Reviews

'East Face of Everest from Rupia La', T Howard Somervell, oil, 49cm × 74cm, 1924. *(Alpine Club)*

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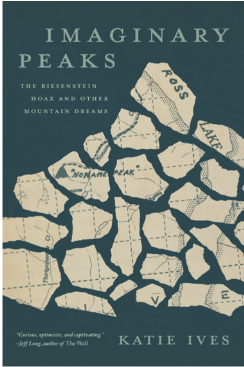


Imaginary Peaks
The Riesenstein Hoax and Other Mountain Dreams
Katie Ives
Mountaineers Books, 2021, 301pp, £22.

As the author Jonathan Raban is sailing north from Seattle on his absorbingly discursive *Passage to Juneau* (1999) he takes an irreverent broadside at the Northwest school of nature writers and poets, singling out, in particular, Barry Lopez, author of the celebrated *Arctic Dreams*. Raban, like me, is an admirer of Lopez's intent, his lyric passages and the microscopic particularity of his writing. But sometimes the prayerful tone can be too much for this self-exiled Englishman:

> *Reading the Northwest nature writers, I found myself an agnostic in their church; embarrassed, half-admiring, unable to genuflect in the right places. I wished there were more jokes.*

Raban's observations came back to me several times while reading *Imaginary Peaks*, and like him I sometimes felt unworthy of the earnestness of the words in front of me. For Katie Ives has written a beautifully crafted elegy to a seemingly more innocent past in mountaineering, unsullied by excessive commercialism and information overload, a time when a dream peak could not be digitally fact-checked.

Ives is editor in chief of *Alpinist* magazine; *Imaginary Peaks*, her first book, is already amassing accolades from the high priests of American mountain literature. But as Raban would have noted: there are no jokes. This absence of humour (I wasn't looking for belly laughs) is ironic in that the whole book is set around a joke – the Riesenstein Hoax – and its principal character is a jester fond of mocking fame-fixated climbers.

Instead *Imaginary Peaks* reads with a wistful melancholy, Ives seeming to echo those yearning lines from Joni Mitchell's song *Woodstock*: 'we've got to get ourselves back to the garden.' It's the garden of childhood wonder and possibility: Edenic. And above and beyond its hazy bowers rise knobbly ridgelines that Ives follows in her dreams up broken staircases spiralling to ancient tower walls.

If this suggests to you the influence of Thoreau or

Katie Ives, editor of *Alpinist* magazine, author of *Imaginary Peaks*. *(Chris Weidner)*

J R R Tolkien you would not be wrong. A New Englander, Ives grew up only a short walk from Thoreau's cabin and would swim in Walden Pond. Tolkien though cast the more powerful spell. Between elementary school and high school young Katie read the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy more than a dozen times and would carry the books along during early hiking trips in the White Mountains of New Hampshire.

Constellations of *Diapensia lapponica*, the pincushion plant, white and yellow flowers that grow only in alpine zones, reminded her of elanors, the golden star-shaped blossoms of Tolkien's elven forest of Lothlórien, where the passage of time seems to slow to near standstill. Eventually, though, Ives realised what she yearned for 'wasn't in the books' but related to a feeling experienced in the cold air above the tree line.

That sentence brought a knowing smile. A good many years ago I was having an immersive browse along the eastern religions shelves in the dusty labyrinth of the old Pilgrim's Bookshop (before the fire) when an elderly Nepali whispered over my shoulder: 'The answer's not in the books.' Nor, ultimately, does it lie in the mountains – real or imagined – though that is where Ives and the cast of this wonderful book spend years looking.

Ives plainly pondered hard over her title, pointing out in an author's note that the common definition of 'imaginary' by no means captures the nuances of all the ways that mountains intersect with human minds. Woven into this textured exploration are a hoax, supported by a photo of very real rock towers, false claims, fabulous mountains in fiction, others presumed by early makers to exist but on no hard evidence, and the alluring mountains of our dreams. Layered on these broad categories are differences of perception; in the mind's eye a mountain might be the abode of deities or a climber's project. The same physical features will be re-imagined according to the beholder.

The Riesenstein Hoax began with a photograph in the June 1962 issue of the since departed American magazine *Summit*. Reproduced at the opening of Ives' book, the photo shows imposing steep walls and towers soaring above glaciers to a jagged, snow-flecked ridge. Two route lines are pecked out but do not reach the summit. Route lines on lower peaks to either side of the so-named 'giant stone' do appear to have reached their summit goals.

The photo was accompanied by an unattributed article describing the adventure of three Austrians who thrashed through a forest wilderness

in British Columbia until, from a high col, they gazed across a vast glacier to unfamiliar peaks. Their attempts on the main summit were repulsed by avalanche, storm and finally a fall that ripped two pitons and left one of the Austrians with minor injuries.

A caption located the unclimbed summit of approximately 8,100ft in the region of Prince Rupert. Though isolated, it could be reached in two days bushwhacking. Then came the challenge: 'Who will be the first to climb it?'

Who indeed? The Riesenstein Hoax is so little known among British climbers and Ives teases out the tale so well that it would be almost a spoiler to go into detail here. Who were the hoaxers? Where was the mountain? Who, eventually, climbed it? There are names here *Alpine Journal* readers will be familiar with – Fred Beckey and David Roberts were among the many who joined the hunt – but most will be strangers. All are caught up in a tale of the unravelling of a mystery and of days of toil through forest and over glaciers that echoes the Tolkien-esque quests of Ives' youth.

So I'll leave the Riesenstein itself hidden beyond the chilly mists. Hidden, that is, to all but the knowing handful. The hoax was rumbled by 1966 but it was more than a decade before the identity of its perpetrators was revealed: three mountaineers living in Washington state: Austin Post, photographer and glaciologist; Ed LaChapelle, glaciologist and author of *Secret of the Snow: Visual Clues to Avalanche and Snow Conditions*; and Harvey Manning, author of popular north-west guidebooks.

Manning, who edited early editions of the classic textbook *Mountaineering: the Freedom of the Hills*, emerges as both the likely mastermind of the hoax and the guiding spirit of Ives' narrative. He too was steeped in Tolkien. As a boy scout he had hiked out alone from camp in the Olympics and had what amounted to a life-defining epiphany on Marmot Pass. Though only 30 miles from his home in Seattle, the wild landscape was a revelation. He remained at the pass until sundown, watching transfixed as the edges of mountains dissolved, forest stretched into dark wildwood and the valley sunk into chasms of shadow. This was 'the-World-as-it-Should-Be,' he thought, 'the World-as-it-was Promised-in-Storybooks.'

Manning spent much of the rest of his life – he died in November 2006 aged 81 – trying to preserve 'the world as it should be.' The influence of his writings and activism contributed to the establishment of the North Cascades National Park and other protected areas in Washington. Passionate but by no means pious, Manning and his friends dreamt up their hoaxes on self-aggrandising climbers and the burgeoning gear industry amid homebrew-fuelled laughter.

Ironically the first team to set off for the 'Riesenstein' once its location had been unmasked came from a band of New York climbers who revelled in the name of Vulgarians. Scornful of stodgy club hierarchies – notably those of the Appalachian Mountain Club – the Vulgarians were the Merry Pranksters of the climbing world. Indeed their spheres overlapped; Ken Kesey was an honorary 'Vulgarian fellow traveller'. In June 1965 five Vulgarians confronted the reality of the hoax mountain and learnt a salutary lesson: in the words

of one of the participants, 'to always be humble in the face of Nature.'

Ives began studying the Riesenstein Hoax and other 'imaginary' mountains in 2011 and finished her book as a Covid lockdown project. Over that decade several of Manning's co-conspirators and friends who shared their stories have died. Perhaps it is appropriate that *Imaginary Peaks* reads with a certain melancholy for it marks the passing of a generation fortunate enough to have been able to approach the mountain with a wonder unconditioned by Google Earth and other digital fog. (Ives, I guess, is some two generations younger than the hoaxers.)

It is primarily a book for an American audience; many of the cast of characters and places will be unfamiliar to British readers. However the broad themes of dubious claims, quests and a yearning for some kind of prelapsarian paradise are universal. Ives writes of her mountain dreams and emotions with a beguiling beauty, though she admits to being unsure what her own dream mountain represents.

> *All I know is that my longing for something nebulous and unnamed persists. If I had to pick a word, the closest one I can think of, now, is hope.*

Here I sense Raban raising a quizzical eyebrow. Hope? Is that hope as a general emotional capacity or for something more particular? Though Ives italicises the word, this isn't a book that exactly brims with hope. Those of us young and active in the 1950s and 1960s certainly felt then that we were living in a time of hope. Jack Kerouac, as Ives reminds us, had one of his *Dharma Bums* calling for a 'rucksack revolution'. And it seemed on the brink. Manning, his friends, the Vulgarians and countless of their contemporaries all wanted a better world: less corporatised and environmentally rapacious, less warlike and socially repressive. Pockets of wild land have indeed been preserved and for that we must give thanks to the likes of Harvey Manning and his fellow hoaxers. As for the rest of those fine ideas, well, as Joni sang: 'that was just a dream some of us had.'

Stephen Goodwin

Everest 1922
The Epic Story of the First Attempt on the World's Highest Mountain
Mick Conefrey
Allen & Unwin, 2022, 320pp, £20.

I do like endpapers. They give a book that little bit of extra value and show that the publisher has taken some trouble, in this case splashing out on semi-gloss paper to enhance the rich tones of John Noel's 1922 team photo. And, significantly, it's not one of the usual hackneyed group shots, but a less familiar panoramic pose of the entire team (65 in all I counted) stretched

across the desiccated landscape of Rongbuk, tweedy sahibs heavily outnumbered by a huge supporting cast of mainly Sherpa helpers.

In his centennial re-telling of the first ever attempt on Everest, Mick Conefrey pays due tribute to that supporting cast, naming many of the individuals who all too often in past accounts have remained anonymous shadows. Likewise some of the lesser known sahibs, such as Crawford and Wakefield: I never realized that they plotted their own unofficial crack at the summit, before admitting reluctantly to themselves that they were barely fit to go beyond the North Col.

The detail is good, but so too is the broad narrative. Conefrey devotes nearly half the book to the 1921 reconnaissance, which in many ways was far more exciting than the actual attempt of 1922. He reminds us just how involved were the political machinations to make that reconnaissance happen at all, and – despite all the petulant bad-mouthing from Mallory – what an impressive leader Howard-Bury was. The extended 1921 preamble will also familiarise readers new to Everest with the geography of the mountain and it introduces some of the key 1922 players, including the appalling, meddling expedition secretary back in London, Arthur Hinks.

That meddling was at its most shameful in the treatment of George Finch, excluded from the 1921 expedition on spurious medical grounds and only accepted reluctantly in 1922 (then shunned again in 1924), despite the obvious fact that he was by the far the most competent and experienced mountaineer on the team. Finch didn't get a very good press in Walt Unsworth's 1981 Everest history and it was only when Finch's son-in-law, Scott Russell, began to put the record straight a few years later that his reputation began to recover, boosted more recently by Robert Wainwright's excellent biography. Conefrey continues the process, examining the whole vexed question of the oxygen equipment championed so vehemently by Finch, making one marvel at the scientist-climber's determination not only to get the hideous Heath Robinson contraption to function at all, but then actually to use it successfully to establish a new world altitude record, only stopping when he was forced to turn back, nobly, to save his ailing companion Tejbir Bura.

As a non-climber, Conefrey brings a fresh eye and a grasp of the big picture. He has delved deep into committee minutes, diaries and letters to illuminate, for instance, the dire financial problems faced by 1922 expedition leader Charles Bruce, and the pressures of having to deal not only with his media sponsors back in London but also the infernal micro-managing of Hinks at the Royal Geographical Society. As a media man himself Conefrey is good on the whole convoluted business of presenting a great national event to the public. When it comes to topography, though, the layman has made a few mistakes. The south-west face of Everest is not the Lhotse face, the north ridge does not overlook the Kangshung face and whatever his Sherpas may have told him, it was not from the Nup La that Mallory gazed down into the Western Cwm in 1921. (I think it was the Lho La; the Nup La is a long way further north and the first westerners to cross it – illegally of course – were George Lowe and Ed Hillary in 1952.)

We will forgive the author those minor technical slips in what is otherwise a thoroughly engaging narrative. The epic first attempts on Everest have been retold so many times that all too often modern authors – myself included – have tended to stick to a few salient incidents and characters. Another tendency has been for the tedious cult of Mallory worship to obscure other perhaps more interesting characters. But for Conefrey this is a story 'of all the talents', including the fascinating John Morris, the irascible Longstaff, the appallingly snobby Strutt and the genial Norton, all of them somehow muddling along against the odds, to establish several new records on the world's highest mountain.

I thought that I was quite familiar with the detail of the actual climbing but this book really brings home just how strung out they were on the north ridge. It recreates vividly the miserable chaos at camp V, the forlorn attempt to reach 'The Shoulder' and the subsequent desperate retreat by Mallory, Norton, Somervell and a badly frostbitten Morshead. It also emphasizes the sense of attrition after Finch's attempt had also failed to reach the summit, with many of the team now too weak to go back up. Of course, the fitter ones did go back for that final fateful attempt to regain the North Col, with its lea slope heavily laden with new snow. Sifting through the diaries, letters and official reports, Conefrey comes to the uncomfortable conclusion that Somervell's guilt was justified: they were rash to try it and they were ultimately responsible for the deaths of seven Sherpas in a huge slab avalanche.

