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# Reviews

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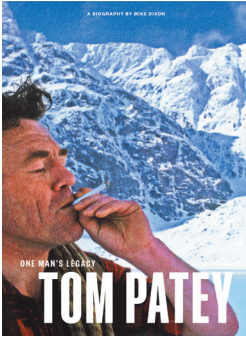


'Gormire Lake, Yorkshire', John Sell Cotman, c1804, watercolour and brown wash, 37.2cm x 54.6cm. (*British Museum*)



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## Reviews



**Tom Patey**  
***One Man's Legacy***

Mike Dixon

*Scottish Mountaineering Press, 2022, 464pp, £30*

This monumental work is a fitting tribute to a legendary figure of mountaineering. Mike Dixon, the author, began his research 10 years ago and has been assiduous in tracking down Tom Patey's friends and climbing partners from across the years, including a goodly number who have since died. The result is a book rich in detail and reminiscence,

scrupulous in its attributions, with persuasive narrative accounts of many of Patey's key ascents. It portrays a whole man, faults and all, that will be recognisable to those who were privileged to know him. It also portrays an ethos and an era that are receding in memory but that deserve to be memorialised. For those who were there, even on the margins, it is evocative and nostalgic as it explores the myths that have developed around its subject.

Thomas Walton Patey, named for his father Thomas and his mother, née Walton, was born on 20 February 1932 at Ellon, near Aberdeen. His father was a minister of the Scottish Episcopal Church, his mother a keen musician who played the organ. In September 1942, when Patey was 10, his father took him to the summit of Ben Macdui. By the age of 17, shortly before he started studying medicine at Aberdeen University, he was undertaking full winter hill-walking outings in the Cairngorms. Within two years he had graduated to climbing proper, both summer and winter. In 1950 he made his mark with the first winter ascent of *Douglas-Gibson Gully* in Lochnagar.

That signalled the start of two decades during which Patey made a series of key first ascents, at the same time expanding the scope of what was possible in Scottish climbing, above all in winter. Based at first in Aberdeen, his key routes included *Scorpion*, the first winter route on Carn Etchachan with Graeme Nicol in 1952; *Eagle Ridge* at Lochnagar with Bill Brooker and Mike Taylor in 1953, considered the hardest Scottish mixed route of the time; the first winter ascent of *Mitre Ridge* on Beinn a'Bhuird with Bill Brooker in 1953; and the epic first winter ascent of *Zero Gully* on Ben Nevis with Hamish MacInnes and Graeme Nicol in 1957. As Dixon notes, this was still the era of long-handled ice axes, clunky hardware, pre-breathable clothing and frozen hawser-laid ropes. It was also a time of poor public transport,



Tom Patey on the rocky terraces and icy gangways of the route he put up with Joe Brown on the west face of the Aiguille du Plan. (John Cleare)



Betty Davidson with her future husband. (Adam Watson)

when few climbers had cars: the bothy culture thrived, providing places where climbers would relax, discuss their climbs and misses 'and embellish them for posterity.'

Patey spent 1957-61 undertaking national service with the Royal Marines, adding 12 months to the basic two-year period by signing up as a doctor and eventually serving for four. He was based in Devon but had the bonus of attending winter warfare training in the Cairngorms and Norway, where he made the first winter ascent of the celebrated *Fiva* route on Store Trolltind.

In 1962, he and his wife Betty (they married in 1957) moved to Ullapool with their three children: Rona, Ian and Michael. Patey took over Ullapool's GP practice, at first single-handed, then with a partner. The fabled northern peaks, from Beinn Dearg to Quinag, became his playground. He climbed numerous new routes, heading out of Ullapool in his battered Skoda as soon as his morning surgery was finished.

Many of his first ascents were, of necessity, achieved solo, a practice he justified by saying that there was little difference in risk between climbing alone and leading on a rope. In 1965 came the route which Dixon hails as his greatest achievement during his time at Ullapool and arguably his best route anywhere: the first winter traverse of the Cuillin Ridge, made, at Patey's third attempt, with MacInnes, Davie Crabb and Brian Robertson.

Patey wrote an enchanting account of the traverse for the *Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal*, subsequently published in the collection of his writings *One Man's Mountains*, published in 1971. That deserves to be read alongside the new biography as testament to his supreme gift as a writer and mountaineering chronicler. There is however one important caveat. Dixon adopts Patey's account of the Cuillin Traverse for his book but there is a telling detail that should be examined.

In Patey's own account, he was called late at night by MacInnes with the instruction to set off at once for Skye. In fact, as MacInnes told me, Patey was reversing the roles. As in this instance, it was always Patey who called MacInnes with peremptory instructions, not the other way round. It is clear Patey sometimes observed the dictum, known also among journalists, that you should never let the facts get in the way of a good story.

Between times Patey climbed in the Alps and the Greater Ranges. In 1956 he, together with Joe Brown, Ian McNaught-Davis and John Hartog, made the first ascents of the Muztagh Tower in the Karakoram. His medical knowledge proved vital when Hartog suffered badly frostbitten feet. In 1958, as members of a British-Pakistan services expedition, he and Mike Banks made the first ascent of Rakaposhi, also in the Karakoram. Patey displayed almost mystical mountain sense in leading an immensely hazardous descent to safety, treating himself as well as Banks for frostbite en route. Patey also made regular forays to the Alps, but never succeeded in his long-held ambition of climbing the north face of the Eiger, turning back in 1963 on his most serious attempt, made with Don Whillans, and leaving regrets which he often voiced (including to me) in the remaining seven years of his life.

One of Dixon's final chapters – 'Lights, Cameras, Sea Stacks' – is devoted to the golden age of British climbing outside broadcasts, where the photographer and camera operator John Cleare was a key player in suggesting locations to the BBC and taking a leading role in the filming. (Patey described Cleare as 'the Supremo who pulls the strings ... the silent man with the Midas touch.') The most spectacular of those events was on the Old Man of Hoy in 1967, with a stellar cast including, as well as Patey, Joe Brown, Dougal Haston, Chris Bonington and Ian McNaught-Davis. Patey had previously made the first ascent of the sea stack with Bonington and Rusty Baillie in a hard-fought three-day campaign. Some parts of the three routes televised by the BBC were prepared ahead of the broadcast, creating the absurdity that two camera assistants had to hide beneath sacking on a ledge in order for it to appear that the climbers ascending the pitch below them were pushing up new ground. In his article 'The Professionals', Patey made much fun of the event, with his most telling remarks directed at the rasping sensationalising of commentator Chris Brasher.

In 1969 Patey scored another triumphant Scottish first with his Creag Meaghaidh *Crab Crawl*, his solo high-level winter traverse of Coire Ardair. I was there that day, writing an article on Scottish winter climbing for the *Sunday Times Magazine*, with photographs by Cleare. Tom had fun at my expense, depicting me as little better than the Fleet Street hacks so despised in the mountaineering world: remembering the complaints of MacInnes, I bore my wounds with due stoicism. (He did however tell me he enjoyed my article.)

I saw other aspects of Patey's rich life during that assignment, among them above all the lock-in sessions at the Rowanlee, Jimmy Carr's hostelry in Carrbridge, when he sang his sardonic verses about mountaineering and mountaineers, accompanying himself on the accordion and sometimes

with Carr on his fiddle. It was approaching dawn when we set off back to Ullapool in time for his morning surgery.

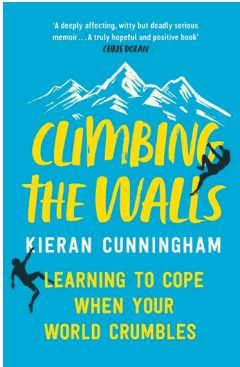
It all adds up to a picture of a supreme figure of British mountaineering. Yet our hero had feet of clay. Scattered through the book's 450 pages are references to his faults and flaws. Witnesses attest to his 'extraordinary force of character' but he is also variously described as callous, selfish, ruthless and manipulative. He often failed to do his share of camp or hut duties, leaving such concerns to his colleagues and companions. He was also a smoker and drinker (he introduced me to the joys of Glenmorangie) and used amphetamines to help meet the prodigious demands he placed upon himself.

He was also notably inattentive to technical details, something he appeared to consider tedious. If that contributed to his image as a non-conformist or free spirit, it also brought his destruction. He was continuing his explorations of the far north-west, in particular its sea stacks, when he targeted the first ascent of The Maiden, off Whiten Head. On 25 May 1970 he and four colleagues, including Paul Nunn, reached the top. They proceeded to make an abseil descent with Patey last in line. He had descended some 15ft when his rope jammed. As Patey tried to shake himself free, the karabiner attached to his harness flew open and he fell 100ft to his death. Dixon makes the stark commentary: 'Crucially, in his typical careless pattern, he was not using a screwgate.' Patey was 38.

The final judgment is accorded to Paul Nunn, who wrote in 1978: 'Tom had exercised an unchallenged hegemony over the North-West, and his going left a void in his fief which could never be so adroitly filled.' It was, in summary, 'the end of an era'. For me, it is astonishing, and unsettling, to realise the era in question ended more than 50 years ago, as the events I witnessed seem so fresh in my memory.

Dixon's writing is strong and clear. For all its magnificent qualities, however, the book has occasional flaws. There is sometimes a lack of chronological rigour, as for example over the dates of the births of the Pateys' three children that go unstated. Nor is the precise date of Patey's death recorded. Dixon makes copious use of footnotes, consigning material there which I felt could have been incorporated into the text with some judicious splicing. This can leave us to patch information together for ourselves, as with the story of Patey's older half-brother Michael, where the details are spread between the text, the footnotes and a picture caption. Perhaps Dixon did not trust his own ability as storyteller but in that event he misjudged himself. Dixon received invaluable help from Patey's son Ian, who shared the voluminous archive devoted to his father. There are numerous photographs, many of the finest taken by Cleare. Like all good books, this one leaves you with questions as well as answers, as you ponder the character of this colossus of Scottish mountaineering, as well as savour the era and the milieu that Patey did so much to define.

*Peter Gillman*



## Climbing the Walls

### *Learning To Cope When Your World Crumbles*

Kieran Cunningham

Simon & Schuster UK, 313pp, £10

There's something like an anxiety or resistance in starting to read someone else's lockdown journal. Every one of us has our own unique and painful recollections of that time and a perhaps low appetite for getting to grips with someone else's. But Kieran Cunningham is an exceptional writer (and climber) and within a few pages of *Climbing the Walls* he wins an investment from you in his story. By the end

of the book he's paid you back with a depth of wisdom and empathy that sheds gratifying light on your own quarantine entrapment and post-pandemic recovery. And on your climbing, too.

There's surprisingly little actual climbing in this book that so wonderfully penetrates the mystery of why we do it. And much of the climbing Cunningham writes about is just the scrappy lockdown contingency of buildering on the property of his 90-year-old landlady in Sondrio, northern Italy. There, in the province neighbouring Bergamo, the epicentre of the European pandemic, he traverses the pain away on a cocktail of schist, serpentine, granite and gneiss making up the walls of her house and the retaining walls of neighbouring vineyards. It's all he can get his hands and feet on without falling foul of Italy's 2020 lockdown, which preceded our own numb torment in the UK by about two weeks. It's day 11 of his confinement when he hits on this solution, suddenly 'finding more pleasure than I ever thought possible from something so banal.'

Halfway through this diary, in good old fashioned technical language, he drafts a 'Guide To The Walls Of No3 Via Aurelio Fracassetti' in loving detail, delineating the crimps and pockets of the Dusk Wall (an ironic reversal of Yosemite's Dawn Wall), the Dirty Wall and an airy, physical pitch around the exterior of the house called *Indecent Exposure*. The Scorpion Wall gets its name from the 'fist-jam pocket just past the bedroom dihedral (which) has a scorpion inside.' He's discovered this feature a few days earlier, taking a sting that swells his hand to double its normal size and potentially threatens the integrity of his quarantine.

Something else exceptional about Cunningham is the extremity of his mental health. All his adult life he's been managing bipolar disorder, surviving manic episodes and suicidal near misses and spontaneous midnight solos of hazardous mountain routes. The reader learns a great deal about the condition, and the day-to-day reality of living with it. It's a nakedly honest account; the experience of his directness feels almost voyeuristic to the reader. But the discussion of his bipolar disorder becomes a prism through which the wordless secret of climbing, what it means and why we do it, is clearly refracted.

One of the disquieting reactions he's got used to when revealing his condition to people he's becoming close to is 'Well, we're all a little bit like that, aren't we?' So I hesitate to say how much we climbers can see of ourselves in this account of his relationship with climbing as an antidote to the suffering his bipolar regularly inflicts. But his depiction of movement in the mountains as a coping tool for the 'excessive physiological and intracranial tension' he periodically endures will be a familiar concept to us all, even if our own mental fugues are not so profound. And he has the wisdom and self-knowledge to upend this paradigm near the end of the book. It's an insight he offers on bipolar rather than on climbing but we all know it deep down as one of the most baffling open secrets of what we do: 'Often the joy is more agonising than the despair, and the despair spangled with exquisitely raw, visceral beauty.' In fact, the book is shot through with this duality. A theme he returns to more than once is his friend Luigi's assertion that *l'alpinismo è sofferenza* (mountaineering is suffering).

