Reviews

A Line of Fox Bones
Looking to Castle Tirrim from Roisbheinn.
Rob Fairley, 1998. (Watercolour. 71cm x 40cm. Private collection.)

Reviews

Alpine Warriors
Bernadette McDonald
Rocky Mountain Books, 2015, pp352, £24

Alpine Warriors was a worthy winner of the prize for mountain history at the Banff mountain book festival in 2015 and speculation naturally followed that it could be a winner of the Boardman Tasker. So it came as a surprise that this important contribution to our understanding of extreme mountaineering was not even short-listed. At the award ceremony, Robin Campbell, chair of the judges, offered the following explanation: 'Regarding [*Alpine Warriors*] and also her prizewinning *Freedom Climbers* from a few years ago… I find it an odd thing for a Canadian to write histories of Polish and Slovenian climbing. How would Canadian climbers like it if some Polish or Slovenian writer rolled up and wrote their history for them? Not a lot I fancy!'

This was such an odd comment; I half expected him to ask what Mary Beard thinks she's doing writing about the classical art of Greece and Rome? That she should stick to something nearer to Cambridge? His joke provoked laughter, but a lot of it was nervous laughter. It was a typical piece of pantomime from the jester Campbell, the sort of myopia that gets individuals and even nations into trouble, combining the ignorance, prejudice and arrogance on display in the recent Yugoslavian civil wars that *Alpine Warriors* tries to explain.

Campbell's comments did provoke me to ask some questions of my own. What do we ever truly understand about other cultures or motivations so different from our own? Was Williams Carlos Williams right, that 'the local is the only universal', that we should study only our native stones? That was the implication of Campbell's comments. It's a comforting but limited position. It doesn't prepare us for the unique tribalism of each culture; it makes no attempt to understand the other.

The story of Slovenian alpinism cannot be separated from centuries of violence in the Balkans culminating just a couple of decades ago with the break-up of Yugoslavia. It was only then that Slovenia emerged as a nation for the first time, miraculously almost unscathed compared to Croatia and Bosnia but not without deep psychological scarring.

If you're looking for Slovenia's native stones, then you have to start with the highest: the three-headed summit of Triglav, the cornerstone of the Slovenian nation and their national symbol. Slovenia is the world's only

nation conceived around a mountain summit. Most Slovenians believe it is their sacred duty to climb Triglav at least once in their lives. And McDonald purposefully starts her story of this remarkable nation of climbers with interviews of people on the summit of Triglav making this pilgrimage.

Reading *Alpine Warriors*, I had to change my own perceptions formed over a number of years visiting and climbing in Slovenia and Croatia. The title was chosen cleverly. If you feel the burden of centuries of both invasion and internecine warfare, leading to corrupt power politics, the reasons to climb become more of a struggle to escape to a new reality than just a part of an adventurous lifestyle. That is perhaps the key to what has made this extraordinary climbing community so successful in all aspects of high-altitude mountaineering, but also very different in nature and far removed from Anglo-Saxon climbing traditions.

Slovenian mountaineers can be fanatically possessive about their own sacred mountains, as McDonald explains early in the book in a gripping account of the first winter ascent of *Cop's Pillar* on the north face of Triglav by Tone Sazanov, Ales Kunaver and Stane Belak in 1966, beating the Germans and Austrians to the prize. Kunaver and Belak went on to provide the other side of the 'local' versus the 'universal' argument. They were involved in visionary first ascents of the south face of Makalu, the *West Ridge Direct* on Everest, the south face of Manaslu, the south face of Lhotse and the south face of Dhauligiri. The list goes on. And the list of major ascents is accompanied by a list of remarkable climbers: the Stremfeljs, Groselj, the Croat Stipe Bozic and then onto the more recent era with Prezelj, Karo, Knez, Jeglic, Cesen, Sveticic and Humar with their own list of increasingly extreme routes on Kangchenjunga, Dhaulagiri, Manaslu, Annapurna and many more in South America, the Garhwal and North America.

Although Slovenians may be firmly rooted locally, their ambitions seem truly universal. But there is another driver, something that Slovenian climbers cannot find at home that goes way beyond national pride, military teamwork and personal ambitions. McDonald I believe comes close to providing the explanation. To get there, she has totally immersed herself in the Slovenian climbing community with great sensitivity. What she uncovers is a religious, almost mystical, spirituality shared by most Slovenians so alien to secular Britain. All Slovenian climbers appear to possess their own tattered copy of a book called Pot (meaning 'The Way' or 'Path') by Nejc Zaplotnik. His writing and philosophy is used throughout to illustrate both individual emotions and uncertainties, and the shared philosophical heart and soul of Slovenian climbers. Zaplotnik himself was a superb climber, a character to the Slovenians as important as Whillans or Haston are to British mountaineering but someone who also wrote a book of psalms that perhaps all climbers should read. Here's an example: 'He who is in pursuit of a goal will remain / empty once he has attained it. / But he who has found the way / Will always carry the goal within him.'

The nation was devastated when Zaplotnik was buried with Ante Bucan in 1983 by a serac collapse on the unclimbed south ridge of Manaslu. The following year, Stipe Bozic and Vicki Groselj with Ales Kunaver in support, returned to make an alpine-style ascent of the ridge in Nejc's honour.

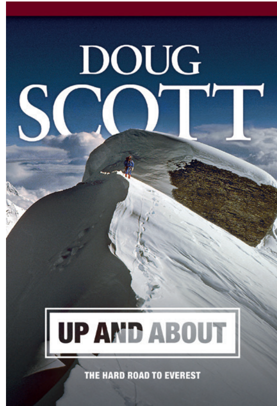
McDonald does not attempt a linear interpretation of Slovenian climbing. As new individuals arrive on the scene, there are at first subtle and then fractious transitions from the old to the new, from the heavyweight, multi-month expeditions of Kunaver to smaller, faster ascents and finally, the pursuit of the perfect solo ascent. Overall, the helping hand – or is it the menacing shadow of Big Brother shadow?) – of the Slovenian Mountaineering Association is forever present, handing out financial support to those who play the right game. But the old order was changing in the early 1990s as the new nation emerged from Yugoslavia. Commercialism and sponsorship first introduced by Cesen and later exploited by Tomas Humar created wounds that have never properly healed. In 1990 a massive controversy exposed the growing divisions in Slovenian mountaineering. As McDonald puts it: 'Tomo Cesen's contested south face of Lhotse route and the changing ideology of Slovenian climbers morphed into one convoluted mess.'

Today the echoes of that hostility still resonate, and to some extent the Slovenians have returned to the insularity that was a feature of their early great ascents on Makalu and Everest's west ridge. These were equal in stature to anything being done in the Himalaya in the 1970s and 1980s but without the fanfare. If the outside world didn't know much about Slovenian climbing, that was their problem. (Regarding Cesen, Marko Prezelj comments: 'I am not saying it is true. I am saying I believe. I believe in the fundamentals of alpinism, which is trust. From this perspective, it is not my problem. He has to live with whatever is true.')

Edward Thomas wrote in the preface to *The Icknield Way*, 'Today I know there is nothing beyond the farthest of far ridges except a signpost to unknown places. The end is in the means.' This book takes us to some of those unknown places, and proves that even though we may think we know the motives of others, different cultures bring surprising and distinctly different responses to the mountains and their own native stones. It seems for Slovenian climbers, finding themselves as individuals, as groups of friends and as a nation are all part and parcel of one quest. As Nejc Zaplotnik put it: '…long days on my fingertips / teach me how to live with my feet on the ground. / When I become a true master of dancing on vertical walls / I will also know / How to walk on firm ground.'

Alpine Warriors combines well-researched and interpreted historical detail with dramatic storytelling that makes the book both thought provoking and, at times, hair-raising. It provides a welcome addition to our knowledge of eastern European climbing, bearing similarities to *Freedom Climbers* but highlighting how different in character the Slovenians are. I look forward to Bernadette McDonald's upcoming biography of the Pole Wojciech Kurtyka, who, like Zaplotnik, connects a nation spiritually with the mysterious attraction of very high mountains.

John Porter



Up and About
The Hard Road to Everest
Doug Scott
Vertebrate Publishing, 2015, pp404, £24

'As a teenager my mother Joyce visited a fortune teller…' Thus our foremost mountaineer opens his autobiography. But this is no fairy tale: it's an enthralling, factual read, warts and all. More than that, it effectively records much of the climbing history of our times, at least the times of those of us of mature age. Luckily Doug has a good memory, for he records it all in considerable detail and in a fluent style, as climb follows climb and expedition succeeds expedition, so that on completing a chapter the reader is left wondering what craggy adventure the next will reveal – and where. Were this but an annotated list of his climbs, it would be most impressive, but every trip, every location, every exploit is qualified by personal comment, intriguing asides and context, the latter enabling readers to place the occasion in their own historical time scale.

The story proper starts in 1941 when Douglas Keith Scott was born to Joyce and her policeman husband George. His childhood in a hardly-affluent suburb of Nottingham during the war and the straitened, fiercely-rationed years that followed, is one with which many of us older readers can identify, whatever our own personal circumstances; scrumping apples, fighting at school, learning to ride a bike, falling in the canal and receiving a clip round the ear from an avuncular copper, these were all part of 1940s boyhood. It seems natural that simple, local adventures, often with the Scouts, should lead in due course to the Peak District, and so to rock climbing and the Nottingham Climbers Club. It would spoil the story to go into further detail, but like this reviewer, many readers will find the book packed with familiar names – Dez Hadlum, Bob Pettigrew, Dennis Gray, Geoff Sutton and others – for the climbing world of the 1950s and 1960s was a small one and Doug and his chums were familiar figures on the crags and in the pages of the primitive climbing periodicals of the time.

It soon becomes obvious that from early on Doug's life was climbing and still more climbing, driven by a determination to succeed at the game. Not that he was able to ignore normal life, for fifty years ago there was no way to support oneself without a proper job, let alone support the wife and son who materialised fairly soon. Doug went to Loughborough and became a teacher, specialising in PE and Geography, and was quite soon exploiting the 'educational' rambling and climbing trips encouraged by the supportive Nottingham education authorities. I recall Doug in those days as a be-spectacled, tweed-jacketed, leather-elbowed, pens-in-pocket schoolmaster, though more powerful, more tanned and more enterprising than the typical 'schooly' – adept at wangling time off for his expeditions, initially overland to the Tibesti in army surplus trucks, and subsequently to the Cilo Dag and then the Hindu Kush. But respectable though he appeared, teaching was too cloying and when in 1971 leave was reluctantly refused for a first expedition to Baffin Island, Doug became a self-employed jobbing builder, earning much better money, climbing when he wanted to, and keeping really fit into the bargain. He freely admits to being a selfish and eventually unfaithful husband, sacrificing his marriage in order to climb, and one is forced to feel desperately sorry for Jan, his wife, and young Michael. At least Doug is honest; throughout the book he indulges in regular introspection, examining his motives, admitting his mistakes and even washing his dirty linen in print. This is very refreshing and reflects well on the man he has become.