It was a sad end to an epic journey into the unknown. In the final pages, Conefrey does not neglect to describe the return journey to Darjeeling, the winding up of the expedition, and the discussions of a possible return to Tibet for another attempt. There is a sense of an unfinished story so I look forward to seeing what Conefrey makes of the 1924 denouement.

Stephen Venables

The Third Pole
My Everest Climb to Find the Truth about Mallory and Irvine
Mark Synnott
Headline, 2022, 448pp, £11.

Phineas T Barnum did not invent show business but he did give it an almighty kick up the backside. So explosive was the American's impact on popular British culture in the 1840s that his method became known as 'Barnum-ism', largely deplored in respectable publications but wildly popular with the public. Tom Thumb dressed as Napoleon? Bring it on. For Barnum, there was no difference in the quality of his spectators' perspectives, only in their ability to pay. Every 'show' had a bit of 'humbug', from religion down, something his friend Albert Smith understood very well when he adopted Barnum's

presentation and marketing élan for his Egyptian Hall lectures on the ascent of Mont Blanc.

I thought frequently of Barnum-ism reading Mark Synnott's bumper new Everest book *The Third Pole*, the latest attempt to solve the mystery of Mallory and Irvine. For example, early in 1923, George Mallory arrived in New York on a disappointingly limited and only partly successful lecture tour. He drew large audiences for two nights in Philadelphia and rave reviews but in New York City on 4 February, despite leaving the audience 'fizzing', half the seats were empty and the show lost money. Synnott suggests that Everest's failure to capture the American imagination was a consequence of competing attractions: the Roaring Twenties and so forth. The *New York Times* certainly knew where the juice was for its readers. Its review next day ran with the clunky headline: 'SAYS BRANDY AIDED MT. EVEREST PARTY; A Swig 27,000 Feet Up "Cheered Us All Up Wonderfully"'. This was three years into prohibition and many Americans might have fancied a tipple, even if it meant a trip up Everest. I suspect Mallory's failure was because his agent hadn't prepared the ground in the way Barnum would have. Either way, America has made up for it since. I think it's correct that Mallory's fate and that of his companion Sandy Irvine now generates even more interest in the United States than in their homeland.

On the Barnum principle that more, not less, is more, Synnott offers a prodigious bill of fare in this book: history, biography, memoir, reportage, travelogue and speculation are crammed into its pages. And it's a congenial banquet, this Everest smorgasbord, cooked up in that moreish American magazine style that slips down easily, even if it does sometimes lack spice. One reviewer judged Albert Smith's show 'an agreeable rattle', and while Everest these days is more tarnished than agreeable, Synnott does his best to imitate Smith. Though he isn't much helped by the blurb on the back cover, pitching *The Third Pole* as the best book on Everest since *Into Thin Air*, published a quarter of a century ago. My immediate reaction was that the blurb's author can't have read many because off the top of my head I can list at least ten I'd rather read than *Into Thin Air*, some of which, inevitably, do better on the history and biography angles than Synnott does: Wade Davis' *Into the Silence*, for example, or Peter Gillman's *The Wildest Dream*. (Synnott does make some startling and dark revelations at the end of the book, more of which later.)

Synnott claims he had no intention of getting caught up in the Everest show but nonetheless the mystery of Mallory and Irvine lures him in and soon he is rummaging through what's left of the two British climbers, looking for clues about their fate. He is best, I think, on Sandy Irvine, who, I concluded, was a man after his own heart: optimistic, forceful, with a can-do spirit, quite American in fact. And Irvine, unlike Mallory, lacks that whiff of snobbery around matters technical: he liked tinkering, making things better. Synnott does something similar in explaining the complexities of the modern drone technology that is transforming so many aspects of our lives, not just filming in the mountains. Just as Irvine made the 1924 oxygen sets

workable on Everest, so Synnott's companion, the brilliant cinematographer Renan Ozturk, gets his flying machines hovering roughly over the spot where Irvine's body was supposed to lie, knowledge of which provided the trigger for Synnott's journey. I found myself, a technophobe, compelled by these accounts in a way I wouldn't expect.

He is on less certain ground when it comes to teasing apart the complexities of British society and culture. He talks often of the British climbing establishment as though it were a homogeneous blob reacting predictably as one entity, rather than a complex of individuals of structures that were and are often at odds with each other. This lack of dexterity springs, I think, from a sort of Barnum-ism, reaching for the colourful snap judgment that moves the story briskly on. For example, he spends time in the company of veteran Irvine hunter Tom Holzel: always good value, never short of an opinion but not always right. (Synnott says in the depths of his notes that he tried to get a perspective from Audrey Salkeld, a more thoughtful source, but heard nothing back, without wondering why that might be.) It says something about Holzel that to test the idiom of 'eating crow' he once actually caught and ate one.

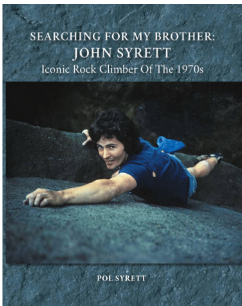
All books have errors and omissions but a few of Synnott's really should have been avoided. He does dig into what Noel Odell saw in 1924 but this was more complicated (and literally nebulous) than he allows; the whole trick springs from those moments and it needs proper scrutiny. You can't just take Odell at face value because the human mind often confects reality from what it expects to find, not what is actually there, especially when it's hypoxic. The reaction to Odell from the Mount Everest Committee was more complicated than simply a cold-shouldering from the 'establishment', another case of taking Holzel at face value. He mangles the relationship between Mallory and the Bloomsbury group. And I'm not sure that the British climbing establishment, whatever that now is, 'reveres' Mallory. The negative reaction, which was far from universal, to the discovery of George Mallory's body was a consequence of having a photograph of his corpse plastered on the front page of the tabloids, not because he was 'revered'. In saying no foreigner went to the north side of Everest in over 20 years before the Chinese in 1960, he forgets the curious exception of Earl Denman. Tenzing Norgay didn't move to Darjeeling after climbing Everest in 1953, he did so in the mid 1930s. The circumstances of the discovery of Mallory's body and the publicity around it could have been more balanced. The section on modern Everest and the training of local guides was superficial and misshapen and should have been omitted.

It's in the climax of the book that things really darken. Synnott's own climb to the summit reveals the polluted nature of modern Everest, impressions that are only reinforced in the documentary film produced from the same expedition by National Geographic and featuring Ozturk's ravishing imagery. It all looks beautiful from a distance but close up we see the ravaged portrait in the world's attic as Synnott unpeels the motivation and fate of a few of the other summit hopefuls around him. All of it seems a bit desperate and best avoided.

As it turns out, the spot that Holzel swears blind is the last resting place of Sandy Irvine turns out to be empty. This is where the book takes a nasty turn. Synnott hears later via the expedition's organiser Jamie McGuiness that the Chinese long ago removed Irvine's body, which is now, allegedly, being kept in storage in Lhasa, along with other artefacts, including his camera. This scenario seems improbable to me, although this is Everest so anything's possible. More likely though, I think, Irvine's body was unceremoniously tossed off the mountain. That also seems to have been the fate of George Mallory, whose remains no longer seem to be where they were interred. Perhaps this will proved to be a mistake. I hope so.

The purpose of this desecration is unclear, although Synnott argues that the Chinese weren't going to allow any possibility that their primacy on the north side of the mountain might be challenged. It's a depressing conclusion to the book and emblematic of the mountain's fate. Yet I doubt these dark revelations about the mortal remains of two genuinely inspirational men will make much difference to this dystopian circus. Because, as Phineas T Barnum once said, there's no such thing as bad publicity. But good heavens, what a freak show.

Ed Douglas



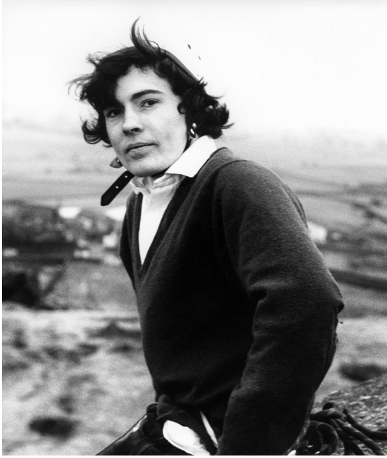
Searching For My Brother: John Syrett
Iconic Rock Climber of the 1970s
Pol Syrett
Blurb, 2021, 174pp, £74.

John Syrett was central player of the Leeds University Union Mountaineering Club in the early 1970s, despite being among a group that would go on to be widely known in their own right: Roger Baxter-Jones, Brian Hall, Angela Soper (née Fowler), Alex MacIntyre and Al Manson to name but a few. The reason is that John had something to teach us: pure style. And something also to show us: pure genius. None of us had either at the time.

I first saw John in action on the iconic Leeds climbing wall in the autumn of 1969 having just returned from the Alps. I arrived for a training session when Bernard Newman stopped me at the beginning of the wall's long corridor.

'Watch this kid.' A curly-haired youth in white shirt and flared trousers wearing sneakers was cruising up and down the wall effortlessly on problems I would soon be flailing on. 'He's just joined the club. Looks like we've found a good 'un.'

And so this shy, soft-spoken demigod entered our midst. By the time I returned to Leeds for post-graduate studies in 1972, Syrett was a major player on the UK rock scene. And two of his close friends, Al Manson and Pete Kitson, were also making names for themselves, especially on Yorkshire grit with bold new routes, all graded HVS and all now regraded mainly in the middle E grades. We all loved to climb with John. His calm confidence ran



Shooting star. John Syrett in his trademark white shirt at Almscliff. *(John Stainforth)*

Brian Hall and John Syrett at the top of Malham Cove's Terrace Wall after making the first ascent of *Midnight Cowboy* (E3 5c) in March 1972. *(Bernard Newman)*

Ron Fawcett, John Syrett and Pete Livesey in Yosemite in 1974. Syrett made many first British ascents during that season, climbing with legends like Jim Bridwell and Steve Wunsch. Livesey recalled how at one point Syrett disappeared into the High Sierra, having decided he needed to lose weight, 'wearing just shirt and shorts to reappear several days later having existed solely on water.' *(Jill Lawrence)*

up and down the rope. It was even possible to copy some of his unlikely moves if you watched him closely. He interpreted the rock in ways very few could, an early version of Johnny Dawes. As John Gill might have commented, for those of us not skilled enough to climb boulders, and were forced to find our challenges on big mountains, what we took with us from John was an understanding that a pure style on rock could also apply to unknown big mountain walls. Alex MacIntyre spent many cold days at the bottom of grit and limestone crags as John worked new routes, part of the learning curve he took with him into 'the art of suffering'.

When my friend Henry Barber came from New Hampshire to visit us at Leeds in 1973, John and Henry immediately hit it off with their shared passion for ground up, on-sight ascents. Ironically, the one failure of style in John's life was the pre-inspection of *Wall of Horrors*, the climb that made his name. But that pre-inspection enabled him to climb the route in short shrift during a gale on a cold November day. It was too cold for his second John Stainforth to even attempt to follow. After that, John became a purist and set an example at a

time when there were whispers of other well know rock stars pre-inspecting routes and arranging fixed gear.

After slicing a tendon in his little finger while trying to open a tin with a knife at a party at my house in the Lakes, John refused to go to the hospital immediately, and that led to the tendon never properly reattaching. I will never forget sitting in my kitchen with John the morning after his accident and hearing him dismiss his injury as trivial and not worth a visit to the hospital. Even the best of times can be so very cruel to the best among us.

His accident came at the end of his time in Leeds but he was already finding a life elsewhere back in the north-east of England working first as a physio and then offshore on oil rigs. He still climbed and according to the hard men of the north-east scene, the disability did not inhibit him as much as we all imagined. He did many new routes and repeats of the ferociously graded crags in Northumbria.

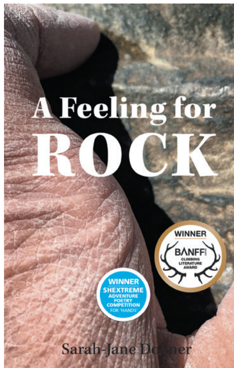
But John had entered a spiral of depression that led to heavy drinking and morose self-isolation. He blamed himself unfairly for the death of a colleague on the Brent Delta oilrig despite a court completely exonerating him at the enquiry. On the same day John committed suicide jumping from the top of Malham Cove after sharing a bottle of whisky with Pete Livesey in the village. His parents refused to believe it was suicide but his sister concludes that it was, citing John's propensity to blame himself for other's deaths and misfortune, and for putting their safety above his own.

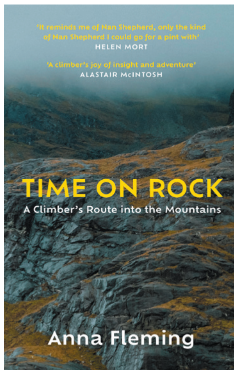
You need not have known John Syrett or even to have heard of him to enjoy and learn from this book. Pol Syrett has immaculately researched the life of her missing brother, travelling on pilgrimages to Britain, Europe and America to meet John's friends and to see the crags and mountains where John climbed. In so doing, she brings back the community and the spirit of those early days of harder on-sight grades. John's biography is engaging, unusually intimate and full of the detail that only a sister could bring to his story. As with many good biographies, John's early family life and letters home when away tell us a lot we did not know about him. He had a passion for other challenges, like growing cacti for which he and his father built a greenhouse. A remarkable and plentiful selection of photographs from the era helps further enliven the telling of John's story.