It's not all reflection. The story is told with drive and tension. You genuinely worry as he slowly runs out of the crucial meds he needs to help fend off a crisis. There's humour and politics: a local bank clerk tells him: 'Your new Prime Minister makes even Berlusconi look good.' The main characters around him, either in Sondrio or at the painful remove of Zooms and phone calls, are all compellingly drawn, especially his parents up in Fife, his girlfriend Aiyla over in Istanbul and Giuseppina the nonagenarian landlady upstairs. Luigi, the climbing friend who understands about *sofferenza*, reappears in a footnote with a lighter-hearted assessment of what climbers are: 'Boulderers are problem-solving technicians, sport climbers are gymnasts, trad climbers are engineers, alpine climbers are adventurers. All of us are madmen and poets.' And when he lets the memory or reality of actual climbing into the narrative he renders it with unflashy but exciting clarity.

One remembered mountain moment comes to him in a dream and provides my favourite passage in the book, a poet climber's capture of the perfect condition of stillness and completeness. The recollection is of an epic on a 300m multi-pitch route in Val di Mello. Near the top, as daylight fades, his partner has revealed herself to be less experienced than she professed. She's never abseiled before but the night will be too cold to bivvy. There's only one head torch between them and that gets dropped at one of the anchors on the way down. They plough on with only their phones for emergency lighting. Then Cunningham has to descend over an overhang into space. In the pitch blackness and 1,000ft above the valley floor, he promises to give a tug when it's safe for her to follow. Inexplicably, he locks off and dangles in the night air for 15 minutes. They make it down at 3am, exhausted and dehydrated, but 'in the dream ... I remained on the rope, dangling in space, snug in the womb-like embrace of the darkness and emptiness. I understood I would stay there for ever and, rather than panic or despair, felt myself suffused with an all-encompassing warmth and peace the like of which I've never known.'

Nick Simons



### In Her Nature

#### *How Women Break Boundaries in the Great Outdoors*

Rachel Hewitt

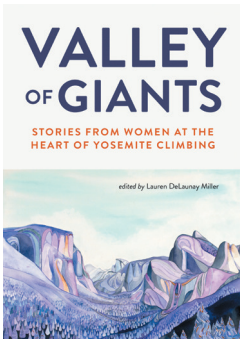
*Chatto & Windus, 2023, pp528, £25*

### Valley of Giants

#### *Stories from Women at the Heart of Yosemite Climbing*

Lauren DeLaunay Miller

*Mountaineers Books, 2022, pp240, £19*



A few summers ago, with my friend MJ, I took a two-day mountain bike ride along a 70-mile section of the Pennine Bridleway. Starting in Hebden Bridge, we headed north towards Kirkby Stephen on the northern edge of the Yorkshire Dales, enjoying the climbs and descents of the Pennine trails in between, along with café and pub stops, and a bivy on Ingleborough Common on a perfect midsummer night.

As two women, MJ and I did not think twice doing this on our own. We have grown up and spent our adult lives around friendship groups in which it is normalised for women go to the outdoors, either alone or in small female groups. It's perhaps not a coincidence that we both started to do this at university: each of us spent time in university climbing clubs, MJ at Southampton and myself at Leeds.

I took to the Leeds University climbing scene as soon as I arrived. I didn't even think about it at the time, but in this club strong women abounded, both in their presence and abilities at the crag and in the mountains. I had found a group of like-minded people and thrived, loving my time spent with them climbing in the UK and beyond.

These were formative years, after which I threw myself into much more climbing, along with fell running and cycling in mountainous places, activities I continue with today in my mid 40s. Halcyon days? Certainly, in many ways. Looking back now however, at the climbing culture and mindset back then, those days were also of their time. For example, while the climbing and mountaineering books and magazines of the era were inspiring, exciting, funny and entertaining, they carried a strong bias towards a particular perspective, dominated as they were by male stories. It was unusual to see a book or journal in this genre that told of the female experience, or a woman's point of view.

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This was of course nothing new. Since the establishment of the *Alpine Journal* in the mid 19th century, men have dominated stories of climbing mountains. You could argue of course that this was reflective of society then

and through the 20th century to today. But that argument quickly falls down. As most history was written by men, many of the stories of female protagonists went unrecorded or disappeared. Women may have been present in fewer numbers than men but they were certainly there, pushing themselves and their boundaries in the same ways as their male counterparts.

In recent years this issue has been increasingly recognised, questioned and pathways of correction sought. Published in 2022 and 2023 respectively, two books that seek to do this are *Valley Of Giants* and *In Her Nature*. Both these books address the historic imbalance by bringing forward the female voice and their experience of rock climbing, mountaineering and mountain-going in general.

Edited by Lauren DeLaunay Miller, California resident and regional editor of the *American Alpine Journal*, *Valley of Giants* is an anthology of nearly 40 pieces written or narrated by women. The book spans the history of Yosemite climbing: Marjory Farquhar's experiences with the Sierra Club in the 1930s, through the golden era of the latter half of the 20th century, to the modern day, featuring well-known climbers such as Liz Robbins and Lynn Hill. Yosemite was of course one of the (if not *the*) global hotbed of rock climbing during this time, famous for the hard-climbing dirtbag lifestyles of the protagonists of the day.

The written pieces in *Valley of Giants* are a mixture of previously published articles (in magazines and journals such as *Alpinist* and the *American Alpine Journal*), book extracts, new prose pieces and interviews. Curating in this way collects into one place, articles with the shared theme of women's climbing in Yosemite, showing us that such women's writing has been present for a long time.

One of the articles from the *AAJ* was first published in 1974. An account of women climbers and notable first all-female ascents in Yosemite and beyond, the author Sibylle Hechtel wanted the piece to be named 'Walls Without Balls'. The *AAJ* editorial team refused, declaring the title too coarse and so Hechtel insisted the piece was published untitled. This anthology reverts to the original title, a fitting name for an article written in the era of the Stonemasters that tells of multi-day epics on the big walls: women climbing for themselves and by themselves.

Not surprisingly, common themes within the pieces are self-discovery, a determination to show what women can climb and the style in which they can do it. But the ways in which the contributors write about their climbing, friendships and how they explore themselves makes for a collection that differs from the standard rock-climbing anthology. As Mari Gingery notes in her foreword:

*Narratives by women offer fresh perspectives on the aspirations, situations, and resolutions encountered in rock climbing. While chasing the basic goal of ascent, they often differ in their motivations, their approaches to the climbing life and their perceptions of the climbing experience.*



Rachel Hewitt.

Yosemite legend Nancy Bickford Miller rappels after climbing the Lower Brother in 1955 (*Bob and Ira Spring*)

There is a far greater willingness to explore emotions and the ways they impact the relationship between climbers as they push themselves on the rock. In the collection this is frequently expressed in the tenacity of women, showing the men they can do it too. That's no surprise given the egos of the majority male environment these women were climbing in. Inspiring in itself this tenacity combines with a willingness to write of weakness and doubt and how these were often overcome with the support and determination of female climbing friendships.

Probably the most renowned female rock-climbing achievement in the Valley is Lynn Hill's first free ascent of *The Nose* on El Capitan. While this achievement is of course referenced in the anthology, Hill's contribution (taken from her memoir *Climbing Free*) focusses on her first female team ascent of El Capitan's Shield, climbed over six days with Mari Gingery.

One of my favourites in this collection was 'Like Mother Like Daughter', co-authored by Jane Jackson and her mother Catherine Cullinane. A piece written in the first person by Jackson and interspaced with Cullinane's memories of the hard climbing she did in the Valley 30 years previously, we follow Jackson as she pushes her own climbing grades, often followed on the rope by Cullinane, who then tells her daughter her story of climbing the given route (or something more difficult) a generation before. The younger woman's eyes are opened with respect, appreciation and pride, leaving her

wanting to learn more and more of her mom's past life on the Yosemite granite. In reading this piece I felt the two of them bond in new ways and felt pleasure for them in the joys they find climbing together.

*Valley of Giants* sets out to redress the balance of the recorded history of rock climbing in the Valley. In *Her Nature* author Rachel Hewitt has the same aims but they are wider. While she focusses on Britain and in particular England, Hewitt traces a history (I so want to write *her* story) from the times when mountains were first being conquered by European and American society figures through to the present day. She takes a two-pronged approach to this: her own contemporary experiences as a female trail runner and, through her research, she finds and tells women's stories, notably Ladies' Alpine Club founder Lizzie Le Blond and a number of her contemporaries.

An academic by background, Hewitt takes a scholarly approach to her writing. It is forensic in the ways in which she uncovers and explores the forgotten stories of women and how they were forgotten. There is depth and authority in this approach and, although academic, Hewitt's writing style is far from dry. This is an impassioned, at times poetic investigation. Hewitt shows her anger and sadness at the ways in which women's experiences and achievements have gone unrecorded in the mountaineering canon, making an important point that it seems the establishment of clubs and governing bodies played a significant part in this. They were literally always men-only groups: women's interests and points of view were dismissed and quashed by the patriarchy.

Along with anger at the imbalances and unfairness, grief was also a powerful driver for Hewitt to write this book. Early in *In Her Nature*, she writes of the intensity of recently losing several close family relatives. Hewitt started to increase her running miles because she found it a source of healing (or at least a mind-calmer). That and the fact that it is probably the most practical way for a mother of young children (as Hewitt was at the time) to get short stints of time to herself in a way conducive to getting fitter. I could more than relate to both of these.

As she increases her time spent running, Hewitt observes the inherent sexism there are within it. The bias of cut-offs in ultra-running races that always favour men and how for decades trail-running shoes, rucksacks and similar have been designed to fit the male foot and frame. And of always having to think about the risks of being a lone female runner, along with the jeers from men in vans were disturbing experiences of men who either followed her or seemed to go out of their way to intimidate her in other ways.

In similar ways to Caroline Criado-Perez's ground-breaking work *Invisible Women*, which exposes the inherent male bias and the impact of this in all parts of society, Hewitt shows us how the great outdoors has carried male bias for generations in ways that have accepted for far too long. Reading *In Her Nature* made me angry and also glad that Hewitt has written this book highlighting these gaps and problems in society.

At the same time, I questioned Hewitt's perception of risk (as she herself does in the concluding sections of the book). Perhaps because I personally

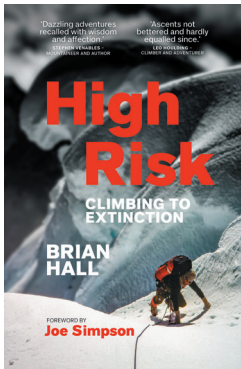
run or walk on moors, mountains and in forests by myself, not uncommonly at night, my own perception of the inherent dangers of risks due to threatening and violent behaviour by men is that it is actually very low. Of course, the problem here is when such violence does occur it is an awful, awful thing. Even though they're rare, such events perpetuate women's fears, heightens our general perception of risk and Hewitt discusses how in itself this is very much a form of male control over women.

This brings me back to my bike ride with MJ along the Pennine Bridleway. During the afternoon of our first day's ride, we dropped off Weets Hill to Gisburn, where we stopped for a while at a café. While we were there, I got talking to a woman who was probably a decade or so younger than me, who had a toddler and six-month old baby with her. She told me how much she loved to go mountain biking on the moors but that she hadn't been for a long time because it's 'too dangerous': her husband was not keen on her going out alone and she was clearly fearful of it herself. After speaking some more, she told me her husband went out biking by himself all the time while she stayed at home and literally held the baby.

I left the café feeling angry and sad for this woman, that the freedoms I cherish were out of her reach. Reading Hewitt's book made me remember this encounter in Gisburn. It also showed me I have a privilege I've never even considered. Yes, of course I consider the potential dangers when I head outside alone. But I am so used to doing so I have long since realised that my risk of harm at the hands of a man is actually extremely small. In today's society I think it likely women like MJ and I, and hopefully now Hewitt, are still in the minority.

*Valley of Giants* and *In Her Nature* are two complementary books. In different ways they show the same things. *Valley of Giants* is very much of its genre: dirt-bag climbers and visceral descriptions of the rock and the women climbing it. We feel their struggles, pain and the exaltation of achievement, interspaced with deeper explorations of the associated feelings and emotion than perhaps we are used to. *In Her Nature* is more of a mainstream book than many about mountaineering and trail running have been. This extended reach is much needed. If Hewitt's words achieve in running and mountaineering what Criado-Perez did with perceptions of how society is generally structured to fit a male, then it can go some way to addressing the male bias and gender imbalance still inherent in outdoor activities today.

*Heather Dawe*



## High Risk

### *Climbing to Extinction*

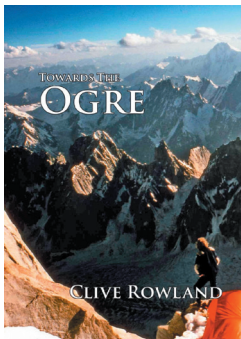
Brian Hall

*Sandstone Press, 2022, 380pp, £25*

## Towards the Ogre

Clive Rowland

*Avoiding the Touch, 2022, 380pp, £20*



There are plenty of reasons for reviewing these two books together. Both are overdue. Both authors tell the stories of their lives. Both try to give honest accounts of dangerous adventures. Neither shies away from the terrible human cost of those adventures. And while they go about their subject matter in very different ways, both approaches have their merits.

Clive Rowland was one of the participants in the 1977 epic on the Ogre, an unlikely survival story that went straight into mountaineering folklore, not least because two of the main protagonists were household names. He tells his version in a straightforward, low-key, unaffected way. ('What would you have done youth, if I had been unable to crawl?' Doug Scott asks him, when Rowland and

Mo Anthoine have brought him and Chris Bonington safely down. 'I would have left you Doug. One dead hero is better than two, especially when the other one is me!') The bonus with this book is the rest of his climbing career; I doubt many will know the scale of what he achieved.

