impress him. He is both cleverer and more interesting than they. There is some unevenness, but *Cold Wars* confirms that Kirkpatrick is a writer, not just a climber who writes. It would be interesting to see him tackle a novel – a kid's novel perhaps. Meanwhile, what has he got left to put into volume III? If it's of the standard of its predecessors he will have created one of the most important of modern climbing autobiographies.

*Phil Bartlett*

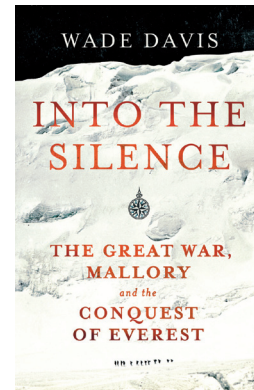
### **Into The Silence: The Great War, Mallory and The Conquest of Everest**

Wade Davis

*Bodley Head, 2011, pp680, £25*

This colossal work deals with the three 1920s Mount Everest expeditions against the backdrop of the First World War and the twilight years of the British Empire.

A decade in the making, the book's strength lies in the serious and



thorough research that Davis has undertaken into the history of the early expeditions and the records of the individual members in the Great War. A clue to Davis's fascination with the war lies in the dedication to his grandfather, Captain Daniel Wade Davis, who served as a medical officer in France with the Royal Army Medical Corps from 1915-16 and thereafter in England with the Canadian Army Medical Corps until the end of the war. Certainly his respect for the work carried out by the surgeons and medical staff on the Western Front shines through.

Davis does not spare the reader, describing at times in disturbing detail the sights, sounds and smells of the battlefield. One of the grimmest of all tasks for the doctors after the battle of the Somme was to pick their way around six acres of stretchers holding the wounded and the dying, deciding who could be helped. At its best Davis's descriptions are worthy of Edmund Blunden as he writes of the sheer, gargantuan horror of the slaughter and the senselessness of the loss.

Davis sees the conquest of Everest as an attempt to wrest something glorious from the annihilation of the war. The summit would prove that although beaten to both Poles the British could master the heights. In a wholly constructed conceit Everest became the third pole. Davis details the diplomatic shenanigans involved in negotiating between the factions that had every interest in keeping the British out of Tibet and away from the mountain.

We are reminded that the first expedition, in 1921, had as its goal not just the summit of the mountain but also the mapping of a hitherto unknown region. Its success was not the height record but the unravelling of the geography of the Everest region. In a matter of weeks, '12,000 square miles of unexplored territory had been mapped on a quarter inch scale and a further 4,000 miles revised with greater accuracy.'

However, it is the men, rather than their achievements that are the focus. Davis brings to the fore the characters involved in planning and executing the expeditions. He weaves colour into the black and white tapestry that has illustrated the familiar but long-gone world of the early 1920s Mount Everest expeditions. Using private letters and diaries as well as official accounts he breathes life and energy into men whose names have faded into the shadows of the legend of Mallory and Irvine.

We read of the achievements of Lieutenant Colonel Edward Norton, who took part in almost every one of the great battles – Aisne, Marne, Ypres, Loos, the Somme, Arras and finally the German Spring Offensive of 1918 – being 'mentioned in despatches three times, he was awarded the Military Cross, appointed DSO, and honoured with every medal for gallantry and combat, save the Victoria Cross.' That he survived was a

statistical miracle. Or Dr Arthur Wakefield, whose experiences in France were so shattering that they changed him forever. Operating as a surgeon on the Somme in July 1916 he witnessed the complete decimation of the Newfoundland regiment he had helped to arm from his own family money. As a colonial doctor since 1908, he had known and treated most of the men and boys before the war. Of the 810 men who went over the top on 1 July only 35 survived physically unscathed. Or Dr Howard Somervell, also operating as a surgeon in France, who with Norton would set a high altitude record of 28,126 feet without oxygen in 1924, a record that stood unbeaten until 1978. It is hard not to be drawn to some of the larger than life characters in this book: General Charles Bruce, who was to lead the 1922 and 1924 expeditions, was described by a friend as having 'the energy of a steam engine plus a goods train'. He was reputed to have slept with the wife of every man in his regiment. Henry Morshead, veteran of 1911 and 1922, ultimately murdered under mysterious circumstances in Burma in 1931, was an explorer, a man of action. Yet it was Mallory, gallant, enduringly youthful and attractive, who would get closest to the summit of Everest. Davis's portrait of Mallory is not as powerful as his descriptions of the First World War. There is almost a reluctance to be too intrusive. I found myself asking whether he had really got into Mallory's head, but perhaps Mallory was so elusive that nobody could. Where I disagree with Davis's thesis is in his suggestion that Mallory was prepared to sacrifice Sandy Irvine in order to obtain the summit come what may. The title of Davis's last chapter: 'The price of life is death' suggests that Mallory chose to die and took Irvine with him and I am not convinced of that.

*Julie Summers*

### **A Day to Die For – 1996: Everest's Worst Disaster, the Untold Story**

Graham Ratcliffe

*Mainstream, 2011, pp 334, £11.99*

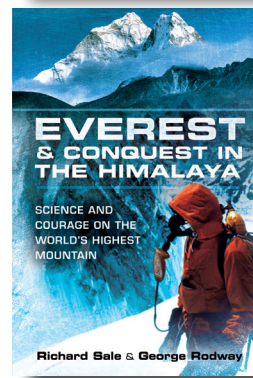
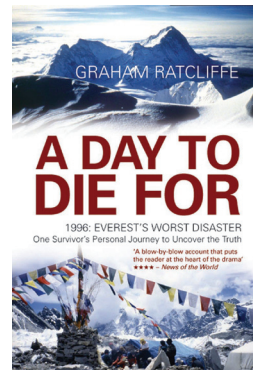
### **Everest & Conquest in the Himalaya: Science and Courage on the World's Highest Mountain**

Richard Sale and George Rodway

*Pen & Sword Books, 2011, pp 240, £19.99*

The Everest disasters of 1996 are among the most scrutinised events in mountaineering history. Numerous books have recounted how five members of commercial expeditions – three guides and two clients – died after being hit by a storm on the south-east ridge on 10 May. The most ambitious in its scope and research is *Into Thin Air* by the climber and journalist Jon Krakauer, which became the second most successful mountaineering book in history, behind only Maurice Herzog's *Annapurna*. Collectively these accounts can be read as a morality tale whereby the excesses of commercialism bring the hapless participants to their fate.

Now a new contender has stepped forward to re-examine what occurred.



British climber Graham Ratcliffe arrived on the South Col around 6.30pm on 10 May in readiness for his own summit attempt. As he lay in his tent that night he was unaware of the dramas being played out nearby. He was understandably shocked when he learned of the deaths – and, as he tells it, remained troubled in the years since, wondering whether he could have helped the stricken climbers blundering around on the South Col at the height of the storm.

Mountain accidents are often the outcome of a succession of incidents and causes, none of them decisive in themselves, but combining to the point where they achieve critical mass. Ratcliffe focuses on one crucial element, the storm which hit Everest while the south-east ridge was awash with climbers making their descent. The two leaders of the commercial expeditions, Scott Fischer and Rob Hall, already stand accused, by Krakauer and others, of distorting their decisions through competition to get their clients to the summit. Ratcliffe goes further, contending that they made their summit attempts in the full knowledge that a storm was forecast. As an aside, he also charges that they recommended to Ratcliffe and his colleagues that they make their summit bid on 11 May, when the storm was due to be at its height.

There could hardly be a graver charge against professional guides than that they deliberately led their clients into danger; and it is worth pointing out that since both Fischer and Hall died on Everest – Hall because he refused to abandon a client – they are unable to sue for libel. They have in addition been unable to present their view of events. However Ratcliffe has a third figure in his sights: David Breashears, leader of a US IMAX expedition, who Ratcliffe says was receiving forecasts which he was sharing with Scott and Fischer. Breashears wrote his own book about the disasters and Ratcliffe also attacks both him and Krakauer for not examining what forecasts the expeditions were receiving in their accounts of the disaster.

There is some truth in the second charge, and Krakauer appears to offer a hostage to fortune by referring to a 'rogue storm' hitting the mountain. But for the first charge to stick, Ratcliffe needs a smoking gun – and he has not found one. After a 10-year search, he established that Breashears and a Danish team, led by Mal Duff, were receiving forecasts via email sent over a satellite phone and printed in base camp. Breashears was receiving forecasts from the Met Office in London, the Danes from the ECMWF (European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts). The Met Office forecasts covered a six-day period and in forecasts for 5 and 7 May, Ratcliffe

relates, 'the storm on May 11 was apparent'. The forecasts to the Danish team, according to Ratcliffe, predicted 'a steady increase in the wind from 8 May onwards' and 'indicated the strength of the winds on 11 May quite clearly'.

It is in light of these that Ratcliffe levels his charge of negligence to the point of recklessness against Hall and Fischer. But for a charge of such gravity, the evidence is a long way short of conclusive. Ratcliffe has not produced the forecasts themselves, nor any data concerning wind strength and direction. Ratcliffe has made at best an inferential case which he attempts to strengthen by eliding his summary of the forecasts with retrospective accounts, obtained from the respective forecasting services, of what actually happened. In addition, Ratcliffe places enormous weight on an article he recalled reading in 1997 in which one of Hall's team was quoted as saying: 'We went on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May because we knew the weather was going to go bad the next day.' This particularly riled Ratcliffe, as his team had scheduled their attempt for 11 May at the commercial teams' suggestion. But despite years of searching, and even offering a reward, Ratcliffe was never able to find the article containing the crucial quote.

There is a further problem with Ratcliffe's proposed scenario, namely that the forecasts he describes do not reflect what happened on the mountain. Krakauer tells how the weather deteriorated on the afternoon of 9 May, with a full storm in progress by nightfall. But at 7.30 pm the wind had all but disappeared. As is evident from Krakauer, the decision to make the summit attempt seemed straightforward, and he and the rest of the Hall team set off at 11.30pm in near-perfect conditions. The weather remained clear until around 4.30pm on 10 May, by which time the climbers should have been at or near the South Col on their descent.

That was not what happened. A myriad of factors combined to slow the climbers. Through misunderstandings ropes had not been fixed on the most difficult sections, there were jams at notorious bottlenecks such as the Hillary Step, and teams were delayed by their least experienced members. Worse, the team leaders ignored their own turnaround deadlines. As a result notional safety margins were eroded so that when the storm did return the laggards were fatally exposed. Three died above the South Summit: Hall, his guide Andrew Harris and client Doug Hansen. Fischer died around 350 metres above the South Col, possibly suffering from a cerebral oedema. Hall's client Yasuko Namba died on the South Col.