The book concludes with a chapter of stories and tributes from many of the most notable climbers of his generation and Pol Syrett draws together all the threads that lead to John's early death in a remarkably frank concluding chapter:

> *Those who excel at any activity are often driven to their limits in order to achieve their goals, thus taking greater risks than the rest of us. … Mum once suggested that John's inability to settle in life was because he achieved too much at a relatively young age. … John certainly suffered when, after the accident to his hand, he was unable to climb at the same standard. He did regain his ability, but this injury, unlike others he had sustained, had a long-term impact, probably on his mental health as well as his physical ability.*

John Porter





A Feeling For Rock
Sarah-Jane Dobner
Dob Dob Dob, 2021, pp268, £13.

Time On Rock
A Climber's Route into the Mountains
Anna Fleming
Canongate, 2022,
pp239, £17.

A *Feeling for Rock*, winner of the climbing literature award at the 2021 Banff Mountain Book Festival, is an edgy collection of 113 pieces of prose, poetry, technical advice, photographs and cartoons which explore a multiplicity of climbing-related topics. Climbing is considerably more than 'a bit of exercise' for Dobner: it propels her into 'the existential sphere' where 'we are stripped down and questions are asked.' Indeed, Dobner is as fearless and direct in her internal interrogations as she is on rock: she lays bare long-held assumptions, particularly about the place of women in the climbing community, and delivers thoughtprovoking 'kicks to the beehive' in areas not commonly prioritised in writing about climbing, notably hierarchy, colonialism and discrimination. She asks questions of readers, spotlighting those areas of the sport she feels merit scrutiny.

She is clearly in love with the climbing experience, embracing the intimacy of 'the heartfelt connection' to the physical features of rock and of the climbing community that the sport affords her. Section headings are different emotions, illuminating what being on rock gives her, with love a constant thread through the fabric of her writing – spiritual, sensual, metaphorical – but always candid and often imbued with a sense of fun. She 'married' the rock, became obsessed with her 'queer love interest' and remains faithful to the partnership. Climbing is both her love affair and her life, laced with the inescapable and addictive frisson of risk.

Of necessity the act of climbing generates a mix of intense feelings and Dobner writes about them confidently, illustrating what lies at the centre of her art. This has the welcome effect of stripping away the sport's mystique, thus opening the sport to non-participants. Her verbatim interviews with a group of young women who are just beginning to climb indoors demonstrate that their initial anxiety about the need for strength and fearlessness at the expense of all other qualities was unexpectedly quelled by their joy in simple achievement, trust and co-operation. This early recognition of what climbing offers is pinpointed in her later interviews with established climbers such as Johnny Dawes and Niall Grimes: 'how your emotions feel – that's what keeps me climbing.'

Dobner's writing crackles with energy: she sweeps the reader along with the force of her convictions. The non-linear form and the unpredictability of her choice of topics stimulate, entertain and amuse. There is a challenge here to look beyond what is expected to what is revealed: an unravelling of stereotypes, challenges to outmoded beliefs and behaviours in order to make the climbing community in which she has joyously found her sense of self and her home an easier place to be for everyone who wishes to join it. *A Feeling For Rock* emphatically communicates the all-consuming passion Dobner has for climbing, from its 'little unquantifiable wonders' to the undeniable conviction that for her 'rock is the earth's truth.'

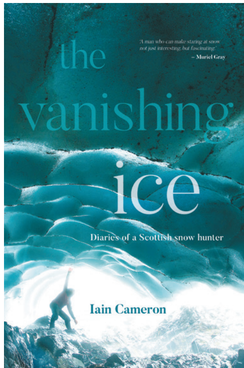
In Time On Rock, Anna Fleming leads the reader on two parallel paths to her self-discovery: the development of her climbing skills and subsequent 'journey into the rock' through a series of encounters both with geological time and the human stories enshrined in it. When she recounts these stories – for example the 1932 mass trespass on Kinder Scout or the 4,000 year old rock etchings on Ilkley Moor – she draws the reader in to share the enrichment of landscape knowledge she experiences. As she becomes more proficient as a climber her awareness of that landscape and her place within it gradually crystallises, bringing a total immersion of self in the rock: 'The self is poured into the stone and the rock flows through the body.' This echoes the writing and practice of Nan Shepherd, the belief that to enter a mountain 'is a slow process of becoming, of allowing the self to soften and mingle into the environment.' There is no sense of 'conquering' the challenges presented by the rock, or climbing to try to prove one's prowess but instead of entering into a partner dance or play, an essential state of being, free from the preoccupations of the self.

The menu of rock Fleming brings to the reader is broken down into chapters, each type with its own distinctive qualities and challenges, each with its accompanying personal anecdotes and broader historical perspectives relating to the geographical area in which they are found. Fleming writes lyrically about the minutiae of surfaces, holds and progression through difficulties and dangers to becoming 'fluent in the rock', able to read its patterns, 'mapping body to stone.' When she broadens the narrative to encompass the vista from the top of a completed climb the 'dizzying expanses of space' propel the reader from acute sensitivity to the smallest of details to an appreciation and understanding of the broader landscape, which has been shaped both by geology and the many lives played out within it.

The two chapters which describe her two attempts to complete the Cuillin ridge, four years apart, are particularly engrossing since they chart a distinct progression not only in ability and experience but in her awareness of differences in scale and challenge. On her initial, ill-prepared ascent she spent 13 hours traversing less than a third of the ridge. On her second attempt she was humbler, having known the power of the environment and learned how to absorb its stresses and difficulties so that they became 'part of us, written into our muscles and memories.'

Fleming's writing is permeated with a deep love of the natural world, not just the rock she climbs on, and she has 'a searing intimacy' with the fells and mountains she walks and wanders. She describes her surroundings beautifully, homing in on telling details – a 'ruffling black loch', 'buttery light' and, pulling back to a wider view, 'the sweeping glacial trough of Ennerdale'. This acutely observant painter's eye adds another layer to the interplay of distance and shift of perspective which she experiences on the rock, the long and intensely pleasurable process of losing self to a greater and more profound awareness.

Val Johnson



The Vanishing Ice
Diaries of a Scottish Snow Hunter
Iain Cameron
Vertebrate Publishing, 2021, pp216, £20.

On 30 September 2017 Iain Cameron hiked into Garb Choire Mòr high on the southern rim of Braeriach in the Cairngorms. By whichever approach – over the plateau from Loch Einich, across from the Sugarbowl on the ski road above Loch Morlich, or from upper Deeside – it is a long and arduous flog.

This was the fifth time that year Cameron had entered Garb Choire Mòr, each time driven by a compulsion that many folk, mountaineers not least, would find a touch insane. He was anxious to know (to say 'curious' would be a gross understatement) whether any snow had survived the summer in this wildest of cliff-girt recesses.

It had – just. Cameron had arrived in time to conduct the last rites. So small and light was the remaining patch that he was able to lift it up.

> *It felt odd to be holding this lunch-platter-sized piece of old, dirty snow that had fallen from the sky late in 2006, eleven years previously, the oldest relic of its type in Britain. For some divine amusement, the weather gods laughed at us as we stood by the dying patch, sending a few derisory flakes downward.*

The 'platter' would soon be gone: the fourth complete disappearance since 1996. Yet hitherto the only record of a snowless Garb Choire Mòr over the previous 300 years was in 1933 and 1959. It was the same story in 2018. Cameron had been keeping watch. On 29 September 2018 he peered over the hollow where the snow usually lies and saw 'not a lick of anything white'.

> *It then occurred to me that I had been one of only a very select few who'd stood on this hallowed piece of [so rarely snowless] ground. It felt like a little comfort, but my overriding feeling was sadness.*

Reading this, a mental picture forms of Cameron, stood in this forlorn place, weary after his toilsome hike, head bowed, gazing blankly at the spot where on so many occasions he had exulted to find snow on a summer's day. He may not exactly have held cap in hands, but the scene evoked is that of the graveside. Think perhaps of the chilly cemetery moments in Carol Reed's *The Third Man* or innumerable westerns.

And perhaps we can people the stage with other mourners: Christopher Nicholson, poet and author of the beautifully meditative *Among the Summer Snows* (2018) would definitely be there, though he suffered agonies on his own pilgrimages into Garb Choire Mòr; Charlie English, author of *The Snow Tourist* (2009) perhaps, and poet Nancy Campbell, whose lyrical *Fifty Words for Snow* (2020) really should include a word for venerable snow patches. Present too, in spirit, would be the ecologist and doyen of snow studies in Scotland, Dr Adam Watson, who died in 2019 and to whom *The Vanishing Ice* is dedicated.

Indeed, as the graveside gathering grows so does the impression that books about snow are proliferating in inverse proportion to the rate of the white stuff's disappearance from the mountains. The fact that I'm writing this review in Braemar in February as the sleet hammers down and skis stand idle in a corner of the cabin only adds a personal element to this sense of loss.

Nicholson comes to recognise that death is closely linked with his fascination with summer snow, and he muses on the equivocal relationship between snow and time. On the one hand, snow is ephemeral, a model of transitory existence, a fact painfully underscored for Nicholson by the death from cancer of his wife Kitty. On the other, snow is capable of checking the onward rush of time, 'or at least of giving that illusion. Heavy snowfall brings the modern world to a temporary halt. Roads are blocked, airports shut down…'

Cameron is not much given to such philosophising. He is an electrician by trade and, being a good deal younger than the poet, more a creature of the social media age and the sharing of data.

However in his slightly gauche way he shares Nicholson's tendency to anthropomorphise snow patches and likens his visits to long-lying drifts, whether on Braeriach, Ben Nevis, Aonach Mòr or Aonach Beag, as akin to visiting an elderly relative: 'you hope that things will be good when you get there, but if the person turns out to be in poorer health than you anticipated, then your own feelings are correspondingly negatively affected.' Moreover, his going back to the same spots year after year is a demonstration that these 'elderly relatives have family that care for them.'

The strength of Cameron's book however lies in the extent of his researches into the arcane business of snow-patch recording and his obsessive enthusiasm for his subject. Each year, on 1 July, he can be found on the summit of Meall Odhar, overlooking the Glenshee ski area, for the annual Scottish snow survey; in 2010 he unilaterally postponed his honeymoon in order not to miss the survey. At 922m, Meall Odhar is, according the Cameron,

Vanishing trick. Only certain frequencies of light can penetrate snow, amply shown here in a magnificent snow tunnel near Drumochter in the Cairngorms National Park. *(Vertebrate Publishing)*

one of the finest vantage points in Scotland for the number of hills one can see that still carry snow. (The view down into the glen is less impressive, the scarred hillsides and skeletal ski pylons, accompanied by a soundtrack of motorcycles revving over the A93.)

Adam Watson initiated the annual survey in 1974 since when the decline in snow patches has been both remarkable and worrying. The mean total of patches visible from Meall Odhar has more than halved from 1,218 in the period 1974-89 to 465 in 2004-19. Cameron points to the correlation with NASA figures which show the 10 warmest years on record have been some of the most recent. One wonders what this year's count will be?

The snows of Garb Choire Mòr disappeared again in December 2021, their absence sending a timely Scottish message to COP26 delegates assembling in Glasgow for the climate change jamboree. (A message that like many others from around the warming globe was more heard than heeded.)

Cameron became the media's go-to expert. He had watched a patch known, from the rock shape above it, as the Sphinx as it dwindled from the size of an A4 piece of paper to nothing. 'How ironic and prescient it is that our longest-lasting patch of snow melted for the third time in five years, right on the eve of COP26,' he said. 'Before 2000 it had melted only three times in the last 150 years.'

This is, of course, disturbing stuff for those of us for whom the snow and

ice of the Highlands are winter essentials, whether for climbing, hiking or ski mountaineering. According to a 2019 assessment *Snow Cover and Climate Change in the Cairngorms National Park*, the long-term trend is towards greatly reduced snow cover with the possibility of some years of very little to no snow by 2080. How soon before we're scraping around for the last patch on which it is possible to inscribe a couple of linked turns?

It is hardly credible to square this almost snowless vision of the Cairngorms – and the Highlands more generally – with the winters Watson enjoyed in the 1950s and 1960s. Cameron devotes an affectionate chapter on Watson, a mentor with whom he shared data and friendship, yet the portrait, for me, is incomplete and misses some of the broader appeal of Watson as a Cairngorm pioneer. Sadly, many of Watson's impressive forays on Nordic skis over the Cairngorms – often solo – will soon be unrepeatable, if not so already. In April 1962 he made a celebrated round of the six main tops of the Cairngorms; there are contrary spikes in the trend of diminishing snow cover so I guess the chances of repeating this traverse are not quite yet simply a dream, but you'd have to be fast into your bindings.

In conclusion let's head south and consider an example of the instances of serendipity that make *The Vanishing Ice* much more than statistics. Though born and brought up in Port Glasgow, Cameron doesn't share the disdain of many of his countrymen for hills south of 'the Wall'; one of his favourite groups of hills in the whole of Britain is the Quantocks, though this has little to do with snow.

One of the best documented hills in terms of snow-related events turns out, to my fascination, to be Cross Fell, hulking giant of the north Pennines and within clear sight of my home in the Eden valley. This record exists thanks to climatologist Gordon Manley, earlier in the field than even Watson, and described by Cameron as 'the snow researcher *par excellence*'. During the 1930s Manley spent many days walking or cross-country skiing in upper Teesdale and Weardale, just over the watershed from Eden.