These were great years in the development of British climbing. In the early 1960s climbing and mountaineering were minority games that few people played; the only 'professionals' were instructors at the new 'outdoor education' establishments such as Plas y Brenin. Leading climbers were still amateurs, frequently hard-driving and hard-drinking weekenders; gear manufacturing was a cottage industry, advertising was primitive, while sponsorship was non-existent. But standards were rising steeply with the use of such things as PAs, curved axes and the deployment of nuts. Aid climbing had already come to Britain, especially to the limestone walls of the Peak, and Doug soon hammered out a not-entirely complimentary reputation as a 'dangle & whack' man, confirmed by his ascent of the huge overhangs on the Cima Ovest north face, and more visibly, his ascent with Henry Palmer, over 22 hours with 40 peg placements, of the *Big Overhang* in the huge Parliament House Cave at Gogarth North Stack. Indeed, in certain Llanberis pubs it was even whispered that Scotty only perfected aid climbing because he couldn't climb free, an unfounded jibe because he was climbing many of the hardest routes in Snowdonia at the time, though unlike some, he usually contrived to keep himself out of the mainstream. But the expanding media, both print and broadcast, was slowly realising that crazy people climbed steep rock and icy mountains and might provide good stories. They discovered Doug in 1969 on Sron Ulladale, the intimidating, overhanging crag on Harris. Nevertheless he never sought fame; there were no agents, no lucrative deals.

Baffin Island became a Scott stamping ground. It sounded attractive; the mountains were only semi-explored but bristling with soaring granite walls and virgin summits, ripe for the plucking. Doug and his chums organised several expeditions and achieved much in typically awful weather, experience which obviously did much to harden even more his resolve, while confirming what was physically possible in the worst conditions of cold and wet. It is interesting to note that on these and other of Doug's trips there was no leader, *per se*. Everyone did their bit and decisions were democratic; this became the Scott style. By now it is obvious that Doug is a driven man, driven to succeed on every climb he attempts, though not at the expense of aesthetics.

Doug's eventual Damascene conversion came in Yosemite and against considerable scepticism he proved a strong advocate of the British clean

climbing ethic. He helped convert Royal Robbins and other leading Valley climbers to the use of the nut and the chock. Not long afterwards I remember lunching in Seattle with Larry Penberthy who insisted that Robbins was crazy to advocate and import such things, how could a jammed nut, however well placed, ever hold a serious fall? (It was an excellent lunch.) Doug's style fitted in with the laid-back ethos of the American climbers; he made many good friends and it is fascinating to read of the antics of the Yosemite denizens of the day and the goings-on in the Valley. He even confesses to an unintentional LSD trip, which forced the postponement for a couple of days of his ascent of *Salathé Wall* with Peter Habeler.

But of course the book is a 30-year prelude to the crescendo of Everest. Surprisingly Doug had not already been to the Himalaya when invited by Whillans to join him and MacInnes as the token British contingent of Herrligkoffer's 'European' south-west face attempt in the spring of 1972. In those days Doug affected the then fashionable John Lennon look, with long hair, droopy moustache and round spectacles, and Herrligkoffer was rather taken aback. The organisation proved something of a shambles and the expedition failed to reach the high point reached by Whillans and Dougal Haston on our own international effort of the previous year, but crucially much of Whillans' high mountain savvy rubbed off on Doug. Meanwhile Bonington, who had opted out of both the 1971 and the European attempt, had obtained an Everest permit for that autumn, and Doug was an obvious candidate for the team, which included Haston, who of course had partnered Whillans on both Annapurna in 1970 and on Everest in 1971. But to everyone's dismay Whillans was not included, and both off and on the mountain there was muttering about autocratic leadership. Nevertheless Doug, climbing with Haston, reached 8,300m before the expedition retreated in mid-November.

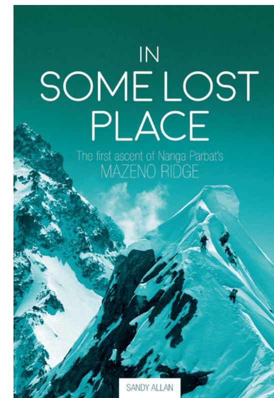
In a single year Doug had twice been high on Everest, and was now busy lecturing when not climbing. For the next two years his climbs and expeditions run virtually back-to-back. They include a reconnaissance to the Ogre, an ascent of Pik Lenin during the disastrous Soviet international climbing meet in the Pamirs, and the ascent of Changabang, climbed with a small Anglo-Indian team which included Haston, by now a trusted partner. Despite a daunting reputation, the climb proved straightforward but there was no comment on W W Graham's claimed ascent of 1883, which Haston once told me he considered to have been quite possible.

Somehow Bonington obtained the 1975 post-monsoon Everest slot that the Canadians had relinquished, and the rest is history. As a magazine editor at the time and myself an Everest veteran, I well recall the reams of reports, the massive publicity and the book that the expedition generated, so far be it for me to précis Doug's own recounting of his part in the final ascent of the south-west face; of how he and Dougal Haston became the first native Britons to stand on the summit of Everest. Having read this book, I realise that Doug had spent some 20 years training for just this climb. I now understand how he and Dougal were able to survive the subsequent fearful bivouac unscathed. The politics of the expedition are intriguing; Doug's retrospective insight is illuminating and answers many long-standing questions, for despite its success, the enterprise was not his style. In Bonington's own words, Doug is 'undisciplined, warm-hearted and emotional, full of a vast, restless energy.' It fits.

As a reviewer however, I would be negligent to ignore failings in the book: the typeface is unusually small, a size that as an elderly reader I found a trifle uncomfortable, while I felt the text could sometimes have been more tightly edited. But more serious to my mind is the poor reproduction of the frequent black and white pictures. Doug is an excellent photographer, one of the very best camera-wielding climbers, and although the several folios of glossy colour plates are well reproduced, the frequent monochrome images scattered throughout the text are a travesty. Good illustrations used in context can make even the best text sing, and with modern printing methods, black and white images should be really telling.

There is no doubt that this is an important book. It is not just 40 years in the life of a remarkable mountaineer: it is history. It contains an excellent bibliography and an exhaustive index so it's likely to prove a valuable reference to happenings, both on stage and behind the scenes, over a period when our game was changing like never before. But there's another 40 years to come and Doug is already sharpening his pencil!

John Cleare



In Some Lost Place
The First Ascent of Nanga Parbat's Mazeno Ridge
Sandy Allan
Vertebrate Publishing, 2015, pp224, £24

When George Foreman regained the world heavyweight championship in November 1994 it was, for me, a choice moment, a comfort of sorts, though I'm no particular fan of boxing. Foreman had seized back the title at the age of 45. I too was 45 years old at the time. To me, and a good many others in their forties and over, Big George's comeback was a reassuring sign – and he's preacher after all – that maybe I wasn't over the hill just yet.

Eighteen years later, the news that Sandy Allan and Rick Allen had completed the first ascent of Nanga Parbat's Mazeno Ridge was a similar 'Foreman moment'. Both were in their late fifties. Age was clearly no barrier to high achievement in the mountains. Indeed it may have been a key to their success – and survival. Decades of climbing in remote places, often together, seemed to have given the pair a stoic resilience, a quiet confidence that, whatever the difficulties, somehow they'd cope.

Yet looked at in a contrary way, these same qualities so nearly proved fatal. Sandy and Rick arrived at the Diamir base camp emaciated and totally

spent after 11 days on the ridge to the summit and three more descending the *Kinshofer* route. The Mazeno is the longest route to any 8,000m summit: 10km of towers, cornices and deep snow at mind-numbing altitude. In such a place, strung out physically and mentally, small things can have big consequences, maybe a stumble, a few dropped matches, or the fortuitous meeting of a Czech climber with a cigarette lighter.

What was that Dylan song from *Blood on the Tracks*? 'A simple twist of fate.' Well, there are twists of fate a-plenty in Sandy Allan's story, his road to Nanga Parbat and the slow motion drama of attrition that unfolds there. *In Some Lost Place* takes an increasingly tight grip on the reader, Sandy's self-questioning mounts, along with his prayers and hallucinations, as he and Rick struggle down the mountain.

If they'd perished, the verdict may well have echoed the opinion attributed by Sandy to Cathy O'Dowd when she and Sherpas Lhakpa Rangdu, Lhakpa Zarok and Lhakpa Nuru bailed at the Mazeno Gap. That Sandy and Rick were 'crazy old men, pushing too hard'. As it was, fortune and fortitude were with them, the long coveted Mazeno route was completed and in recognition the pair were awarded a 2013 Piolet d'Or. Twists of fate?

Sandy seems a bit sensitive about the age thing and says he doesn't really understand why it was so often remarked upon after their climb. 'In my head I still feel as enthusiastic and excited as ever,' he says. Well good: if I've harped on about your age Sandy it's only because I drew such encouragement from it.

I thought twice about whether to read *In Some Lost Place*. During my tenure as editor of *AJ* I'd published Sandy's account of his and Rick's 2009 ascent of Nanga Parbat by the Diamir Face[1], and then Rick's account of the Mazeno climb took centre stage in the 150th anniversary *AJ* in 2013[2]. I thought I knew their story pretty well. In addition, a surfeit of mountaineering books to read during my *AJ* decade had left my taste for the genre somewhat jaded. I'm glad I thought twice. Sandy pours out so much of himself – youthful rebellion, divorce, his religious nature – that the book tells a personal journey as well as an account of an extraordinary climb.

Sandy emerges a freewheeling character, happy to stand apart from mountaineering's celebrity clique, and for whom his eventual life as an IFMGA guide was perhaps the most appropriate calling. In his youth he was scornful even of this elite body, thinking guides 'slow and pedantic'. Independence is clearly important to him; as he reflects during one of several bone-chilling bivies, he was on the mountain because he chose to be. 'I wasn't here for any other reason – like fame or to please a sponsor.'

My one criticism concerns the arrangement of the narrative, and it is really a criticism of an arrangement common to several books I've read recently (not only 'mountain' books) of which *In Some Lost Place* is just a further example. It's the practice of lifting a passage from a dramatic part of the story and plonking it at the front of the book to create a cliffhanger,

1. 'To Get Closer', Sandy Allan, *AJ* 115, 2010/11, pp11-17.
2. 'The Long Ridge', Rick Allen, *AJ* 117, 2013), pp3-14.