Then there is Brian Hall's intriguingly imaginative account of 12 of his mates who for a variety of reasons that are obvious from the title are no longer with us. How Hall remained alive to write *High Risk: Climbing to Extinction* is a mystery that even he doesn't attempt to explain but he doesn't shy away from the hard truth that is all too apparent to the great majority of us: that climbing is dangerous. He starts with a quotation from what is called in the West the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, exhorting us to keep in mind our own mortality. One wonders to what extent the 12 subjects of his book had this in mind as they went about their climbing lives.

Some more than others you suspect. Hall himself says: 'I look back on many of our actions as idiotic and unjustifiable. But viewing those pictures and unpacking those old boxes in my office took me back to an exhilarating and happy part of my life.' It was, he says correctly, 'a significant time in climbing and mountaineering' and his 'outrageously talented companions' and their legacy 'deserve to be remembered.'

So who were these 12? Some I knew, some only by reputation, one or two not at all. There's his climbing pal from youth Sam Cochrane, who dies

unexpectedly of a heart attack shortly before a long delayed reunion. After school in Kendal they went to Leeds University together, in the late 1960s a hotbed of climbing talent. There he met the rock-climbing wunderkind John Syrett, whose tragically short life and suicide was the subject of a recent biography. Also at Leeds was legendary alpinist Alex MacIntyre. In 1971, he opens his student house door to Mick Geddes, then at Cambridge with Al Rouse, another of his 12 subjects. Geddes was 'a magician when ice climbing', Hall writes, and his death from cancer at 34 is a reminder that fate may not choose the mountains to come for you. There's old friend John Whittle, whose talent for pub-time story-telling became a kind of curse, as his health collapsed from too much drinking. There is of course a litany of climbing accidents: Roger Baxter-Jones, Georges Bettembourg, Pete Thexton, dying high on Broad Peak from pulmonary oedema, driven, obsessed Joe Tasker, avuncular, big-hearted Paul Nunn. The last of the 12 is Andy Parkin, who very nearly wasn't with us, but continues to explore the mountains through his art as well as his climbing.

It was interesting reading each portrait of the outrageous characters that inhabited our psyche during climbing's 'lost decade' as he names it: a long decade from the early 1970s to the 1980s. I felt at times those portraits were too short. He offers an honest account and tries to address the complexity of their motivation, in life as well as the mountains, their different personalities, their weak spots and fears. Are they're common answers here? What can we say about their histories when motivations can be so different? When trying to fathom the reasons for why Peter Boardman and Joe Tasker pushed so hard on the north-east ridge of Everest in 1982, he wonders if they were addicted to risk. 'Joe's ambition and drive were unbounded, ultimately killing him.' Hall tries to dig into these questions, without ever excusing himself from a similar charge, honestly acknowledging where he lacks understanding, and he turns to experts for help. Yet at the end of the book his conclusions are straightforward: 'I chose to be a mountaineer because I wanted adventure,' he writes. Trying to explain why he's alive and so many friends aren't, he often reaches for the same word: fate. Yet in telling their stories, he takes great pleasure in spending time with his old pals, 'forever ... vibrant and young.'

Clive Rowland's conclusions are rather similar but his book is very different. Hall won the Boardman Tasker Award for *High Risk* and it's well published. *Towards the Ogre*, I felt, is more like a diary spanning the whole of Rowland's long climbing career, worth reading for the sheer breadth of expeditions he went on. I suspect these are largely unknown by the wider mountaineering audience. But he doesn't delve into the personalities or motivations of his companions in the same way Hall does.

It starts in his native Sheffield. Rowland came from a time and place that is starting to fade from memory. He opens with the story of being fascinated by snow falling on his street in Crookes and how he got sick eating a snowball. That's the industrial north for you. His parents were keen cyclists and clearly devoted to family life and gave him a stable upbringing and a love of the outdoors. From the start he clearly had a sense of natural justice, standing

up to bullies on behalf of the weak. Ordinarily quiet and easy going, when he sees something wrong or foolish, he doesn't hesitate.

Rowland serves a familiar apprenticeship, from hillwalking and climbing in the Peak, to north Wales, Scotland, the Alps and the Himalaya. Along the way he meets a cast of interesting characters, like Hall did, which is where you feel he thinks the value of adventure lies. 'We had fun, didn't we Clive?' Joe Brown tells him towards the end of his life. 'Yes we did,' Rowland concludes. 'Maybe some summits were not reached, but the shared endeavour and camaraderie made it all worthwhile.' He had his share of tragedy. It was Rowland who turned over the body of Tom Patey at the bottom of the Maiden following his abseiling accident. He was in the Pamirs in 1974 for the tragic events that saw 13 climbers perish on a doomed international expedition. And he watched in despair as the young and newly married Graham Evans asphyxiated having got into difficulties on the *Yellow Edge* of the Tre Cime. Paul Nunn is a presence in both books and he proved one of Rowland's great friends.

For climbing historians, there will be particular interest in Rowland's story of the Ogre, or Baintha Brakk to give it its proper name. In Hall's book, I knew perhaps half the cast. In the legend of the Ogre I knew three of the four key players excepting Rowland. This was corrected in 1993 when I made a film about Doug's epic crawl down the mountain. The story is well known. After reaching the summit Doug slipped and broke both his legs while Chris, not wishing to be left out, later fell and broke a couple of ribs, contracting pneumonia as a consequence. It's most likely that Rowland's actions stopped him from dying in the fall, as well as sharing the burden of rescue with Mo.

Over three days I interviewed Chris, Doug and Clive who seemed the most relaxed despite the presence of our two superstars. (Mo had sadly died by this point.) The reason I deduced was simple: he had no public profile to protect. Now Clive has searched his memory to give us a wonderfully descriptive memory of an epic survival story that could have so easily given Brian Hall two more chapters on extinction.

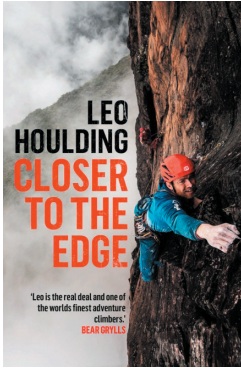
In my opinion it's alpinism's answer to Shackleton's epic retreat from Elephant Island to South Georgia after *Endurance* had slipped beneath the ice in Antarctica back in 1914. True, none of Ernest's 27 men were injured whereas on the Ogre everyone apart from the heroes wanted part of the action. The personal cost for Rowland is shown in a photo taken shortly after they reached the safety of base camp. It shows Clive emaciated and sunburned, like the survivor of an overexposed concentration camp. 'What the \*\*\*\* happened to you?' Jim Curran asks when they run into each other at Skardu airport. Back in Islamabad, he's asked to come to the morgue to identify Bonington's body, only to discover a mistake has been made and it's an unknown American.

Even then it wasn't over for Clive Rowland. After two weeks rest and recuperation fishing in the Swat valley, he set off to drive home with a young British embassy official but was unable to avoid hitting a boy playing

chicken with the traffic across the border in Afghanistan. The aftermath of that accident must have been a nightmare and how Rowland dealt with it shows the measure of the man.

Both these books, like the best mountain stories, have much to tell us about the risks and rewards of the climbing life. Despite it all, neither of these authors seem to regret the path they chose, just the pitfalls along the way.

*Leo Dickinson*



### **Closer to the Edge**

Leo Houlding

*Headline, 2022, 337pp, £20*

Maybe I live a cloistered existence and belong to the wrong generation, but though I'd heard his name, I had little idea what exactly is the author's claim to fame. Now, having read his autobiography, I know. Leo Houlding is an exceptionally gifted rock climber who has grown up to become an adventurer. No longer a youngster but a family man with small children, it seems he is still addicted to extreme adventure. In the book he recounts

important episodes and events in his life story to date, coming over as rather full of himself, which is tiresome, if perhaps justified.

Leo was lucky, not only to spend his childhood in the Lake District but also to have a father and grown-up friends who were serious hill walkers and scramblers. When hardly more than a toddler he was encouraged to scramble around on small rocks and outcrops accessible from home. He was only seven when he accompanied his father and a friend to the summit of a snowy 3,000m peak in the Taurus of southern Turkey. In such company he met serious adult climbers, was introduced to the technicalities of rock climbing on real Lakeland crags and rapidly became obsessed, encouraged enthusiastically by his father who even took up the game himself. At the age of 11, after an ascent of the Old Man of Hoy with adult friends, Leo never looked back.

Winning climbing competitions as a child prodigy he established a name for himself but he abandoned such things as 'boring in format and completely lacking in adventure', an ethos which has governed his life ever since. An impressionable kid, for a while he became 'apprentice' to some of the leading rock jocks of the 1990s before dropping out of education with his parents' agreement on the promise of making a go of it as a professional climber. Indeed, by the age of 16 he was actually attracting sponsorship and earning money from his climbing. Graduating to the infamously hedonistic Llanberis climbing scene in its final years, he was able to burn off the hardest routes on Cloggy and Gogarth, often solo, and out-neck the best of his rather older mentors. Before long, fully sponsored and a television personality of sorts, it appeared that he'd already made a go of it; at the age of only 17 he was a professional climber.

Captivated as a child by Ansel Adams' photographs, Yosemite was the obvious next stop. The Valley became Leo's promised land. Aged 18 when he arrived to join the Camp 4 scene, becoming the youngest of the so-called Stone Monkeys, one of the hard climbing, hard drinking, dope smoking, squalor living, fulltime tearaway climbers who were also into the illegal and extremely dangerous thrills of base jumping and wing-suit flying, in both of which 'diversions' the young Leo also took great delight.

A large part of the book is devoted to the Valley and what he achieved there with his like-minded colleagues; he hoped to concentrate on big-wall free climbing but also found himself breaking speed records on the hardest routes, putting up new ones and surviving storms. Everything in these chapters seemed to be 'outrageous', 'terrifying' or 'horrific'; it proved tedious and left me rather cold. I'm no stranger to Yosemite myself and am well aware of its climbing history but I soon lost track of move after move, crack after crack, roof after roof, haul-bags full of fear and the frequent falls, spread over a number of years and dozens of pages.

Adventure eventually rears its head with an expedition to the Paine and Fitzroy massifs and an all but disastrous attempt on Cerro Torre. I could follow the action because I know both areas so I found this chapter quite interesting. Later chapters cover an expeditionary climb on Mount Asgard in Baffin Island, described in repetitive detail, and another to Cerro Autuna, an iconic tepui or mesa monolith in the Venezuelan jungle, a sort of re-hash of Hamish MacInnes' *Climb to the Lost World*.

By the age of 32 Leo is married and making serious money by organising and appearing in way-out adventure films and still capable of leading top-end rock climbs, if rather more responsibly than in his youth. Two good chapters cover expeditions to the Antarctic, the first to Ulvetanna, the Wolf's Fang, a spectacular granite spire rising some 900m from the ice of eastern Antarctica. Located only in 1994 and no longer virgin, the first ascent of the spectacular mile long north-east ridge presented a worthy subject for an exciting and exceedingly expensive movie.

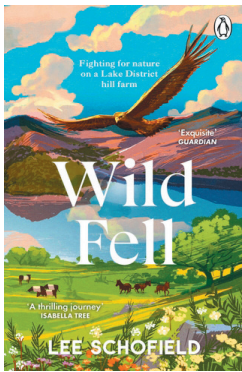
The other Antarctic adventure was aimed at Spectre, an upstanding granite molar in the remote Gothic range, only 270 miles from the pole and thus out of range of the usual polar aircraft. This time the three-man team made the 17-day approach and return by kite ski, towing some 1,400lb of food and gear on pulks. This surely was a serious and necky adventure.

Yet to my mind the most illuminating chapter describes Leo's ascent of Everest's north ridge in 2007 for an IMAX movie, acting the part of Irvine for a short stretch of the climb while (at least to start) wearing contemporary clothing and using the appropriate equipment alongside Conrad Anker playing Mallory. Particularly intriguing was how Anker, having removed the Chinese ladder, climbed the enigmatic Second Step with a couple of crampon moves and a single hand jam. This was exactly how Everest climber Chu Yin-hua, then my expedition liaison officer, told me he himself had climbed the Second Step in 1960, his ascent being discounted by the establishment. Chu believed Mallory might well have reached the summit.

There are two folios of good photographs, 46 images in all, very well reproduced on glossy paper but often of the snapshot variety and used too small to make much impact. Several of the best images reproduced full page would have added much to the book.

The concluding chapter tells how Leo and his wife Jess introduced their two very small children to climbing, not merely on outcrops or Lakeland crags but on full blown, serious alpine peaks. No doubt many will castigate them for this, but the Houldings feel that 'Learning to manage fear is an invaluable life skill,' adding that adventure is important to nurture a child's confidence and unleash his or her capabilities. I think we will all agree with that, and I'd hazard a guess that Leo and Jess know what they're doing.

*John Cleare*



## Wild Fell

*Fighting for Nature on a Lake District Farm*

Lee Schofield

Penguin, 2023, 368pp, £11

Halfway through Lee Schofield's engaging and hopeful book, I got so excited I put it down and took a trip to where the book is largely set, the Naddle Forest and the stretch of land between Haweswater and Swindale. Much of this is owned by United Utilities, one of our beleaguered water companies, and in recent years managed for nature by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). The Naddle Forest is ancient and surrounded by a high wall constructed in the 1300s to create a hunting preserve for the elite. At that time, there were still wolves in the Lake District, beavers too, and cranes, doing their delightful, dipping courtship dance in the spring. Eagles too, and Schofield opens his account with the sad tale of the last golden eagle to disappear from the Lake District, a lonely male which presumably died in 2015 after a decade on its own. All these melancholic absences are part of a long process that has left Britain as one of the most nature-depleted countries on earth. Beavers and cranes are making a small comeback, wolves not so much. Fingers crossed for the eagles, since both golden and white-tailed eagles were there in Wordsworth's day.