Cameron picks up on Manley's finding that 'the indigenous use of skis by the lead miners in the northern Pennines has died out since 1900.' This suggested to Cameron that it was no longer practical to use them because of reduced snow cover, but he adds that Manley observed it might equally have due to the demise of lead mining on the Pennines.

'It is a delightful thought to imagine lead miners in Alston or some other North Pennine village setting off from their houses after breakfast on skis,' writes Cameron. Aside from the fact that the folk of Alston would point out that theirs is not a *village* but the highest market *town* in England, this is a distinctly romantic picture.

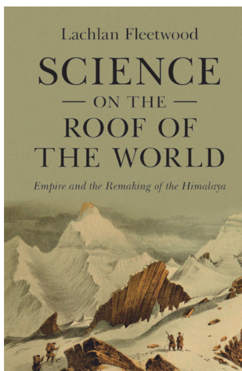
Lead mining was a hard life and a short one. Breakfast, as like as not, would not be had in the comfort of a house in the valley but in a stone hut high on the moors close to the mines. Here, in cramped conditions, men and boys would spend the long working week. As for skis, here I turned to the Gordon Manley's papers held at the University of Cambridge and came across the following gem:

> *Nothing is more enjoyable than to take quick advantage of a cheerful windy and bright February Sunday up Teesdale. It may be added that formerly in Teesdale and Weardale up to the end of last century [19th] the lead miners made use of what they called 'skees' – I have spoken with one of the last local men to use them, above Stanhope; they made them out of barrel-staves and it seems fitting that the most snowy district in England should be the only one I know of in which a 'native' development of 'skees' was found.*

So my own, probably still over-romantic image is of miners, released from the hell of their working week, strapping on their barrel-stave skis and whooping down to the villages of Nenthead and Garrigill. Surely a run even less likely to be repeated than Watson's epic traverses of the Cairngorms.

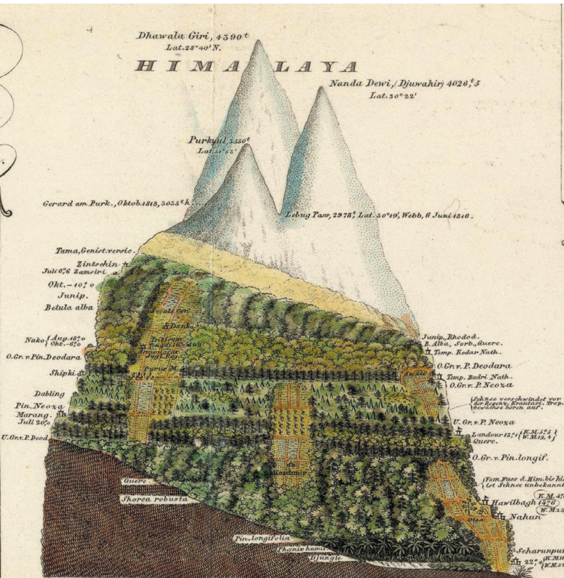
Cross Fell, at 893m, is the highest hill in England outside the Lake District. Stalwarts of Carlisle Ski Club reportedly skied a large patch of snow near the summit on 1 July 1979 and a local farmer observed two tiny white dots in the same locality on 18 August that same year. This is the latest Cameron has ever heard of snow lying on an English hill in the current era. 'It is very hard to imagine that date being beaten in my lifetime, alas,' he says. I fear he's right, but I'll be keeping a weather eye out nonetheless.

Stephen Goodwin



Science on the Roof of the World
Empire and the Remaking of the Himalaya
Lachlan Fleetwood
Cambridge University Press, 2022, pp294, £75.

Conducting science in the 19th century was truly hard work, especially in rugged mountain environments such as the Himalaya. For Europeans this vast region of mountains was a 'blank space' on the map, but it was by no means an invisible space. In particular, for the British East India Company (EIC), looking up from the lowland plains of India, it appeared to be a very visible and formidable barrier. An unacceptable geographical lacuna, the Himalaya presented itself as both a troublesome and a challenging prospect to the military minds that staffed the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India, the men tasked with measuring and mapping the entire subcontinent. It was both a physical and a political frontier demarcating the northern limits of the EIC's imperial vision. Psychologically tainted with the ever-impending threat of Russian military encroachment, which might descend otherwise unseen from the north. For the indigenous communities who had long lived in the region, of course, this space was far from being a blank. It was home. A place they knew and understood well. Consequently, in order to comprehend and quantify this region as a globally comparable space, European explorers realised they would need to utilise indigenous networks in strenuous efforts



A detail, featuring the Himalaya, from the map 'Umrisse Der Pflanzengeographie', 'outlines of plant geography', from the monumental work *Physikalischer Atlas* (1838-45) which was used to illustrate Alexander von Humboldt's *Cosmos*. 'Umrisse Der Pflanzengeographie' was the work of the appropriately named geographer and cartographer Heinrich Berghaus. *(David Rumsey Collection)*

to measure these mountains and fit them into the hierarchical purview of western science, a fact that many of these heroically self-styled individuals subsequently downplayed.

At the start of the 19th century, as Lachlan Fleetwood shows in *Science on the Roof of the World*, contrary to our present-day perception, the Himalaya stood in the shadow of the Andes. Alexander von Humboldt's famous scientific explorations, particularly his ascent of Chimborazo in 1802, occluded the true stature of the Himalaya. It was not until 1856 that Mount Everest was found to be the world's highest peak. However, this book is not about the contest for achieving summit records. As Fleetwod says, 'mountaineering as a sporting pursuit, shorn of scientific pretensions, was still decades away from reaching the Himalaya when this study takes its leave'. Instead, this book is more intimately concerned with the ways in which a new concept of a 'vertical globe' was first mapped out. The guiding tenets of this project were very much rooted in, and facilitated by, imperialism. As such, it was a project that only really became feasible as a result of the Anglo-Gurkha War of 1814-1816, which gave the British greater access to the region.

The recent 'spatial turn' in historiography has prompted historians of empire to utilise geographical features such as oceans, islands, rivers, and, in this particular case, mountains to examine previously unseen 'transnational, transimperial and translocal stories'. Simultaneously, seeking to find and amplify the role of indigenous and subaltern voices who played a crucial part in assisting or resisting such efforts to broaden the horizons of western imperialist interests in frontier zones is also an important part of such histories. Hence, contemporary historians such as Fleetwood are increasingly

drawing upon the more expansive scholarly resources of a transdisciplinary toolkit to re-write the history of exploration. For instance, utilising the allied perspectives of anthropologists, historical geographers and historians of science, to better inform their enquiries, reassessing primary source materials, and thereby shaping new and transformative histories of empire. In this respect, Fleetwood builds upon the previous work of exemplary scholars in this field, such as David Arnold, Christopher Bayly, Felix Driver and Sujit Sivasundaram.

Over the course of six fascinating and richly detailed chapters, Fleetwood contends that scale was a key criterion in assessing 19th-century scientific engagement with the Himalaya. As already noted, it was also one of the main reasons why the region's pre-eminence remained comparatively unrecognised for such a long time. While efforts to know and understand the region were initially overshadowed by the likes of the Andes and the Alps, the most useful and familiar comparisons to hand at the time (such as Mont Blanc and Snowdon), were simply dwarfed by both the conceptual and the physical reality of the Himalaya.

As a vast and culturally diverse region, the Himalaya was a space over which it has always been difficult to exert imperial or state power, something that has been a substantial focus of recent scholarly interest since the publication of James C Scott's *The Art of Not Being Governed* (Yale University Press, 2009). In terms of both culture and climate, this vast region is a multi-layered zone of both mutually distinct and interdependent frontiers. And, as the first two chapters of *Science on the Roof of the World* demonstrate, this is why the Himalaya has always managed to resist easy quantification. Many of the scientific instruments available during the early decades of the 19th century were simply not robust enough or sufficiently calibrated to contend with the intense rigors of the region. It was these difficulties which scientifically-minded travellers set out to overcome, aided by parties of locals who acted as guides, porters, and collectors, but whose names were all too often left unacknowledged in the official records of such expeditions.

The central portion of the book (chapters three, four and five) examines the medical topographies as well as the materiality of mountain environments. Looking in depth at early understandings of altitude sickness and the different physiological ways in which mountain environments adversely affected the human body in terms of the physical and mental capacities of explorers to observe and record their findings under extreme conditions. This neatly flows into an examination of social hierarchies and the role of labour, as well as the ways in which material specimens, such as fossils and plants, were moved from the uplands down to the lowlands. Such material was circulated, used and interpreted in a variety of ways; valued either as medicinal or ritual objects by indigenes, or as purely scientific or commodifiable specimens by western scientists; for instance, informing geological interpretations of mountain formation, or providing the seeds for distribution to a network of botanical gardens across the British Empire. Here Fleetwood gives a special focus to the lesser known and somewhat neglected

'Junnoo [Jannu (7710m)] 24,000 ft from Choonjerma Pass [Mirgin La (4640m)] 16,000 ft, East Nepal', from Joseph Dalton Hooker's *Himalayan Journals* (1854). *(Wellcome Trust Library)*

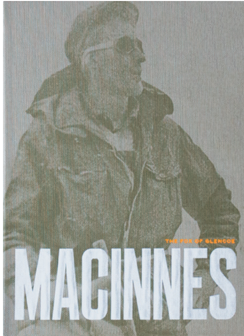
gardens located in the Himalayan foothills where such specimens were first sent, to be commercially developed by indigenous staff. As Fleetwood discovers, these persons could be highly skilled and knowledgeable men who were already in post at these institutions and whose roles had been retained and continued from previous ruling hierarchies, thereby giving us a tantalising glimpse into the continuities and cross-overs involved in such processes of knowledge exchange between indigenes and imperialists.

The book concludes with a sixth chapter that very neatly surveys and sums up the highly detailed findings already outlined in the preceding chapters, reflecting upon the 'vertical limits' mountain environments imposed upon the creation of various 'imagined geographies', utilising Peter Bishop's *The Myth of Shangri-La* (Athlone Press, 1989) as a notable datum peg for previous cultural-scientific interpretations of the Himalaya. However, rather than being a region set wholly apart, Fleetwood demonstrates that the lowlands and the uplands were simultaneously both separated and conjoined in the contemporary colonial consciousness of British India. Thereby showing that while the mountain regions of the Himalaya ultimately remained marginal and peripheral spaces to the British Empire as a whole, they were nevertheless still intimately tied to, and thus in many respects helped to define, the imperialist appropriation of the Indian subcontinent. In essence, science was undoubtedly a tool of empire, but the Himalaya was the pre-eminent region that pushed the limits and defined the boundaries of both.

Science on the Roof of the World is a meticulously well-crafted scholarly monograph which has been very deftly derived from Lachlan Fleetwood's PhD thesis. Examining and reflecting upon a good range of scientific and geographical traditions, as they were first practiced in the Himalaya,

Fleetwood writes in an admirably lucid and engaging manner, which gives depth whilst remaining accessible. As such, *Science on the Roof of the World* should appeal equally to academics as well as to informed lay readers who are interested in the history and exploration of mountain environments alike. This book is an excellent and fascinating addition to the growing literature on early scientific and imperialist engagements with the Himalaya, one which views the region from the twin perspectives of both the local and the global, and one that shows the many ways in which each is intimately interlinked with the other.

Tim Chamberlain



Hamish MacInnes
The Fox of Glencoe
Edited by Deziree Wilson
Scottish Mountaineering Press, 2021, 366pp, £30.

The heart of the bibliophile mountaineer will surely beat a little faster on first handling this beautifully presented volume, cloth-bound in its smart slip case. It does indeed suggest something special.

Hamish MacInnes needs no introduction to readers of the *Alpine Journal* – his obituary appeared in last year's edition – and you would be forgiven for thinking this is a biography. Rather, it is a collection of MacInnes' memoirs in 33 chapters, some quite short, some running to 3,000 words or so and some mere musings, illuminated by several short, pertinent pieces from old friends with whom he had worked and climbed. (I must confess to being one of them.) It's well illustrated with photographs of his own, buttressed with others from several known photographers. Each chapter is a self-contained piece telling of an epic climb, an incident, an adventure perhaps or just an interesting happening that he felt was worth recounting and although those of us who knew him will realise that much is missing, by the time you have read this book you will have a pretty good picture of an extraordinary man.

Hamish was 90 and a well-established author when he died in 2020, with dozens of articles, several expedition books, a series of guidebooks, an internationally acclaimed mountain rescue handbook and even several whodunit novels to his credit, but canny Scot that he was, he had always organised his papers with a view to some sort of biography. Over the years he had written much that was applicable and doubtless he had expected to complete it himself but it was not to be. As an elderly man in his eighties the disgraceful misdiagnosis of a urinary infection saw him forcibly incarcerated in a psychiatric hospital, which together with the resulting memory loss, denied him valuable time in his few final years. Nevertheless, delving into his archives he did manage to reconstruct most of his life, and with BBC Scotland he produced a visual, semi-biographical pull-together for television, a fascinating miscellany of film rushes and photographs hung around

his own commentary. Alas, it proved to be his public obituary, albeit only a transitory one, for unlike a book, things visual are here today and gone tomorrow.

Thus this book is selective and in no way definitive, and as the chapters are arranged in only approximate chronological sequence, and not formally dated, it recounts only segments of the MacInnes life story. There are several inaccuracies in material that presumably was written or completed in those final years after his recovery from memory loss. I hardly recognise his recounting of the filming of Clint Eastwood's *The Eiger Sanction* though I was with him the whole time, and there is much unsaid elsewhere that readers might have expected. But after all, the completion of the book was posthumous.