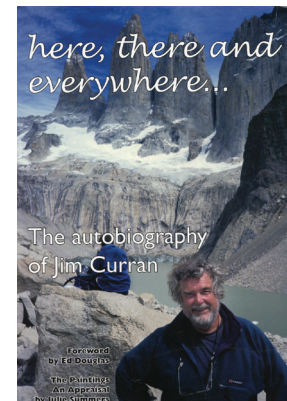
In relating his account, Ratcliffe suffered from the difficulty that he was unable to include any comment from those he criticises. Fischer and Hall were dead; he approached Breashears and got no reply. Breashears says now that he must have overlooked Ratcliffe's enquiry in the volume of letters and emails he habitually receives. When I contacted him, however, he delivered a forthright statement co-signed by his team member Ed Viesturs. Breashears insists that neither he nor any team members had seen any forecasts predicting a storm of the intensity that hit Everest. The Met Office forecasters had warned that their forecasting was poorly developed and not

to be relied on as the primary source of weather information. Breashears adds that the forecasts were just one element in their decision making, alongside daily forecasts on Radio Nepal and their own observations of cloud formations, indication of wind on other peaks, and barometric changes – 'skills and techniques that had served experienced mountaineers very well during long and demanding Himalayan careers'.

Breashears and others have also pointed out that in any case in 1996 climbers placed far less trust in forecasts than today, when up to the minute forecasts can be received on laptops. Breashears also insists that it was unthinkable that Hall or Fischer would have deliberately risked their clients' lives. 'Hall and all the team leaders wanted successful and safe ascents. Ed and I have acknowledged publicly that mistakes were made high on the mountain on that fateful day, but ignoring important weather information that would place one's team members, long-term climbing friends and others at risk was not one of them...'

Richard Sale and George Rodway also touch on 1996 in their book, *Everest & Conquest in the Himalaya*, but without drawing any conclusions. Much of the book consists of a useful summary of major ascents and accidents on Everest and elsewhere. It is at its best when it fulfils its brief of relating success in mountaineering to scientific advances. The summaries of early work on high-altitude physiology, giving all due credit to figures such as Alexander Kellas and Griffith Pugh, are the most illuminating part of the book.

*Peter Gillman*



### **Here, There and Everywhere**

Jim Curran

Edgebrook Publishing, 2012, pp 388, £30

Back in my student days in Sheffield I went along with a group of mates on a dank winter evening to an unpromising venue to hear Jim Curran speak about a mountaineering expedition he had recently returned from. While I cannot recall Jim's exact trip, his talk painted a compelling picture of far away exotic mountains and he kept us entertained with liberal doses of what I would learn was his trademark self-effacing humour.

Later I would come to know Jim socially as a big-hearted, generous and supportive man – a natural storyteller and pub raconteur second-to-none. Now at what he acknowledges is nearing the end of his life he has sat down and written a comprehensive autobiography, lavishly illustrated with many photographs. As such, it is a warm book about a life lived to the full; it feels very much like Jim wrote it predominantly for himself and appears to leave few stones unturned. For a time he struggled to come up with a suitable

title, but what he has settled on is very apt. Here then are the climbs, life-long friendships with some of the great and the good of British climbing, anecdotes from his time as art lecturer and filmmaker, all told with wit, humour and some superb one-liners. However, like any life it has not all been a bed of roses, with deaths of family members and close friends, failed relationships, divorce, tiffs – most notably with fellow climbing media types Jim Perrin and Kurt Diemberger, his involvement in the 1986 K2 tragedy and latterly the discovery of prostate cancer that despite treatment is going to kill him in the end. While these trials and failures call for some self-analysis, at no time does it slip into self-pity.

Personally it was not surprising to learn that Jim has suffered from bouts of depression, as a life lived with such intensity and highs is likely to dip into troughs from time to time. Thankfully he has managed to muddle his way through the darker periods and as somebody with such varied interests, passions, along with family and good friends he has always had plenty to look forward to.

By the end of the narrative Jim has come full circle and his first love of art (particularly drawing) is rekindled. Being something of a philistine when it comes to art, I confess to not reading Julie Summers's appraisal, but there are plenty of plates of drawings and paintings for the reader to do what I did and simply look and come to their own conclusions. For what it's worth I like most of Jim's output, but not all of it.

Jim describes himself as a jack-of-all-trades, simultaneously following several paths as a climber, writer, filmmaker, artist and college lecturer and wonders what might have happened if he had chosen to focus more on one discipline. Nonetheless, there is a weighty legacy of climbs, some fine mountaineering literature and films, drawings and paintings, students' lives influenced or shaped by his time as their mentor, children and grandchildren. And yes, as many already know, he's also a pretty good public speaker. I think most would happily settle for a lot less – Jim's has not been a life wasted and it was a privilege to read such an intimate recollection.

*Simon Yates*

### **The Wild Within Climbing the World's Most Remote Mountains**

Simon Yates

*Vertebrate Publishing, 2012, pp 240, £20*

In this, his third book, Simon Yates covers the decade he describes as the most productive and rewarding of his mountain life. It was also a period of change, both personally – he became a father – and in the world as a whole, with the expansion in technology and communications making the far corners of the earth seem less remote than previously. The book describes trips to some of the few remaining remote regions of the world, including Tierra del Fuego, Alaska and Greenland, where Simon has achieved an impressive tally of climbs. As well as inspiring accounts of the



climbs, the book tells amusing tales of acquiring new skills in order to access these remote mountains, such as sailing and horse riding. The accumulation of climbs described in *The Wild Within* reflects Simon's dedication and persistence and the fact that he chooses to climb with people who share his passion. In contrast, his account of the filming of *Touching the Void* highlights the lack of understanding between non-climbers and climbers and it is sad to read of Simon's experiences during and after the filming.

Simon writes about how becoming a father has changed his perspective of the world and of the joy of being able to share beautiful places and magical moments with his family. In response to the increased responsibility of becoming a parent he has managed to turn his passion for mountains into a paying profession both as a mountain guide and lecturer. By forming his own guiding company he has been able to share his love of mountains with others, taking them to some of the remote ranges he has come to love. And through his series of lecture tours Simon has entertained and inspired a far wider audience. It is impressive that despite this hectic work schedule he has seized every opportunity to meet old friends, make new ones and of course to climb wherever possible.

Throughout the book Simon discusses the ways in which the improvements in technology and communications have affected the world of climbing. In the past, once you had left the last major city there was almost no communication with the outside world, now it is possible to get a mobile phone signal almost anywhere. There are the obvious benefits, such as the ability to stay in touch with loved ones and keep them up to date with your progress. But Simon describes how this increased contact can at times make it difficult to find the focus needed to commit to a difficult climb and can result in more worry for those at home waiting for news.

*The Wild Within* is an enjoyable and inspiring read, a reflection of how the changing world and changing personal circumstances affects us, about the legacy we leave and what is really important in life.

*Joanna Campbell*

### **Full of Myself**

Johnny Dawes

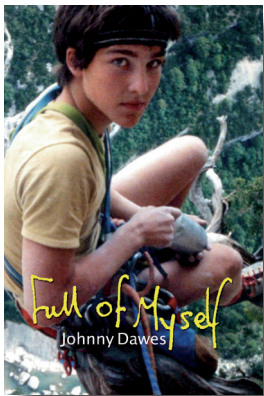
*Johnny Dawes Books, 2011, pp 298, £25*

In his generous and thoughtful foreword, George Smith recognises that Johnny Dawes 'has difficulty cracking the code to ordinary everyday stuff'. This not unsurprisingly idiosyncratic autobiography goes some way to explaining why.

The first part of the book is a high-speed chase through Dawes' early life

as the second son of wealthy parents. Their bemused confession that ‘we didn’t know what to do with you’ seems to set the pattern for relationships throughout his life and points up the concerted rebellion against protocol which he mounted from an early age.

Dawes is an engaging raconteur, describing vividly a childhood holiday in Vienna spent in Hitler’s bedroom, an early attempt at rallying in a Porsche Carrera touching 100mph down the long drive at the family home, a succession of travelling misadventures and a plethora of impromptu parties. His writing is a breathless, cinematic rush that embodies his self-confessed hyperactivity, his inability to leave unclimbed any promising new route on the walls of home and school.



The narrative loses momentum when Dawes chronicles his many remarkable climbs. Although his accounts are often poetic, they are many and overloaded with the sort of technical detail only fully comprehensible to climbers. This closes down the initial impact of the book; it begins expansively but then loses its grip on a wider audience. Oddly, the aftermath of his stunning ascent of *Indian Face* – the stuff of instant appeal to climbers and non-climbers alike – is never fully expanded on. Similarly, he provides tantalising snippets about famous climbing personalities, then goes no further. This will surely frustrate those who are familiar with the prominent players of the time and fail to enlighten those who are not. Conversely, the quality of the photographs

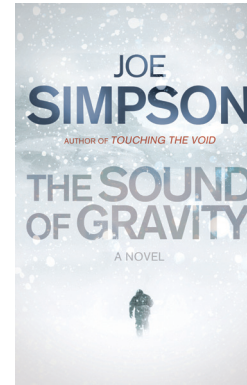
and the informative nature of their captions is consistent throughout, translating some of the more incomprehensible climbing terminology into the immediacy of impressive action.

*Full of Myself* is, however, not merely a roller-coaster ride of outrageous stories and equally outrageous climbs. There is an undercurrent of uncertainty which begins early in his life and, later, a deeper and more persistent melancholy. Uneasy at family parties, bullied at Uppingham, his public school, unable to tolerate ‘the herd’, he often feels isolated, both from his friends and his love of climbing, by a deep vein of unhappiness he attempts to understand, in part, through the construction of the narrative.

This book is more than an account of an unusual climber’s life. It marks something of a watershed in the sport, looking back at a time before sponsorship and a preoccupation with training and competition threatened to overtake the love of the rock and the audacity of the challenge. ‘Climbing can show us how rock and we are kin and make us at the end good friends,’ he says.

Dawes’s writing may occasionally lose its way in the twists and turns of his hectic thoughts but what never falters is, again, admirably pinpointed in George Smith’s foreword – ‘the gallantry of his assaults on the unknown’.