The Naddle Forest is a magical place, unsurprisingly perhaps given its great age. It's a tiny fragment of the temperate rain forest that once ran the length of western Britain, its old oaks moistened with warm and wet Atlantic air, sewn through with mosses and ferns, patched with lichens. The bird life is delightful: pied and spotted flycatchers, several species of warbler, redstarts and tree creepers. Yet only around 12% of the Lake District is wooded and half of that is conifer plantation where there is only a small fraction of the biodiversity of somewhere like Naddle. Most of the Lake District, of course, has for centuries been sheep walks, where, more recently,

historically high stocking levels have left little apart from grasses tough enough to survive constant grazing.

If anything, the situation has worsened since the Lake District became a national park. As Schofield reminds us, in 1951 'its streams and ditches were busy with water voles, corncrakes rasped from the meadows, black grouse lekked on scruffy fellsides and corn buntings perched on fences around little arable plots.' A large part of his story is about what ecologists often call 'shifting baselines'. An obvious example is the experience of the the curmudgeonly Alfred Wainwright, whose discovery of the Lake District before the war introduced him to a paradise that he watched become gradually 'overrun' with visitors, many of whom were inspired by Wainwright's popular guidebooks. Quite what he would make of the current scene you can only imagine. In 2018, the Lakes had 19.38m visitors, a figure to set against the 42,000 who actually live there. Those visitors, outnumbering inhabitants by more than 450 to one, spent £1.48bn. That's roughly what the sheep-farming industry turned over nationally. Of course, tourism and sheep farming are often intertwined. Many of the Lake District's 1,200 farms rely on tourists to boost their incomes. Much of the farming income on hill farms comes from the taxpayer in the form of government support payments.

So the framing of Schofield's book seems pretty dismal. An unprofitable industry with deep cultural roots that has caused long-term impacts on a region of a nature-depleted country that is often thronged with visitors. Many of those visitors, inspired by best-selling writers like George Monbiot and his warnings of a 'sheepwrecked' landscape, make loud demands for change. Farmers, whose families have worked on the fells for generations, feel understandably aggrieved. The idea of rewilding, in all its several definitions, becomes a new battleground in the culture wars fought daily on social media.

Schofield tacks through these stormy seas with remarkable patience and considerable self-knowledge. It's quite clear in recounting his experience that he's had to face a great deal of opposition, some of it unpleasantly aggressive, and in doing so addressed some aspects of his personality that made that process more difficult. He took over the running of Naddle and Swindale farms soon after the RSPB started managing them in 2012. The prospect of one of the big conservation charities getting their hands on traditional sheep farms, with all that implied for their neighbours, raised hackles. The RSPB was now sharing common land with a group of farmers who resented their presence. Schofield was regularly told he was an idiot and that he didn't know what he was doing.

At public meetings he was accused of dismantling a thousand years of custom and practice, of abandoning land and of removing sheep whose lineage dated back to the Vikings. All he'd done is halve the flock on the properties he was managing, give more space to nature and a bit less to food production. He could have become angry and resentful but instead he examines himself for not explaining the arguments better. The uncomfortable

truth is that the Vikings didn't have access to the kinds of public subsidy that almost every sheep farmer in Britain relies on to stay in business. That financial support cannot be unconditional, not when our mountains are so poor in biodiversity, shorn of native forests and even now sometimes restricted in access.

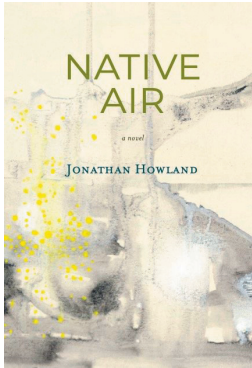
It's an uncomfortable truth that tourism in the British uplands has made a purse from a sow's ear, or perhaps in this case a sheep's ear. Travel to many other European mountain ranges and you cannot fail to notice this. There's more of everything: birds, mammals, flowers and trees. Somehow we have managed to turn the upland environment into an issue in the ever-decreasing circle of our times: the culture war. Schofield shows remarkable patience and forbearance in trying to lift the argument out of this binary dead end. He says he loathes the 'toxic polarization' of the debate. He draws a neat distinction between farming policy and farmers. There are an increasing number of sheep farmers in England who are beginning to see that another way is possible. And Schofield takes a trip to Norway to illustrate how a country once almost as denuded as Britain changed its ways and allowed the mountain environment to recover.

The aspect of this discursive, uplifting and thought-provoking book I liked best was Schofield's attention to flowers. His knowledge is both broad and deep; he sees their beauty but also understands what their presence or more often in the case of Britain's mountains their absence tells us.

*A deflowering has happened across vast tracts of our countryside, both in the intensive farmland and in the seemingly wilder hills above. Over time, we've come to accept a landscape in which wildflowers survive only in the liminal spaces as normal. Yet without them, the rest of life has little chance.*

Walking across a patch of boggy ground at Naddle Farm, I found myself thinking of these words. In front of me was a large patch of spiky yellow bog asphodel and some marsh valerian, bright white against the reedy grasses. The whole scene had a richness and complexity I've rarely experienced in England or Wales. This was much more the Lake District of a few centuries ago, not the battered relic we've inherited. Seeing this place was a revelation, Schofield's book even more so.

*Ed Douglas*



### **Native Air**

Jonathan Howland

*Green Writers Press, 2022, 380pp, £23*

‘Nothing ever happens once and is finished.’ These words from William Faulkner on the frontispiece of Jonathan Howland’s award-winning novel contain a tension echoed in the vehemence of the book’s first word: ‘No.’ It is 2013 and Joe, a former climber, receives a letter from Will, son of his dead climbing partner Pete, inviting him to finish a climb of extreme difficulty on the fictitious Mount Moriah that the pair hadn’t been able to

complete. Joe’s reaction is understandable; he has climbed only twice in the last 24 years. Yet despite his initial misgivings, he recognises Will’s communication is ‘less an invitation than a summons’ and decides to accept it, acknowledging that he misses the cocktail of emotions that had so potently fuelled his climbing days and had long been absent during his ill-fated Christian ministry.

The narrative circles back to the 1980s, when Pete and Joe were joyously living the archetypal hand-to-mouth climbers’ existence with nothing more urgent on their immediate horizon than the next project. Theirs was a climbing marriage: sharing not only what few possessions they had but also the essential trust and intimacy of a relationship on rock. Howland illustrates this perfectly as the pair find themselves confronted by a chimney, its narrowness seemingly un-climbable until Pete manoeuvres them both into a chest-to-chest position in order to ascend: ‘One animal, two sets of lungs.’ They build their lives, navigating both the unspoken intensity of their friendship and their partnership on the rock, by not dwelling on either aspect. They shared an unspoken confidence in each other, enjoying an impressively successful partnership that other climbers envied.

Pete was the stronger partner: bolder in vision, fitter and with a seemingly limitless imagination that fed on the increasing difficulty of the climbs he planned so meticulously. This, coupled with his generosity of spirit, charmed and inspired Joe for a decade but then the ‘seethe I felt about his ever-expanding chart of enthusiasms’ started to erode his own. He saw Pete’s ideas were obsessions whose powerful hold seductively stripped away the norms of everyday living, which had simply lost their meaning for him. Yet there was still the irresistible call of the rhythms of their existence, its routines unhitched from conformity, its closeness and what Pete referred to as ‘its aliveness’ making Joe’s un-crystallised ambitions of studying in a seminary and entering the ministry seem to lack truth, substance and vitality. Climbing with Pete, Joe could see solutions to the physical problems rock presented them and simultaneously feel the proximity of risk that both threatened and enlivened them. His rationale for becoming a minister was rooted not in his need to help others but to discover the same juxtaposition he found in



Jonathan Howland.

climbing within religious belief: a flawed premise. Would his tenuous hold on faith pay the price of what Pete felt to be his betrayal of all that they held so dear, not least their partnership?

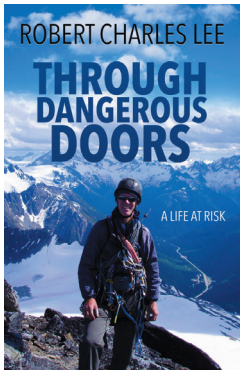
Pete's death, nine years later, caused by an inexplicable 700ft fall from a route he had soloed with ease on countless occasions, brought Joe a double grief: both for his friend and for the way of life that had still taken him to the mountains, despite his family commitments, and allowed him to be wholly present in the vertical world in which he so obviously thrived. Joe felt anew the loss of colour and challenge in his life, dislocated from the urge of appetite, with memories his

most vividly immediate companions. He had only the irreconcilable loss of the man who had given him the compulsion to climb, the source of all his vitality: 'It's all there is, a deep and true and unshakeable communion of grief.'

Will's invitation to finish the Mount Moriah route has come at a timely moment for both of them. Will's life has been drenched in the past, awash with the mythology of a father who was simultaneously 'everywhere and nowhere', often poetically and heroically alive to the climbers who knew and admired him, but a barely remembered presence to his son, who wanted only to have an honest understanding of the father he had never really known and whose prodigious talent he had inherited.

Howland narrates the eventual completion of the climb with a tenderness that never slides into the maudlin. The scattering of Pete's ashes both revives but redefines Joe's grief: this time his sadness is for Pete, the consummate lover of life and for all the living he would never do. As Joe and Will wrap around each other all night in order to endure the bitter cold at the top of the route the steady beat of Will's heart reassures Joe that this is a life that will continue what Pete was, what he began and what he never had the chance to finish. This will be no mere imitation: Will is invested in a future and a family with his partner Alison. Pete, on the other hand, while loyal to Will's mother, found nothing compared with his love of climbing. Ties to home came second to an uncontrollable need to construct his life around the truths of existence that he felt climbing and understood nowhere else.

*Native Air*, which won the grand prize at the Banff Mountain Book Festival last year, is very far from simply a narrative for and about climbers. The fluid and compelling descriptions of the technicalities of the various routes within it beautifully convey the essence of experiences on rock and, with the inclusion of two glossaries of climbing terms, bring clarity to climber and non-climber alike. Howland has, with consummate skill, succeeded in weaving together stories of a heart-and-soul commitment to the beautiful danger of climbing and two people trying to make sense of the most profound loss of their lives.



## Through Dangerous Doors

*A Life At Risk*

Robert Charles Lee

*E L Marker, 2021, 213pp, £19.95*

There are two life stories told in this fascinating book, both of them beset with risk and enlivened by adventure, but Robert Charles Lee's two lives couldn't be more different. They're delineated under two headings, 'Solo' and 'Duet', though it feels like the lived experience of pivoting from one to the other may not have been as sharply defined as it is on paper. The duet is played with Linda,

who emerges from Kenya after three years in the Peace Corps with Linda Lee's wife and climbing partner, more or less saving his life.

The wild solo he's been playing until then evolves out of a troubled childhood in a racist backwater in North Carolina and develops into a long and very trippy passage of drug abuse and either surveying or logging in Oregon and Alaska. Orthodox climbing barely intrudes. Adventure comes from high-speed drunk driving or solitary multi-day explorations of desert canyons.

Lee describes both his lives with unselfconscious honesty, barring the occasional and troubling ambiguity. ('I don't recall any lynchings,' he writes.) It's a clear, individual voice, as if you were sharing a tent on a mountainside and hearing his story face to face. And in his unguarded vividness, you wonder (as you sometimes do of any climbing partner you're stuck in a tent with) whether you actually like him or not. The dazzling adventure anecdotes, the careless tales of rolling 'joints with one hand while driving, chain-smoking weed along the way', the precisely recalled macho ripostes to threatening interlopers. ('Bring it on. I'll wrap this fucking bike around both your fucking red necks.') Yet you can't help allowing for his faults and fallibilities in the frank account he gives of himself. Just as you see the truest version of a climbing partner in the extremes of exhaustion or weather, you accept and admire Lee for the humanity his exceptional life story reveals.

After turning away from a life of using and into one of proper climbing, his working life takes him into a graduate course in environmental risk assessment. Over the following quarter of a century he evolves into a respected and substantial risk scientist. The word risk is in the subtitle to the book, and often he mentions the managing of risk or alludes to its rewards. But this is not an academic treatise and, perhaps disappointingly, he doesn't make space for a detailed analysis of the science of risk. Sometimes the subject is dovetailed into a poetic equivalence with something intangible, maybe a connection to William Blake or Aldous Huxley, dating from his psychedelic days, a deliberate abandonment of science and exactness in a committed reach for the heart of the matter. The whole book is a meditation on the drive to go through the doors of perception. And yet the reader is left hungry for an earthier, more rooted investigation of the 'complex and

dynamic set of risks' that climbing involves. He mentions a paper that he and Linda once wrote on rational risk management approaches in mountaineering, which I would have welcomed as an appendix.

Towards the end, he confesses a regret that he 'didn't study risk psychology.' And yet it's a psychology he's been inhabiting all his life, whether blasting away with boyhood firearms or stoned and adrift with the US Forest Service or climbing with the best in the Canadian Rockies. The answer to the riddle is tantalisingly close.