The chapter titles are typically MacInnes and suggest an intriguing and probably exciting text to follow. 'Misadventure on the Charmoz-Grépon and a Drainpipe' recounts an early escapade from which he was rescued by none other than Lionel Terray and Raymond Lambert. 'Perambulations on Mount Cook' explains why he is a notable figure in New Zealand, while 'Uncommon Men' is essentially a short history of the Glaswegian Creagh Dhu Club, with whom his time spent climbing 'was probably the most memorable in my life.' The reader will soon discover why. There is a vivid account of his lucky survival with Mike Banks in an avalanche on Rakaposhi, and of his epic 13-day traverse of Shkhelda on starvation rations.

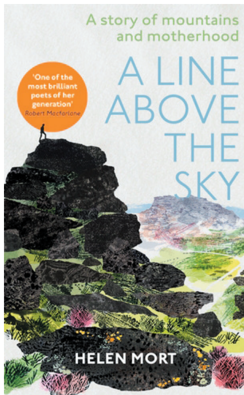
It's is not all gripping adventure though. MacInnes tells the story of the legendary Glencoe School of Winter Climbing and of the development of the famous Message – the first all-metal ice axe – and how it evolved into the Terrordactyl. 'A First Ascent in the Frosty Caucasus' describes how prototype Terrordactyls proved their worth climbing a desperate new line on Pik Shchurovsky deemed impossible by the Russians. And few appreciate that besides his mountain-rescue expertise and the safety innovations to which several chapters are devoted, MacInnes was also something of a Rider Haggard character. Early on, while in New Zealand, he had learnt how to pan for gold and the chapter 'Not All that Glitters' chapter tells how he, together with Joe Brown and Yvon Chouinard roamed the Ecuadorian jungle on the trail of a lost cache of Inca gold, not just once but three times. Not surprisingly the famous ascent of the Great Prow of Roraima, complete with Don Whillans, Joe Brown and Mo Anthoine as jokers, warrants no less than 26 pages in 'The Lost World'. And let's not go into the contents of Chapter 31: 'The Y-Front Rescue'.

Of course the gist of some of the hair-raising happenings will be familiar to well-read mountaineers but reading of them in MacInnes' own words, telling it as it was, enlivened with his frequent wry asides and his fine sense of the ridiculous, brings them to life. He is often introspective and always aware of far more than mere difficult moves, overhanging rock and manky pitons: a hard man, yes, but a genuine aesthete. It is interesting to compare his rather folksy style with the more eloquent prose of his close friend Tom Patey, whose brilliant account of the first winter traverse of the Cuillin appears as Chapter 18, the only complete chapter from an outside contributor

and too good to ignore. Each chapter is an easy and enjoyable read, and being complete is ideal for bed time reading and happy dreams of exciting adventures.

Some books are a pleasure to handle and the Scottish Mountaineering Press, the modern manifestation of admired guidebook publisher the Scottish Mountaineering Trust, has done Hamish MacInnes proud with this unusual volume. His friends especially will be touched by the excellent, specially commissioned pencil portrait of the man himself on the final page. Arranging his manuscripts, editing his text and designing such a book required much work and considerable talent. Deziree Wilson and the SMP production team are to be complimented on what must be the most attractive volume of its genre, at such a price, to appear for many a year. It is a worthy memorial and Hamish would surely have been delighted to see the finished volume.

John Cleare



A Line Above the Sky
On Mountains and Motherhood
Helen Mort
Ebury Press, 2022, 268pp, £17.

Remember Messner's definition of mountaineering? 'If no risk has been taken, no climbing has taken place.' Remember Robert Burton on danger and what he calls 'a bitter jest' in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621)? 'A bitter jest, a slander, a calumny, pierceth deeper than any loss, danger, bodily pain or injury whatsoever'. Helen Mort is the victim of at least two 'bitter jests', but she is also a risk taker. Halfway through this reflective memoir she catches herself 'taking liberties with a story that isn't mine to tell […] I have no right to narrate this, embellish it, just as I have no right to delve into Alison Hargreaves's innermost life.' In this book Mort is intimate and unsparing in examining her experience of pregnancy, giving birth and the first years of motherhood as a climber and fell runner fascinated by the experience of Alison Hargreaves who sits on her shoulder throughout as her 'ghost companion'. It is a risky writing project. We know that Alison's story, and that of her son Tom, did not end well. But Mort is up for the challenge: 'If there is no risk in my writing, no fear, there is no pleasure. I have to make myself feel uncomfortable, take chances in the way a mountaineer does, calculating and recalculating, pitching their frail body against the wind. In risk, we feel most alive.'

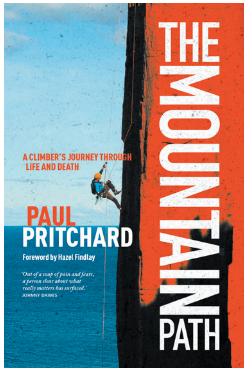
There have been other books by women on climbing, the outdoors and motherhood, perhaps most notably Lilace Mellin Guignard's *When Everything Beyond the Walls is Wild* (2019), but none so frank, so visceral and so layered in meanings. Teased at school as a 10 year old for being fat – the first bitter jest – Mort turned herself into an athlete. 'All my life I'd wanted to be a line,'

she writes, giving the book's title one of its meanings. The others are in a life as a writer of lines, a climber, a runner and 'underlining the desires of others'. 'Then there is the line of the pregnancy test' and the renunciation of lines, together with individuality. With her pink-cropped hair, Mort is uneasy at first in joining NCT classes with the other expectant mums: 'I did not feel like a mother. I barely felt like a woman.' But after their babies were born they 'began to know each other as women as well as mothers.' She writes: 'Together, we formed a shield.' The result of this new-found female kinship is a desire, when Alfie is a year old, to climb with a woman, something Mort had barely done before. The return to leading on Stanage with Anna Fleming as the only women climbing together that day is a reminder of how pioneering this can still feel at a personal level, for all our assumptions about progress.

Of course, the Alison Hargreaves narrative inevitably leads towards the death of her son, Tom and here the parallel 'ghosting' story might get uncomfortable. Mort recounts watching reports of Tom's disappearance and search efforts hourly through the night whilst breastfeeding three-month-old Alfie. Her emotional investment is clear. Later, while Alfie is safe at pre-school, there is a knock at the door. 'I could not shake the instinct that something must have happened to him.' In fact, it is an acquaintance calling to warn her that her face has been superimposed on a body on a porn site – the second bitter jest and the ultimate crossing of the line of her own body. In writing about this Mort 'takes back control.' Women, she says, have always been judged by the world by more than their subjective selves, as in the duality of mother-climber in Alison Hargreaves' case. Mort's conclusion to this book is to reflect upon the multiple roles of the women who came before her, her present friends and, as poet and novelist, her fictional characters: 'If women are always to be doubled, surveyor and surveyed, then let us be multiple. Let us stand so close that we seem to merge together, the dead and the living, the real and the fictional.'

In the final lines of the book Mort sees, with her eyes closed, a mother and son climbing on Stanage in the winter sun. A male reviewer might be forgiven for seeing, with his eyes closed, other lines above the sky, yet to be written. But that would not diminish his appreciation of this extraordinary revelation of what is also ordinary. The book belies its teasing assertion that to find meaning in climbing is to find meaning in life. Clearly it is not true for Mort to say that, 'You love it precisely because it means nothing.' Any reader will come away from this book profoundly enriched by the knowledge of why the opposite is the case.

Terry Gifford



The Mountain Path
A Climber's Journey Through Life and Death
Paul Pritchard
Vertebrate Publishing, 2021, 192pp, £24.

Live it up, fill your cup and be merry, sow your wild oats whilst you may, for the toothless types of tomorrow, they were the tigers just yesterday!
Tom Patey

This is the most unusual mountaineering book I have ever read, a combination of the philosophy of risk, the psychology of why we climb and how it may unexpectedly change our whole being. I should have been prepared for Hazel Findlay's outstanding introduction; a committed climber she confessed that she finds most climbing books rather boring, too full of machismo, but not the writings of Paul Pritchard.

In the style of Dylan Thomas, let us begin at the beginning. Paul grew up rather hedonistically on the moors of Lancashire, setting fire to them being among his favourite occupations, along with spitting competitions and cutting school, but a teacher introduced him to the life-affirming activity of rock climbing in the local quarries of Wilton at the age of 16 and he was hooked. From then on climbing was to dominate his life. I know from personal experience what a vibrant climbing scene there was at that time in the rather low-key climbing environment of those quarries: Anglezarke, Houghton, the various Wiltons and that boulder-freakies' delight, Brownstones. Paul quickly became one of the area's leading pioneers.

In 1986 Paul moved to Llanberis, to what was to be one of the most innovative scenes of British climbing history, with totally committing new routes on the sea cliffs of Gogarth and desperately run-out climbs in the Llanberis slate quarries. There was besides the climbing scene the wild partying and this unfortunately led some of its participants to the dead end of drug use and a promising climbing career snuffed out. Fortunately Pritchard was not to be one of these. It was the time of the Thatcher revolution, the running down of heavy industry and the coal mines leading to mass unemployment, but Paul, who had happily sacrificed a joinery apprenticeship, became a full-time climber on the dole. Going climbing every day, the standard of these dole boys went through the roof. I recall giving a lecture in Sweden at that time and being asked at the end why there were so many hard, free rock climbs in the UK. The reply – 'we have to thank Mrs Thatcher for this!' – rather confused the questioner.

Paul was to experience the first of his brushes with death at this time whilst repeating a route on the back wall of the Wen Zawn at Gogarth. When he reached what he expected to be the crux it was seeping water, but he was not too worried for he believed he had good protection below him. The inevitable happened and he slipped off, but to his surprise the wired nut

Paul Pritchard, on the profundity trail. 'When I was first recovering, I never thought I'd be able to travel again, never mind pedal all the way to the highest mountain on Earth.' *(Sharyn Jones)*

just below him broke and this led to a chain reaction as his whole line of pro failed and he landed in the sea. The fall rendered him unconscious and he was under water for many minutes before his partner, the Australian climber and photographer, Glenn Robbins managed to climb down, fish him out and pull him onto a ledge above the high-tide mark. Glenn then gave him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and Pritchard came back from the dead, although still injured in the fall. Robbins then tried to climb out but failed and things were looking serious when another climber appeared at the lip of the zawn. Alerted to Paul's predicament, a rescue helicopter was eventually summoned. But you cannot keep a man like Pritchard off the crag for long.

A few years later Paul was winter climbing *Centre Post Direct* on Creag Meagaidh, when he came upon a section of eggshell ice: frozen on the outside but soft snow underneath. In trying to climb this he was soon in difficulty and was sinking up to his armpits, breaking through the surface ice into the powder beneath. He tried to retreat but the inevitable happened and he took a monster 50m fall severely injuring his back. Fortunately fellow guide Nick Kekus was on the mountain that day and arranged a lower to the valley floor and the eventual arrival of Lochaber MRT and a helicopter that deposited him in Fort William's hospital. Besides his back injuries the ice hammer he was carrying hit him in the face as he was falling. Once again, instead of seeking solace on the couch, he was soon off to Patagonia and the Himalaya, and was still wending his way up extreme rock climbs.

Paul had begun to write about his climbs and journeys, and from the start his articles he received wide acclaim. His 1997 collection *Deep Play* won the

Boardman Tasker Prize and though this was richly deserved, it set in motion the most challenging of Paul's mishaps. Using his prize money to fund a world climbing tour in 1998, he arrived with Celia Bull on Tasmania for an ascent of the needle-thin sea stack the Totem Pole. What happened that day, when a rock struck him on the head and left him close to death as Bull hurried to get help, was described in *Totem Pole*, which also won the Boardman Tasker Prize.

In *The Mountain Path* we learn that though this left him hemiplegic, he has somehow crafted a life of adventuring and doing, albeit of a different style and standard but nonetheless worthy. In fact he writes in his latest book that his life has been enhanced and enlarged spiritually by this tryst with the grim reaper.

After a long period of rehabilitation in the UK, learning to deal with his reduced physical ability, he returned to Australia and to Hobart in Tasmania where he now resides, having married and become a family man; but his spirit of enquiry and his wide reading on every subject from psychology to philosophy fill the pages of *The Mountain Path*. Recovering myself from a stroke and a serious infection, I have also found one lives in thought rather than physicality. It's hardly surprising that Paul became enamoured of this exploration, especially whilst practising intense periods of vipassana meditation.

One chapter I found particularly interesting was 'Pilgrimage'. This describes the train journey from Chengdu to Lhasa and then Paul's challenging journey by tricycle first to Everest Base Camp then on to Kathmandu. The final chapter is about Paul's return to climb the Totem Pole, 18 years after the accident which nearly cost him his life. A jolly team assembled on the promontory opposite and belayed by Steve Monks he set forth. Steve, once a stalwart of the south-west climbing scene before discovering Arapiles and emigrating, led with his usual flair while Pritchard followed on Jumars, managing one arm pull-ups with his one good hand and a clever rigging system. Two long pitches and the summit was reached; Paul could finally put to rest his Totem Pole ambitions though he was, as we say in the north, completely banjaxed physically.