Val Randall



### The Sound of Gravity

Joe Simpson

Jonathan Cape, 2011 pp 234, £16.99

This is the second novel by Joe Simpson who was perhaps somewhat surprised to discover himself as a writer at the famous first attempt. Since *Touching the Void* owed much to the editorial advice of the late Tony Colwell, to whom the present book is co-dedicated, Simpson would not have known whether he was a one-book wonder, especially since the very structure of the two-voiced form was Colwell’s idea. It was therefore a rather bold move to attempt a novel for

his second book. With *The Water People* Simpson might have been testing himself as ‘a real writer’, as it were – someone who was not dependent upon having a gripping personal survival story to tell, but a writer with a shaping imagination and a range of characterisations at his finger tips. The result was a creditable first novel that I thoroughly enjoyed reading. Now comes something rather different – so different, in fact, that readers who come straight from *Touching the Void* will find a writer who has, in many ways, produced a contrasting kind of book at a very different stage of his life. *The Sound of Gravity* is slower, more philosophical, deeply introspective and driven by a mature devotion to love.

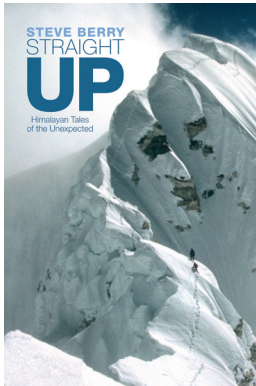
But if the opening chapter is a gripping read in the old Simpson survival mode, it’s actually about not gripping enough: a man lets his wife fall through his hands after she slips on their bivvi ledge. Except that she has noticed that in unclipping herself from their belay to take a pee she has also unclipped him. In fact, she has released herself from his grip to save him, which he will never know. The first section of the novel is about the man’s survival of a storm and his descent to search for the body that he finds in a crevasse into which he has fallen. More accurately, it is about the ebbs and flows of emotions, thoughts and memories of a lover who has lost what he thought he could keep safe.

Actually, the male climber has been unnamed in the first section, so it takes the reader some time to realise that the Patrick who has occupied the hut every summer for the last 25 years in the second section is the same man. And the reason for this long-term vigil is only fully revealed in the novel’s final pages. In between there are compelling characterisations of a series of visitors to the hut: the terminally ill climber, the mixed bag of a village rescue team, the arrogant macho climber who pushes his girlfriend, Cassie, into a state of blank hypothermia. Patrick, a grumpy old bachelor by this time, insists that the girl stays behind at the hut as her boyfriend pushes on through a building storm that lasts several days and dramatically rips apart the hut. Patrick’s methodical preparation for this eventuality is punctuated by a melting of his reserve that leads to a tender sex scene amid

the storm that is Lawrencian in its significance. Cassie returns to the hut later and tracks Patrick across the glacier to its snout where she finds him collecting, in a wooden chest stored there, the bones and clothing of his wife in 'a mixture of revulsion and love'. The novel's final sentences are a powerful and fully earned redemption in which Cassie says, 'You have her. We can take her home now.' Some may find the first section over-written, and the cynics, of whom Simpson would have been one in the past, may find a romantic redemption hard to swallow, but even hoary old alpinists are allowed to find love in the harshest of conditions. *The Sound of Gravity* is another bold statement by a mature and compelling writer who has yet again extended his reach, both emotionally and stylistically.

But I can't help smiling at the memory of the gnarly younger Simpson limping into the Byron from Siula Grande and grunting, 'I'm *not* going to write about it', and then later, 'I'm *not* going to give talks about it'. It's rather wonderful to consider where a little article for *High* magazine might lead.

Terry Gifford



### **Straight Up** **Himalayan Tales of the Unexpected**

Steve Berry

*Himalayan Kingdoms*, 2012, pp 166, £12.99

Steve Berry is the MD of Mountain Kingdoms, one of the UK's foremost trekking companies, an outfit that, at least to all outward appearances, runs with smooth efficiency, conveying its clients from Heathrow to the Himalaya and back, all creature comforts assured. Fascinating then to read of the young Berry's first muddling steps, pain and elation in equal measure, on a shoestring learning curve in the mountains that would eventually form the bedrock of his business.

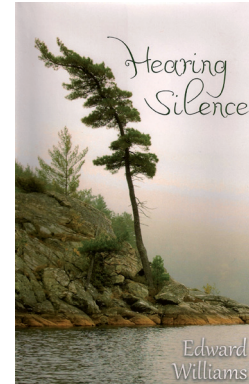
Self-published, *Straight Up* is really the story of Berry finding himself, not just as a climber, expedition leader and pioneer of trekking of Bhutan, but also emotionally. The book is dedicated to Berry's father, Roy, 'who gave me my love of mountains', however as Steve and his brother Richard gasp towards the summit of Nun (7135m) in Ladakh comes a searing piece of self-examination and indictment of Berry Snr's influence:

*I really never thought we would make it, but of course it had to be done. I had failed at school, I had failed to enter Hamble to train as a pilot, I had been arrested at the age of nineteen for possession of cannabis, I had been kicked out of my dad's best friend's engineering company, and I had smashed up my mother's car on more than one occasion. At the root of it all was a hate, love relationship with the Old Man, more hate than love in fact. Now I was going to show him.*

I was going to say, so an everyday story of growing up in the 1960s and 70s, but maybe your experience was different.

The Berry boys took their punishment and made the first British ascent of Nun, 'finishing the job' for Major Roy Berry who had attempted the peak with Tom Stobbart in 1946 while soldiering in India. If the relationship with the Old Man was tortured, Berry's frustrated love life, or should it be lust life, sounds even more so. Indeed his pursuit of the late Ginette Harrison while attempting unclimbed Gangkar Punsum (7570m) in Bhutan contains rather more confessional detail than some may care for. But then as Berry says, he's told his story 'warts and all'. And what a story it is.

Stephen Goodwin



### **Hearing Silence**

Edward Williams

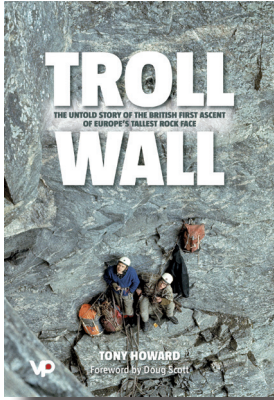
*Book Guild Publishing*, 2011, pp80, £9.99

Fifty years a member of the AC, and here's a first book of poems from Edward Williams. They have the ring of the real thing, finely crafted and informed by years of learning from the masters: 'Fine fragile hairy clasps now unfolded, / Flowed to sheltering fronds on sturdy stems.' We can watch a 'Bracken Forest' come alive before our eyes in lines such as these, which might seem to out-Hopkins Gerard Manley. Indeed, Hopkins' preoccupation with the glorious detail of the

natural world and its elusive source is an appropriate point of reference for these poems, although Williams seems more certain about that source: 'God's so pure and palpably perfect presence'. Against Hopkins' doubts, or 'loneliness, sorrows unspeakable ... inner ineptitude, disappointments', Williams finds that daffodil spikes through the frost and drab cold represent 'hope: a call to trust in holy care'.

It is his own vulnerability as a mountaineer that unsettles him as he faces the approaching storm and threat of avalanche: 'But what could I do, / Though I knew full well / The dangers of this place? / Only increase my pace.' In one poem titled 'Memory Gap', he reveals that he's quite right to be anxious about ineptitudes, beyond just the inner kind. 'At fourteen thousand feet, with all the world aglow, / The sun shone warm and clear, woolly clouds below', but the poem's title is revealed, in the last line, to refer to 'a blank about the fall'. At such times, as in the poem 'Avalanche', the poet is wise to seek to 'retain my prosaic poise'. Alpinists of a certain age will enjoy the crack of canvas, the roar of the Primus, the tinkle from crampon straps and the smell of stew from a billy on a wood fire. But some things do not change: the sense in the mountains of being 'betwixt mortal and eternal life'. That's just where Edward Williams' poems delight in negotiating, detailing, reflecting upon, a creative life.

Terry Gifford



### Troll Wall

Tony Howard

*Vertebrate Publishing, 2011, pp 208, £17.99*

The term 'big wall' can be applied to many faces, having no minimum requirement in height, verticality or difficulty; no European norm with which to categorise a route as being more than simply a 'climb'. It is perhaps only those who attempt the ascent that can really judge those special, defining qualities. For me a big wall is a route that weighs down on the climber, its difficulty beyond gymnastics, its sheer height and history enough to intimidate all but the bravest, or most ignorant.

Of the many walls I've tried (I'd like to say climbed, but then that's the nature of big walls) the one that I believe stands out as offering the true definition of a big wall is the Troll in Norway. It has a status much like that of the Eiger in the 1930s: probably unjustifiably dangerous to try, being loose (looser than the Eiger), wet (imagine a kilometre-high wall in autumnal North Wales) and hard (every hard Lakes mountain route one on top of the other). The Troll is no place to climb, and nothing is in the climber's favour; and therein lies its appeal – well, to a certain type of climber.

Knowing what I know about the Troll Wall added an extra element to reading Tony Howard's excellent book, a simple story well told, a classic *Boy's Own* adventure; only not one by Oxbridge graduates penning romantic prose about easy holiday summits but Northern lads taking on what I'd rate as the hardest unclimbed objective in Europe at the time – and climbing the buggler! Being a Northerner, it's no surprise that it's taken Tony Howard nearly half a century to get round to sharing the story with the rest of us; one of the most important British ascents of the last century; up there with the Fréney Pillar, Annapurna south face and the Trango Tower, but I for one am glad he eventually did.

Having been on the Troll Wall three times with all the best gear on the planet it's hard to imagine how any climber without such modern gear as belay devices, jumars, portaledges, haul bags, cams, or even a harness, would find the courage to attempt to be the first to climb such a thing, let alone by a line up the middle of the steepest, baddest piece of rock you could image. As I said, the Troll is no ordinary wall, not a scaled up crag such as the walls of Yosemite or the Dolomites, nor a gnarly alpine face like the Jorasses or Dru (which are just slabs really), oh no. If it was a crag scaled up, it would be one that even Gary Gibson wouldn't touch; covered in grass, its cracks full of mud, loose and dangerous 'stuff' hanging everywhere; and if it was to be compared to an alpine face, just take the Eiger and turn it upside down, making every slab a leaning overhanging wall, every ledge a roof (just make sure all the loose stuff that falls off is collected and piled back on any ledges you do find in order to retain the

ambiance). Add to this weather that would make a Welshman weep and a vertical height four times higher than Canary Wharf and you should get the picture, an objective that is pretty much a climber's worst nightmare.