Last year in this country Bangor University sports psychologists Dr Marley Willegers and Prof Tim Woodman published research on how climbing and mountaineering regulate our emotions, giving us a sense of control over our inner lives. I would love to hear Lee's take on their conclusions. Like him they agree that those taking part in high-risk sports 'are not "sensation-seeking" and don't crave the adrenaline rush. There's something else taking place.' It's that elusive something else which Lee circles throughout his memoir, using for instance the expression 'I maintained' to describe staying rooted in the extremes of both colossal LSD doses or disproportionately hazardous climbs.

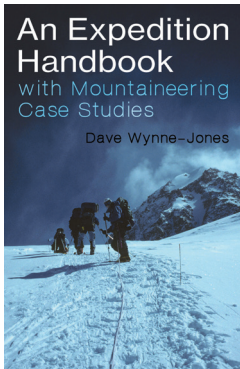
Willegers and Woodman say, 'People who feel that they have little control over their daily lives, who feel like a "pawn", can be drawn to high-risk sports where they are able to exercise control over strong emotions, such as fear, and take actions that dictate whether they succeed or die. The benefits of this emotional control in high-risk situations are then transferred back into daily life.' I recognise something in that and feel sure Lee would too.

Lee doesn't turn his back on the question, far from it. Peppered throughout the book are cold-bloodedly clear axioms that we all know are true. Fundamentals like 'Risk is cumulative ... the more I climbed the more likely it was I'd be involved in a serious accident.' Or: 'Sometimes it's just more efficient and safer to climb without pro and get it over with.' Or the one prized by loved ones who don't understand the great care with which we undertake our climbing: 'there's only so much that can be done to prevent incidents like this ... aside from *not climbing* [my italics]'.

There are thrilling passages of climbing narrative, especially in the 10 years when work takes Linda and him to Calgary and his American climbing experience takes a Canadian quantum leap: 'The Rockies are snarling Pitbulls compared to the Golden Retrievers of the Cascades.' He's the kind of climber who, on a work visit to the UK, can bowl up to see what the Ben is all about and settle for a winter solo of Tower Ridge in 'what Scots climbers sportingly call "full conditions", or "a bit fresh."'

Flow state is the condition he's striven to achieve all his life, in all his risky undertakings, stepping boldly through the doors of perception, and again and again there are rich and satisfying traces of it in this very enjoyable memoir. Recommended.

Nick Simons



**An Expedition Handbook  
with Mountaineering Case Studies**

Dave Wynne-Jones

*Whittles Publishing, 2023, 256pp, £15*

There have been a few books published before with similar titles aiming to show how to organise climbing expeditions to remote locations. This book is a little different. It is an account of the author's experiences over several decades of mountaineering and ski expeditions, presented with the benefits of hindsight, aiming to examine successes, mistakes and lessons learnt. The first third of the book is organised thematically considering the various aspects of expedition planning and management. The larger section is made up of entertaining and well-written accounts covering over a dozen trips worldwide between 1997 and 2013. Dave was heavily involved in both the Alpine Club and Eagle Ski Club during this period and the majority of the trips described were either club meets or more informal projects involving a combination of club members and friends.

Reports and articles covering several of these trips, written by Dave or other team members, have already been published elsewhere, not least in the *Alpine Journal* or the Eagle Ski Club's yearbook. There are also several reports lodged with the MEF and held in the Alpine Club Library available for consultation. What makes the accounts different here is that they have been written to highlight the multitude of issues that can make the difference between a harmonious and well-organised expedition and trips that are less successful or enjoyable. In doing so, Dave succeeds in giving a snapshot of a particular type of expedition at a particular point in time.

Club-based trips and peer-to-peer expeditions have their pros and cons. In the decades since the start of low-cost long-haul travel, these have been the traditional entry routes for many UK climbers to mountaineering beyond Europe. In more recent decades, with the increasing prevalence of commercial operators offering guided trips to popular and less well-known peaks worldwide, this has been changing. Climbers wishing to travel to the Greater Ranges now have a variety of options to choose from.

Anyone wanting an insight into how the peer-to-peer option works would be well advised to read this book. Along with several successes there are a few damp squibs and an alarming number of near misses. Perhaps Dave's teams just had more than their share of bad luck. From the examples described it would appear that this style of expedition is best suited to small independent groups climbing different objectives from a shared base camp. It is much harder to harmonise the strengths and abilities of a disparate group of climbers on a single large peak, as shown by Dave's experiences attempting Saraghrar (7340m) in the Hindu Kush.

There will always be a place for this type of trip. Some are attracted by the

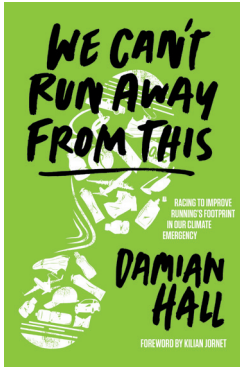
obvious cost savings when compared to guided trips. Others will have a strong preference for the ethos of self-organised expeditions. Without the chance to lead a low-cost self-organised trip I would never have had an opportunity to visit the Himalaya. That first trip in 1987 also inspired me to embark on a 35-year career that is only now drawing to a close. I am fairly sure that most British guides of my generation working in the Himalaya started in the same way.

Commercial expeditions are now a more popular gateway to climbing in the Greater Ranges. Increasingly, people are drawn to short duration trips to popular peaks. While these lack the exploratory aspect of the trips described in this book they appeal to many of today's climbers who are more risk averse and who are prepared to pay a higher cost for a higher chance of summit success.

There are other ways in which the expeditions of the future will differ from the projects described here. Environmental considerations will make it difficult to justify regular long-haul travel in the future. On a practical level climate change is now rapidly destroying the world's glaciers. Diminishing snow cover is making traditional snow and ice routes unviable in many mountain ranges. On the more positive side there are now good local agents in many countries who can provide quality equipment like tents making for more comfortable trips and reducing the need to struggle with excess baggage on flights from home. Communications technology is also advancing and there are now lightweight affordable options that enable teams to communicate effectively both on the mountain and with the outside world. In regions with an adequate rescue system these can save lives.

There is however one constant that links the expeditions of the past with those of the future, applying equally to self-led and guided groups. The single most important aspect of any trip is the relationships formed between the participants. Team dynamics and interpersonal considerations are the key to any successful trip in the mountains. No group sets out to become dysfunctional but it can happen. Dave gives many examples of teams that have worked well together and a few of teams that have not. For anyone considering organising or joining a first expedition to the Greater Ranges these should be studied carefully. There is as much to learn from Dave's examples of group interactions as from his information on planning, equipment, logistics and medical kits.

*Dave Hamilton*



**We Can't Run Away From This**  
*Racing to Improve Running's Footprint  
 in our Climate Emergency*

Damian Hall

*Vertebrate Publishing, 2022, 215pp, £15*

This is a difficult book to read. That's not a criticism: it's meant to be, as Damian Hall acknowledges from the start: 'Stop! Please, for your own sake, put this book down right now. There's a very good chance you'll regret reading it ... you'll probably never think of your running in the same way again.' We can't say we weren't warned.

As Kilian Jornet, no mean runner himself, puts it in his foreword, 'Runners like myself often think that because we run in the outdoors we have a special relation with earth and nature, and that we're more aware of the problems we're facing, but unfortunately that awareness isn't really that great when we dig deep, and it isn't doing much to solve the issues.'

Although this is a book primarily aimed at runners, especially those who compete, it also holds up a mirror to the embedded environmental consequences of mountaineering (kit, travel, fuel and so on). On those grounds, it merits reading by those of us who traverse our mountains more slowly.

Hall, an ultra runner perhaps best known for his record breaking FKTs (fastest known times), was spurred by the mainstreaming of the climate emergency in the last decade to examine his own impact. His first response was 'low carbon' record attempts, using public transport and 'ethical fuelling' (his vegan diet) with some 'plogging' (picking up litter whilst jogging) thrown in. He soon became regarded as a de facto activist though he felt 'more eco-worrier than warrior'. He was also asked to help advise on the sustainability of races. This book traces his three-year journey towards understanding running's impact on the planet and what can be done to improve it.

Clearly, this could have been a very dry book. But, despite the 89 footnotes, eight pages of endnotes and five pages of further reading, he's made it very accessible. That's not to say you don't reel sometimes from the relentlessly depressing facts and figures but Hall does his best to dress this up with black humour and some fabulously bad puns and bants. Indeed, in 'Hall-speak' climate change is usually referred to as the 'Big Kerfufflefuck', which pretty well sums up the situation we find ourselves in. As the title aptly proclaims: 'We Can't Run Away From This'. He's not wrong but ploughing through the book in one go will be beyond most people's endurance, despite his engaging writing and wry commentary: definitely a dip-in and dip-out of book.

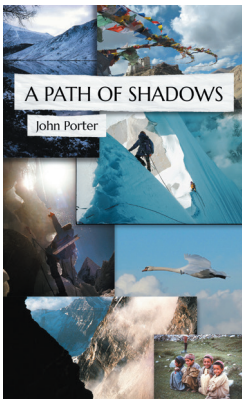
His scope is certainly comprehensive and takes a holistic look across all of running's specific impacts before segueing into how our home lifestyles are part of the problem. Chapters address footwear ('Shoespiracy'), running clothes ('Getting T-shirtly'), the role of the sportswear industry ('Industry Illusions'), events ('Racing Away from Net Zero'), transport to events

(‘Great Training’), food (‘The Planet-based Diet’), plastics (‘Fossil Fuelling’), consumerism (‘Well Stuffed’) and agency (‘Little Bit Activism’), all sandwiched between a very on-point intro (‘How Bad is Running?’) and a more upbeat outro (‘How Good is Running!’).

Each chapter wraps up on a positive note with a ‘Yeah, but what we can we do about it?’ set of suggestions. Whilst this often provides welcome advice on options and next steps, the list of points or asks are sometimes pretty long and daunting. Perhaps anticipating the lift in mood we need before reading that list, all chapters end on a joke. As a signed-up member of the tofu-eating, Guardian-reading wokerati my favourite was ‘What’s the difference between Greta Thunberg and Donald Trump? One is an angry attention-seeking child who yells at foreign leaders at international conferences and never does anything that actually helps. The other one is a Swedish climate activist’.

Although each chapter does, depressingly, include a long litany of negatives, there is plenty of balance and he aptly weaves in many other voices of those engaged in the issues to provide a wider perspective. Sometimes it’s difficult to judge if he’s a bit too close to the problem, or too wedded to his sport, to have a properly balanced view but he’s honest about that, often to the point of self-flagellation. He’s also upfront about his closeness with the industry (the companies that support him are listed at the outset), although he has now narrowed his brand sponsors by dint of their ethical outlook. Whilst I do have a high regard for inov-8 shoes and the brand itself (who sponsor Hall), I did find them rather over-quoted in the early part of the book. But it’s a minor quibble that doesn’t detract from what is a unique and impactful book. I, for one, learnt a lot and realised there’s a lot the ordinary Joe like me can do to tread a bit more lightly.

*Andy Tickle*



### **A Path of Shadows**

John Porter

*Little Peak Press, 2022, 80pp, £17*

‘Climbing takes us to a place where we’ve never been before,’ says John Porter at his poetry reading for the Alpine Club’s Bristol group. Actually this is the second mountaineering poetry reading that the AC has boldly belayed up the twisting stairs of the Nova Scotia pub recently. As was the case for Dave Wynne-Jones’ exhilarating evening of local climbing poets, the room is full. What is going on? It is three decades since Ken Wilson barked at me, ‘Poetry isn’t where climbers are at.’ At that time the

late Al Steck reported to me the frank commercial judgement of Michael Kennedy, editor of *Climbing*: ‘There is no demand for poetry.’ Indeed, in my elevated position as poetry editor of *High* magazine it was clear that my job was to be making gracious rejections. And over all that time, for the last 50

years in fact, John Porter, alpine-style pioneer in the Greater Ranges, was writing the poems now collected in this first (and, I hope, not last) collection of poetic meditations on that path of shadows. 'That place,' John continues quietly, in the exposure of his solo platform, 'is beyond the comfort zone.' We all know what he means. But now he lets slip the clue as to why we are all here: 'I just wanted to be somewhere different inside myself.' John's English father met his Canadian mother in Nova Scotia. And here we are, full circle, and experiencing somewhere different inside ourselves.

There are brief prose introductions to each of the six sections of poems in this book and they illuminate and elaborate an original conception of poetry. John is a scientist, his background, before joining that legendary Leeds University climbing cohort, was in geophysics. For him poetry is a symbolic equation in which juxtapositions of atoms attempt to explore 'the dark matter and dark energies' that science cannot articulate. But make no mistake, these are real poems, playful with form and space and thought:

*Above these peaks  
Imagination gathers  
Takes what it can  
Leaves  
A blank wall*

So we have sections titled, 'Equations', 'Addition', 'Subtraction', 'Divisions', 'Mountains' and 'Abstractions'. Of course, divisions and additions infuse poems in the section 'Mountains', not least in the poem 'Leaving the Mountains' where the three-line stanzas each expand the accumulating exploratory 'equation' of the poem whilst not avoiding the hard physicality of shared climbing that is both uncertain and connecting:

*Those hard uncertainties shared so steeply  
Gathered divisions of our lives together  
No luxury of fate fixed in stars.*

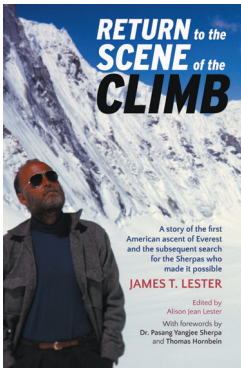
*Yet still that touch of the mountain made,  
The hard connections to a way above  
Created a link, what we had to do just to be.*

At his reading John referred to these poems as 'meditations' made at moments over decades. They are accomplished poems that do not come from poetry workshops or regular participation in a poetry group. Most significantly, they arise, in notebooks and diaries, from a mountaineer, as John said, 'Giving myself permission to write without readers.' Now is the time for these thoughtful, probing, strangely affecting poems to find readers who will gain pleasures and insights from this particular path of shadows. 'We grasp moments in the mountains / to invent the rest of a lifetime'.