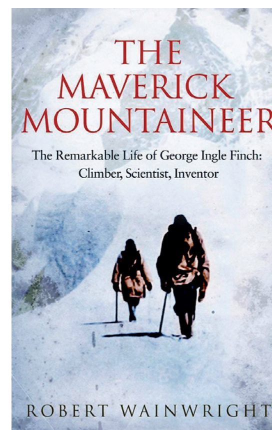
literally so in the case of Sandy's prologue. When the last sentence reads, 'All Rick and I could do was watch in horror', in my head I hear the *di-di-di-DAH* of Beethoven's 5th, 'fate knocking on the door' as the motif has been described.

But we already know that the expedition ended in success, not tragedy. Furthermore the need to create such tension exposes the literary abilities of the author too soon. Not all climber-writers are Shakespeare. Prologue over, Sandy tells his story with the natural pace of an expedition coming together, after a gestation of almost 20 years, and builds through nine hard days on the ridge to arrive at the Mazeno Gap, from where the dramatic opening has been snatched. By this point I was comfortable with Sandy's style and totally absorbed in his story. This is where I would have preferred to read of Zarok and Rangdu's slide towards the ice cliffs.

Publishers, who after all care deeply about sales, should remember that the world's runaway bestseller begins quite literally, 'In the beginning…'. Modern fashion would open Genesis with Abraham's knife poised over young Isaac and then oblige the reader to race through 22 chapters before learning that an angel of the Lord intervenes and bids Abraham spare the lad. Such breathlessness is unnecessary.

The Bible reference may not be so out place here. Few climbers today are as open about their strong Christian faith, at least in writing, as Sandy Allan. He writes of himself, prior to the summit bid, of feeling 'full of a spiritual grace' and wondering if he was being guided. Yet engagingly he punctures this reverie with the realisation that their one lighter is in Cathy's pocket, and she is already way down the mountain. Not so providential after all. Rick and Sandy will be sorely tested, and Sandy's prayers gain added fervency as, on the long descent, their predicament becomes critical.

Stephen Goodwin



The Maverick Mountaineer
The Remarkable Life of George Ingle Finch: Climber, Scientist, Inventor
Robert Wainwright
Allen & Unwin, 2016, pp416, £18

George Ingle Finch became an unsung hero in the early history of Everest who fell victim to the elitism of the English establishment and the shadow cast over the mountain's history by the disappearance of Mallory and Irvine in 1924. There was also his refusal to suffer fools in the least bit gladly. This excellent and closely researched biography of a truly maverick mountaineer makes clear the contribution Finch made to mountaineering and to a much wider scientific field. Although he did ultimately become president of the Alpine Club and chairman of the Mount Everest Foundation, such possibilities

would have seemed inconceivable to the organisers of the early attempts, critical of any suggestion that bottled oxygen, or 'English air' as it became known, should be used to reach the world's highest summit or that an outspoken Australian with robust opinions should be included in the team, even though his mountaineering ability outclassed most of the early pioneers.

More than half this biography is devoted to Finch's long wrangle with Everest. Robert Wainwright had full access to family records and correspondence to bring together the jigsaw of experience that led George Finch, born into a wealthy but dysfunctional family, to his own adventurous but equally dysfunctional life. Edward Whymper's classic *Scrambles Amongst the Alps* inspired Finch and his younger brother Max towards an interest in mountaineering. A 'grand tour' of Europe by the family allowed the brothers to begin their own exploration of the Alps, largely ignoring their mother's insistence that they should employ a guide and indulging their own independent zest for mountains, ticking off an impressive number of summits and high level traverses. In Paris, only the timely intervention of a priest stopped them from attempting an outside wall of Notre Dame.

As a student, Finch rejected medicine as unsuited to his academic curiosity. Concert pianist was a possibility; he was a zealous performer, but when he demanded to know from the Austrian pianist Arthur Schnabel: 'How good am I?' Schnabel replied: 'You are first rate second rate.' 'I thought so,' said George, immediately abandoning both the idea and, almost entirely, the piano. Instead, he turned to chemistry which in the early 1900s was making impressive strides and Finch found himself at the cutting edge of new scientific methods as the untapped mysteries of science were meeting the industrial demands of a new century. By 1913, with world war threatening, Finch joined the staff of Imperial College in London, running a course on explosives.

The biography ploughs deeply into Finch's troubled personal life. His first impulsive marriage was to a pretty but flirty ash-blonde called Betty whom he met shortly after enlisting as a second lieutenant assigned to the Royal Field Artillery. Posted to Macedonia he supervised the salvaging of 62,000 artillery shells that had become dangerously unstable through damp. This success declared him a war hero by dint of chemistry and he returned to the UK nine months later to discover that his wife was having an affair and had given birth to a son, leaving in doubt the father's identity.

Back in the Balkans, Finch used his expertise to deal with a German fighter pilot who specialised in attacking British observation balloons with tracer bullets, causing them to explode. The 'Richthofen of the Balkans' had menaced the British effort for a year until Finch equipped a balloon with a dummy observer and 550lbs of explosive detonated by a trigger switch from the ground. The balloon was duly attacked by the twin-gunned Albatros fighter, but as it moved in for the kill George pressed the switch and blew the balloon and the Albatros from the sky.

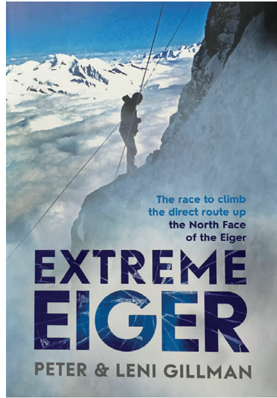
Shortly after this success Finch became one of the 160,000 men in the Balkans who fell ill with malaria. His second marriage was to Gladys May, the Red Cross nurse who had cared for him. Even before their wedding he had misgivings and three weeks later he moved out, abandoning her even though she was pregnant. Two days after their son was born the marriage officially ended and, as Wainwright observes: 'In the space of six years George Finch had been married twice, divorced twice and been named on birth certificates as the father of three young boys.' Gladys' petition through the courts demanded that a judge order Finch to return to the marital home and 'issue a decree of restitution of conjugal rights.'

In 1920 Everest had become the joint focus of the Royal Geographical Society and the Alpine Club as an object for national prestige with Finch a natural candidate on his mountaineering record but not on his social standing. The Alpine Club, it was explained, was a club for gentlemen who climb whilst the RGS was represented on the Everest organisation by Arthur Hinks, a brilliant Cambridge astronomer credited with determining the mass of the moon and the distance of the earth from the sun. Described by one writer as a 'fleshy, humourless and bitter man who had never climbed higher than his chair,' Hinks took a powerful dislike to Finch and in a chapter entitled 'the Bastardy of Arthur Hinks' set about his exclusion.

As organisation for a reconnaissance expedition went ahead, Finch was once more smitten, this time by a secretary at Imperial College. Agnes Johnston was a disarming Scottish beauty with a head of wild curls, for which he called her 'Bubbles'. But although Finch had powerful supporters he was excluded from the first expedition on medical grounds. Two doctors deemed him to be unfit, but as the Everesters were failing to reconnoitre beyond 23,622ft, Finch promptly and successfully climbed the southern flank of Mont Blanc, the biggest climb in the Alps that summer. Not even Hinks could argue against his inclusion the following year when Finch, the pragmatic scientist, not only produced a padded outfit that kept him warm while others shivered, but oxygen equipment that allowed him and Geoffrey Bruce to reach 27,320ft, higher than man had ever reached.

Finch was famously excluded from the 1924 attempt after being accused of breaking a gentleman's agreement over use of confidential material, infuriating Hinks. Andrew Irvine, his replacement and a 'genius mechanic', was given charge of the oxygen equipment, which was redesigned, but without help from Finch. Due to neglectful haste the cylinders arrived in India, broken, half empty and leaking. Wainwright does not disagree with the prevailing view that Mallory and Irvine died on the ascent or with Finch's belief that defective oxygen equipment was the cause. This biography presents fascinating detail about the mores of mountaineering in the early 20th century and the aftermath of the early attempts on Everest, affirming the respected position George Finch holds in British mountaineering.

Ronald Faux



Extreme Eiger
The Race to Climb the Direct Route
up the North Face of the Eiger
Peter and Leni Gillman
Simon & Schuster, 2015, pp394, £20

Halfway through *Extreme Eiger* I started wondering what Martin Heidegger or Jean-Paul Sartre would make of it. The events it describes, the famous first ascent of the dangerous Eiger Direct in 1966, the rivalry between German and Anglo-American teams, their decision to come together after the death of John Harlin, the presence of the enigmatic Dougal Haston with his fondness for Friedrich Nietzsche, beg questions that are profoundly philosophical: why do we do what we do? If we do the same thing for different reasons is it still the same thing? In fact, given the media frenzy that frothed around the foot of the Eiger during the weeks of this epic climb, like spume on the ocean, it might be useful to hear from Jacques Derrida as well. Would this 'thing', whatever it was, have existed in the same way if the media had ignored it? Was it changed by being observed?

In the closing pages of this remarkable book, Peter Gillman writes: 'five people had previously ascended the rope that broke, four of them that same day. So did Harlin die because he had prevaricated that morning? Or was his death pure chance, the outcome of a lethal game of existential roulette, just as it was pure chance that I happened to be watching at the moment he lost the game? Was the flaw in his character? Or in the rope?'

Gillman was watching through the telescope when Harlin fell, a young man on virtually his first big assignment as a journalist, a new father who knew Harlin's own young family; how could it not have had a profound impact? He filed his pieces and then wrote a book with Haston about it, moved on to other stories, worked for the great Harold Evans at the *Sunday Times*, wrote books with his wife Leni, as he did this one, watched his kids grow up and move out, grew old himself and, after half a century, returned to that image of that figure in red turning through the sky. Such immense themes, coupled with the passage of time and new perspectives, make for powerful reading.

In the first adrenaline rush of youth, it's hardly surprising that Gillman didn't get everything right and he is modestly open about his misunderstandings – without taking it too far. Instead, he uses his opportunity to reassess, most notably in tracking down the surviving members of the German team, a low-key, blue-collar lot for the most part, a team of friends, not stars, who came up with a workable plan of how to climb this great challenge and stuck to it. This is where much of the book's new ground lies. The Gillmans fill in their backgrounds, try to understand their motivation and then, most poignantly, trace the passing years and how the climb seemed to them after the passage of time.

Harlin, Gillman now more fully understands, was a different kind of animal, self-absorbed, ambitious, creative with his own life story and at times indecisive, even moody. Whillans took one look and offered his verdict: 'bull-shitter'. While the Germans plodded upwards doggedly, the Anglo-American climbers lurched forward and then ground to a halt, like a sports car in first gear, never quite getting going. The irony is that Harlin was on his way to what most likely would have been a resolution of the competition that had so fascinated the media – and perhaps the anxieties within himself – when the rope he was jumaring snapped.