One of the most fascinating things about *Troll Wall* is that it documents the cusp of a new age, the dawn of American climbing technology with the jumars, pulleys and steel pegs, that would revolutionise all such climbs in the future. Unfortunately for Tony and his team, they were just a few months, or even weeks too early to reap the benefits of this advance, unlike the Norwegian team on the wall at the same time who had the latest gear from the US. Instead they had to carry 240 soft steel pegs, a range of homemade nuts on slings, not to mention homemade leather harnesses and bivvi gear, all carried – often on lead – in 50lb sacks. The difficulty and sheer hard work and grit it took to climb the wall 'old school' style only serves to make the ascent even more incredible.

I expect if this book had come out after the ascent in 1965 it would now rank as a classic alongside *The White Spider*; indeed Tony's tale reads very much like the first ascent of the Eiger 1938 route, full of hazard, friendship and vertigo as well as the simplicity and drive of the rope. The book is a real page-turner as bit by bit Howard, John Amatt and Bill Tweedale push and push and push for the top, forever driven, forever barred by some new obstacle, the story always moving, devoid of any ego or bullshit. It's a story told by a man aware that he will be judged by his peers, so it's one not of heroes but of mates. Tony's reluctance to showboat is the root of it having taken so long for the story to be told in full, that and the fact that Tony is a pioneer of the 'Gone Climbing' lifestyle, leaving the manuscript to languish in his loft since the first ascent. The upside is that it is not one written by an older man looking back at his young self, but his young self telling it how it was half a lifetime ago, giving the account a freshness that brings the climb back to life.

What I enjoyed most of all, however, was reading of Tony's life either side of the Troll Wall; tales of working on whaling boats, 'out there' expeditions to the far North, and journeys to the warmer climbs of the desert. I got the impression of a man who was unafraid of life, as bold in living as in climbing. Reading the short chapters that book end the ascent of the Troll, I wanted to know more and entertained the hope that age might slow Tony enough for him to sit still and bang out a few more such memoirs. However at 70 he is still climbing (and looking) like a man half his age, so I guess *Troll Wall* will probably be our lot.

*Andy Kirkpatrick*

### Woman on The Rocks:

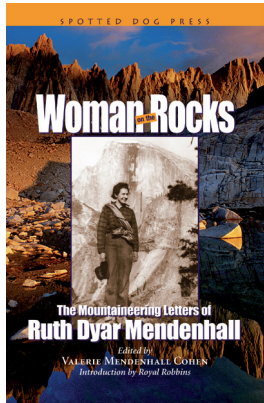
#### **The Mountaineering Letters of Ruth Dyar Mendenhall**

edited by Valerie Mendenhall Cohen

*Spotted Dog Press, 2009, pp 349, US\$18.95*

In Appendix E, Valerie Mendenhall Cohen recounts her mother's thoughts

about the letters – in excess of 900 pages of them – which spanned 50 years of her climbing and mountaineering experiences. She felt they were like ‘a series of novels in which I am the heroine... like having a sort of verbal journey back into the Past’. They are, unquestionably, both of these things, providing both an idiosyncratic perspective on the way in which climbing developed in California in the 1930s onwards and a personal view of the role of a female climber in this patriarchal landscape in which women were excluded from all-male climbing expeditions.



Ruth Dyar Mendenhall’s introduction to climbing came as a result of joining the Sierra Club Ski Mountaineers in order to ‘meet new people and have fun’. And have fun she certainly did. Her early letters are shot through with the enthusiasm for physical exercise and the sheer joy of being in the mountains, which lasted throughout her life. Indeed, it is clear from her first trips that she is incapable of understanding those who never travelled to the peaks she found it impossible to live without: ‘I don’t know how people get along without climbing mountains.’

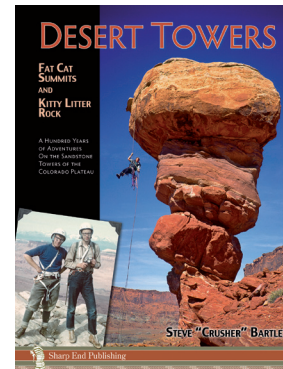
Her use of language is delightfully anachronistic and her descriptions of her fellow climbers candid and forthright – ‘Howard cannot yodel, but can howl in a wondrously foey way just like a pained cow.’

– effortlessly enveloping the reader in the climbing environment and the companionship it spawned. She writes with the same breathless energy she brought to her climbs, cataloguing the hardships endured with a pride born out of a love of total immersion into the landscape and a fiercely competitive nature; she is scathing about another female climber who ‘had to wait for Brinton to tell her practically every move to make with hand or foot’.

Ruth’s skill, nerve and determination enabled her to make 21 first ascents with her husband, John Mendenhall, often with homemade or adapted equipment. Many of her early climbs on mixed ground in the Sierra Nevada were made in crepe-soled tennis shoes, yet she makes light of difficulties and physical deprivation alike. Her home life was equally energetic and her standards as exacting. She wanted to be seen to succeed in this realm, just as she did on rock. Her children were left behind with grandparents in their early years when they were too young to accompany their parents on expeditions, but as soon as they were old enough they were made a part of the outdoor life of physicality, challenge and emotional fulfilment which was at the very heart of Ruth’s and John’s lives.

*Woman on the Rocks* provides an entertaining and insightful portrait of a charismatic and committed climber who cheerfully ignored the barriers erected to dissuade her sex from participating in climbing and mountaineering, and who wrote with wit and irreverence, puncturing the posturings of the men often less at ease than she on rock but who sought, in vain, to keep her from it.

Val Randall



## Desert Towers

**A Hundred Years of Adventure on the Sandstone Towers of the Colorado Plateau**

Steve ‘Crusher’ Bartlett

Sharp End Publishing, 2010, pp 352, US\$49.95

Like its subjects, this lavish book is monumental. *Desert Towers* was shortlisted for the 2011 Boardman Tasker Award and the fact that Bartlett came away empty-handed underlines a downside of the BT in having just a single winner with the emphasis on a ‘literary’ work. They do things differently at

Banff, with half a dozen different award categories. *Desert Towers* walked away with the ‘mountaineering history’ prize at Banff, though it could equally have taken the ‘image’ prize.

The BT judges don’t have that flexibility, which is a pity, for the 2011 panel was certainly impressed by *Desert Towers*. A peek into Bernard Newman’s judicial notebook gives a flavour:

*I was totally blown away by this book. Everything about it is on the grand scale: the breadth of climbing history, the scope of the writing, the characters contributing and profiled, the style and audacity of the climbing and of course the star of the show: the exquisite desert landscape.*

*The production values reflect the subject: large hardbound format, superb reproduction and printing, and most importantly informed and skilful photo editing. The group photos, always the soul of a climbing history, span the decades and show that ‘cool’, like sex, is nothing new. Once you dip into it, the only thing that will make you put it down is the ache in your forearms!*

Counting against the BT chances of *Desert Towers* was the fact that it is in part an anthology. Many of the 30 or so essays have been culled from American magazines and journals – like Don Wilson on the first ascent of Spider Rock or Fred Becky on Moses – great for conveying the actuality of the climbing and likely to be ‘new’ to most readers, certainly in the UK, however they are not original.

The sections by Bartlett himself however are both original and engaging, particularly his charting of Native American history, notably that of the Navajos for whom many of the most iconic monoliths are sacred. One of the most cinematic of the fabulous photos in this book is of Eric Bjornstad and Fred Beckey in 1965, stood by a convertible of the era, gazing across to Shiprock. But climbing is banned on the Navajo Nation, and as Bartlett observes: ‘For modern climbers Shiprock is so far off the radar screen it could be in Namibia instead of New Mexico.’ (And for more reasons than the ban.)

Later, weighing the ban, Bartlett concludes that in some ways the current climber-access situation suits everyone: the Navajo Nation sees almost no climbers, and for the self-selected elite who do attempt the illegal towers the possibility of arrest can be looked on as just one more hazard.

It is choice irony that this superlative history of a uniquely American aspect of the climbing game should be the work of an Englishman who learnt his rock climbing trade in the Peak District. But Bartlett went native decades ago and as John Sherman says in the Foreword: 'He may talk funny, but Crusher is a desert rat through and through'.

*Stephen Goodwin*



**Exploring Greenland:  
Twenty years of adventure in the  
great arctic wilderness**

Jim Gregson

*Vertebrate Publishing, 2012, pp160, £20*

This book in landscape format is a beautifully illustrated record of the author's various summer trips over a period of 20 years to explore not 'Greenland', as the title suggests, but a limited area of the mountains of the

central east coast of that island, mostly made possible by access with a ski-equipped Twin Otter aircraft organised through the initially developing but now ubiquitous Tangent Expeditions.

Each visit is the subject of a separate chapter covering mountain ascents and ski journeys, the chapters linked with shorter notes covering general issues such as ice, weather and fauna. While most of the action is in the higher alpine regions bordering the Inland Ice there are two sections on travelling in the ice-free areas in the interior of Scoresbysund which provide an interesting contrast.

Jim has obviously fallen under the spell of the Arctic and transmits his feelings well. Having been on similar expeditions to the areas covered I found it easy to empathise with his enthusiasm after a good mountain day and with his frustrations caused by bad weather and delayed pick ups, but I wonder if other less committed readers will appreciate all the detail without a map to which locations and routes can be related.

Throughout the body of this book the photographs and text provide enduring images of the wonderful mountain, glacier and ice cap world of this part of Greenland, for which it is easy to share the author's affection. To those, like the author, who are already committed to the Arctic this book will be a great affirmation of their addiction. To those not yet so affected it will surely encourage them to join the ranks.

*Derek Fordham*

**Tasmanian Summits To Sleep On**

Kevin Doran

*Desdichado in support of Bookend Trust, 2011, pp 128, Aus \$44.99*

This book is an engaging collection of the author Kevin Doran's expeditions



over 30 years accompanied by Ossie Ellis and others on ascents of the main peaks in the Tasmanian wilderness, with the added commitment of sleeping on their summits. The excellent photographs show their routes in all seasons, revealing the strange and lonely landscape of Tasmania's mountains, most of which involve two or three day approach walks and

have seriously rocky summits.