*Terry Gifford*

• Also received are two books from micro-publisher Little Peak Press, one of poetry and the other an illustrated travelogue. Faye Latham's *British Mountaineers* is a paperback collection of over 60 erasure poems, each printed in full colour. The book is as much artwork as it is a collection of poetry. It takes as its starting point F S Smythe's *British Mountaineers*, published in 1942 at a moment of national crisis to tell the history of our alpinism, with stories of courage, triumph and sacrifice, and not a little jingoism. Using the process of erasure, Faye Latham reshapes Smythe's text into a dreamlike tale told from the perspective of an avalanche victim. Words are painted over and 'buried beneath the snow', with Tippex standing in for actual snow. 'Fragments of conversation tumble down like sentences cut off in the wind,' the publisher writes. 'The narrative voice is as changeable and combative as the weather, momentarily strong then filled with doubt, transiently still then bursting with life. Holding onto language, the original text resists its complete erasure. A voice speaks to the reader from beneath.' There are images grabbed from Ron James' Snowdonia guidebook as well as Latham's family pictures and the whole montage is both haunting and fragmentary, as you might expect from an avalanche victim, but also at times quite witty. 'What happens when we bury ourselves within a landscape? What do we become, and who will remember us? At the brink of losing everything, what stories are we left with? What do we leave behind?'

The travelogue is from Little Peak publisher Heather Dawe, artist and co-editor of the award-winning anthology *Waymarking*. *Mountain Stories* is an illustrated memoir of journeys through some of Scotland's most beautiful landscapes, including Skye's Cuillin, Knoydart, Assynt and the Far North. Writing during lockdown, author and artist Heather Dawe finds telling these stories a powerful means of reconnection with the mountains when they are physically inaccessible. Dawe's journeys are made by walking, running, cycling or sea-kayak. These stories are a reflection of the importance of wild places and the inspiration, art and culture associated with them.



### Return to the Scene of the Climb

*A Story of the First American Ascent of Everest*

James T Lester

Bench Press, 2023, 273pp, £25

As his daughter freely admits, Jim Lester, 'wasn't any sort of an athlete, or even a hobbyist sportsman. He liked to sit, and especially to lie down.' Nevertheless, for a few months in the spring of 1963, he was part of one of the most successful expeditions to visit the Himalaya. The American Expedition to Mount Everest (AMEE) placed no fewer than six mountaineers on the summit,

including Tom Hornbein and Willi Unsoeld, pioneers of a new route on the west ridge.



Sherpas on their American road trip after the 1963 Everest expedition. Left to right: Girmi Dorje, Ila Tsering, Nawang Gombu, Capt Noddy Rana, Ang Dawa, Nima Tenzing.

On their return, President Kennedy famously declared that AMEE members had pushed ‘human endurance and experience to their farthest frontiers’. As a psychologist, Jim’s role on the expedition was to identify the personality traits of those most likely to succeed in such a challenging environment. Over the course of a month at advance base he conducted a series of lengthy interviews with those who passed through. However, as Hornbein later observed, he offered so much more. ‘He was a caring presence who provided counsel to various members of the team in addition to his research pursuits.’

Caught up in expedition life, Jim paid little attention to those local porters and climbing staff that made such an extraordinary expedition possible. He would correct this oversight later: ‘Within the stories of expeditions, one can often glimpse a crowd of obscure figures, mostly in the shadows of the climbers and of the mountain, figures who are absolutely essential to the plot but who seldom get more than a few sentences in expedition narratives. These are the Sherpas, and they deserve more.’ And ‘more’ is what Jim provided. On returning from Nepal, the US government invited five Sherpas, along with AMEE’s liaison officer to visit on an all-expenses-paid trip. Jim volunteered as guide and driver and spent two months crisscrossing the country. Whether it was a visit to a ranch or a tour of a coalmine, the group received nothing less than red-carpet treatment. However, Jim quickly learnt that what impressed his guests most was something far simpler. ‘They were wild about window shopping, just strolling down the avenue – any avenue – and observing the really fantastic variety of objects offered in the windows. I could make our stay in any town a success by giving them an afternoon on their own for this kind of strolling.’

By the end of their trip, Jim's respect and affection for his charges had grown immeasurably. Later, he would describe their time together as a 'joyful and unexpected bonus, a wonderful dessert after the main meal of Everest.' A further course would be added some 30 years later, when armed with just a group photograph, Jim set off for Kathmandu with the intention of seeking out those Sherpas he first met on AMEE. With the help of guide and interpreter Sherap Zangbu, he was able to meet 10 Sherpas including three who visited the US after the expedition. Their conversations were wide-ranging, from their memories of the past through to plans for the future. From each meeting it was clear that the mountains had played only a small part. What really mattered was the life led in between. Above all it was the relationships formed with family and friends that counted, something Jim wholeheartedly agreed with.

Jim's account of AMEE, the road trip through the US, and his eventual return to the Himalaya have been brought together in *Returning to the Scene of the Climb*. Edited expertly by Jim's daughter Alison Jean Lester, it is a moving account of a life that was enriched by contact with the Himalayas and it's people. It's a book that I would highly recommend.

*Jeremy Windsor*



**Seeking The Light**  
*Climbing All 24 Of New Zealand's  
 Highest Mountains*

Gavin Lang

*Potter & Burton, 2022, 192pp, NZ\$89*

Sitting here in south-east London, the Southern Alps of New Zealand feel a long way away. At least, that's how I remember feeling 15 years ago when

I was actually in that country, anxious that my first (and in fact only) child's imminent birth might come sooner than expected while I was still far from home, powerless if required to dash to the maternal bedside. Compartmentalising that anxiety, I remember gawping into the emptiness of the Cook Strait from Wellington, wishing my short-term assignment would take me across it and closer to the legendary Aoraki/Mount Cook over on South Island. I came home with the New Zealand Alpine Club's 2001 guidebook, a map of the two national parks it covers and an aching appetite to return, which has never let me go.

That sharp appetite has been whetted again by Gavin Lang's mouth-wateringly beautiful photographic book documenting his project to climb New Zealand's 24 3,000ers. It really has ignited a whole renewal of my passion and planning to get back to the other side of the world and onto these sensational mountains.

Comparison is odious (or odorous, as Shakespeare's Dogberry would have it), but I cannot help likening Lang's work in the Southern Alps to



Spreads from *Seeking the Light*, New Zealand's sumptuous answer to Ben Tibbetts' *Alpenglow*.

Ben Tibbetts' in the European Alps. Tibbetts has been working on his own book of northern hemisphere 3,000ers which is yet to be published, but it's his signature 2019 book *Alpenglow* (a photographic and literary journey over the 82 peaks on the UIAA list of European 4,000ers) that I'm thinking of. *Seeking The Light* is its New Zealand cousin.

There's a kilometre's difference between the familiar 4,000m benchmark covered in *Alpenglow* and the 3,000m that delineate Lang's 24 peaks. Yet even if you've never set foot on them yourself, it's not difficult to accept that discrepancy as being inconsequential when you consider the Southern Alps' orography and proximity to the south-west Pacific Ocean with its moisture-laden airflows plastering them with snow and ice. Lang reminds us that, 'Climbing in New Zealand's Southern Alps is often referred to as a training ground for the Himalaya. The vertical relief is the same from the valley floor to the summit, but without the issues related to breathing thin air at 8000 metres.' They certainly made Edmund Hillary into a worthy partner to the experienced Tenzing Norgay in 1953. Hillary's son Peter, himself a prominent pioneer in the Southern Alps, provides a deeply felt foreword to *Seeking The Light*.

Chapter by chapter and with a variety of strong partners Lang ticks off his peaks, often enchainning more than one into a single multi-day outing, most notably with an ultra grand traverse of Aoraki/Mt Cook, Rakiroa/Mt Dampier, Vancouver and Malaspina and, perhaps even more impressively, with the first winter traverse of Torres Peak and Horokoau/Mt Tasman.

It isn't only toponyms that are rendered into *te reo* Māori. The book is studied with motifs and dual language passages honouring indigenous culture. To Ngāi Tahu (the South Island's principal *iwi* or tribe), Aoraki represents the most sacred of ancestors, from whom they are all descended. Standing at the very top of the mountain denigrates its status and climbers are encouraged to stay off the true summit.

Lang, originally from Ireland, found his true mountain range in 2004 and has lived and guided there ever since. In the book, the partner he ties on with most frequently is Ruairi Macfarlane, another mountain guide, raised on New Zealand climbing and snowboarding and now based mostly in the Canadian Rockies. The Southern Alps are notable for their long, difficult and fast-changing approaches, and for the custom of leapfrogging over those approaches by helicopter. Many of the chapters begin with an environmentally dubious but locally normalised chopper ride. Macfarlane, however, is a stickler, 'not keen to truncate the approach with a helicopter flight.' As he and Lang walk in to their sensational winter Torres-Tasman traverse, their packs are 'a sobering reminder that walk in/walk out affairs are for purists, requiring a fair amount of sweat. But it helped us acclimatise.'

From the comfort of my home in Peckham, it's hard to guess how taxing these approaches and exits really are. Certainly, the wasting of glaciers and erosion of moraine walls is a fast-moving story. The modern NZAC guidebook that Lang recommends more than once (*Aoraki Tai Poutini* by Rob Frost, 2022) is very good on all this, warning where customary approaches have become unviable, forecasting changes yet to come and even in one instance cautioning readers to ignore the map entirely. Having followed Lang's prompt and ordered my own copy, I too (as an armchair daydreamer at least), strongly recommend Frost's very clear, thorough and thoughtful guidebook.

Something else that's hard to interpret from the northern hemisphere is New Zealand's alpine grading. These are grades that have evolved since I first got my hands on the predecessor guidebook in Wellington 15 years ago. Now there are two sets of numbers to baffle the grockle on the other side of the world: an unfamiliar seriousness grade in Roman numerals and another technical grade in Arabic ones. *Assez Difficile* never felt so foreign. For added interest, where Lang writes about pure rock climbing on Magellan, there's the equally exotic (to my ear) Australian Ewbank grading to contend with. (Although neither Lang nor Frost says so in their respective books, the new NZ grades are known as the Frost grading system.) The lasting impression is one of having to travel to Southern Alps to prove the puddings in person.

Lang's stunning photography provides a powerful incentive to do exactly that. Frequently his frames cover whole pages and often stretch across two, inviting not only a rich imaginative diving pool for the far-flung foreigner but also immense detail and visual data for those operating locally. Conditions vary, of course, but each photo is dated for seasonal context.

Outsiders like me, unused to the range's complexity, will benefit from opening Google Earth or having a local map to hand. A very interesting appendix details the camera equipment he carries but the truest photographic insight he reveals is during his account of climbing the south face of his favourite mountain Tititea/Mt Aspiring (in a first ascent achieved in winter with Sooji Clarkson which, like the book, is called *Seeking The Light*): he has the humility and self-knowledge to understand, notwithstanding the excellence and beauty of his results, that 'despite shooting hundreds of images on each trip, they never fully capture the range of experiences I've had.'

Any of us who commits to handling a camera in the high mountains understands that conundrum.

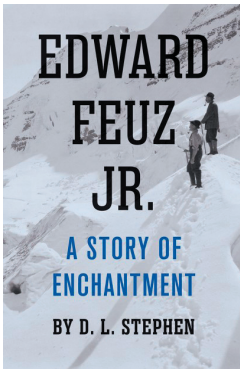
The writing that accompanies the photography brims with vividly rendered action, fascinating technical detail and indispensable local knowledge. And there's a current of personal reflection that shows through repeatedly. The impressive Torres-Tasman traverse unfolds, for instance, while a friend in hospital who looks to be rallying sadly loses her life to cancer, and from the beginning of the book the questions of loss, change and recovery. Lang's own battle with burn-out and the promise of the healing power of climbing ripple across the surface: 'You may have come here for information about the mountains, but what permeates these pages is their value as an element of nature and adventure, in freeing us from mental-health shackles and helping us to lead healthy lives.'

The Southern Alps have a rich climbing heritage and I sometimes wished that editorial prerogatives had allowed greater scope for Lang to tell the reader more of the range's history. The name Freda du Faur comes up a couple of times, for instance. She was one of the party of three who made the first Grand Traverse of Aoraki/Mt Cook in 1913, a globally significant climbing achievement in its time. Lang names her 1915 book *The Conquest of Mount Cook* in his bibliography and maybe I'll read that next. I'd love to know more about her.

When Lang returns to Aoraki/Mt Cook for a second chapter so that he can describe his incredibly bold solo of its (south-east) Caroline face, I was reminded of a tragedy that is genuinely the stuff of climbing legend. He rightly quotes John Glasgow claiming 'a victory for hippies' when he and Peter Gough made the first ascent of the Caroline Face in 1970. Seven years before, John Cousins and Michael Goldsmith had left the Ball hut for a reconnaissance or attempt on this very hazardous aspect and had disappeared. In a rhyme or echo of the mystery surrounding Mallory and Irvine vanishing high on Everest in 1924, the bodies of Cousins and Goldsmith were discovered in 1999. Film in their camera was too damaged to develop, but the fact that they were found *on the other side of the mountain* strongly implies that the first ascent may have been theirs.