The paradoxes of the climb reach out to you across the years, most obviously in the ambivalence of one of its key players, Chris Bonington, who withdrew from the team and then ended up leading one of the hardest pitches of the route – and of his life. He could sense the enterprise was somehow misshapen, mostly because of Harlin's leadership, but could not help being drawn – moth-like – towards something so bright.

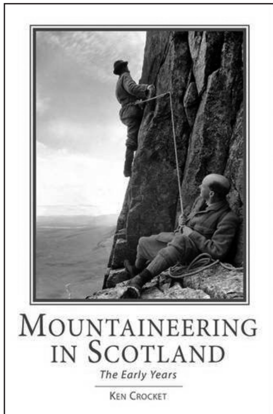
The presence of competing teams made each of them behave differently, the irony being, given how savage criticism was in the Alpine press at the tactics employed, that the climbers ended up enduring far more discomfort, being stuck to the face to take advantage of breaks in the weather and keep their noses in front, than if they'd been on their own. Layton Kor had the right idea, abseiling down whenever he could to chat up the postmistress at Kleine Scheidegg. Kor, in fact, proved Harlin's secret weapon, his aid skills unlocking key sections of the climb in rapid order.

The Gillmans capture the protracted agony of the route, which took over a month thanks to the hostile weather, with plenty of atmosphere, the squalor of the snow caves, the dogged courage, the sudden bursts of panic, the final, rather desperate lunge for the summit that so nearly ended in further tragedy. They catalogue the inadequacies of both teams' equipment, which had far more in common with the decade or two before than those that followed. Most powerfully of all, they delve into the psychology of men born into the chaos of war and its aftermath. The book is meticulously researched.

If this account lacks anything, it's in how public recognition stretched and warped the enterprise itself. Gillman does quote Robbins that Harlin 'would have risked his life ten times over if he could have done it in a grand and heroic way.' But there were more prosaic considerations too: the money that Gillman's newspaper had advanced. The uneasy, often unwelcome relationship the media has with alpinism is on full display here. What did Bonington learn? How to sup with the devil? I wondered too how it impacted on the generation then coming of age. *Mountain* magazine launched in the *Eiger Direct*'s aftermath; its dogged preservation of the authentic must have been in part a response to the circus that unfolded 50 years ago.

Always compassionate, almost never indulgent, the Gillmans have crafted a rich and layered story, one that captures a particular time, enough to make me feel nostalgic for a place I didn't know, one that explores the vagaries of memory, our weakness for rationalisation and the darker recesses of human motivation – without ever losing sight of the better human qualities.

Ed Douglas



Mountaineering in Scotland: The Early Years
Ken Crocket
Scottish Mountaineering Trust, 2015, pp360, £24

Whymper's 1865 ascent of the Matterhorn, the last of the major Alpine summits to be climbed, closed the curtain on the Golden Age of mountaineering in the Alps. But in 1865, as that curtain closed, the curtain on the Golden Age of Scottish Mountaineering – the era of Naismith and Collie, Glover and Goodeve, Raeburn and Ling – had barely begun to twitch. Oddly enough, the Swiss Alps were much more accessible, and hence better known to British mountaineers, than the Highlands of Scotland. Although some of the mountains on the western seaboard could be reached by boat, travel around much of the Highlands was, until the coming of the railways towards the end of the 19th century, fraught with difficulties.

A few peaks became must-go-to destinations for tourists. For example in 1818 the poet Keats attained the summit of Ben Nevis in 'sullen mist', accompanied by his friend Brown, a local guide, and copious libations of whisky, which may explain why he found himself negotiating much of the summit plateau on all fours. The only other non-locals to venture into the hills were geologists, botanists and cartographers. There were of course cragsmen about, such as the bare-footed fowlers of St Kilda, who scaled the massive sea cliffs of those remote islands to catch birds for food. But these men were motivated by sustenance not sport, and so cannot be regarded as mountaineers in the currently accepted meaning of the word.

The Alps long dominated British perceptions of what mountains should look like. The nearest equivalent in Britain were the jagged Black Cuillin of Skye. The Cuillin were also relatively easy to get to. Gradually, some of the more intrepid visitors to the island ventured onto the main ridge, and in 1836 Professor Forbes of Edinburgh University made the first ascent of Sgurr nan Gillean. As this required some scrambling, involving the use of hands as well as feet, Crocket awards him the accolade of 'Scotland's first known mountaineer'. In 1859 Charles Richard Weld of the Alpine Club visited the Cuillin, and saw what was later to become known as the Inaccessible Pinnacle. 'Surely some bold member of the club,' he wrote, 'will scale this Skye peak ere long, and tell us that it is but a stroll before breakfast.'

The gauntlet had been thrown down, but it was to be many years before systematic exploration of the Cuillin – and the other ranges of Scotland – was to get under way. The Inaccessible Pinnacle itself had to wait until 1880 for its first ascent (by the Pilkington brothers, both AC members). The Alpine Club had been formed in 1857, but in Scotland the early clubs were more interested in fine dining than heroics on the hills. The first major club, formed in 1889, was the Cairngorm Club, followed two months later by the Scottish Mountaineering Club. The latter was to prove the main driving force in Scottish mountaineering, at least up to the outbreak of the First World War, and inevitably much of the remainder of Crocket's narrative involves the SMC and its members.

Transport limitations continued to restrict the areas favoured by Scottish mountaineers. This partly explains why they spent so much time exploring hideous dank fissures such as the Black Shoot of Beinn Eunaich. This was described by one pioneer, with some restraint, as 'disagreeable' but it had the merit that it could be reached from the railway line to Oban. Another favourite playground was the huge but notoriously 'loose, slimy and appalling', as a later guidebook writer put it, north-east face of Cir Mhor on Arran, an island easily accessed from Glasgow by train and steamer.

By the last decade of the 19th century, however, the expanding railway network allowed climbers to explore more widely, notably on Ben Nevis, where all four main ridges received ascents before the First World War, and where Harold Raeburn pointed the way to the future when in 1906 he climbed the unprecedentedly steep ice of *Green Gully* (IV, 4; a grade still attached to several other Scottish winter climbs of the time, such as the Ben's *North-east Buttress*, which received what was probably its second winter ascent a few days earlier that year by a party including a 20-year-old George Mallory). A summit photo taken after Raeburn's ascent of *Green Gully* is just one of many fascinating archive photographs included in the book.

Glen Coe was still only reachable via the old military road, built in the mid 18th century, largely keeping it the preserve of those wealthy enough to own a motorcar; mountaineering in Scotland in these early years was almost exclusively the preserve of the moneyed – and reasonably leisured – middle classes. Nevertheless, before 1914 Glen Coe saw first ascents of such classics as the strikingly bold *Crowberry Ridge Direct* at the hands of the Abraham brothers from the Lakes. Explorations were carried out even further afield, in the far north-west; Crocket's account of an audacious new route by Raeburn and others on Quinag's Barrel Buttress is just one of many thrilling retellings of new-routing in this era.

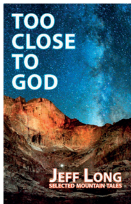
The mountaineers of the day did not just depend on the railways, or on new-fangled motorcars. Muscle power and stamina underlay many new routes, which were not uncommonly bracketed by punishingly long walks or bike rides at the beginning and end of the day. These were men – and women – of mettle: the Ladies Scottish Climbing Club was founded in 1908, and still thrives. Not only that, the early pioneers possessed extraordinary levels of skill, given the primitive nature of the equipment at their disposal – not to mention their willingness to climb in all weathers, summer or winter. The latter, being outside the shooting season, was often preferred, given the attitude of the proprietors of Scotland's 'sporting' estates.

Most remarkably, as Crocket points out at the end of the book, 'not one fatality was recorded in Scotland to any mountaineer during these early years'. The same could not be said of the four years that followed the outbreak of the First World War. A dark curtain suddenly descended on

the Golden Age of Scottish Mountaineering. It was to take some decades before the standards attained before 1914 were to be reached again.

Mountaineering in Scotland: The Early Years is the first volume of a planned trilogy on the history of Scottish mountaineering. Its author, Ken Crocket, is a former editor of the *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*, and wrote the SMC's official history of climbing on Ben Nevis. This first volume demonstrates beyond doubt that Crocket is the man for the job. His scope is vast, his copious sources skilfully deployed, and his command of his narrative both meticulous and masterly. Above all, he allows his cast of characters, with all their strengths, foibles and passions for high places, to glimmer through the sullen mists of the years.

Ian Crofton



Too Close to God
Selected Mountain Tales
Jeff Long
Imaginary Mountain Surveyors, 2015, pp296, $19.95

Jeff Long is 'indisputably one of the best storytellers of the mountain world,' according to the cover blurb on this collection of short stories. To my loss then, I have to admit I have never read any of Long's novels and therefore it would be unfair to judge his publisher's fulsome claim on this single book.

Collections of short stories are frequently a curate's egg. This isn't necessarily the author's fault. Some settings and characters will inevitably be more appealing than others to an individual reader. *Too Close to God* (the title comes from the final story) is an egg of a good deal more variable quality than even the curate might appreciate; yet paradoxically I was left wanting to read more of Jeff Long's writing.

The most unsatisfying aspect of the collection is that several of the stories are versions of chapters from previously published novels. How much adaptation has been done, the first-time reader cannot tell, but in the case of two of the stories 'Abe', from *The Ascent* (1992) and 'Ike' from *The Descent* (1999) the narrative lacked the tight, yet fully rounded preciseness that distinguishes the best short stories. Abe, a naïve lad caught in an emotional dilemma on a rescue mission, and Ike, a trek leader trapped, with his clients, in a cave of grisly horrors in Nepal, remain only partially formed characters whose paths clearly have some way to run. But that's another story; the novels you've still to read, or so I guess.

Mountain tales lend themselves to short stories, just as expedition accounts lend themselves to 3,000-word journal articles (much longer and they become tedious) and a good many writer-climbers have tried their hand. In the 1980s and 1990s, Anne Sauvy and Dermot Somers both enjoyed success with collections redolent of their particular backgrounds: Sauvy's tales often set around Chamonix and Somers drawing on a rich Irish heritage. More recently Jim Perrin joined the dance with *A Snow Goose and other utopian fictions* (2013), a break, he said, from the 'tyranny of facts'. All well worth your time.