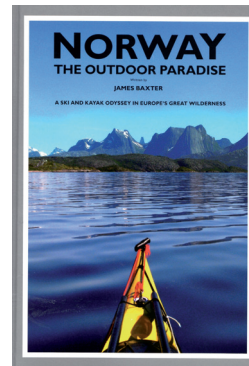
The author dedicates this book to the memory of Ossie Ellis. He says in the introduction: 'He befriended me when I was a newly immigrant mountaineer in Tasmania and we became climbing and bushwalking companions for nearly thirty years. He could float a plan for an expedition and I'd probably routinely go along with it.'

Ossie Ellis was an important figure in Tasmanian climbing and became a co-founder of Pencil Pine Lodge, which later developed into Cradle Mountain Lodge, situated just north of the Cradle Mountain-Lake St. Clair National Park.

Kevin Doran was born in England where he trained as a doctor; he has climbed mountains in various parts of the world and has lived in Tasmania since 1971.

For anyone familiar with Tasmania, this book will no doubt bring back strong memories, and for those who aren't the book reveals the surprising richness and variety of the mountains of this unique island, a territory so near to mainland Australia but yet so different.

*Julian Cooper*



**Norway The Outdoor Paradise:  
A ski and kayak odyssey in Europe's great  
wilderness**

James Baxter

*Scandinavian Publishing, 2012, pp448, £29.95*

This is the story of James Baxter's remarkable eight and a half month journey, in which he skied the length of Norway from south to north (*Norge på langs*) and then kayaked back round the coastline to finish in Oslo, clocking a total distance of 6213 kilometres. Whilst many Norwegians have done the ski trip and a few

have kayaked the north to south coast route, nobody is known to have done the two expeditions consecutively without any break. Undoubtedly, this is one of the finest achievements by a British traveller since the days of Empire. For James this great journey was the consummation of a lifelong

love affair with Norway's wilderness and her people. The expedition also had a charitable purpose in raising funds for schools in the remote Limi valley of north-west Nepal, another area which James knows and loves.

James had already produced an attractive guidebook to the 2000-metre peaks of the Hurrungane massif in the Jotunheimen under his own publishing imprint, which I regard as one of the most informative and inspiring guides I have ever used. The account of the ski-kayak journey employs similar layout, graphics and typeface, but is an altogether weightier volume, recording in detail every day of the 249 that he was on the move.

The diary narrative encourages the reader to become immersed in the vastness of the terrain. The early weeks are an exciting struggle for survival as James fights a lonely battle against huge snowfalls and maritime tempests across the southern plateaux. Once he quits the Jotunheimen massif and heads into the interior the pace and interest of the narrative flags. One senses the easy rhythm but also the tedium of a hundred days spent traversing forests and tundra plateaux, each ending in the twilight search for lodgings in remote cabins. James's freedom to travel is to be envied, but the text makes such repetition of minor problems, observations and encounters that at times you feel that you are wading with him in the snow. Yet this reflects the reality of wilderness as much as any romantic evocation. Scandinavian landscape doesn't pander to our taste for variety and excitement, and is barren, unending and oppressive as well as it is beautiful.

Throughout the journey James is helped by countless kind Norwegian folk, who provide lodgings, meals and social comfort wherever he pitches at nightfall. His narrative pauses to describe many notable events in Norway's history from the disastrous invasion of the Swedish Karoliner in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the Nazi occupation of the Second World War. James also diverts from his daily routine to tell us a great deal about the country's geology and culture.

In the straight-laced tradition of pre-war expedition writing, James is noticeably reserved about himself. There are few moments of doubt, no introspective interludes, and no hints of homesickness. His ability to delegate his business and disappear for nine months remains unexplained. How we would love to know how to pull off that trick! We only find out that he was once married to a Norwegian when his ex-mother-in-law offers accommodation near the end of the trip. This is all rather frustrating. Apart from occasional mild self-deprecation, he never adopts the detached satirical view of himself that might have been revealing, and so we end the journey little wiser about James the man.

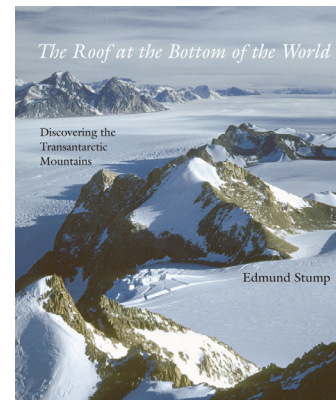
The kayaking half of the book is distinctly more scenic, colourful and adventurous than the ski journey. Going round Nordkapp you share the commitment of crossing 20km of choppy open water of death-inducing temperature. The island paradise from Tromsø down to Trondheim is splendidly described and his travails dodging surf and skerries round the Skagerrak coast make for a gripping finale to the adventure.

The book has hundreds of photographs, many of them so beautiful that

they deserved full-page reproduction. There are 35 large-scale maps to help the reader plot the journey's progress.

By the end you will be with James in heart and soul, and fulsome in admiration of the passion and patience which enabled him to achieve this wonderful odyssey. We might wish that the book was a hundred pages shorter and that diary discipline had occasionally been relaxed in favour of reflective narrative, but no reader could be left unmoved by what he achieved with such modesty and willpower. Most importantly, many will be inspired to get out into the Scandinavian wilderness and explore themselves as a result of this book.

*Martin Moran*



**The Roof at the Bottom of the World:  
Discovering the Transantarctic  
Mountains**

Edward Stump

*Yale University Press, 2011, pp 272, £25*

As a professional geologist, who has visited Antarctica on numerous occasions, Stump is in a good position to write this authoritative historic summary of scientific and exploratory discovery in a fascinating region of Antarctica. Focusing on the area surrounding the Transantarctic Mountains and early attempts to reach the magnetic and geographic South Poles, Stump has extensively reviewed the reports of pioneering explorers such as Ross, Scott, Shackleton, Amundsen and Byrd, among others, to compile a comprehensive account of man's endeavours during the opening third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that culminated in detailed aerial and land-based mapping of the region. Supplemented by route-marked maps and modern personal photographs, Stump attempts to bring to life the revelations presented to these early explorers and to give some indication of the physical challenges which they faced in this often hostile terrain. In later chapters the author reviews the lesser known nationalistic wrangling that took place over 'ownership' of parts of Antarctica in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century followed by the dominance of scientific endeavour that ultimately led to the International Geophysical Year in 1957 and later ratification of the Antarctic Treaty, subsequently signed by 67 nations.

On the negative side I thought that Stump frequently delves too deeply into the trivial detail extracted from some of the pioneering accounts and that his personal experiences, embedded in boxes within the text, appear somewhat anachronistic in such an account. Nevertheless, on balance, this book should appeal to all those with an interest in Antarctic endeavour

and exploration. For those intrigued by the names given to mountains, glaciers and other prominent features on topographical maps of Antarctica the book will provide interesting insights as to how these were derived.

*Derek Buckle*



### **On Top of the World: The New Millennium**

Richard Sale, Eberhard Jurgalski & George Rodway

*Snowfinch Publishing, 2012, pp 248, £30*

This handsome volume provides a welcome antidote to the depressing reports from 'Circus Everest' in May 2012 accompanied by photos of endless columns of punters gasping their way up the Lhotse Face. Crowds have been the Everest story for more than a decade. Meanwhile, as Sale and his collaborators remind us, amazing things have been going on

elsewhere on 8000-metre peaks – siege style on super-hard technical routes or fast and light when the weather windows open. It's been the era of the likes of Christophe Lafaille, Denis Urubko and Simone Moro.

One wonders if Richard Sale ever sleeps. He has authored or co-authored three of the books reviewed in this *AJ*. For this one he was joined by high altitude physiologist and author George Rodway and 8000m data compiler Eberhard Jurgalski. Together they have produced a sequel to John Cleare's and Sale's *On Top of the World*, published in 2000, covering the history of the 14 big peaks up to the end of 1999. *New Millennium* essentially picks up the story, with just brief revisits of 20<sup>th</sup> century pioneering plus a re-evaluation of the first ascents of K2 and Broad Peak.

Jurgalski's tables are simultaneously fascinating and sobering. One table lists climbers who have summited 10 to 13 of the 8000ers; its footnotes are a roll call of those for whom pursuit of the final big ticks cost their lives. It cannot escape notice that AC member Alan Hinkes is not included in the table of climbers who have summited all 14 8000ers. According to Jurgalski, Hinkes's ascent of Cho Oyu is not recognised: 'Hinkes certainly reached the summit plateau, but may not have reached the true summit.'

*New Millennium* muses on the numerous adventures waiting on the 8000m peaks for alpinists with vision and commitment, starting with Everest's west ridge alpine style, and also on ethical questions. The latter include the possibility of climbers tackling routes beyond their abilities when the idea of 'extreme rescue' by helicopter has taken hold, and 'doping', whether by supplementary oxygen or, say, dexamethasone taken as a prophylactic, potentially allowing alpinists to ascend higher, faster. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has also brought a crop of fine new images, used effectively here to complement the story of alpinism at its most tenuous limits.

*Stephen Goodwin*



### **Ascent: The Vertical Life**

2011 & 2012 issues

*From the publishers of Rock and Ice magazine, US\$12.95*



Early copies of the journal *Ascent* retail for about £10 in the second-hand bookstore I frequent in Carlisle: hardbacks a little more, softbacks a little less. I see that I paid £6 for the 1989 volume, by which time the slim magazine of the late 1960s had grown into a book of more than 200 pages. Inscribed inside the cover of that 1989 *Ascent* is a 'Merry Christmas' greeting to Andrew from David and Linda. No surnames are given and I have no idea as to identity of these people, but I would have shared the opinion offered in the accompanying message:

*I've always enjoyed American books on mountaineering – they seem to have kept the spirit of amateurism which is sometimes lacking in the massive expeditions.*

Would David and Linda, or any of us, express the same sentiments today? The re-emergence of

*Ascent* after an absence of 13 years provides an opportunity to look at what has changed in this stable of mountain writing, what it reflects, and perhaps what has not changed.

First, let us be glad that *Ascent* is back. The fact that Steve Roper and Allen Steck, the founding editors back in 1967, have both written essays for the new incarnation must be a welcome seal of approval for the revivalist work of the editorial team at *Rock and Ice* magazine and publisher Duane Raleigh.

