

Guide-books

Dolomites West; Dolomites East (Companion Vols.) Selected climbs adapted from Italian, German and other sources and compiled with additional information by J. Brailsford. Alpine Club, London, 1970. Pp 176 and 247 respectively. Illustrated.

These new editions of *Selected Climbs in the Dolomites* have been long awaited and happily on publication they will be found to disappoint neither seasoned alpinist nor valley mandarin. The single volume guide, published by the Alpine Club in 1963, edited by Peter Crew, served its purpose admirably in leading many parties to visit the Dolomites who would not otherwise have done so, and in also bringing to the notice of British climbers the maturity and wealth of mountaineering possibilities of the region. But it was rapidly overtaken as an authoritative source of up to date information and its many inaccuracies have cried out, via parties in distress, for a more thorough and detailed work on the whole district. These handsome new green-backed volumes do just that, with a far more extensive coverage of selected climbs; nearly three hundred as compared with less than two in the old edition, plus much additional information such as the inclusion of a glossary of Italian-English climbing terms, a selection of Dolomite walks—which will undoubtedly give the work a much wider appeal, a metres-feet conversion chart, etc., etc.

Several new areas have been included in these volumes and those well versed in Dolomite history and events, will doubtless be pleased to see descriptions of the North face-Furchetta, the climbs on the Croz dell'Altissimo (Brenta) and the North Face of Pelmo. The worst inaccuracies of the old guide were to be found in the Brenta section, where parties not only found difficulties in finding their selected climb, but even on occasion their selected mountain! Happily this area now seems to be more accurately compiled, perhaps as a result of the pooling of hard-won information by Alpine Climbing Group members both in their bulletin and elsewhere.

There is much in these volumes for the moderate climber or even the mountaineer searching for areas well away from the populous regions. And the inclusion of additional material to ever popular groups, such as the Sella and Sassolungo, will help British climbers visiting those groups to sample some of the best of Dolomite climbing without all queuing for the same over photographed ascents!

The author has shown concern for those using his guides by asterisking all climbs where there is doubt about the accuracy of route description; straight translations are notorious for producing inaccurate climbing information, and

such a precaution has much to commend it. It provides the expert with a lead to climbs not often ascended or awaiting a British ascent, or it warns the inexperienced not to rely overmuch on the description but to use his own innate powers of route-finding if in doubt. Descents are carefully described and I for one am pleased that such a serious outing as the way off the Torre Trieste (Monte Civetta) is given the due emphasis it deserves. Six hours of abseiling is not to be undertaken lightly and Brailsford has done late descenders a service here! Sooner a stop over on a big ledge and the chagrin of a night out, than a later forced bivouac plus burnt hands, sore shoulders and hours sitting in a rope sling.

The initial technical and introductory matter is adequate as are the author's warnings and attempts to deal with the sticky problem of free versus artificial climbs and their grading. It was a long time before I realised that if a piton appeared on a route in the Dolomites, you pulled up on it, whether the route was supposed to be free or not. The stern avoidance of such a method often resulted in an outing of at least one grade higher than the guide-book suggested. John Brailsford has done his best over this, but I cannot see the actual division of where one type of climbing begins and the other finishes ever being clear cut in practice.

I do have a few criticisms of this guide despite admitting of its general excellence. The odd legacy of vagueness or inaccuracy has crept in from the previous edition, despite the efforts of the 1968 *Alpine Climbing* in publishing a corrective list of all known errors. The description of the North face of Monte Agner is as woolly as ever and the descent from the Cima Su Alto as incorrect as before. I would also quibble with some of the route selections, especially giving much emphasis to climbs which are bolting extravaganzas, e.g. on the North faces of the Tre Cime at the expense of the many recent first class and major free ascents on the Marmolada, Civetta and Falzarego areas. Robin Collomb has made an artistic presentation of the book designs, but case bound, hard covers, gold blocked or not, are vastly inferior to the protection given by plastic bindings for actual use on mountains. One suspects these books are designed from this artistic viewpoint and thus are very presentable on bookshelves, but what will they look like after two days out in a storm? Brian Evans's diagrams are absolutely first class but his lettering is sadly second-rate. The expense of Letraset is always worthwhile, especially for maps.

These are minor gripes when compared to the overall quality of the work, John Brailsford, and his many collaborators, both inside and outside of the A.C.G. are to be warmly congratulated on their labours. Such effort is a true service to the British mountaineering community and, despite the often niggardliness

of such expression, is appreciated! It does the Alpine Club nothing but credit to be the publisher of such volumes.

Dennis Gray

Walks and Climbs in Romsdal, Norway By Tony Howard. Pp 174. Illustrated with black and white photographs and diagrams. Cicerone Press, Manchester, 1970.