Like Somers and Sauvy, Long draws deeply on the scene he knows best: Yosemite; it is his rock-climbing stories that, for me, are the most satisfying. The closer he is to stone, the more his imagination seems to bubble with possibilities for mesmerising narrative. Included here is 'The Soloist's Diary', the piece that launched Long as a writer. The tale defies description. Three climbers on an infinite wall as seasons roll on endlessly, in no way captures its hallucinogenic quality. Long recalls in a note the 1970s milieu from which it sprang: 'we were writers and poets full of wild nonsense that sounded pure and right to our ears. We climbed, drank jugs of ice melt from local glaciers, and read copiously, from *Finnegan's Wake* (over my head, and probably the others', though no one admitted it) to Calvino and obscurities like *Palm Wine Drunkard*.'

The collection is made up of 10 stories each of which is preceded by an 'author note' reflecting on the composition (and more widely) while also providing a window on the writing life for young writers, a kind of long range mentoring. I enjoyed these insightful introductions as much, if not more, than one or two of the stories that followed. Similarly the depth of the book is enhanced by a thoughtful 10-page foreword by Katie Ives, editor-in-chief of *Alpinist* magazine.

Much of Ives' foreword could be read as a stand-alone essay, dealing with the resistance writers encounter in getting fiction accepted as a valid genre for mountain stories. 'If mountain fiction appears oddly threatening to many climbing readers, it may be because it is inherently subversive,' she writes. 'The best works question precisely what numerous mountaineers consider to be "sacred", daring to tear down the immense architecture that underpins much of our history.'

Long's riposte to the non-fiction realists is equally forceful and comes in his note to the opening story 'When God Throws Angels Down.' (This piece comes from chapter one of his novel *The Wall* (2006) and to my mind is the pick of whole collection. I read it with a shudder: this is how it could be. No-one ever tells of course.)

Long points out that no matter how well written, non-fiction, with its real life epics is born chained to reality. 'That straps it to a fundamental contradiction. Because the thing is, defying reality – breaking chains, transcending borders, trespassing without visas, imagining the unknown, inventing maps, ascending into hearts of darkness, and, even if only for a instant, regaining Eden – is exactly why we climb. And that is fiction's province.'

I agree wholeheartedly; but note also Long's use of the words 'hearts of darkness' and the nod to Joseph Conrad. In his introduction to the whole collection, Long says that once upon a time he had hoped, 'in vain', to be the Melville or Conrad who would elevate mountain literature to prominence. It's a wish that opens up a bigger question. To be sure, Jon Krakauer and Joe Simpson hit the bestseller lists, but is it actually possible to rival Melville or Conrad while remaining within the straitjacket of what might

be termed a ‘mountaineering novel’?

The devil lies in the dual identity as both climber and writer. While Melville and Conrad both spent a few youthful years at sea (I’m happy to say I attended the same rude ‘university’) they did not go on to write novels about sailing per se. In the words of Harold Beaver, whose dizzying commentary to the 1986 Penguin Classics edition of *Moby Dick* is almost as long as the novel itself, Melville’s theme is the mythopoeic imagination, ‘the neurosis of man in usurping the ritual role of Gods; the trauma that converts the pretensions of an Ahab to a suicidal re-enactment of myth.’ No mere salty tale.

Climbing may hold the key to the meaning of life to some *AJ* readers, but to the world beyond it is, as Lionel Terray and others have reminded us, a fairly useless recreation. If it touches on the big themes of life, it is more by accident (and regrettably in the course of accidents) than by design. Several of the best works of fiction in which climbing has figured in the plots, have not actually been written by authors who think of themselves as climbers, though some have had a taste of it: for example *The Condition of Ice* by Christopher Burns (1990), *Electric Brae* by Andrew Greig (1992), *The Fall* by Simon Mawer (2003) and *An Afterclap of Fate* (2006) by Charles Lind. If there’s a lesson from this maybe it is that the non-climbers have not let the climbing get in the way of the bigger themes of human drama.

However, rivalling Melville or Conrad in producing the great novel was not Jeff Long’s business with *Too Close to God*, and perhaps too it would be unkind to draw any comparison with short-story masters such as Chekhov or Kipling. Think of it simply as in the words on the cover: ‘selected mountain tales’. Climbers will recognise Long’s locations, identify with his characters and on occasion with their pain, but hopefully share none of their nightmares.

Stephen Goodwin

Souvenirs Pittoresques des Glaciers de Chamouny
Gabriel Charton
Foreword for 2015 facsimile by Jaques Perret
Translated by Linda Dubosson
Les Alpes Livres, 1821, pp128, £35

Do you ever wonder, as you travel the countryside or admire a mountain view, how different the scene would have been years ago – a century perhaps, five hundred years maybe, or before the Romans came? I certainly do, and it’s not always fruitless speculation, for since the birth of photography some hundred and fifty years ago, there has existed an accurate visual record, sparse at first and then increasingly comprehensive, of how the country appeared – of what we would have seen then, had we been there. Before the birth of photography we must rely on art, descriptive perhaps but inevitably stylised and by definition never exactly accurate. Nevertheless we can learn much, surmise more and even enjoy a whiff

Plate 11 Le MONTANVERT

‘Le Montanvert… a plateau on a slight incline, covered in beautiful pasture, and serves as a base to the peaks of the Charmos, the Crepan, the Bletière, the Plan and the Midi.’ From *Souvenirs Pittoresques des Glaciers de Chamouny*, first published in 1821 and now beautifully republished by Tony Astill.

of the atmosphere from the best paintings, engravings and drawings from the past.

Most of us have travelled by train, by road or by the *Autoroute du Mont Blanc* from the balmy shores of Lake Geneva, from where Mont Blanc hangs on the horizon, up the wide strath of the Arve, past small towns, through villages and meadows, before the valley narrows, the cliffs loom over and the mountains crowd in. It’s about fifty miles to Chamonix where now Mont Blanc and its glinting glaciers rise immediately above the bustling town. It’s a classic entry to the realm of the high mountains.

Souvenirs Pittoresques, first published in 1821 in Geneva, is a record of that same journey from Geneva to Chamonix – and then around the Chamonix area – as it was two centuries ago, when Haute Savoie belonged to the kingdom of Sardinia rather than to France. The original volume is considered to be the world’s rarest book of the mountain genre and only two copies are known to exist, thus the volume actually under review is a modern, superbly produced facsimile of the original.

It contains 18 plates rendered as hand-tinted lithographs, each backed by the author’s succinct text. As an accurate record it obviously suffers from the interpretation of the artist whose technique is perhaps a trifle naive, though doubtless as truthful as he was able to make it within the constraints of his technique. Beautifully reproduced at full page, these

charming colour illustrations are atmospheric, recognisable, and will be especially intriguing for those familiar with the Mont Blanc massif. Each plate is accompanied by the appropriate text and the book is bound as a valuable presentation volume.

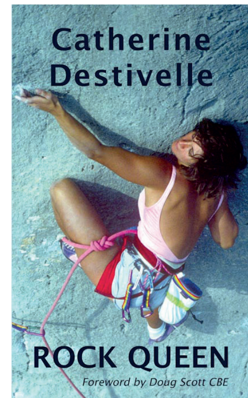
The illustrations start with views of Geneva and across the Lake towards Mont Blanc, and continue via Bonneville and St Gervais to the Col de Voza in plate eight, a most impressive viewpoint, the picture spanning the northern flanks of the range from the Aiguille du Midi to the Col de Balme, with Les Bossons, Mer de Glace and Argentière glaciers flowing right into the valley bottom. A telling image indeed. Plate 10 is of Chamonix, merely a collection of cottages clustered around the priory, the background dominated by the three ice streams birthed on Mont Blanc itself. The following plate, depicting a view we all know, shows '*Le Montanvert*' and the Mer de Glace, but of course there is no railway and no hotel, only the strange, still standing, little octagonal 'Pavilion'. Plate 15 rather echoes Plate 8, though seen in the opposite direction, this time from the Col de Balme, another excellent viewpoint. Every subject is so familiar yet the detail is different – this is what it looked like in the pre-dawn of Alpinism.

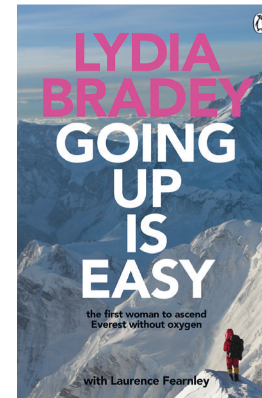
The final three plates show action rather than topography, two illustrating de Saussure's scientific expedition to, and traverse of, the Col du Géant in 1788, the year after he had made the second ascent of Mont Blanc, while the third depicts the tragic accident actually happening to Dr Hamel's party on the Petit Plateau in 1820. Action indeed.

Two text pages accompany each plate, one a facsimile of the original in French, the other a duplicate English translation. Gabriel Charton was an accomplished travel writer, his descriptions are informative and his anecdotes fascinating. He describes the route – the old road often follows a different line to the modern highway – but also captions the plates, naming and commenting on the important peaks and landmarks. I found the spelling of certain names rather interesting, Chamouny for instance, le Crepan and le Bletière. His comment on 'Chamouny' is still appropriate: 'There are excellent inns: one finds there all that one can desire, gourmet meals… and the luxury of the big cities.' Initially mystifying were several references to 'l'Allée', until I discovered that the upper reach of the Val Veni is known as the Vallon de la Lée Blanche, thus the name appears to refer to the several peaks of the Tré la Tête group, which fits the text.

Privately published by our member Tony Astill, this is a magnificent book, of which he and any collector or connoisseur of alpine books, can be very proud.

John Cleare





Rock Queen
Catherine Destivelle
Translated by
Marguerite Wright
Hayloft, 2015, pp228, £12

Going Up Is Easy
Lydia Bradey with
Laurence Fearnley
Penguin, 2015, pp272, £12

These absorbing and informative autobiographies come to the reader by means of a process of filtration. In *Going Up Is Easy*, Lydia Bradey had the assistance of Laurence Fearnley, an established author and close friend; Catherine Destivelle's *Rock Queen* has been translated into English by Marguerite Wright. In each case, the collaboration has proved highly successful, but Fearnley has done much more than process the narrative, working through boxes of letters and using hours of interviews and conversations to recreate the significant events in Bradey's mountaineering and personal life. The immediacy of both books is undeniable, drawing the reader into what feels like a conversation with the climbers, both books opening with particularly vivid and startling chapters.

Both climbers rebelled against convention from an early age. Bradey's was the more unusual childhood, brought up by a mother who was fiercely protective of her personal space and who encouraged her daughter to be independent of her from the outset, ready to make her own way in the world. As a result, conventional schools did not satisfy her educational needs and she attended a high school, which fostered her love of the arts and of the outdoors, leading to her first forays into the mountains of her native New Zealand. Soon, she realised, 'Being a mountaineer was the most exciting person I could be in the world.'