*Ascent* began life in July 1967; West Coast climbing's contribution to the 'Summer of Love' sweeping their home cities. The 'far out idea' – Roper's words echoing the argot of the time – was to showcase good writing and high-quality photography. And so it did. Published by the Sierra Club and featuring early work by writers such as David Roberts, Doug Robinson and Galen Rowell, *Ascent* set the standard for journal writing for two decades, but gaps between issues lengthened as Steck and Roper ran out of steam.

As Roper puts it in an essay entitled 'Genesis' in the 2011 volume, they called it a day in 1999, after 14 issues, because: 'The glossy climbing magazines paid a lot more than we could... and we simply couldn't attract the best writers. Photos all looked the same and the prose we received didn't seem to have the spark it once did. Steck and I became jaded in our waning years.'

Roper's words certainly strike a chord with this journal editor. It goes back to David and Linda's words about 'the spirit of amateurism' – and 'amateurism' in its proper French origin of doing something for love, and

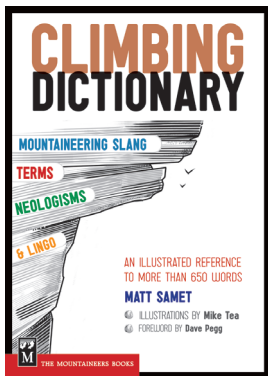
not in the corruption whereby an ‘amateur’ climber is often equated with a bumbler. The Sierra Club never paid Steck and Roper more than \$100 each per issue – ‘mainly used to score our “editing wine”’ – and contributors received just a token honorarium, starting at \$25.

That sense of a journal put together by friends at wine-soaked after-dinner editing sessions at Steck’s Berkeley home is gone from the new *Ascent*. The emphasis is still on art and stories well told – 2011 features, among others, Geof Childs, Tommy Caldwell, John Long and Doug Robinson; 2012 Reinhold Messner, Renan Ozturk, Dave Pagel and Colin Wells – but there is a slick professionalism too. As J J Cale sings it: ‘Money talks, you’d better believe it.’

So the old *Ascent*’s stodgy subtitle, ‘the mountaineering experience in word and image’ is replaced by ‘The Vertical Life’, with more market appeal to our vanity, and there are pages of glossy advertisements. I am not knocking ‘ads; there are a good many at the back of this *AJ*; bills have to be paid, and maybe the odd bottle of wine purchased too. It’s just different.

For the past decade, the literary and photographic aspirations of *Ascent* have guided that other US publication, *Alpinist*. Although the new *Ascent* is an annual event and *Alpinist* a quarterly, they are competing on the same territory. Raleigh’s *Ascent* falls in appearance between *Alpinist* and *Rock and Ice*. Surely the market is getting a little crowded, or have American climbers an insatiable appetite for this stuff, and the deep pockets to sustain it? (Not dirtbags after all.) I haven’t sufficient knowledge to judge the economics, but as a journal editor I am aware that the number of good mountain writers is worryingly finite and, as Roper observed, there is a danger of photos looking all the same. That said the new *Ascent* has got off to a cracking start, and good luck to it.

Stephen Goodwin



**Climbing Dictionary:**  
Mountaineering slang, terms, neologisms & lingo  
Matt Samet

*The Mountaineers Books, 2011, pp 250, US\$ 14.95*

What use is a climbing dictionary? OK, it might be useful to a non-climber as a glossary, but shouldn’t actual climbers know these words? Maybe, but you would have to be well-travelled to know all the 650 words explained in this US-centric publication.

Samet’s highly entertaining little book puts in mind that famous misquotation: ‘England and America are two countries divided by a common language.’

How many UK climbers would get a reference to ‘Jimmy Deans’? It’s swollen-knuckle fingers brought on by too much crack climbing; Deans was the creator of a popular brand of breakfast sausage, and also a country

music singer (remember ‘Big Bad John’?)

‘Jimmy Deans’ type of knowledge might be regarded as optional for your US road trip, but any American partner would appreciate it if you knew what he meant when he yells ‘Up rope!’ It translates as ‘take in slack’, or probably when said with feeling: ‘Tight rope!’

And what about a ‘Hawaiian’? Any idea? Well think the 1970s TV programme *Hawaii Five-O*, then *Five-O* equals fifty and the word, coined at Smith Rock, Oregon, means a fall of 50ft or more. Thus I can say, last year I did a Hawaiian and survived to tell the tale.

So the fun of delving into the climber’s argot would be the main reason for owning Samet’s dictionary (zamily illustrated by Mike Tea). Two more would be that it might help translating American climbing magazines, even one or two terms in Andrew Bisharat’s article in this *AJ*, and secondly – an editor’s gripe this – that climbers are not always the best spellers in the world.

Stephen Goodwin

**Spirit of Adventure:**  
An Anthology of Mountain and Wilderness Tales inspired by the K2  
pioneer Henry Haversham Godwin-Austen

Edited by Catherine Moorehead & David Dunmur

*Moyhill Publishing, 2011, pp 303*

This anthology celebrates the adventurous spirit of Henry Haversham Godwin-Austen (1834-1923), the great military mountaineer of the Victorian era who pioneered the exploration of K2 (8611m).

For a time the world’s second highest mountain was eponymously his until it reverted to the more prosaic K2 as the second peak to be officially measured in the Karakoram. Although his name still resounds on the approach glacier to the mountain, it was Godwin-Austen’s old school, the Royal Grammar School, Guildford, one of Britain’s ancient independent schools, that sparked the idea for this collection of essays and recollections by 30 former pupils and teachers who inherited his powerful interest in climbing mountains and exploring wilderness.

What is refreshing about this anthology of mountain adventure is that there are none of the usual suspects, only an eclectic selection of individuals from a broad spectrum of day jobs; criminology to aerospace, software engineering to management consultancy, with a shared theme of time spent among mountains. The wanderings range around the world from serious ascents, such as Mike Norris unsupported and oxygenless on Cho Oyu, via an assortment of adventures in a variety of Alpine regions to simple days out enjoyed among unthreatening hills.

Guildfordians clearly remain an adventurous lot and this collection of their stories reflects the legacy Godwin-Austen left to his old school, handed down as a torch that still burns brightly.

Ronald Faux



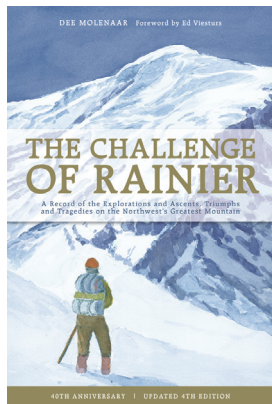
### The Climbers' Club Journal 2011

Editor John Yates

*The Climbers' Club, 2011, pp 170*

How many CC traditionalists, I wonder, received the Club's 2011 *Journal* with a gnashing of teeth as they took in its radically different format and the fact that their bookshelves might not be deep enough for it to sit alongside previous volumes? Praise should really be the first response. Journal editors regularly ponder redesigns but I cannot recall one as total as this transformation of the *CCJ*. The wider page format has allowed for dramatic use of photographs, wide margins and double columns of text giving a clean, open feel to the pages. And thereon are chronicled the adventures of Club members as active as their predecessors, from Mugu to Madagascar, via the Craig Cwm Du and Harrison's Rocks – as bold, almost, as John Yates, his editorial team, and the late Tim Oliver who did much of the ground work for this attractive reincarnation. Reviews of other club journals are not normally carried in the *AJ* but here is an endeavour that deserves saluting. Congratulations! *SG*

formation of the *CCJ*. The wider page format has allowed for dramatic use of photographs, wide margins and double columns of text giving a clean, open feel to the pages. And thereon are chronicled the adventures of Club members as active as their predecessors, from Mugu to Madagascar, via the Craig Cwm Du and Harrison's Rocks – as bold, almost, as John Yates, his editorial team, and the late Tim Oliver who did much of the ground work for this attractive reincarnation. Reviews of other club journals are not normally carried in the *AJ* but here is an endeavour that deserves saluting. Congratulations! *SG*



### The Challenge of Rainier

Dee Molenaar

*The Mountaineers Books, 2011, pp 432, US\$24.95*

This 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary reissue of Dee Molenaar's classic history of Mount Rainier (4392m) in the Pacific Northwest, Washington state, includes restored illustrations and a new foreword by Ed Viesturs who was a Rainier guide during the 1980s. Molenaar's professional association with the mountain began in 1940 and it is a mark of both the allure of Mount Rainier and Molenaar's enthusiasm that he has once again met the challenge of updating this history when, as he says, most of his early climbing

companions have hung up their nailed boots and now use their axes for garden work. *SG*



### Mountain Heroes: Portraits of Adventure

Huw Lewis-Jones

*Conway, in association with Polarworld, 2011, pp 288, £30*

Welcome to the Big Book of Beards. Ruskin takes the prize with a flowing, Old Testament cascade that, like the piled hair of Gertrude, Countess of Groan, could hide numerous nesting birds. Scots Andy Nisbet and Adam Watson are contenders, and so might be Cory Richards, looking traumatised on Gasherbrum II, but his growth is

too encrusted in ice and snow to be sure.

My apologies to Huw Lewis-Jones for being flippant when he has, in fact, produced something rather magnificent with this collection of portraits of the great and the good of mountaineering, plus a few young pretenders and a handful of *real* mountain people – that is those actually at home there. Perhaps it was his title that irritated me. 'Heroes' has become tabloid-speak, a word devalued. It should be reserved for those who rush into burning buildings to save complete strangers, or for Greek myths. And to be fair I doubt any of Lewis-Jones's subjects would regard themselves as heroes.

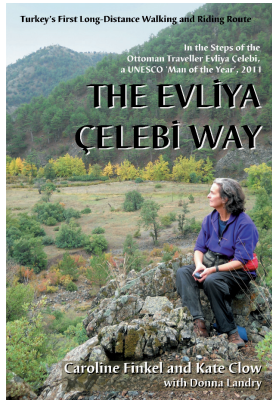
Steph Davis (first female ascent of the *Salathé Wall*, 2005) exudes a more grounded sense of self when she tells Lewis-Jones of her delight in the mountains. 'Spending time in wild places will always remind you that in the great scheme of nature, the universe and geological time, you are just the tiniest smidge of all the other energies at play. And I think this really good for people to remember.'