Buy this book. Treat yourself to the expert wisdom of a climber who knows the Southern Alps like the back of his hand and who captures them with an exceptional eye. If, like me, you're trapped in a dream of making it back across the world and onto those mountains you'll find yourself already there, where 'warmer air wafts up from the valley below, bringing the scent of lush green rainforest.'

*Nick Simons*



### Edward Feuz Jr

#### *A Story of Enchantment*

D L Stephen

Rocky Mountain Books, 2021, 320pp, \$28.00

The Canadian mountaineering tradition has its layered origins in the role of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) and its employment of Swiss guides, of whom Edward Feuz Jr (1884-1981, originally Eduard) was, without much doubt, one of the most significant of the first generation of Canadian mountaineering. The beauty and joy of Donna Stephen's biography of Feuz is the way she intricately threads together both Feuz's compelling mountaineering life and her own journey of sorts with Feuz and his wife. *Edward Feuz Jr* is both a biography of Feuz and a memoir of Stephen's journey into the enchantment and magic of mountaineering and mountain life and culture via Feuz's Sherpa-like leadership.

*Edward Feuz Jr* is a companion book and yet takes deeper dives into the Swiss Guide ethos than the path-breaking *The Guiding Spirit* (1986), by Andrew Kauffman and William Putnam. Many of the first-generation guides are aptly mentioned in this admirably personal and focused biography of one the legends in Canadian mountaineering culture. But its evocative beauty is revealed in the way Stephens highlights Feuz's multiple first ascents, significant guiding skills and legendary status along with his personal, private and family character, and his distinctive personality.

Stephens had access to this latter aspect of Edward Feuz because her American family, for decades, had a maturing relationship with Swiss guides and in particular Feuz and his wife, Martha. The history of the Swiss Edelweiss Village in Golden, a heritage site presently threatened by developers, is told in tender detail, while the tensions between the Swiss guides and the CPR are recounted in an equally candid manner. The early years of the Swiss guides and their families was a most difficult one: the British Columbia interior lacked basic amenities and the frigid Canadian winters were in stark contrast to the more temperate and urbanised Alpine life in Switzerland.

Stephen is certainly not shy about sharing in poignant detail many of the challenges faced by Feuz and other Swiss guides in Golden in the early decades of the 20th century. The ample collection of photographs of Feuz and friends, including many with Donna Stephen's friends and family, provide a generous contrast to the text. The photos offer a journey into the emerging generations of the Canadian mountaineering ethos in BC, with the Golden, Rogers Pass, Yoho, O'Hara and Lake Louise mountain paradises worthy of many a repeated trip and trek.

I enjoyed the bounty of this book on several levels. I lived in Alpine Switzerland from 1972-4 and spent much of my time near Interlaken, where the Feuz family is from, and I trekked many of the trails and climbed many of

the peaks that Stephen mentions and that Feuz led trips to. Many of the mountaineering legends in the Canadian Rockies including Bruno Engler, Lizzie Rummel, Georgia Engelhard, Conrad Kain, Seppi Renner and Ruthie Oltmann, to name a few, have since whispered mountain lore and wisdom to my soul. I have also spent time at the Swiss Edelweiss Village in Golden and chatted with Jean Feuz Vaughan when she was alive. She kindly invited my wife Karin and me to spend an evening in the standard and much decorated Feuz mountaineering home.

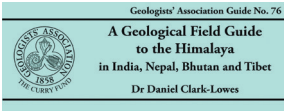
Many BC climbs led by Feuz feature in this keeper and charmer of a book. Legendary trips include Assiniboine on the Great Divide between BC and Alberta. In December 1976 I did a five-day ski trip into Assiniboine under a full moon. Small wooden cabins and crackling fires kept us warm on frigid nights. Feuz did multiple trips into the Lake O'Hara area, which is certainly one of the must-do trips of the Rockies and the crown jewel, in many ways, of high alpine trips, with the Alpine Club of Canada's Elizabeth Parker hut to nest in. Feuz played a leading and significant role in the building of Abbot hut, once a delight of a rock-solid shelter to bunk in at night before climbing Lefroy or Victoria, sadly now torn down because of the vagaries of climate change. Stephen recounts the many trips she, her sister Cindy and her family went on with Feuz and records the multiple comments left by patrons and clients who honoured and celebrated Feuz's guiding skills.

As the book inches towards its inevitable end, Feuz's wife has died and increasingly he is alone and lonely. Donna and Cindy become not only Feuz's daughters but 'Edward's Girls', as the final chapter is titled, making this a touching and telling tale of lives knit together through the enchantment of the mountains.

This final chapter lingers on the climb that Donna, Cindy and Seppi Renner did to the summit of BC's Mount Tupper in 2005 to celebrate Feuz's first ascent of the peak decades before. It was a pleasure to me to relive the animated moments as step by step, rock by rock, photo by photo the group made the lengthy trek to the demanding peak. Seppi, faithful guide and mentor, was in many ways the younger version of Edward Feuz.

There is ample reason for a pleasurable read or browse of *Edward Feuz Jr*, a story about the enchanting world of mountaineering culture and mountains. Feuz is a true guide into such a reality.

*Ron Dart*



## **A Geological Field Guide to the Himalaya In India, Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet**

Dr Daniel Clark-Lowes

*Geologists' Association, 2022, 176pp, £17*

Collisions of continent-bearing plates are among the most spectacular manifestations of plate tectonics, yielding awe-inspiring mountain ranges and playing an important role in modulating climate, controlling seismic hazards and influencing the global carbon cycle. And with the 14 highest mountains in the world, all over 8,000m in elevation, the Himalaya com-

prise the largest active collisional mountain belt on Earth stretching from the Karakoram mountains of the Kashmir region in the north-west to Myanmar in the east, over a distance of no less than 2,300km.

*A Geological Field Guide to the Himalaya in India, Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet* is the fascinating story of how the Himalayan mountain belt evolved, piece by piece, from the convergence and collision of the Indian and Eurasian plates beginning approximately 60 to 50 million years ago, to the closing of the ancient Tethys Ocean and formation of one of the most spectacular and geologically significant areas on Earth.

This elegantly written and produced field guidebook covers every segment of the mountain belt from the southernmost foothills of the Himalaya, the Siwalik Hills that were derived from the uplifting mountain chain to the north, through the old, yet low-metamorphic grade Proterozoic sedimentary rocks of the Lesser Himalayan Series, across the spectacular crystalline core of the high-grade Greater Himalayan Series, through the surprisingly un-metamorphosed sedimentary rocks of the Tethyan Himalayan Series that form the backside of the mountain range and cap Mount Everest, to the Indus suture zone and the collisional boundary with the Eurasian plate. The book also includes historical snapshots on some of the early geologists who shaped our understanding of Himalayan geology, succinct and clear explanations of the fundamental concepts of metamorphism and the partial melting of rocks, igneous terminology and volcanism, a review of the vexing question of dating the onset of the India-Eurasia collision, an overview of the last glacial cycle in the Himalaya and younger post-glacial features, a description of the four sacred rivers that have their source near Kailas, Tibet's holy mountain, information on the catastrophic Gorkha earthquake of 2015, and more.

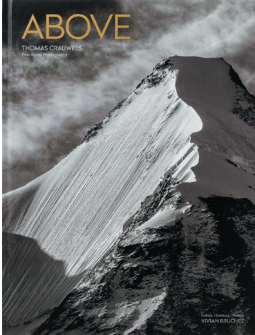
This is one of very few guidebooks that present the entire sweep of Himalayan geology for both the expert and the general reader. It is profusely illustrated with full-colour photographs, figures, geological maps and sketches. It also includes contemporary and classic images that capture some of the region's notable cultural and geological features. And true to its title, one of the guidebook's main appeals resides in the careful geological description

of localities, road itineraries, trekking routes and excursions known to the author. Much to the reader's benefit, each of these is placed in a proper geospatial and temporal context using maps, schematic cross-sections, time charts and numerous magnificent photographs of mountains, outcrops and rock samples as taken by Dr Clark-Lowes. Finally, the guidebook also features suggested titles (including tourist and trekking guidebooks) for future reading, select key references in leading scientific journals that are keyed to the text and a comprehensive listing of recommended small and large-scale maps for excursions in the Himalayan region.

In short, this is an essential reference for travellers, hikers, climbers, naturalists, rock hounds, students and academics: indeed, for anyone curious about the Himalayan mountain belt. Importantly, the book showcases many sites that are easily accessible from roads and paths making it an invaluable field guide in a land of superlatives. Every page of the guide sparkles with information and knowledge. Just reading the captions in this profusely illustrated book provides an education in the geological forces that have shaped the highest mountains in the world. It presents the science of geology and the geology of the Himalaya in a very colourful and easy to understand fashion. I have no doubt that any geologist who flips through the book will not be able to resist the urge to purchase it. It is the ideal source book for a basic understanding of the geology of every segment of what is considered the archetypical collisional mountain belt and it may well inspire young people to pursue a career in the study of geology.

*Prof Marc St-Onge*

## Photographic Books



Here is a book to immerse oneself in. To look at **Thomas Crauwels'** images in *Above* (Hemeria, 2021, 200pp, £82) is to revel in the mountainous sublime, and the beauty of sumptuous and subtle tones of grey. These photos are exquisitely printed. And one would hope so, given this book comes with such a hefty price tag.

Though he began 15 years ago photographing from terrestrial viewpoints, Crauwels now does much of his work from helicopters. He's a master of the craft of aerial photography, timing his photographic missions at the most majestic moments, often just after the epic snowstorms of winter and spring. These photos, mostly taken in conditions when it would be extremely hard to be in the high mountains, are also a testament to the expertise of the helicopter pilots.

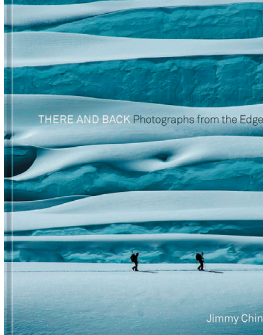
Crauwels is also a skilled image editor. He prints his images at an often monumental scale and since first taking up a camera just as the digital revolution was just getting underway, he has been on a continual hunt for better image quality. He admitted to me a certain geekiness, keeping up with each development of camera technology and moving from Nikon to Sony to Fuji as each generation advanced. When looking into the details you can see Crauwels is exploring and exploiting everything that a modern sensor can capture. He sometimes pushes the images to the brink of collapse.

Nowadays this is, thankfully, rather quicker with processing software like Lightroom than it was 20 years ago in the wet laboratory, where one would pull endless proofs and carry out meticulous dodging and burning by hand. Yet in the search for the dramatic and sublime, it is now very easy to over-edit photos. Contemporary photography is rife with examples. Most of the time Crauwels has the tact and judgment to remain the right side of gaudy, and cover his editing tracks behind him.

A minor gripe I have with this book, and most vertical format photography books, is the abundance of images that are cut in half by the crease of the book. I find this rather undermines the effort Crauwels has made to keep the pages clean: six pages of thumbnails are dedicated to this at the back of the book so as not to obscure the page with the text!

Positioned somewhere between Balthasar Burkhard and Mario Colonel, the notes of the former in Crauwels work make me yearn for the days of celluloid film, the hours and days of the magic dark room, and the subtle fumes of selenium toner. Crauwels work is clearly a product of the digital age;

his crisp image quality speaks of how good the current cameras are. Yet his work strives for the kind of grand gestures that we typically associate with large-format analogue photography. The rich blacks and subtle highlight tones are deceptively difficult to bring out in digital printing compared with in silver-gelatin printing and Crauwels has obviously worked closely with his printers. The result is stunning.

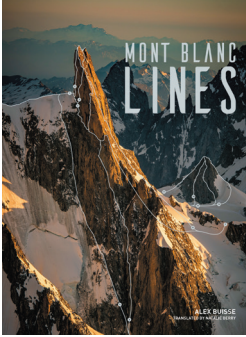


Rather than a book of photography, *There and Back* (Ten Speed Press, 2021, 320pp, £38) from **Jimmy Chin** is a chronological chart of Chin's adventurous life with a camera. The years 1999 to 2017 are illustrated by hundreds of photos, and each chapter or adventure is introduced with a short essay. The book travels in time from a pre-digital era where Chin was cutting his teeth as a North Face athlete to more recent projects, images from which many of us will have already seen. In the last decade Oscar-winner Chin has become a notable figure in popular culture

through his acclaimed films and his association with some of the legends of climbing, notably Conrad Anker and Alex Honnold. His creative output has landed him firmly on the world stage.

Apart from his story of waiting in Galen Rowell's studio for five days until the legendary photographer would deign to speak to him, this book leaves us wondering how he went from the humble background of son to two librarians in Minnesota, to doing several expeditions each year as a North Face athlete? I can't help but admire and envy the diverse and magnificent journeys Chin has been on. His skills as a professional adventurer – of earning a living from a life lived outdoors – are second to none. Given the diversity of roles he has filled, from alpinist and climber, to skier, photographer and cameraman, Chin seems as much an entrepreneur and businessman as photographer.