Destivelle, too, kicked over the traces both at home and at school. Her parents, great lovers of outdoor life, suggested she join the French Alpine Club and divert her abundant energy into climbing, rather than drifting onto the fringes of anti-social behaviour. Mentored initially by an instructor who spotted her promise she was able to develop her precocious talent, discovering that, when climbing, 'I was complete.'

A foray into the hectic world of climbing competitions brought recognition, then fame, reluctantly embraced, and she was invited by Jeff Lowe on her first mountaineering expedition to the Trango Towers. David Breashers was filming the expedition and a famous and prodigiously talented woman climber would help to attract the funding he needed. There were very similar parallels here with Bradey's route to the high mountains. The opportunity

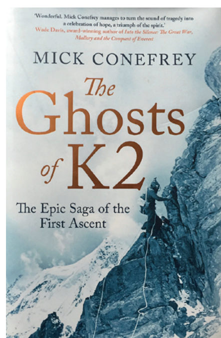
to join an expedition to Cho Oyu presented itself as a political and commercial expedient: the sponsors welcomed a woman whose proven ability on rock and ice and familiarity with mountain environments might well equip her to be the first female to summit the peak.

These introductions to the Greater Ranges serve to illustrate more insistently a theme that weaves subtly into both narratives: the impact of women on the world of high-altitude mountaineering and their position in what is a largely male-dominated enclave. Bradey cites the early female pioneers and their links with the British and American suffrage movements and recognises that, as her own introduction to climbing took place during the feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s, those climbers she most admired were those who had 'sought equality and recognition in the Himalaya.' Ironically, it was when she achieved her greatest feat, the first female oxygen-less ascent of Everest in 1988, that she came up against 'damning and chauvinistic statements' from Rob Hall whose expedition she had been 'invited' to join, who had failed to reach the summit on this occasion and refuted Lydia's assertion that she had succeeded.

When Destivelle considers what motivates her to climb, one of the factors she considers is the need to 'prove something to myself, certainly as a mountaineer, or as a woman.' In her early climbing years she took huge pleasure in watching 'the idiots charging off to follow a mere girl', assuming, quite wrongly, that the routes she was climbing with such aplomb must be easy. Press reaction to such notable achievements as her solo climb of the Eiger in winter embarrass her because they focus on her sex and unnecessarily exaggerate the difficulties of the climb rather than the purity of the achievement.

Both Bradey and Destivelle have forged memorable careers on rock and in the high peaks and both freely admit an unchanging love of the mountains and dreams of new projects, which allow them to continue to develop and grow. There is a shared desire to pass on their enthusiasm and expertise to others, Bradey as a mountain and ski guide, Destivelle as a technical advisor and lecturer, and, of course, as a mother to her son. Through this process, both feel that they can inspire others to realise their dreams, to set themselves free from convention, to follow a passion, which sets their lives ablaze.

Val Johnson



The Ghosts of K2
The Epic Saga of the First Ascent
Mick Conefrey
Oneworld, 2015, pp317, £20

The Ghosts of K2 charts the history of all attempts to climb the world's second-highest mountain from 1902 until its first ascent in 1954. Most of this has already been written about before, first in Jim Curran's *K2, The Story of the Savage Mountain* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1995), *K2: Challenging the Sky*

(Swan Hill, 1995) by Roberto Mantovani and Kurt Diemberger, and Richard Sale's comprehensive *The Challenge of K2* (Pen & Sword, 2011). What I particularly like about Conefrey's version is that he brings to life the characters involved in the early attempts in a way that other books fail to do. His very readable style gives a vivid impression of characters like Oscar Eckenstein, Aleister Crowley, the Duke of Abruzzi, Vittorio Sella, Fritz Wiessner, Dudley Wolfe and Charlie Houston.

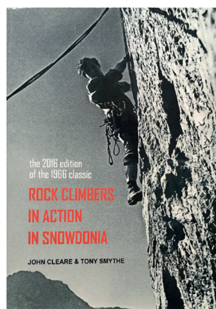
Conefrey's justification for yet another book is new archival material that gives a fresh perspective on disagreements regarding the first ascent by Achille Compagnoni and Lino Lacedelli in 1954. The successful Italian expedition led by Ardito Desio has been embroiled in decades of controversy and legal battles, and has consumed the lives of those involved. The fact it took the Italian Alpine Club (CAI) 53 years to publish a detailed enquiry shows how the issues were complicated by contradictory evidence, nationalism, politics, and big egos.

After so many years, and detailed consideration by the CAI, it takes a brave man to challenge this new official version. Yet in *The Ghosts of K2* this is exactly what Mick Conefrey does, asserting that the findings of the esteemed judicial committee representing the CAI to investigate the first ascent controversies are wrong. Just as significantly, Conefrey also states that the mountaineering 'god' Walter Bonatti was wrong in his assessment of events that he was part of in 1954. Not surprisingly this has rather angered the mountaineering establishment in Italy. Imagine the British indignation if an Italian filmmaker and author categorically stated that Captain Robert Falcon Scott was an incompetent buffoon who indirectly killed his men, rather than being an inspiring and courageous leader of a heroic expedition to the South Pole.

Certainly there is a faint whiff of journalistic sensationalism and I for one have lost the appetite for delving through yet more confusing evidence about oxygen mask usage and flow rates, what was said or not said on the mountain, re-interpreting the summit photographs and diary entries, etc. What is clear is that there are some entrenched positions and that everyone has their own story or truth that no one else will ever be able to change.

If you have not read much about K2 history then I can recommend this book for the early attempts but do not be naïve about Conefrey's claims about the first ascent. Of course, make your own mind up, but in some ways I prefer the short story: Achille Compagnoni and Lino Lacedelli successfully reached the summit of K2 with crucial and unselfish support from Walter Bonatti and Amir Mahdi. Bonatti is still rightly regarded as one of the 20th century's greatest mountaineers and the Italians rightly remain proud of a brilliant first ascent.

Chris Harle



Yosemite in the Fifties: The Iron Age
Edited by Dean Fidelman and John Long
Patagonia, 2015, pp176, $60

Rock Climbers in Action in Snowdonia
The 2016 Edition of the 1966 Classic
John Cleare and Tony Smythe
Francis Frith, 2016, pp200, £25/£20

These books are time capsules. *Yosemite in the Fifties* features curated archive photos and first-person accounts of groundbreaking ascents in the Valley during the 1950s; *Rock Climbers in Action in Snowdonia* is a collection of commissioned photos from the mid-1960s by John Cleare, with text by Tony Smythe. They share a strong use of photography, evoking a powerful sense of what it meant to be a climber in that time and place.

Some climbers will already be familiar with *Rock Climbers in Action in Snowdonia*, first published in 1966, although it is unlikely to have registered on the radar of climbers introduced to the sport through modern-day climbing walls. A first edition is highly sought after and comes with a hefty price tag. Fifty years on, Cleare has chosen to publish a new edition, adding the photos 'that got away' to the original iconic 39 black-and-white shots. Aside from these additional photos and a few explanatory words the book essentially remains unchanged in feel and lay-out.

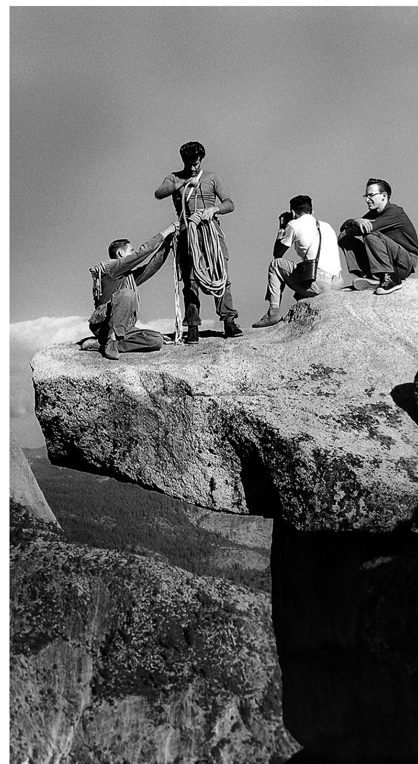
By contrast, the cleaner design of *Yosemite in the Fifties* reflects the fact it is a contemporary publication. Designed by Tom Adler the photos and words are given space to breathe, made possible by its larger format. Published by Patagonia, it is, as you might expect, worthy of the coffee table.

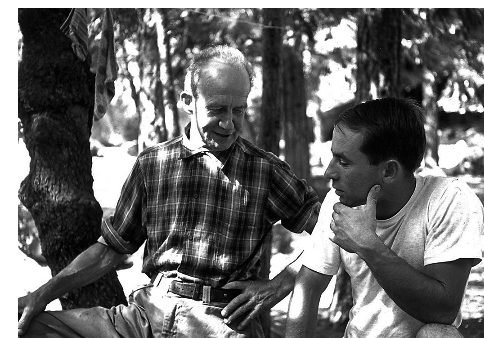
Never feeling weighed down by history, it builds to a remarkable climax with the first ascent of the Nose in 1958. Wayne Merry's account of their eleven days on the 3,000ft wall in 'The Longest Climb', originally published in *Mariah* magazine, was the most gripping and compelling piece of writing in the book. It's quality is summed up perfectly in the essay's introduction: 'And for a few enchanted paragraphs we all become granite astronauts.'

The 'primitive' nature of the equipment available really struck home when Merry describes abseiling with over-the-shoulder friction and a pad to stop it cutting into your flesh. More than the 2014 historical film of Yosemite climbing *Valley Uprising*, Merry's words made me appreciate the herculean effort involved in the 1958 ascent of The Nose.

Co-authored by the writer John Long and photographer Dean Fidelman, the timeline of significant Yosemite first ascents traced by the book during the 1950s is punctuated with short biographical pieces, shining a spotlight on the leading protagonists from this era. These broader brushstrokes give a valuable and fascinating insight to the characters beyond their climbing

These images are taken from Yosemite in the Fifties: The Iron Age, edited by Dean Fidelman and John Long, with the permission of Patagonia. Individual photographers are credited after their image caption. For more details, see www.Patagonia.com/Books.





Above right: Mark Powell, Bill 'Dolt' Feverer and Warren Harding, c1957, hitting the cheap jug after a rainy exploratory climb on El Capitan. *(Beverly Powell Woolsey)*

Left: Overhanging Rock, Glacier Point, a favourite locale for 'I was there' photographs. *(Jerry Gallwas Collection)*

Middle right: Hardware rack from 1957. Pitons beyond two inches were lacking, so on wider cracks Iron Age climbers built them. *(Bill Feuerer Collection, Don Lauria)*

Bottom right: The sorcerer's apprentice. John Salathé stands at the shoulder of Yvon Chouinard, Camp 4, circa 1961. *(Tom Frost)*

achievements: the likes of John Salathé, a man who heard voices, and Mark Powell, America's first rock jock.