The Mountain Path is, like the writer, unique. I would recommend it to all who love and aspire to climb in wild places. But I would also place it on a list by anyone studying the psychology or philosophy of risk. The reading list at the end of this volume illustrates where the author is coming from and is comprehensive. Vertebrate, its publisher is to be thanked for the courage in publishing such an impressive work.

Dennis Gray

Kangchenjunga
The Himalayan Giant
Doug Scott
Edited by Catherine Moorehead
Vertebrate Publishing, 2021, 272pp, £24.

Kangchenjunga: a strange yet catchy name. Wasn't it that high, mysterious mountain of my childhood, beyond the lake where the Swallows and Amazons enjoyed their adventures? Literary researchers have suggested Arthur Ransome's original was probably Coniston Old Man but my mother told me the real mountain stood in the mighty Himalaya range in India, so I knew of it, as did geographers for centuries past. Indeed it was the best-known mountain in the Himalaya before the epic of Mallory and Irvine focused interest on Everest.

Visible from afar, known together with its massed satellites as the 'Five Treasuries of the Great Snows'[1], venerated by several religions and until 1849 thought to be the world's highest mountain, Kangchenjunga proved awkward to explore and a feasible climbing route difficult to locate. Nevertheless, standing a mere 46 miles (74km) from the Indian hill station of Darjeeling, itself served by a railway, the massif's eastern, Sikkim flank, where access was controlled by the Raj, was relatively well frequented from Victorian times. The western approaches meanwhile, rising in Nepal, remained, with a couple of notable exceptions, forbidden until 1949 when Sikkim itself, from 1950 an Indian state protectorate and later absorbed into independent India, became difficult to visit.

With its long history and ranking as the world's third highest peak, Kangchenjunga was an appropriate subject for a major biography, a task which has been shouldered by an author who knew the mountain better than most, having made its third ascent and that by a challenging new route. Sadly it is a posthumous publication and was to be his final book. That it actually appeared is due to the sterling work of its editor Catherine Moorehead, a notable author herself and an authority on the mountains of Central Asia.

Not surprisingly much has been written over the years about the Sikkim Himalaya and the occasional clandestine journey into far eastern Nepal, and Doug Scott delved deep in his research. The book comprises four parts, the first describing the geography of the region and explaining the various ethnic groups who inhabit it and something of their history, then in part two the missionaries, traders, explorers, scientists and artists who came to Sikkim are covered in some detail. He suggests that the first European sighting of Kangchenjunga was possibly by a pair of Portuguese missionary

1. 'Treasuries' or 'Treasures'? The local Lhopo folk considered the mountain to be the hiding place of mythical treasures hidden among the snows: gold, turquoise, precious stones, grain, salt, medicine and sacred scriptures, the latter rendering of the Tibetan was by those who held that it referred to the massif's five prominent summits.

Last words. Doug Scott at the snow cave at camp four (c7350m) on Kangchenjunga's north ridge in 1979. This third ascent of the mountain features in Scott's book *Kangchenjunga*. *(Doug Scott)*

friars in 1627, although later he postulates that it could well have been the English trader Ralph Fitch (1550-1611) who must certainly have seen the Himalayan snows from northern Bengal. As geography and history all this is a worthy addition to the works of Kenneth Mason and John Keay.

The third part is titled 'Climbs and Attempts' and is essentially the stories of the pioneering Victorian and early 20th century artists, writers, mountain travellers and serious mountaineers who penetrated into the inner recesses of the Kangchenjunga massif, explored, attempted and sometimes climbed outlying peaks, crossed difficult passes and searched for possible ascent routes, until eventually the boldest attempted to climb the mountain itself.

Many of these forays are described in the words of those who made them, with excerpts from the writings of the botanist Joseph Dalton Hooker and Edward Lear of nonsense fame, to Douglas Freshfield and Howard Somervell. Ten pages are devoted to the still on-going controversy over W W Graham's claimed first ascent of Kabru, an important Kangchenjunga outlier, in 1883. Had it been verified, this would have remained for many years the highest summit ever reached. In 1905 Aleister Crowley's team made the first attempt to climb Kangchenjunga itself. As it so happened the route selected by Crowley, later notorious for his dabbling in the occult, was that taken by the British first ascent team in 1955 after all attempts elsewhere by others had failed. Naturally the heights quoted in these pre-Second World War extracts are mostly in feet, while throughout the text all heights are rendered in metres, making it difficult to recognise the location mentioned. Unable to swiftly convert one to the other in my head, I found this omission exasperating. Why not include both?

Of particular interest were the exploits of Kellas, Raeburn, Tilman and Smythe, the latter on Dyhrenfurth's 1930 attempt on the very quadrant of

the mountain by which Scott's team finally succeeded nearly 50 years later. It was Bauer's three gallant German attempts on the Sikkim flank, almost reaching the north col in 1931 that paved the way to the second ascent of the mountain by an Indian Army expedition in 1977. The old maxim that on a major peak the first ascent party climbs on the shoulders of previous attempts is particularly true on Kangchenjunga.

The fourth part is titled 'Ascents'. The first three are covered, each from a different direction and by lines identified many years earlier. The first two, well described elsewhere, occupy few pages, but Scott's own lightweight oxygen-less ascent of 1979, dealt with in some detail, is accompanied by a good map and his own fine atmospheric photographs, though initially the narrative first-person treatment seems incongruous in the context of a history book. Occupying considerable space, it is very much a personal account, typically *à la* Scott, and is, I suspect, much condensed from the original manuscript. For a detailed report of the climb it is worth re-reading Joe Tasker's succinct 550 word account in *AJ* 1980. The book concludes with a useful tabular summary of parts three and four and an exhaustive bibliography.

There are two picture folios containing 38 photographs, well reproduced, 18 of them from Scott's own expeditions. However, I would consider this as no more than adequate coverage for the sort of 'biography' this sets out to be. Were expense no object, what a fine opportunity it could have been for the lavish use of illustrations: maps, ethnic work, paintings (two are included) and the work of photographers such as Sella, Smythe and Brenner. In an appropriate format this could have been *the* definitive biography, a valuable collector's volume. The recent MacInnes memoir shows what is possible at a reasonable price.

However, my major criticism concerns the two most crucial of the four full-page maps in the text. While the art work is good, only the main Nepal-Sikkim watershed north and south of Kangchenjunga and its immediate glaciation is depicted; the forest of peaks and passes beyond to east and west, their names and heights, is blank paper. The important peak of Siniolchu, 'the world's most beautiful mountain' and prominent in the text, is nowhere to be seen. Thus, despite knowing the area personally, it was impossible to follow most of the exploratory itineraries mentioned without having my own maps to hand. The superb line drawings in Baume's *Sivalaya* and Evans' *Kangchenjunga: the Untrodden Peak* also proved useful reference for the later chapters.

It seems evident that the author envisaged a rather more comprehensive volume that he was, sadly, unable to complete. He was, I understand, already a sick man by the time he concluded his exhaustive research. To fit the publisher's requirements the editor was forced to cut some 80,000 words from the original manuscript, a challenging yet unavoidable task completed with great skill and only occasionally discernible. Nevertheless, whatever its faults, this is an important book from the pen of one of the giants of Himalayan mountaineering.

John Cleare

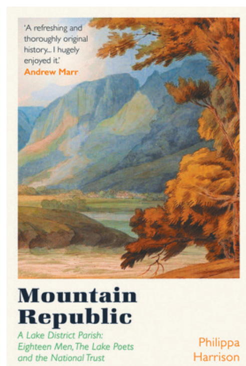
The Complete Rainbow
For Alan Rouse on K2

Knowledge never fits
or competes with symbols.
This perfect rainbow,
the arch of life, spans
from my motorway to your
distant mountain camp
where I should be
had work not made me pause
and leave before.

It completes those weeks
high up that made life seem
a world suited for atomic engineers
and mathematicians
on the unclaimed heights.
Its fragility gives beauty, shape
and ownership no home
but the knowledge shared
that you are no more

John Porter

Alan Rouse, who would have turned 70 at the end of 2021.
John Porter, who had been on K2 with Rouse in the fatal summer of 1986, includes this poem dedicated to Rouse in his new collection *A Path of Shadows*, published this summer by Little Peak Press. *(Bernard Newman)*



Mountain Republic
A Lake District Parish: Eighteen Men, The Lake Poets and the National Trust
Philippa Harrison
Head of Zeus, 2021, 740pp, £35.

This history of a single large parish in the Lake District will be of particular interest to ice climbers. It will prodigiously improve both their historical knowledge and the strength of their wrists. It weighs 2.5lb and contains more detailed information than you can shake an ice axe at. The parish of Crosthwaite is: north of Dunmail Raise; east of Sty Head, Newland House and Whinlatter pass; south of Skiddaw; and west of Helvellyn. It therefore includes Borrowdale and Thirlmere. Its market town is Keswick and just north of this is the church of St Kentigern's, which was the keystone to the parish, ordained around 533. At 90 square miles it is by far the largest old parish at the centre of the Lake District, its boundaries crossing the summits of Helvellyn, Great Gable and Skiddaw. This really is the glorious heart of a landscape whose real social legacy remains little known despite the Romantic poets' popularisation of the district. Philippa Harrison uses the phrase 'the indigenous people' in seeking to bring alive their story through fascinating detail from 533 to the First World War.

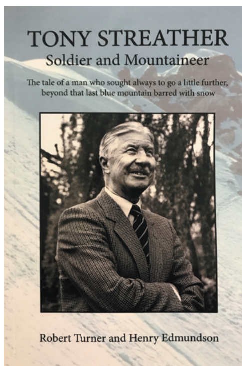
I confess to intending to skim this tome for the benefit of alpinists, who, like me, tend to take the long history of indigenous people for granted. But I got hooked on the telling details and the unravelling family stories. There are over 200 pages of parish life, governance, mining, forest clearance, sheep hefting and timber protection laws before we get to part two and the arrival of poetic strangers, 'laiking' among the surprisingly sophisticated and regulated life of the rustics, to become known as 'The Lake Poets'. In fact, the three themes of the subtitle are the highlights of the book's four sections. From 1400 and for nearly 500 years, 18 local men regulated parish life, adjudicated in disputes and raised a tax for the school and poor relief, persisting in this role into the 19th century. Although about the lives on isolated hill farms, this book emphasises community. In the later Middle Ages peasants' improvised huts were replaced by 'clay daubins': clay and straw making walls between oak beams. Building such a house took two days and was a community event celebrated by a party at which all the neighbours helpfully danced on the new clay floor to bed it in.

The parish is slightly 'expanded' in the second section of the book to include Wordsworth in Grasmere, but the interest is much more upon Robert Southey who settled at Greta Hall long-term. He organised a bonfire party on the summit of Skiddaw in August 1815 to celebrate the final defeat of Napoleon. A cart reached the summit with fire barrels for rolling in flames down the mountain, but also with beef and plum puddings, plus prodigious

amounts of punch. Wordsworth accidently kicked over the punch kettle and tried to slink off. But Southey identified him and set up a chant pointing him out. (Sounds like familiar euphoric summit behaviour.) What we miss today are facts like this: in 1800 eagles from Eagle Crag, Borrowdale and Eagle Crag, Thirlmere caused 'carnage' in the breeding season, taking a lamb a day in Borrowdale.

In 1856 the New Parishes Act reduced the parish from 90,000 acres to 9,200 and in 1874 the Endowed Schools Act removed from the 18 men the governance of their free grammar school. It is only at the end of the large parish story that Philippa Harrison sums up the way the enclosed mountain environment has sustained human qualities of fraternal solidarity, social restraint and independence for over 500 years. Landowners and lords of the manor may come and go but the inherited tenancies of the statesman system had led to what Harrison calls 'the special statesman community – to whom the mountains lent their strength'. In 1883, Hardwicke Rawnsley became the young new vicar of Crosthwaite's new smaller parish, the same year he founded the Lake District Defence Society and he would later co-found the National Trust in what, for Harrison's book, is an 'Afterglow'. (Harrison, drawn from a family of Furness farmers, now lives in Rawnsley's old vicarage.) But Wordsworth's claim for this community as a 'mountain republic' is endorsed by Harrison's characteristically finding the telling detail: 'the indigenous sense of equality, largely caused by the demands of nature and the mountains, as the hill farmer went about his everyday life, is exhibited in the wills of the time, which demonstrate a strong ethic to provide equally for every son and every daughter'. Anyone who thinks they have an intimate knowledge of the Lake District will enjoy discovering how much this fascinating book will prove them wrong.

Terry Gifford



Tony Streather
Soldier and Mountaineer
Robert Turner and Henry Edmundson
Fastprint, 2021, 144pp, £13.

This co-authored memoir records the life of a very remarkable man: the soldier Col H R A Streather OBE, MBE and the mountaineer Tony Streather.

Streather's career as a professional soldier spanning some 37 years between 1945 and 1981 was unusual, variegated and distinguished. After joining the Queen's Royal Regiment from University College School, London where he was head boy, he was commissioned into the Indian Army to complete six years of active service with local tribal forces on the North-west Frontier as a participant in the closing chapter of the Great Game and witness to the creation of Pakistan after its partition from India.

Transferring to the Gloucestershire Regiment, ostensibly for the opportunities it afforded his passion for hunting, he served successively in Korea and in Cyprus where, in recognition for his leadership during the inter-communal riots between Greeks and Turks, he was awarded the MBE. He then went on to raise a new regiment for the Malaysian army during the communist insurgency; saw active service with the Gurkhas in Borneo and commanded the Gloster's Battalion in Berlin and Northern Ireland. Having done spells as an instructor at the School of Infantry, the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, the army's Outward Bound School at Towyn (and subsequently given unstinting support for the Duke of Edingburgh's Award and Endeavour Training) he completed his professional career as deputy commander, Sennelager, north Germany where he trained British units to support NATO in the event of military confrontations with Russia.