While it is the portraiture that makes the initial impact and feeds the desire to own this book, it is the writing that provides the sustaining meat. Those national treasures, Bonington and Scott, bookend *Mountain Heroes* with *Fore* and *Afterwords*, there is a thought-provoking essay by Jack Ives and AC hon member Bruno Messerli on the environmental, cultural and political pressures on mountains, a fascinating four-way discussion between Lewis-Jones, Gordon Wiltsie, Glen Denny and Cory Richards entitled 'Photography Now', plus a short essay for each of the mountaineers portrayed.

Naturally, many of the portraits have been taken on mountainsides, showing their subjects at their gnarly, steely-eyed best; it comes as a surprise then to turn over a page and by the dateline 'Hathersage, 2009' see Ron Fawcett in the bath, naked except for a pair of yellow rubber washing-up gloves. Every picture tells a story, but you have to cross-refer to the text to have this bizarre scene explained: Big Ron was so dedicated to his climbing that he used to wear gloves in the bath to preserve the tough skin on his hands.

Lewis-Jones says he will consider the book a success if people enjoy its rich photography, pause awhile on the writings and are perhaps inspired to head off to see something of the beautiful mountains with their own eyes. Only a dullard would not be so inspired by *Mountain Heroes*. Lewis-Jones can count it a success.

Stephen Goodwin



### The Evliya Çelebi Way

Caroline Finkel and Kate Clow, with Donna Landry

*Upcountry (Turkey) Ltd, 2011, pp 160 plus map, £17.99*

Evliya Çelebi's 17<sup>th</sup> century work *Seyahatname* (Book of Travels) is one of the longest travel accounts in world literature. You wouldn't want to carry its 10 volumes in your pack across the mountains and plains of Anatolia, not least because some have never been translated from Ottoman Turkish. However there is no need: this comprehensive guidebook provides not only all the practicalities but fascinating insights into the culture, past and present, of this little-visited area

of Turkey. Evliya (1611-1685) passed this way in 1671 after setting out from Istanbul on a pilgrimage to Mecca. The Evliya Çelebi Way follows the early stages of that journey through north-west Anatolia. Running 600km long from the Sea of Marmara via Bursa, Kütahya and Afyon to Usak and Simav, it is described as Turkey's 'first long-distance walking and riding route', though in fact the walking route is little more than half that length – omitting sections across the plains. The book follows the style of earlier books produced by Kate Clow, creator of both the Lycian Way and St Paul's Trail and reflects once again her love of the Turkish countryside and desire to promote a sustainable form of 'soft' tourism in these backwaters. SG

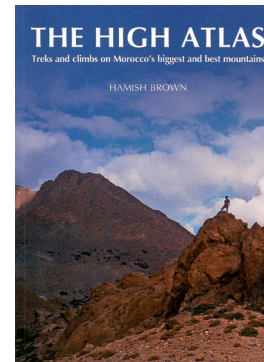
### The High Atlas

Treks and climbs on Morocco's biggest and best mountains

Hamish Brown

*Cicerone, 2012, pp 224, £17.95*

Do not be misled by the title. This is not a conventional guidebook. Rather, AC member Hamish Brown has brought together the fruits of almost half a century of wandering in the mountains of Morocco to produce a work of inspiration. The necessary background for planning a trip and getting to grips with the bureaucracy, culture and language is all here, but when it comes to the itineraries, Brown is not so much guiding your every step as telling how it was for him, encouraging you into diversions to take in, say,



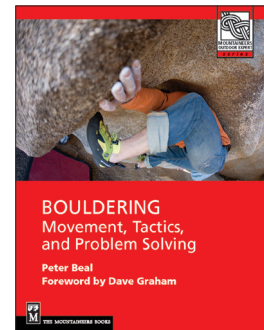
ancient rock art, gossiping as if you'd met him on the trail somewhere and he was passing on his top tips.

The book features 48 routes spread across the full length of the Atlas. Each has a sketch map and panel of essential detail, notably 'commitment'. Many are multi-day trips or peaks to be tackled in the course of a longer trek. The strength of the book though is in Brown's discursive route descriptions and excellent photographs, combining to create an alluring portrait of the mountains and Berber people.

Brown lays great emphasis on the use of local guides, indeed the book is dedicated to one, his friend El Aouad Ali, who was a key figure in Brown's 96-day traverse of the Atlas, undertaken in 1995 and described in his book *The Mountains Look on Marrakech*. Contact details for Ali, in the Western Atlas, and guides for other ranges are listed in a useful set of appendices.

The generous format of *The High Atlas* means this is not a pocketbook guide, however Brown is willing to produce the relevant area for any of the featured hills, at A4 or A3 size, for anyone who asks. But give him sufficient notice: Brown spends months at time in Morocco, still adding to the rich store of experience that has been poured into this inspiring book.

Stephen Goodwin



### Bouldering Movement, Tactics, and Problem Solving

by Peter Beal

Foreword by Dave Graham

*The Mountaineers Books 2011*

If, in the scope of human endeavour, Himalayan mountaineering is a celebration of the vast, then bouldering is a celebration of the minute. By its very nature bouldering involves short, intense experiences, but having said that its exponents can be just as obsessive, often in

the long term, about their goals as those with their mind's eye focussed on some vast unclimbed wall in the Hindu Kush.

I once asked Alex MacIntyre how he coped with being frightened for long periods of time in the big mountains? 'It's addictive, you become addicted to fear. . . .' Well, bouldering is certainly addictive and (depending on the size of the boulder) the fear is of failing.

Now I am (was) what's touchingly referred to by modern climbers as an 'Old School' boulderer (i.e. our problems have holds), but the desire, the

addiction stays with you into old age and structural infirmity. Recently at the climbing wall Jan and I were watching some young people attempting, with varying degrees of success, a ludicrously overhanging problem on well spaced and tiny holds. I felt myself irresistibly drawn in, and began shuffling towards them. 'Bernard, no. BERNARD – NO!' warned Jan, like a sober wife pulling a stropky husband away from confrontation. 'It's not worth it.'

So it was with a feeling of curiosity tinged with envy that I picked up this latest training tome from The Mountaineers Books. Maybe it would convince me, as I've often jibed, that that there's more to bouldering than taking your shirt off and wearing a woolly hat.

Basically this book is a bouldering *Know The Game*. There's an introduction by those twin gods of bouldering Dave Graham and John Gill. There follows a detailed history of bouldering which contains a nod towards Fontainebleau and Britain before 'Bouldering as we know it today began to emerge in the 1960s in the United States though the efforts of one individual, John Gill.'

The meat of the book is a comprehensive and detailed analysis of every aspect of bouldering from hold types to diet, rock types to skin care. There's a slightly anachronistic section entitled 'Women and Bouldering' which does, however, contain a valuable message regarding eating disorders.

I was predictably drawn to the section 'Bouldering and The Older Climber' in which, amidst a wealth of sound and encouraging advice, the use of pads was recommended to improve your grade: 'I regularly encounter older boulderers who started before pads *even existed*. . . [my italics]. Old-school insinuations of cowardice or cheating associated with pad use are usually uttered by those who have quit the sport, often, ironically enough, because of injuries.' That's told me then.

*Bernard Newman*

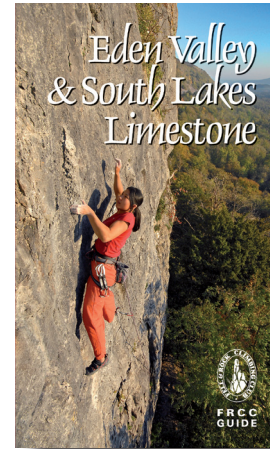
### Eden Valley & South Lakes Limestone

Ron Kenyon, Nick Wharton & John Holden,  
ed. Stephen Reid

*The Fell and Rock Climbing Club, 2012, pp 456, £18*

On Wednesday evenings in late spring the jackdaws of the Eden Valley, east of Penrith, can find themselves disturbed by half or dozen or so climbers grubbing up the somewhat esoteric cliffs that, I see from this guide, have been described as 'Cumbria's best kept secret'.

The personnel of this motley group may vary from week to week, as does the choice of crag, but each will be a member of the Eden Valley Mountaineering Club and Wednesday is their night for 'getting out'. The ritual round usually begins around Easter on the sandstone of Armathwaite, above the River Eden, wends around the valley via places like the limestone-atop-sandstone cake of Jackdaw Scar and ends as daylight lengthens and attention switches to the more conventional crags of the Lake District.



Regulars have hardly needed a guidebook, which is just as well since the last definitive one to include the Eden Valley and its surroundings was *North of England Rock Climbs*, published in 1992 and long out of print. What we have had, for years it seems, are printouts of Ron Kenyon's ever-developing notes for each of the Eden crags – and Ron himself as our tireless ringmaster.

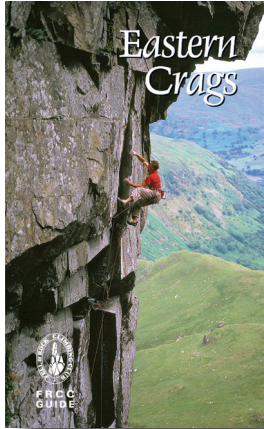
By now I have given away a personal connection that should disqualify me as a reviewer. My excuse is that this guide was only published in June 2012, indecently late to recruit any reviewer, and secondly it is hard to think of anyone sufficiently familiar with the Eden Valley who isn't *ipso facto* part of the EVMC circle. However I shall confine myself to detail rather than judgement.

In his introduction, series editor Stephen Reid speculates on who will buy this latest addition to the FRCC guides, including, as it does, a large area of Cumbria that has not featured in the club's definitive guides before and does not lie within the Lake District National Park (therein, of course, lies some of that 'secret' charm). As Reid says, those leading F6c and above will buy it for the South Lakes Limestone section authored by Nick Wharton, and particularly for the sport climbing at Chapel Head Scar. Others might want to keep it handy for when rain envelopes the central Lake District.

The new guide follows the pattern established under Reid's regime of clear colour photodiagrams, a comprehensive history, first ascent lists, numerous action photos and all the customary 'useful info'. A disturbing feature is the number of crags where climbing has been forbidden by the landowners. It is galling to see the three star route *Merry Monk Direct* (HVS) on Lazonby Crag described as 'one of the finest lines in the Eden Valley' when in fact climbing here has been forbidden for many years. The place is also forbidding! More grievous perhaps is the recent ban on access to The Hoff, a friendly little eruption of vertical conglomerate in a meadow near Appleby – an early playground of Leo Houlding no less. All the routes on banned crags have been included, but with a warning in red print that this is to maintain the historical record only and in case access is allowed in future. We live in hope.