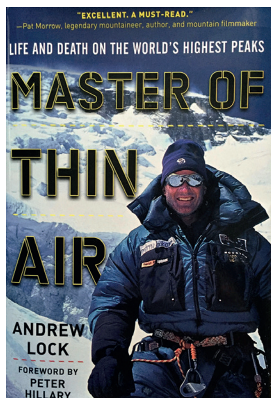
As you might expect, it is Warren Harding's stubborn and roguish character that steals the show. A memorable caption accompanying the 1956 photo of him, Powell and Bea Vogle in his Jaguar convertible, reads: 'Harding went through three essentials at speed: tyres, wine and girls.' On the cover of the book he is the James Dean of climbing as he cuts a heroic figure prusiking on the west face of Leaning Tower.

Photo captions are often undervalued and nowadays added almost as an afterthought, but when I first read *Rock Climbers in Action* it was the synergy of some of the captions and photos that stayed with me. Gems such as: 'I has this dream, see, and I was falling upwards in a shaft of light,' describing *Pellagra* at Tremadog; Baillie 'bombing' up the *Gates* in the Pass; and 'You go, you commit yourself and it's the big effort that counts,' on *The Plum*.

If I have a criticism of this new edition it is the reproduction of some of the photos, particularly the new ones. I have a sense it is down to the scanning of the negatives, rather than a scan of a print, and some over-sharpening in Photoshop, as opposed to the printing itself. That aside, the book is still a unique insight to what Cleare describes as 'an especially interesting era in British climbing history – the final period when the leading activists were still disorganised 'weekenders' who trained on beer, smoked 20-a-day, drove like furies and thought it was all a big laugh.' The journey for the weekenders racing up to Wales from London was often as dangerous as the routes themselves, 'because the faster the car the sooner the climber gets to bed.'

In *Yosemite in the Fifties*, John Long writes: 'Every period has a footprint unique to its time and place,' and that is exactly what these two books reveal. While one highlights pushing into the unknown on Yosemite's big walls, and the other the gritty romance of poorly protected cragging, they are both inspiring reads.

Ray Wood



Master of Thin Air
Life and Death on the World's Highest Peaks
Andrew Lock
Arcade, 2015, pp332, $26

Andrew Lock was the first Australian to climb all 14 8,000m peaks and, if you don't accept Alan Hinkes' ascent of Cho Oyu, which remains disputed, the first from a Commonwealth country too. The feat took him 16 years and 23 expeditions. Although there are no startling new routes, and for the most part Lock sticks to regular routes, those 23 expeditions include attempts on significant challenges, like the Mazeno Ridge on Nanga Parbat with Rick Allen and Voytek Kurtyka, and he is a self-reliant man, carrying his own stuff and, like Tilman's herring, hanging by his own tail.

If you have any interest in the steroidal – literally and metaphorically speaking – world of high-altitude peak-bagging, this is the book for you. Lock is a driven man, not overly prone to introspection, straight-talking, opinionated but with a good sense of humour, which is from time to time directed at himself. He had an equally driven father, whose interests – money and prestige – were more conventional, understandably perhaps for someone who grew up in poverty. Lock himself prefers the great outdoors and as he enters adulthood experiments with ways of spending as much time outside as possible, setting off on a career in farming before swerving into a long stint as a Sydney cop, working undercover, and spending his holidays in the Greater Ranges. Later he took a degree in disaster management (your disaster, his management, not managing to have disasters) and worked in Antarctica.

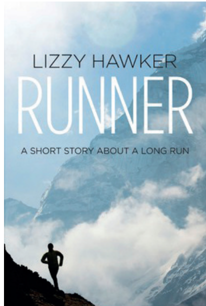
His early high-altitude career wasn't propitious, out of his first six expeditions scoring just one success, K2, and witnessing half the climbers with whom he shared the summit dying on descent. This long and traumatic apprenticeship does seem to have served him well though, because his success rate shot up and he learned how to survive in a world that has a much higher tolerance of risk and death than around most of the climbing population, let alone the general one. In the course of his 8,000er career, he says that 20 friends lost their lives in the mountains, and catalogues them at the end of each chapter.

He was lucky to meet Anatoly Boukreev early on, learning a great deal from the Kazakh climber. Hearing Boukreev, an ethnic Russian, singing a folk song, Lock asks him what it means: 'I sing that the winter is cold, the snow is deep, the cattle is dead, the crops is failed, my wife is leave me and my children is in the war, but… life is okay.' Apart from the farming setbacks, that seems a pretty accurate description of the life Lock has chosen.

His antipathy for Hinkes is clear; they climbed Nanga Parbat together but, as Lock writes, 'I soon learned that Alan wouldn't break trail – he preferred to follow… I knew I was taking the risks and sacrificing my own fitness while Alan preserved his.' I've no doubt as the years passed Lock became adept at preserving his own fitness, but finding the right climbing partners in this rather strange world proved difficult. He seems to have been most happy on his 2006 expedition to Kangchenjunga with the popular Finn Veikka Gustafsson and Gerlinde Kaltenbrunner, also well liked among high-altitude climbers. Some things in alpinism don't change, it seems. Trust is everything.

His failure to climb Everest without oxygen clearly rankles but he is uncharacteristically coy about it. I suspect he's a man who doesn't like being thwarted. He has some pertinent things to say about the crummier end of commercial climbing in the Himalaya and how to fix it, although he's not alone in such opinions, which apparently count for little with the Nepali government in particular.

Ed Douglas



Runner
A Short Story about a Long Run
Lizzy Hawker
Aurum Press, 2015, pp288, £13

In Hawker's memoir, running returns to its most simplistic state. Breath, steps, freedom and pain. We pace her neat rhythm, as she races from a naïve student on the starting line of her first Ultra-Trail du Mont-Blanc (UTMB) to a world-record-breaking high-altitude runner on The North Face roster. In *Runner* Hawker collects her years between journeys of 'discovery', 'exploration' and 'rediscovery and realisation' as racing shows her, to her surprise, her lack of perceivable limits. It is a gentle meditation on the risk and beauty of ambition, though Hawker's ambition is so inherent it can only be heard reverberating in her footfall as she runs past.

She runs because she must, and you believe her when she reiterates that everything that has happened since that first naive UTMB is an accident of faith rather than strategic sportsmanship. She describes an intuitively monastic life, one of perpetual motion, rootless, though without any gypsy romance. Throughout her book Hawker is free from the usual trappings, or even pleasures the rest of us rely on: car, house, a meal more exciting than a cheese sandwich. There are few friends or lovers in her prose. She works and runs, and processes softly, and without arrogance, the wins and lessons running offers her.

Hawker's running takes her from road to the hills, to the fell and eventually to high altitude, and her time in Nepal provides a warm cultural balance to her background as a scientist. Both come together in her quest for simplicity. Working for the British Antarctic Survey provided Hawker with a stark, but safe wilderness to lean into. She thrives on minimalism, and though Nepal is chaotic, she is more comfortable in these environments where everything must be worked for and nothing in the distant future can be taken for granted. Like an extremely long run.

'There is a saying here in Nepal that says it how it is. *Ke garne?*

'What to do? – because sometimes you just don't know. And when you don't know what to do; then what do you do? You just go on doing what you do. You go on trying, you go on failing, you go on trusting, you go on loving, you go on living.'

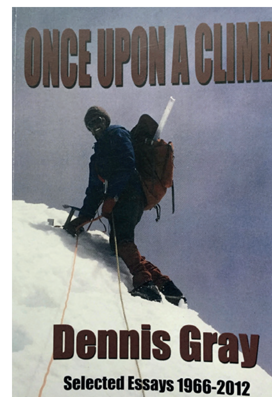
In a *Guardian* interview, Hawker says her training tip is 'staying in the moment' and later 'and trusting in that'. This book is her eulogy to the moment and her developing faith that living temporally is a release from fear, and so gives her permission to risk failure and dream of where next to run. Before each chapter she passes our hand over a prayer, intention or aphorism, leaving it to spin behind the words as we continue on, following her journey past medals and injuries into pure running. In this way we review her experiences with the same revolving questions: how do we cope with injury, how do we stay in the moment, how do we trust, how do we win, how do we stay humble? To do this Hawker has to accept her identity as someone who spends the majority of her time running.

She makes two contrasting statements: 'Why do we run? It is an expression of who I am. That is why I run. Simply that.' But also: 'Running is a luxury.'

She swings between fearing preoccupation with a luxury, and trusting in this sport that is pulling her through her life and teaching her so much. The book is fractured; the lessons she describes are still in the process of being learnt. Hawker's fear of losing humility surfaces instead as fear of being seen. For example, the book begins with the dedication 'This is for you,' a powerful opening that a reader can fall into without hesitation. But then midway through, without explanation, Hawker stops speaking to the reader and the 'you' she is addressing becomes a partner, though we are never allowed to know how or why the reader has been replaced by a real figure in her life. How did she fall in love? Surely this process is important as a new third wheel in her life, spinning alongside her running and her work.

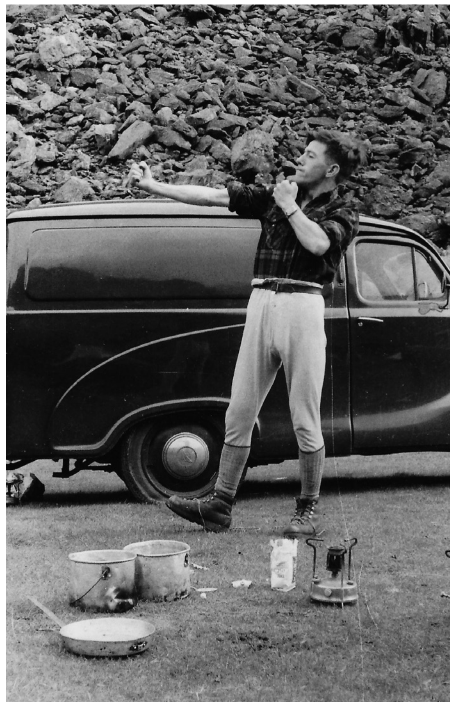
Despite this frustrating – if unsurprising – shyness, Hawker has written a trustworthy and thoughtful book. Held in her quiet, lyric cadence, her extreme experiences mirror our own rare moments of running flow, and fly us over the boundaries of footsteps and into that moment of space before we land.