This meritorious record of military service would have sufficed for most men but it was Streather's achievements as a mountaineer that mark him out as exceptional. His transition from being the equivalent of a high-altitude fell runner, ridge-hopping the high passes of the Hindu Kush with fleet-footed tribal soldiers to becoming the first climber to ascend two peaks above 25,000ft with no previous alpine climbing experience is unique and extraordinary.

The fairy-tale of Tony Streather's ascent to mountaineering's pantheon in the space of a mere nine years from 1950 to 1959 is the book's main theme as neatly summarised in the eulogy Chris Bonington gave at Tony's thanksgiving service and reproduced herein. It began improbably when Tony joined the 1950 Norwegian expedition to Tirich Mir, at 7,699m the highest peak in the Hindu Kush, as its liaison officer. It soon became apparent that his strength, stamina and ability to perform seemingly effortlessly at high altitude qualified him for the summit team. On duly achieving their objective, Tony managed to unfurl on its windswept summit an enormous Union Jack, the only size available in Chitral.

Turned down for the 1953 Everest expedition for his lack of any Alpine experience, he was snapped up by the Americans as transport officer for their attempt on K2. Once again, his powerful performance at altitude promoted him to the eight-man summit team whose forced retreat after sitting out a seven-day storm at 7,700m would have ended in total disaster had not Pete Schoening's miraculous ice-axe belay held all seven on a precipitous ice slope. Tony survived this first near-death encounter though Art Gilkey perished. He was now a natural for selection to Charles Evans' brilliant 1955 Kangchenjunga 'reconnaissance' expedition, and with Norman Hardie became the second pair to summit after Brown and Band had shown the way.

Two years later, he agreed to lead the 1957 Oxford University Mountaineering Club's expedition to Haramosh. High on the mountain, against his advice, two members of the team Jillott and Emery pressed on up a suspect ridge and were swept down 300m by an avalanche into a remote snow basin. Tony's repeated attempts to rescue them over four days and three nights without food or shelter was, in Stephen Venables words: 'a tale of misfortune, catastrophe and heroic sacrifice almost unparalleled in the history of mountaineering'.

Two of those young men died on the mountain and a third suffered terrible frostbite injuries. No proper account of the Haramosh disaster was published in standard mountaineering literature until Ralph Barker's *The Last Blue Mountain* (1959). The recollection of the tragedy haunted Tony for the rest of his life.

In 1959, as a founder member of the recently formed Army Mountaineering Association, Tony led an army team to explore the remote Tirich Gol area in Chitral where they made the first ascents of the Malubiting East (6000m) and six smaller peaks including the aptly named Gloster Peak (5880m). In 1976, it was only appropriate that Tony's mountaineering career should close as leader of the AMA's Everest expedition on which Brummie Stokes and Bronco Lane, two SAS corporals, made the summit.

Although Tony was never to climb seriously in the Alps, on the strength of his Tirich Mir ascent and 'several years of scrambling in Baluchistan, Waziristan, Gilgit and Kashmir', he was elected a member of the Alpine Club in 1951 having accepted that it was not quite the moribund gentleman's club he had first imagined. Thereafter, he was to make valuable contributions to its administration as a committee member, vice-president and ultimately its president between 1990 and 1993. It was unfortunate that his two-year term as president should have coincided with the highly contentious issue of the Club having to find new premises before its lease at 74 South Audley Street ran out. Tony, then aged 64, had retired from the army nine years earlier and was working as the sports and estate manager of the Sandhurst and Camberley Estate.

Conflicting views on the new location, in part reflecting the AC's style and future direction, engendered bitter disagreements within the membership. The full story of that saga has yet to be told but what might have precipitated a financial catastrophe for the Club had it proceeded with the absurd scheme of building 'an underground bunker' in the Royal Geographical Society's garden was only averted at the eleventh hour. Mountaineering politics were not Tony's natural metier. The heat that this tricky issue engendered gave him 'little peace' and the loss of 'quite a few nights sleep pondering on the decision that had to be taken.' In 2014, he was awarded honorary membership of the Club.

Although a skilled lecturer and a compelling raconteur with a deft literary turn of phrase, Tony never published his autobiography. *Tony Streather* attempts to redress this, but joint-authorship and the separation between Tony's military and mountaineering careers leads to a degree of duplication and tends to interrupt the flow of the narrative overall. Extracts from Tony's own writings and others (particularly Stephen Venables on K2) bring immediacy to the mountaineering expeditions that occupy the greater part of the book while the account of Tony's military career features some amusing anecdotes that well illustrate his character.

This is not a book that attempts to examine Tony's deeper motivation or his private life. Nonetheless, the authors have painted a compelling portrayal of an outstandingly courageous yet modest, generous and sensitive man who

possessed the highest qualities of leadership. Tony Streather's achievements as a mountaineer will remain his principal legacy but his contributions to furthering outdoor adventure and education gave his life an extra dimension that will have benefitted many more than just the mountaineering community.

J G R Harding

The Moth and the Mountain
A True Story of Love, War and Everest
Ed Caesar
Viking, 259pp, 2020, £18.99.

Maurice Wilson, who died making a hopeless attempt to climb Everest in 1933, has long been one of the footnotes in the mountain's history. A biography, *I'll Climb Everest Alone* by Dennis Roberts was published in 1957, but since then he has attracted only intermittent attention. The British writer Ed Caesar has returned to the subject, finding him worthy of a fresh look. Through assiduous searching he has unearthed priceless material, helping to cast Wilson in a new light. He has followed Wade Davis, author of *Into The Silence*, in framing his subject through the prism of his experiences of the First World War. Caesar has placed in him an illuminating personal and cultural context and although we may still be mystified by his apparent act of self-immolation, we have a plentiful source of information to inform our considerations.

Wilson was born in Bradford in 1898, the son of an engineer in the weaving industry who eventually ran his own company. He joined the British army in 1916 and two years later, by then a captain and winner of the Military Cross, he was seriously injured by German machine-gun fire. Although Wilson was invalided home to recover, Caesar believes he also suffered from undiagnosed shell shock, the contemporary – and controversial – name for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). An older brother, Victor, suffered far worse, surviving hideous battles, incurring a near-crippling leg injury, and being effectively disabled by PTSD.

After the war Wilson's life assumed a nomadic quality, as he pursued business ventures and also a spectacular series of relationships. Having married in 1922, he immigrated alone to New Zealand in 1923, working as a travelling salesman. In 1924 he cabled to his wife to join him there. By the time she arrived, he had fallen in love with another woman and his wife sued him for divorce, spending a further 18 months in New Zealand while she saved up for her return fare home. Wilson married for a second time but that marriage ended in 1930. Wilson next headed for South Africa with a new woman by his side but they never married. In 1932 he became involved in an apparent ménage à trois with a couple named Len and Enid Evans – and it was Wilson's subsequent letters to Enid that form important new verbatim evidence in his account.

It was in 1932, during a visit to southern Germany, that Wilson was seized with the idea of climbing Everest, triggered by reading an account of the 1924 British expedition, which culminated in the disappearance of Mallory and Irvine. Caesar believes that Wilson experienced some kind of epiphany, a religious rebirth that reflected a mix of fashionable quasi-Christian theories and elements of Indian mysticism. A further contributing factor, Caesar argues, was Wilson's unresolved PTSD after the First World War.

Wilson was undeterred by the grim histories of the three 1920s Everest expeditions, with their accounts of savage weather, illness, frostbite, deprivation, the effects of high altitude, and avalanches. His aspirations achieved another level of implausibility when he resolved to travel to Everest by flying a solo Gypsy Moth from England, even though he had never piloted a plane before.

That part of his ambition he did at least fulfil, doing so wearing boots he intended for both the flight and the subsequent ascent of Everest. After a breathtaking series of adventures and mishaps, he reached Darjeeling in mid August, just a few days after the defeated British 1933 expedition passed through on its way home. He promptly engaged the services of Karma Paul, the fixer who assisted the British expeditions of the 1920s and 1930s. Running short of money, he sold his Gypsy Moth and solicited a loan from his long-suffering widowed mother; he also wrote copiously to his new love, Enid Evans.

He finally set off on the trek to Everest in March 1934, assisted by three 'Bhotia' porters. Three weeks later he arrived at the Rongbuk monastery. It is now that his great adventure appears the most preposterous, as he headed alone up the East Rongbuk glacier with a 45lb pack on his back, planning to reach the summit in five days, his 36th birthday. When that day arrived he was still floundering, without crampons, on the glacier some way short of the ascent to the North Col. Deciding to retreat, he barely survived a desperate descent to the Rongbuk glacier.

It was now that by any rational standards Wilson should have renounced his attempt. Caesar argues that what impelled him to continue was an instinctive desire to redeem the gruesome experiences of his brother Victor. Wilson left no evidence to that effect: his diary and his letters to Enid merely recounting how he set off up the glacier again some three weeks later, this time accompanied by two of his porters. He felt that the fates were with him when he found both a pair of crampons and a box of food, some of it bearing Fortnum and Mason labels, that had been abandoned by the British expedition the year before. This time he climbed halfway to the North Col before turning back once more. Three days later he made a further attempt to climb to the North Col. He died, most likely from exposure and exhaustion, a day or so later. His body was found the following year by the 1935 Everest reconnaissance expedition led by Eric Shipton.

Caesar admits that his attempt to give meaning to all he learned about Wilson was not entirely successful. He clearly relished his quest, and was rewarded for his persistence and diligence. Some of the records he used are close to home, such as Wilson's diary, which is kept in the Alpine Club Library.

His best new resource, Wilson's letters to Enid Evans, was harder to come by. They were originally in the keeping of Wilson's previous biographer, Dennis Roberts, who appears to have struck a pact with the Evanses whereby he could use information in the letters without attributing them directly, for fear of revealing their unconventional relationship. Roberts later sold the letters to a German mountaineering author, Peter Meier-Hüsing, who passed them to Caesar in return for a lunch in Berlin.

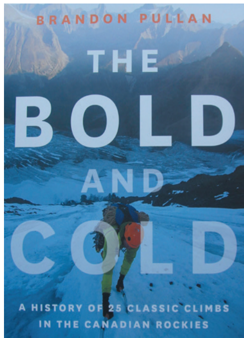
Such treasures help make a biography rich in researched and descriptive detail, adding to its authenticity. Caesar incorporates his quest into his narrative, although appearing to distance himself by using the second person – 'you' –instead of the first person, perhaps suggesting that said quest is universal in its nature. There is one curious lacuna however. Caesar adopts a radical approach to chronology in his opening chapters, which works well, apart from the fact that he nowhere provides the precise date or location of Wilson's birth (21 April 1898, according to Wikipedia), leaving us to deduce the year from inferential references. There are just four photographs of Wilson (one is used twice) and because they are incorporated within the text the two that are not portraits are difficult to read. The book has no index.

Those quibbles apart, this is a rewarding read, with a power and clarity to the writing, not quite answering all the questions it poses and leaving you to ponder them after you have closed the book – a sign of its enduring qualities.

Peter Gillman

- A shorter notice of *The Moth and the Mountain* appeared in last year's *Alpine Journal* despite having this long and more considered review to hand, an error on the part of the editor.

For a decade from the mid 1970s, British climbing enjoyed a creative renaissance as a group of young radicals with small budgets and high ambitions arrived on the scene determined to take alpinism back to a purer form. Brian Hall was at the heart of that process and his new book, published too late for review in this year's *Alpine Journal*, recalls 11 people from that seminal period of his life and the dramatic and sometimes fatal events that defined them all. They include familiar stars like Joe Tasker, Alan Rouse and Alex MacIntyre, but also cultural lodestones like Paul Nunn, the prodigiously gifted in the shape of John Syrett, whose biography is reviewed in this year's *Alpine Journal*, and Brian's childhood friend Sam Cochrane, visiting his early years in an essay that reveals much about Hall's own life's journey. After a tricky start, Hall found new direction as a mountain guide and film-industry regular, working in location safety and rigging for a host of high-profile projects, including the award-winning movie *Touching the Void*. *High Risk, Climbing to Extinction*, Brian Hall. Sandstone Press, 2022, 400pp, £24.99.



The Bold and Cold
A History of 25 Classic Climbs in the Canadian Rockies
Brandon Pullan
RMB, 2016, pp264, £30.75.

Back in the early 1990s a close group of five of us in the Edinburgh Section of the Junior Mountaineering Club of Scotland started looking for interesting objectives outside Scotland and the western Alps. Possible peaks and routes were entered into our little black books including a few pages of Canadian objectives, added when we came across two articles in *Mountain* magazine, the first by the great Canadian alpinist Dave Cheesmond, titled 'Starlight and Storm: The Great North Faces of the Rockies', and Eric Brand's 'Mount Thor: Direct West Face'. The routes featured were way above our standard but a few trips to the Graham Brown collection at the National Library of Scotland generated some mere-mortal material for our black books. Alas, our plans for the Arctic and an Alberta summer never happened and while a couple of our group later discovered Alberta's winter ice climbing, I have to confess I have never made it to Canada.