One aspect of Eden Valley intelligence the guide does not include is which pub to retire to when fading light, falling rain or failing strength brings an end to the evening's exertions. Maybe the pubs, unlike the crags now, should remain 'secrets', but I'll let you into just one: a few minutes above Jackdaw Scar at Kings Meaburn, the White Horse Inn serves a fine pint to wash away the dust of old birds' nests and a crumbly cliff.

*Stephen Goodwin*



### Eastern Crags

Al Davies and Nick Wharton, ed. Stephen Reid  
*The Fell and Rock Climbing Club, 2011, pp 498, £18*

It was with a mixture of nostalgia and a sense of urgent revisit that I dived into the elegant 2011 edition of *Eastern Crags*, the new authoritative guidebook to the climbing in that less climbed side of the Lake District. The book covers an area stretching from Windermere in the south to Ullswater in the north, and includes some of the greatest trad cliffs in Britain such as the North Buttress of Dove Crag, Raven Crag Thirlmere, and Raven Crag Threshwaite Cove.

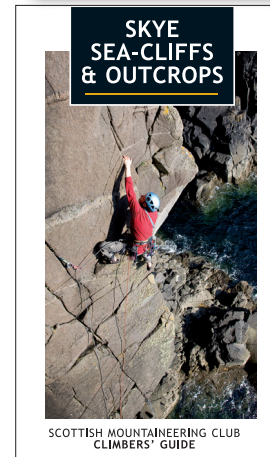
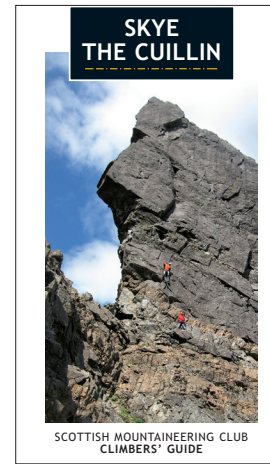
I first climbed in the area as a teenager and remember being completely awestruck by the quality of isolation combined with the outstanding climbing to be found on the best cliffs in this hidden corner of north-west England. I recall one particular day when Kevin Avery and I climbed the classics *Fear and Fascination* and *Bucket City* on Dove Crag: when I reached the top of the latter the mist came in over the summit of Fairfield, smudging out the fading light, and my ropes vanished down into the swirling cloud. Just as I was preparing to abseil off, a raven swooped past, then circled, croaking as I descended. It remains one of the best day's trad climbing in Britain I can remember.

As befits such a singular and charismatic region, *Eastern Crags* combines a classic design style with clear and informative route descriptions, detailed modern photo-topos, and excellent diagrams and maps (the latter being of great importance in an area where many of the cliffs are invisible from any road or inhabited place). It is refreshing that the authors have retained the traditional size of these guidebooks – which makes them much easier to carry on long routes than the larger A5 format guides – whilst including all the information demanded by the contemporary user.

It is particularly commendable that French grades of many of the harder (E5 and above) trad routes are given. This is of significant value to prospective on-sighters, and ought to become a standard principle in all British climbing guides. Providing this kind of information obviously requires a significant degree of local knowledge, and that is one of the tremendous strengths of this book. Both the level of authorial expertise and the extensive history section in *Eastern Crags* also illuminate some of the problems of selective guidebooks, whose authors are often unable to provide important details of the harder routes, or to create a sense of a region's climbing history due to the limitations of copy space.

*Eastern Crags* is a marvellous guidebook to one of the UK's finest climbing areas, and the clarity of its composition, its sense of place and history, and the level of local knowledge it brings to the reader remind us all what real British climbing guidebooks should actually look like, and what they are actually for.

*David Pickford*



### Skye: The Cuillin

Mike Lates  
*Scottish Mountaineering Club, 2011, pp 324, £25*

### Skye: Sea-cliffs & Outcrops

Mark Hudson  
*Scottish Mountaineering Club, 2012, pp 336, £25*

### Skye Scrambles

Noel Williams  
*Scottish Mountaineering Club, 2011, pp 400, £25*

Befitting its status as the most alpine-like part of the British Isles, Skye probably contains more exposed climbable rock than the rest of the country put together. Such is the vastness of the climbing potential that, despite our information-saturated society, only a fraction of the best lines are well known, and many of the low technical difficulty climbs hardly at all.

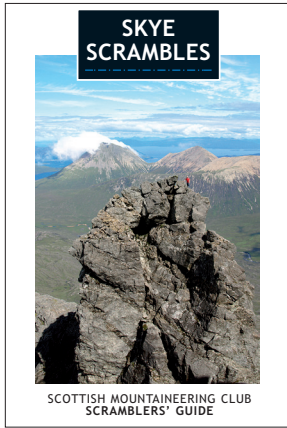
Faced with such an overwhelming amount of climbing terrain, the SMC has decided the only answer is to take a radical approach – implementing a three-pronged strategy to overhaul the documentation of the island's recent climbing exploration. The result is a trio of guidebooks devoted to the Cuillin, the coastal and sub-alpine cliffs and to the scrambles.

The Cuillin are admirably covered in the flagship volume of the set. The range is notoriously complex, and sometimes confusing even to aficionados. But the copious use of full-colour topos, allied to local expert Mike Lates's clear and unambiguous prose, helps

nullify the background noise generated by a chaotic concertina of hard-to-pronounce peaks and corries. These improvements, partly enabled by the enormous advance in colour printing technology, mean the current volume marks an enormous leap forward compared to the last edition published 15 years ago.

Not only are there far more climbs recorded, in better, clearer detail than ever, but the guide remains slim and lightweight (still just 390g) ensuring it can easily be carried up into the remote mountains – which is after all its primary purpose. But it also works well in its secondary role – as an armchair research tool – thanks to an array of colour action and landscape shots peppering the text.

*Skye Sea-Cliffs & Outcrops* meanwhile is destined to become a long-overdue boon to those long-suffering visitors to the island whose Cuillin ambitions are all too often rained on. Within its covers is a staggering collection of



holiday-salvaging short routes, massively expanded now they have been liberated from being shackled to the mountains in guidebook form. Usually set in delectable lowland situations, most of which have largely been the secret playground of locals until now, the range of enticing climbs recorded is likely to be revelatory even to visitors who thought they were familiar with the island.

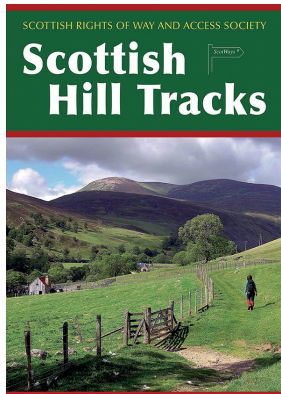
At the other end of the technical spectrum, the latest edition of Noel Williams's scrambles guide reveals an enticing cornucopia of 200 easier climbs and scrambles, plus some outstanding walks, which might easily detain the visiting climber for an entire lifetime. In addition, the book contains the most authoritative description of the Cuillin Main Ridge Traverse. All its potentially confusing sections are carefully and clearly described together with extremely useful technical sketch maps annotating the crux areas and potential emergency escape routes.

*Skye Scrambles* also develops a welcome trend in recent SMC publications by expanding their compass beyond the narrow focus of climbing or hillwalking information. Thus there are expansive and authoritative chapters on the geology, archaeology, history and natural history of the Cuillin range, all attractively illustrated.

For the curious mountain explorer they offer excellent primers on the environment in which all the climbing activity takes place. All in all, *Skye Scrambles* represents an exemplary holistic approach to describing the mountaineering experience of a range in its broadest sense.

It is difficult to see how any climber might think of visiting Skye without any of these guides from now on.

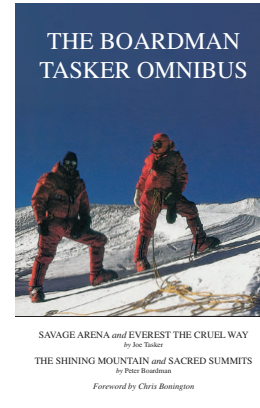
Colin Wells



### Scottish Hill Tracks

Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society  
*Scottish Mountaineering Trust*, 2011, pp 252, £18

First published in 1947, this is the fifth edition of *Scottish Hill Tracks*. With 344 routes, it is a unique resource for walkers, cyclists, riders and runners wishing to explore the network of paths, old roads and rights of way which criss-cross Scotland's hill country, from the Borders to Caithness. Divided into 24 sections, each with a detailed colour map, this new edition has been fully revised and features more than 100 colour photographs of the routes.



### The Boardman Tasker Omnibus

Peter Boardman and Joe Tasker  
*Bâton Wicks*, 2012, pp 873, £22

The re-issue of this omnibus edition of books by Peter Boardman and Joe Tasker, coming 30 years after their disappearance on the north-east ridge of Everest, serves as reminder not only of their tragic loss to family and friends but also of the loss to mountaineering literature of two outstanding talents from whom so much more eloquent writing might have been expected.

Each wrote two books that captured the excitement and commitment of high altitude climbing in the 1970s: Boardman's *The Shining Mountain* and *Sacred Summits* and Tasker's *Savage Arena* and *Everest the Cruel Way*. The quartet was first published in omnibus form in 1995 – a classic collection that has sold some 20,000 copies and now gone out of print in hardback.

Ken Wilson at *Bâton Wicks* is to be commended for keeping the literary legacy of Boardman and Tasker to the fore with this new edition of the *Omnibus*. It has a fresh cover, additional photographs at the start of each component book and an updated history of the mountain literature prize founded as the pair's memorial, with lists of entries, shortlists, winners and judges. Keeping the price affordable in a trade paperback should also help keep alive the writing of this talented pair. *SG*

### The Boardman Tasker Prize for Mountain Literature 2011

Winner: *Freedom Climbers* by Bernadette McDonald, *Rocky Mountain Books, Canada*

Others shortlisted:

*Desert Towers* by Steve 'Crusher' Bartlett, *Sharp End Publishing*

*Murder in The Hindu Kush* by Tim Hannigan, *The History Press*

*Shadow of The Matterhorn* by Ian Smith, *Carreg*

*The Sound of Gravity* by Joe Simpson, *Jonathan Cape*

There were 25 entries.

Judges: Barry Imeson, Bernard Newman and Lindsay Griffin.