Claire Carter



Once Upon A Climb
Selected Essays 1966-2012
Dennis Gray
Flux Gallery Press, 2015, 263pp, £11

Dennis Gray holds an almost unique place in British climbing, a good climber with experience stretching from the gritstone of his native Yorkshire to mountains like Gauri Sankar, a networker, with friends across time and space, having been close to Rock and Ice climbers like Joe Brown and Don Whillans, and pretty much every generation of climbers since, both at home and abroad, and a political operator, running the BMC as general secretary and being enmeshed in all sorts of controversies and causes that introduced him to yet more interesting people. In retirement he has travelled and studied in China, learned the language, and set off in new and unexpected directions. All through his life, however, he has remained an entertainer, something that shines through this book. Only Dennis Gray could give us sketches of Arthur Dolphin in his 'Red Flash' pumps and the reaction of rock god Patrick Edlinger at seeing a stripper take the stage in a northern club, catching Pete Livesey sneaking fibreglass into rock shoes or living in Edinburgh across the street from T Graham Brown.



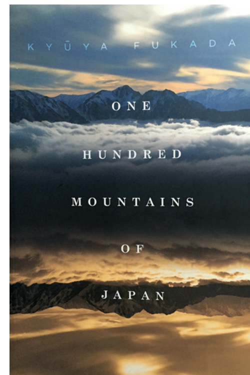
Joe Brown getting ready for the fray, from Dennis Gray's *Selected Essays*, perhaps for the winner of the bout between Lovatt and Hughes on page 211. *(Doug Verity)*

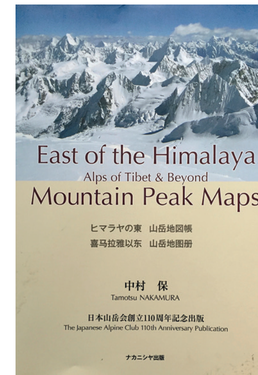
The stories are largely set in the age of the classic British motorbike: Nortons, Ariels, Royal Enfields, BSAs and Triumphs roar past, with the apparently concomitant crashes which were mostly survived. The car driving was not much better. The dangers of the road blend into climbing. Trevor Peck in his Rolls Royce picking up the hitch-hiking Pete Biven, who was to become his climbing partner; Ned Kelly ice climbing the vertical turf of Slieve League in Donegal after endless alcoholic ceilidhs; Eric Beard and his record runs on the Cuillin and Lakeland – and many more. Naturally Brown, Whillans and Tom Patey make re-appearances, often with the same story fragment, but as in life, repetition does little harm. In Dennis Gray's hands, names in the back of guidebooks spring back to life, fleshing out characters and quirks, adding richness to our understanding of the sport.

I enjoyed his use of language, especially contemporary jargon. For example the Western Gully of Ysgolion Duon is 'a tigerish outing in the snow and I am not a tiger…' I didn't know people were still using 1940s climbing terms in 1972. There is more in the same vein, 'running-belays', 'hands, knees and daisies-a-bum' (still trying to work that one out) and so on. In the same way accents place language in space, this argot places the stories firmly in their time. And then he will quote the Chinese proverb *Wang tian men shan*. 'Look to the mountains and see a heaven.'

I have a couple of very minor gripes about the structure of the book. First, there is no index to cross-reference names. This is a pity in view of the historical value of the book; it would be good in future to be able to easily relate 'this' story with 'that' person, rather than the future inevitable: 'Oh yes, I remember reading it somewhere in Gray, but where?' Second, the contents list is inadequate; it consists only of a list of chapter titles and page numbers. I wanted to know the year of publication, since the range spans 48 years. But these are minor complaints. It's wonderful to think of him turning 60, flying to the States, buying a Buick for $800 and hitting the road for four months of cragging.

Victor Saunders





One Hundred Mountains of Japan
Kyuya Fukada
Translated by Martin Hood
University of Hawaii Press, 2015, pp240, £23.50

East of the Himalaya
Alps of Tibet & Beyond: Mountain Peak Maps
Tamotsu Nakamura
Japanese Alpine Club, 2016, pp334, £60

In 1910, an Austrian army officer and military attaché, Theodor von Lerch, was seconded to the 58th infantry regiment of the Japanese Imperial Army based in Takada. He had brought his skis with him with their, for the time, modern bindings. Japanese engineers at the Imperial Armoury in Tokyo had never seen such equipment before and yet within a month they managed to produce copies so good that even von Lerch couldn't tell the difference. He taught 30 officers how to ski, moved to Hokkaido and did something similar and in 1912 went home. Although Japan's ageing population has seen a fall in numbers from its peak, there are still eight million skiers there today.

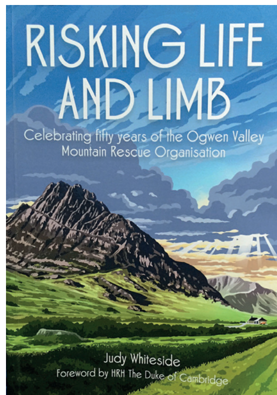
Taken with the more familiar story of how the missionary Rev Walter Weston introduced alpinism to Japan, this story feeds into the trope of how Japan is great at copying the west – think motorbikes and tape recorders as well as skis – but not so innovative on her own. These two books should dispel that notion. First is a very welcome and very capable translation of Kyuya Fukada's *Nihon Hyakumeizan*, or *100 Mountains of Japan*. Fukada's translator, Martin Hood, (see also Hood's article in *AJ* 2015), describes this classic of Japanese mountain literature as 'a veteran mountaineer writing for a readership of fellow mountaineers.' Which begs the question: what, in Japan, is a mountaineer? Certainly more than Weston's muscular Christian; his parting shot, when he finally left the 'Japanese Alps' he had made famous, was that they had become too popular, having been taken over by artistic types. By then, Japanese mountaineers were dreaming of the same summits their western counterparts had made famous.

Fukada's great achievement was to produce a list of peaks, so appealing to many climbers, that was not simply comprised of the highest summits, or the most famous, but drawn from deep within Japanese culture and experienced over a lifetime, a list chosen, if you like, by a highly evolved aesthetic sense. Weston wouldn't approve, but Sir Hugh Munro, eat your heart out. The appeal of Fukada's list, as Hood explains in his excellent introduction, 'lies in the rich tradition of mountain literature that its author drew on.' Fukada was as much writer as climber, one with highly refined

taste, reading Stendhal in his billet in Nanjing when he was passed news of the Japanese surrender in 1945. There are few alpinists who can draw comparisons between H W Tilman and the eighth-century monk Shodo. A peak's inclusion in his list relied as much on its religious traditions as its scenic grandeur. But Hood also points out that plenty of Japanese were climbing mountains just for fun long before Weston arrived. This minor literary masterpiece has been overlooked for too long in the west. If we had something similar for Scotland or the Alps, we would all be wiser.

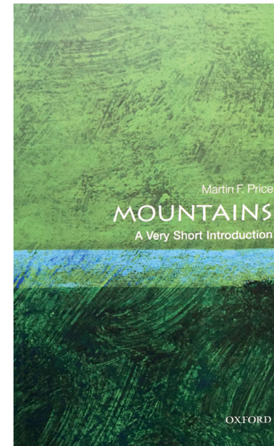
Another happy synthesis of western inspiration with Japanese depth is revealed in a new book from the Club's honorary member Tamotsu Nakamura. For the last quarter of a century, Nakamura has made a detailed exploration of the eastern Himalayan region inspired, he explains in this new book, by the pundit Kishen Singh and the British explorers Frank Kingdon-Ward and F M Bailey. His methodical record of sketch maps and photographs has been inspiring alpinists ever since and this work brings together in one mammoth volume the fruits of that labour. This fully illustrated, large-format work, full of clear and useful map diagrams, is already a hit, and will remain a source of inspiration for years to come, a fitting climax to the work of Nakamura, who recently turned 82. The information on first ascents is incomplete, it seems to me; so if you're using it to plan one, do some digging elsewhere as well. But as a starting point for climbing and exploring all points east of Lhasa, this is a highly valuable resource. Highly recommended. (Copies of *East of the Himalaya* can be ordered from ibd@kinokuiya.co.jp)

Ed Douglas



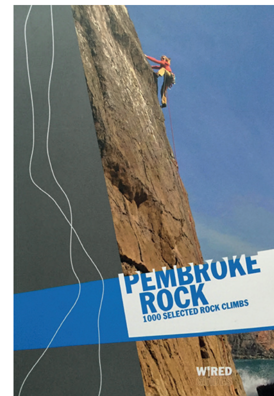
Risking Life and Limb
Celebrating Fifty Years of the Ogwen Valley Mountain Rescue Organisation
Judy Whiteside
OGVMRO, 2015, pp300, £18.50

The Ogwen Valley Mountain Rescue Organisation celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2015 and celebrated with this engagingly written, well-designed and beautifully illustrated history. Mountain rescue continues to be one of the great success stories of the voluntary sector in the UK, its original ethos of climbers looking after their own still intact, but the pressure of so many rescues – 140 at its peak in 2010 – is unrecognisable from the team's inception. There's some background history on rescue leading into the formation of the Ogwen team and a treasure trove of archive images that illustrate the rapid evolution of rescue equipment. Rich with anecdotes and notable rescues, an index would have been useful, given how useful a resource this book will be. (See also: obituary of Dr A S G Jones MBE, pp400-03)



Mountains
A Very Short Introduction
Martin F Price
OUP, 2015, pp134, £8

The well-established format from OUP of 'very short introductions' turns its attention to mountains, in the very capable hands of Martin Price, director of the Centre for Mountain Studies at Perth College, University of the Highlands and Islands and UNESCO chair in sustainable mountain development. Price describes the origins of mountains and explains how, on geological timescales, they come and go. The combination of climate change, so high on the environmental agenda, alpinists' own experience of melting glaciers and population growth, it's demonstrably the case that the natural entropy we know so well in the mountains is going to be a critical issue for policy-makers around the world. A useful book for scientists, geographers and curious general readers alike.



Pembroke Rock
1000 Selected Rock Climbs
Emma Alsford and Paul Donnithorne
Wired Guides, 2016, pp416, £30

It's rare that you find yourself paying close attention to a publisher, but in this case there's a story. Few would disagree that the UK is in the happy position of producing many of the best rock-climbing guides in the world, but the arrival of independent publishers caused panic among the clubs which had fulfilled that task, with little reward, hitherto. For a while they got mad, now they have got even, with five major publishers – the Climbers' Club, the Fell & Rock Climbing Club, the BMC, the Scottish Mountaineering Club and the Yorkshire Mountaineering Club – joining together in a co-operative to share expertise, knowledge and enthusiasm and publish guidebooks. Pembroke Rock is the second they've produced in this new venture, joining a selected guidebook to the Lake District, and it's beautifully done. Culling the best routes from the Climbers' Club four-volume opus, this is the perfect solution for those who are less devoted to what for many is the best rock-climbing venue in England and Wales. The authors are steeped in knowledge and are ably assisted with stunning photo-diagrams prepared by Mark Davies. The ageing alpinist, looking for pleasurable cragging by the sea, should pay careful note to the crags around Lydstep. More power to Wired's co-operative elbows.