Although this book was published in 2016, winning a special jury mention that year at the Banff Mountain Book Festival, there has not been a review in the *Alpine Journal* and until this year there wasn't even a copy in the Alpine Club Library, despite several members being mentioned, quoted or featuring in the book's photography.

As the introduction states, this is not a guidebook, rather a collection of stories about 25 classic climbs brought together by the author. The idea though came from Swiss alpinist Urs Kallen. When Urs moved to Canada, he couldn't find a book that would help him find the classics. He travelled back to Switzerland in 1970 for a few years, where he came across the recently published *Im Extremen Fels* by Walter Pause. By 1979, having been back in Canada for several years, he had put together a mock-up book of his favourite routes and mountains. It was his version of Pause's book for the Canadian Rockies. Together with Dave Cheesmond, the idea of the book developed and the plan was to publish it after Cheesmond returned from the Yukon in the summer of 1987. Cheesmond's death on the Hummingbird ridge of Mount Logan led to the project being abandoned. Then, in 2005, Brandon Pullan met Urs, who told him about the idea. Urs handed over his material and said:

> *Go climb these 25 routes and then you can write the book Dave and I never finished. The goal of the book is to climb as well as Dave climbed. He was one of the best alpine climbers to have ever climbed in the Rockies. You cannot change the routes or the order and you have to call it The Bold and Cold. Good Luck.*

The book draws on multiple contributors who provide first-hand accounts throughout the five chapters describing the 25 climbs as you travel through the Rockies. Each chapter details five climbs of similar grade and commitment. The first five climbs are called 'The Shakedowns', then 'The Maiden Routes' and 'The Middle Earth Routes'. 'The Gladiator Routes' are climbs 16 to 20, opening with a stunning double-page image of Mount Geike. 'The Titans' opens with number 21, the north face of Alberta. There are two icefall routes: *Polar Circus* on Cirrus Mountain and *Gimme Shelter* on Mount Quadra. Some might consider pure ice routes to be secondary to alpine climbing but the inclusion of these two obvious classics ensures the list reflects the multi-faceted world of modern alpinism.

Generally, the photography is inspiring and many of the shots bring home the scale of the emptiness of this mountain range. Each of the 25 climbs is introduced by a full-page portrait image. A number of these appear to be aerial shots taken by John Scurlock, photographer and pilot, often taken in excellent light picking out the line in question. Scurlock's shot of the seventh climb, the *Beckey-Chouinard* on South Howser Tower is a good example, helped by the fact it's a granite peak rather than grey limestone. This use of light to pick out the line shows the obvious influence of *Im Extremen Fels* where Jurgen Winkler's superb photographs of each face, taken in sunlight at exactly the correct moment, illuminates so very precisely the line of the climb described in the text that follows. The shots of The Titans, the north face of Alberta, the east face of Assiniboine and the north face of North Twin capture that north-face atmosphere of brooding, sullen shade. The dour limestone of The Titans makes for a less than warm glow but underlines the sombre nature of the terrain. Some of the pictures of Mount Robson's Emperor face were a little misleading, perhaps because they had less of its grey limestone but once again the full-page portrait introducing the face communicates its vast scale. It is no wonder that *Running in the Shadows* (2,300m, VI, M6, AI5, A0) climbed on Robson during the fall of 2020, was one of the ascents honoured at the 2021 Piolets d'Or.

One frustration was the lack of maps. Even a single introductory map, like the one published on the endpapers of *Im Extremen Fels*, would have at least offered an overview of where the mountains are in relation to one another. And yet the book contained a glossary of mountaineering phrases. (I never understand why pure mountaineering books need to spell out basics such as crag, crux, ice screw, pitch and similar terms.) The omission of something so simple and effective as a locator map seemed a missed opportunity.

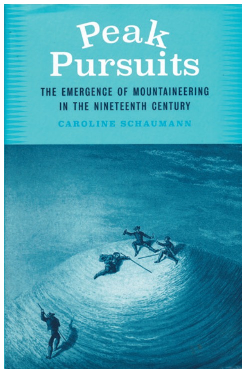
Regardless of the grade you climb at there is ample in this book for anyone interested in the Canadian Rockies. It's an incredibly absorbing read. Historical essays and quotations (printed in a shade of red close to that used on the Canadian flag) supplement the text, adding depth to the story of these big faces climbed between the 1960s and 1990s during what must rank as the golden age of alpinism in the Canadian Rockies.

I suppose the book is just a list, despite its interesting genesis and the rich history it contains, but it isn't a list in the same way as Gaston Rébuffat's

The Mont Blanc Massif: the 100 Finest Climbs, once described by John Barry as 'slippery with lyrical prose'. *The Bold and the Cold* is rawer than Gaston's. Then again, the mountain range itself is clearly the same: no cable cars, not many huts and some very gnarly wildlife. As I read through this highly recommended book I kept coming back to a passage from Nick Bullock's introduction:

> *I feel that some of the alpine climbing we used to think about was out there in our European backyard and even some of the Greater Ranges has been reduced to holiday destinations because of all the modern world has given in the way of reports, information, rescue possibilities and communication. I'm glad to say that alpinism in Canada appears to be way behind. I take my hat off to the gents and ladies who practice going to the hills in Canada.*

Charles Stupart



Peak Pursuits
The Emergence of Mountaineering in the Nineteenth Century
Caroline Schaumann
Yale University Press, 2020, 364pp, £30.

The emergence of mountaineering can be traced to different sources. The last *Alpine Journal* reviewed Simon Bainbridge's book *Mountaineering and British Romanticism* arguing that British mountaineering was begun in the Romantic period rather than the Victorian era. Now here is Caroline Schaumann, a German teaching in an American university, tracing the emergence of European mountaineering in the 19th century to Alexander von Humboldt in combining a delight in gaining height with scientific enquiry: the aesthetic and the empirical; exercising the body and the mind. The tension in this combination (Humboldt would forgo a summit if his instruments could not be carried there) is traced through chapters on de Saussure, Forbes and Agassiz, Albert Smith and Alfred Wills, Tyndall and Whymper, and Leslie Stephen. The last two chapters explore the American West with Clarence King and John Muir. Discussing the last chapter first reveals how the current academic writer's desire to focus, quite rightly, upon 'privileged notions of exclusivity regarding race, gender, and class' can lead to distortions in order to prove that Muir was not a modern white liberal.

Some of this is based on accusations of the sin of omission: 'Muir remained silent' on his friend's behaviour or Muir 'refused to acknowledge the rich cultural history' of Indian life in Yosemite prior to his arrival, or 'Muir remained oblivious to the Native American genocide around him.' But, more seriously, it has suddenly become fashionable to denounce Muir as a racist. In 2020 the Sierra Club apologised for Muir's 'racist remarks' against Native Americans. Actually, when Muir arrived in the Sierras, the Mariposa

Battalion had already cleared the indigenous people into the reservation at Fresno. The demoralised and isolated remnant groups of Indians Muir came across begged for tobacco and whiskey. He reported that they were dirty. But the sentence that follows this observation in *My First Summer in the Sierra* is now ignored: 'Yet it feels sad to feel such desperate revulsion from one's fellow beings, however degraded.' This is not the guilt of a racist who harbours a 'dislike of the Yosemite Miwok' as Schaumann puts it, or who therefore apparently argues for a 'depopulated wilderness'. Muir's notion of wilderness did not 'facilitate the expulsion and extermination of Native American populations' as Schaumann claims. *Travels in Alaska* is testimony to Muir's respect for the culture, skills and resilience of indigenous people, a respect that was apparently reciprocated.

'Meanwhile his gaze towards "wilderness" turned a blind eye toward social injustice, especially when it came to those not privileged to enjoy nature's remedies, such as minorities and most women.' Schaumann expects Muir in the 1890s to have solved the problem of access to mountains for minorities that remains to this day. She has to write 'most women' because there are photographs of Muir leading Sierra Club summer camps which are mostly populated by, admittedly middle-class, women. Unlike British clubs, the Sierra Club which Muir co-founded, as with most other American mountain clubs, admitted women from the start. Perhaps Muir's biggest error was his optimistic belief in the national park visitor as voter and his confidence that 'only Uncle Sam' can save trees and protect landscapes. This, however, is an issue on which Schaumann remains silent.

A revisionist contextualisation of Victorian 'muscular science' by mountaineers and their social attitudes is to be welcomed. Some readers may be excited to find 'Bigotry' and 'Prejudice' announced in the subheadings of this book, or that 'queer studies have since outed Humboldt.' But it is one thing to say that John Tyndall was 'a staunch opponent of women's suffrage and emancipation', and another to point out that he nevertheless 'admired a female climber' who had gone high on the Matterhorn, but it is quite another to write that, 'During their youthful years, both Tyndall and Whymper focussed on their professional careers and times spent with other males in the mountains, excluding women from both of these areas,' or that Whymper had 'not investigated the political causes of such living environments' when commenting on the prevalence of cretinism and goitres in the Aosta valley. Sometimes criticising Victorian male mountaineers is just too easy for Caroline Schaumann and at such moments Schaumann undermines her achievement in this book, which is to explore the tension between science and the sublime in the writings of these men. That project gets displaced by a focus on 'questions about privilege, exclusivity, and bias'. These are, of course, legitimate questions, but in this book contextualisation overwhelms its starting point and misplaced claims distract from convincing critique.

Perhaps the best chapter is the epilogue in which Schaumann not only sums up the book she thinks she has written, but relates its lessons to our Anthropocene present. 'Place attachment as a means of fostering environ-

mental awareness' includes knowing our local uphill places in both a cognitive and an embodied way, combining close curiosity with close physical contact, recording the purple saxifrage whilst scrambling above Blea Water, for example, adding to the scientific record whilst taking in the view achieved by breathless, booted, bodily movement. It may be a long way from Humboldt's Andean researches but may redirect and enrich performance in mountaineering. For this suggestion and for this Humboldt-derived model we can be grateful for Schaumann's book.

Terry Gifford

Scottish Winter Climbs West
Neil Adams
SMP, 2022, 424pp, £30.

Sumptuous quality and refreshed design are the hallmarks of the latest incarnation of the Scottish Mountaineering Press, judging by its latest offerings, including the highly collectable *The Fox of Glencoe*, reviewed elsewhere in this edition. *Scottish Winter Climbs West* arrived too late to find an appropriate reviewer for 2022 but we'll return to it next year. However, the guidebook clearly reveals a shift of gears from the narrower format of its previous and hugely popular offerings. (The deep margins in this version allow you to photograph the pages on your phone, meaning the book can stay at home.) Two more volumes, north and east, are on the way.

While including the classic winter climbing venues of Glen Coe and Ben Nevis, *Scottish Winter Climbs West* also stretches from the Southern Uplands all the way to the rugged hinterland of Knoydart and Glen Shiel, a grand tour of the best winter climbing destinations across western Scotland. With over 1,300 routes and an abundance of newer lines on familiar and lesser-known crags, its scope and range offers options for climbing across all levels and styles in almost all conditions. Crag and route information is accompanied by high-resolution photographic topos, beautifully rendered maps and detailed advice on conditions to help you be in the right place at the right time. Hugely absorbing and beautiful to look at, it will be fascinating to see how this latest offering is judged against the successes of the past.

Ed Douglas

Also Received

The dedicated Polish mountain cartographer and climber **Jerzy Wala** was born in Krakow in 1930 but he remains active into his nineties, producing two recent monographs for exploratory mountaineers with **Janusz Majer**, the latest on the **Chiantar glacier** in the eastern Hindu Kush, the largest in the range or indeed the Hindu Raj, which fills the gap between the former and the Karakoram. A German expedition was active there in 1967 but little

Massimo Faletti on the lower wall of *WaterWorld* on the north-east face of Kiris Peak in the Shimshak mountains, featured in the new monograph from Jerzy Wala and Janusz Majer. (Maurizio Giordani)

since until 2019 when Pierre Neyret led a largely French team to the glacier's head, reporting back that there are plenty of exciting objectives left to do and that the region is 'far from any Taliban'. His *American Alpine Journal* report is included in Wala's collection of maps and reports that provide a useful resource for those contemplating a visit. Wala and Majer published a similar but more extensive monograph on the **Shimshak mountains** of the Karakoram, the range south of the Mango Gusor group and east of Skardu. The region attracted a lot of attention recently thanks to an impressive big-wall first ascent on Kiris Peak (5428m) called *Waterworld* from an Italian team led by Maurizio Giordani. As Giordani himself put it of their summit day: 'On this clear day, we could see from Nanga Parbat to K2 and K6. There were hundreds of unnamed peaks with no climbing history, future projects for those, like us, who want genuine adventure among the high mountains of the Karakoram.' Wala and Majer continue to offer mountaineers new horizons.

Ditto the equally venerable **Tamotsu Nakamura**, now in his late eighties but still producing inspiring results from his decades of mountain travel. His latest offering is *Unclimbed Summits and Three Parallel Rivers*, another glossy picture book from the Tibetan marches, taking in east and south-east Tibet, south-west Qinghai, west Sichuan and north-west Yunnan. The three great rivers are, of course, the Yangtze, Yellow and Mekong. He notes in his introduction that hardening attitudes in Beijing are making travel in there regions often impossible for foreign tourists. Pressure on indigenous Tibetan nomads, with forced resettlement now government policy, is changing the human aspect of this stunning region. But, as Nakamura points out, there is plenty new to discover. 'Some are led to believe that the experience of encountering unknown mountains in great ranges is now a thing of the past, but eastern Tibet has an incredibly vast and complex topography that hides countless unclimbed summits.'

Ed Douglas