Though much of the book is gritty documentary photography that shows us the work going on behind the scenes of big, ambitious mountain projects, a handful or so of these photographs are truly stunning, show-stopping images. There are moments here that epitomise the magic that can occur when a skilled photographer collides with a world-class athlete. Some of the photos of Honnold, for example on the Thank God Ledge on Half Dome (p178) or the Enduro Corner on *Freerider* (p279), are epic images and defining cultural moments for the sport of climbing. You've got to be trusted by the right people, to be in the right place at the right time and have the right skills to get images like these. Chin has also clearly been willing to put in the thousands of hours of work necessary to craft such complex and ambitious stories. Having now created several highly acclaimed documentaries, Chin is at the pinnacle of his career. We wait to see what he does next.



**Alex Buisse** spent over 10 years collecting images of the Mont Blanc massif for *Mont Blanc Lines* (Vertebrate Publishing, 2022, 176pp, £40), setting himself the mission of harvesting images of the steep mountain faces of Mont Blanc and then more recently, iconic mountains and cliffs across the world, under the most magnificent light of sunset and sunrise. The book itself is a novel hybrid of photographic coffee-table book and Alpine climbing topo. The photographs stand on their own as landscape image, but on top of these Buisse has painstakingly drawn on nearly all the existing climbing routes, as detailed in François Damilano's guidebook series to the Mont Blanc massif *Snow, Ice and Mixed* or the ski lines in Volodia Shahshahani's *Toponeige*.

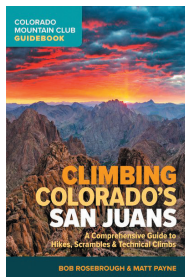
During the 2020 lockdown, a friend and pilot (who, as a professional, was authorised to take to the air), invited Buisse to fly in the high mountains. Buisse used this unique opportunity to pull together a more comprehensive overview of most of the faces of the Mont Blanc range in ultra-high resolution. The topo aspect of the book shows the routes that already exist, with their difficulty and date of first ascent. (There isn't any more detailed information, as these can be found in the comprehensive guidebooks.) Moreover, assiduous alpinists can use this book to spot the spaces that are still bare, where opportunities exist for first ascents.

On top of all this, the book is packed with fascinating texts by prominent (or less prominent) alpinists, recounting ascents of some of the featured lines, as well as extracts of historical information. This book does a lot of things well. Perhaps it's the book version of a Swiss army knife. That said though, it's far too heavy a tome to put in your mountain backpack.

*Ben Tibbetts*

# Guidebook

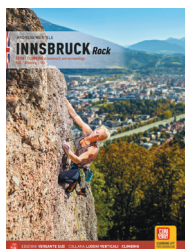
## Notes



There have been relatively few new guides to alpine destinations published in the last 12 months but revised editions of some important volumes have arrived on our shelves. On this front, Ben Silvestre and Philip Jardine examine the updates to *Patagonia Vertical and Rockfax Chamonix* later in this section. Also of likely interest to alpinists is the new release from Mountaineers Books: *Climbing Colorado's San Juans* by Matt Payne and Bob Rosebrough.



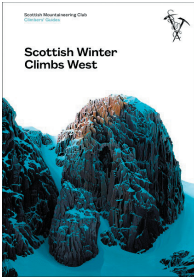
Closer to home, Italian publisher Versante Sud, who have an impressive range of guides in both Italian and English, have released the first volume of *Easy Alpinism in Trentino-South-Tyrol*. This selective guide provides descriptions for 133 climbs in the lower grades for the area west of the Adige valley in northern Italy. Most of the lines included are classic routes, primarily selected for their low difficulty and spectacular surroundings.



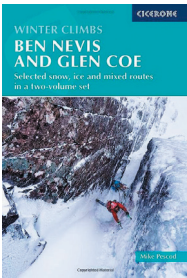
In 2023, Versante also released an update to 2003's *Innsbruck Rock*. This guide to sport climbing around the Austrian Alpine mecca is a useful addition to visitors' libraries, providing information on a host of worthwhile venues.



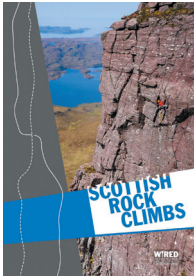
In the UK, publishing activity has been focused on Scotland, with the Scottish Mountaineering Club (SMC) enlisting Iain Thow to produce the new issue of *Highland Scrambles North*. This title complements 2017's *Highland Scrambles South* (also by Thow) to provide coverage of the best scrambles and low-grade rock routes in most of Scotland. The guide is produced in the new SMC style, with larger proportions, no plastic cover and the addition of photo topos in place of traditional illustrations. Also in this new house style is *Scottish Winter Climbs West* by Neil Adams. Covering not just Glen Coe and Ben Nevis, but many other less well-travelled venues as well, the guide includes more than 1,300 routes and has a significant focus on conditions, offering advice on the best venues for particular weather cycles. Profits from



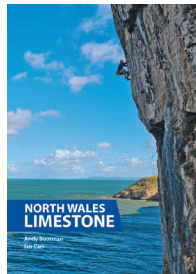
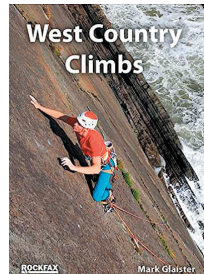
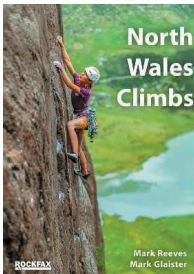
both of these titles go to the Scottish Mountaineering Trust, which provides funding for mountain education, access and the maintenance of mountain infrastructure such as paths and huts.



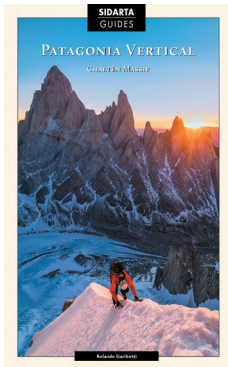
*Scottish Winter Climbs West* is not the only new guide covering Scotland's most famous honeypot venues. Mike Pescod has produced the eighth edition of Cicerone's *Winter Climbs: Ben Nevis and Glen Coe*, an update to the 2010 edition. The title is split into two volumes: the first covering Glen Coe and Ben Udlaidh; the second Ben Nevis, Mamores and the Grey Corries. Both books are pocket-sized guides that can be carried separately or stored in a larger joint sleeve. The two-volume set covers the most popular routes at the included venues with a wide grade spread from introductory snow plods to hard mixed and ice lines. Each venue comes with an overview of the route types, approach details and a photo topo. While the small size of the guide is undoubtedly an asset when carrying it on the hill, it also means that photo topos are smaller than would be ideal and route descriptions shorter. While not a problem for the experienced Scottish winter climber, route finding with this guide would likely prove challenging for the uninitiated.



Lastly for Scotland, 2022 also saw the release, under the Wired banner, of a new version of *Scottish Rock Climbs*. Compiled by Kevin Howett, the guide covers both trad and sport climbs, at all grades, throughout the entirety of the country.



Other updated titles for the UK include new editions of *North Wales Climbs* and *West Country Climbs* from Rockfax, *North Wales Limestone: The Definitive Guide* from On Sight Publishing and a revised edition of Cicerone's *Scrambles in Snowdonia* which covers selected lines in the national park from grade I to III.



## Patagonia Vertical

Rolando Garibotti & Dorte Pietron

*Sidarta D O O, 2022, pp416, £40*

Whilst leafing through this new, second edition of *Patagonia Vertical*, it is hard to be anything other than impressed at how much effort has gone into documenting the climbing in these mountains. This not only makes the book a fantastic resource but also renders it rather difficult to review. Climbing somewhere like the Chaltén massif isn't something a climber usually takes on without some expectation of having a serious adventure. But that sort of adventure isn't usually accompanied by first-class topos and route descriptions of which even the Alps would be envious. Therefore I must emphasise that any criticisms come with an important footnote: that having this guidebook available at all is incredibly good fortune.

I've been lucky enough to travel to El Chaltén twice, both times equipped with the first edition of this guide. Even in the first edition the knowledge contained in the book was incredibly useful, with the layout designed both to inspire and to make finding suitable objectives as simple as possible. The first edition was always straightforward to use but it is clear that great effort has gone into streamlining the new edition, making it a pleasure to read through and easy to navigate.

The photos are wonderfully selected, with the front cover immediately capturing the grandiose essence of climbing in the range. Glancing at the book sat on my table is enough to give me the strong urge to return. But it's not just the front cover. Inspiring photos are peppered throughout, which I always feel adds a lot to a guidebook. In terms of the actual climbing, it's hard to overstate just how useful it is to have high-resolution photographs of most of the faces with the routes marked and often a detailed topo to boot. Given the sheer number of routes in the massif, it would have been easy for this book to become an arduous tome but the balance between information and history is just right, with the descriptions kept brief on all but the most classic routes (or those most in need of either completion or repeat ascents). Nonetheless there is enough history to make reading the guidebook enjoyable in its own right.

One element that would have benefited from more detail is in the approach descriptions, as this seems to be one of the areas where first-time visitors come a little unstuck. The approaches to the Torre valley for instance seem to change year on year, with the north side approach being both notoriously hard to do on sight and having significant objective danger. More reference to the evolving nature of these approaches would have been welcome but it's possible these descriptions have been kept to the minimum to encourage discussion amongst climbers about the best approaches during a given season. That being said this section doesn't seem to have changed much since the first edition.

Finding the correct level of detail is one of the most difficult parts of guidebook writing, particularly when the availability of information inevitably contributes to the growing number of inexperienced climbers who are venturing into the massif. Not everyone has the Alps on their doorstep to help them develop the necessary skillset and these mountains are perhaps mistakenly seen by some as a place to learn the art of alpinism. This issue is compounded by the fact that whilst staying in El Chaltén it is easy to get caught up in the hype of looking at forecasts and ‘going big’ during the rare weather windows. I don’t remember if the first edition addressed this issue much but it is a relief to see that this new edition has a fairly extensive section dealing with risk assessment. This is an absolutely vital read for novices and a worthwhile refresher for experienced alpinists.

All in all, reading *Patagonia Vertical* is an unalloyed pleasure and as well as imparting his immense knowledge of the range, the author’s passion for the area is also evident on every page. Whilst hanging out in El Chaltén it is not uncommon to find oneself at a bar or party, only to find the author, Rolando Garibotti, holding court over a crowd of onlookers who are all desperate to glean as much precious information from him as possible. To have that well of information neatly summed up in a mere 400 pages is absolutely priceless.

*Ben Silvestre*



### **Chamonix**

Charlie Boscoe & Luke Davies

*Rockfax, 2022, pp512, £35*

The first edition of this book (led by Charlie Boscoe) came out in 2016. Luke Davies is now at the helm and has edited the second edition into an enthusiastic and modern young adulthood. Luke came to live in Chamonix in 2016 and is now on the British guide scheme, so it’s not fanciful to imagine both he and the guidebook coming of age together.

Just like a member of the Alpine Club, a good guidebook improves with age (and puts on a little weight). This new edition has grown in size to more than 500 pages and covers the main Mont Blanc massif from Le Tour to the Conscrits hut, as well as the Aiguilles Rouges (extending just into Switzerland) and valley crags from Servoz to Barberine. There are several completely new sections in this edition, including the addition of Charpoua and Nant Blanc.

The route descriptions are the meat of any guide. These follow the familiar Rockfax format with complementary topo photographs. Many of these have been improved (for instance the south face of the Moine) but I am left wondering whether a good drawing would be even better. Am I the only AC member to have wandered aimlessly on this face, hopelessly lost?

Subtle improvements have also been made to many of the route descriptions. For instance, you now know where to go at the top of the Lépiney crack: left if you were wondering.

Yet guidebooks are not just for facts, they are also for inspiration. The action photographs in this guide certainly inspire. Davies is pretty handy behind the camera and most of the superb action photographs in this edition are new. A generation of young, mainly British climbers who came to Chamonix to live and work before Brexit are here in multi-coloured glory.

These improvements are to be commended, but in alpine terrain even the best guidebook descriptions and photographs can soon find themselves out of date. This problem has only been exacerbated in recent years as climate change has ravaged the Alps. In those areas where summer heat waves have begun to melt the permafrost, not only are formations changing, but the risk of accidents from instability and rockfall is also increasing. Nowhere is this more obvious than on the Grand Couloir below the Gôûter hut that sees fatalities due to stone fall every year. This guide helpfully tells you how to pronounce the French for stone fall (p340) 'but any loud expletives should work.' The *Cosmiques* also changes frequently due to its altitude and geology, as do huts: no Fourche bivouac hut anymore. No written guide can hope to keep up with these changes and therefore any description needs to be supplemented by online resources, particularly *Camp to Camp*.

For some climbers this book may act as a catalogue of possibilities. Further information can then be sought either online or in the various specialist guidebooks. To their credit, Rockfax lists many of the other specialist guides in a full-page photograph. It seems unlikely you will head off for one of the hard multi-day routes in this guide without supplementary information from online sources. Rockfax has its own digital resource, complete with imported UKC comments in the form of their excellent app. I find the route photographs (especially of multi-pitch rock climbs) display very well in this format.

As a directory to the routes and peaks of this historic range, this updated guide has much to recommend it but I would not be earning my salt as a reviewer if I did not highlight a minor flaw: the *Perrons Traverse* a 'half day'? No: not for most people climbing on sight. My humble apologies to Paul Fairburn, with whom I completed it in five and half hours to prove it could be done, but it's better to allow eight or nine.

Very minor errors aside, if you're an Anglophone on your first visit to Chamonix and keen to sample the range of climbing styles the massif has to offer, this guide is an essential buy. Many AC members who already know Chamonix will also enjoy it and it would be a brilliant gift for any budding young alpinist. I look forward to seeing the guide reach middle age under Luke's expert direction.

*Philip Jardine*