Tony Howard is to be congratulated on the excellence of this guide, which describes all ascents made in the Romsdal up to the end of 1969.

Recent publicity given to climbing in Norway has created the impression that the Romsdal and surrounding area is a playground for the expert alone. A glance at this book proves this not to be the case, the vast majority of the ascents falling into the lower grades of difficulty. There is also an excellent variety of training climbs in the vicinity of Andalsnes, which give a good introduction to the area, as well as many outstanding mountain walks and excursions. The pictures give a good idea of this diversity as well as pointing towards the mass of first ascents still to be made.

Throughout the guide, the diagrams are clear and precise, and are again a credit to the author. However, one wonders at the accuracy of some of the route descriptions, which cannot all have been checked before publication. A case in point is the description given by the French for their Direct Route on the Trolltind Wall ('Trollveggen'), first climbed in 1967. The British climbers attempting the second ascent failed to find the original line and consequently both French and British descriptions have been included. Climbers attempting repeat ascents of this and other climbs would do well to bear the implications in mind.

For the newcomer, the guide includes information on travel, amenities, entertainment, accommodation, weather, etc. There is also a unique section on 'local attitude' and I hope that visiting climbers will take note of these comments and pay heed to Joe Brown's words in his foreword. An added attraction are the excellent maps of the entire area, which give the exact location of all major peaks and valleys. Although the title of this guide refers specifically to Romsdal, the contents cover the walks and climbs in the surrounding Grovdal, Vengedal and Isterdal valleys, as well as one or two outlying ranges.

All in all, this guide is an excellent introduction to a beautiful mountain paradise, which is surely destined to become as popular as the Western Alps as a summer playground for the British climber. For those intending to visit the area, the guide is a 'must'.

John Amatt

Rockclimbing in Wales By Ron James. Pp 241. Illustrated with black and white photographs. Constable, London, 1970. Price £1.50.

Few would challenge the competence of the author to undertake his chosen task, even fewer would envy him. Ron James, resident in Snowdonia for a decade, as both guide and instructor, has selected and described 200 climbs that he considers the 'most enjoyable' in five principal areas—Ogwen Valley, Llanberis, Beddgelert, Dolwyddelan and Anglesey. Introductions to each area include details of transport, accommodation, toilets, mountain rescue and equipment suppliers—invaluable information for the occasional visitor. He stresses the personal aspect of choice, and as the quality of climbs is essentially a matter of opinion it is inevitable that we do not always concur. Nevertheless the majority of routes included are undisputed classics.

My first impression was favourable; stiff covers, attractive type-face and layout, with numerous photographs, many by the professionals, Wilson and Cleare, are all conducive to this. Closer inspection revealed that comparatively few of the action shots gave an indication of the nature and style of climbing as is claimed. Crag photographs are particularly disappointing with important features obscured by shadow, high-light or clumsy lines, which are supposed to indicate the routes. Those of 'Cloggy' and Bwlch y Moch are refreshing exceptions. The adjectival grading system has been supplemented by plus or minus to provide finer classifications.

Grading is more stringent than that used elsewhere and apparently no climb warrants more than EX—, which might puzzle the odd 'hard-man' who has sweated a little on *Erosion Groove Direct*. The 'star' system, which is rapidly gaining acceptance, is used to denote quality and is bound to excite—*Mostest* three stars and *Vember* only two. Not on my card

Combinations of climbs are described where appropriate, yet some excellent ones are neglected, *Great Slab/Bow-shaped Slab* for instance. I enjoyed reading many of the descriptions which are generally more informative than the cold factual style of current guide-books. The accuracy of descriptions is good—with a few notable exceptions; *Commuter's Crack* on Llech Ddu for example.

I have no doubt that this Guide will prove an invaluable asset for both novice and expert alike. It draws attention to routes of particular merit and whets the appetite for areas the reader might not otherwise visit; and all for little more than the price of a single guide-book.

Les Holliwell

Bernese Alps West (from the Col du Pillon to the Lötschenpass) By Robin Collomb
Pp 74. 16 illustrations. West Col Productions, 1971. Price £1.50.

'A selection of popular walking and climbing routes' in an area where there is a great deal that is straightforward and suitable for the novice climber, and in many places even for the mere walker. The style is thoroughly competent, as in the other volumes in this series. It is good to know that the English-speaking climber can be adequately guided nowadays without the labour of an agonised return to schoolboy French or German.

Edward Pyatt

Mountaineering journals

Der Bergsteiger 1970 (Österreichischen Alpenvereins). *Der Bergsteiger* seems to have lost some of the zip that has made it so attractive recently. Or is it that familiarity breeds—well, certainly not contempt, for it is too good a journal for that,—but a certain boredom? The East Alpine flavour is as strong as ever, naturally, but there is a lack of ideas this year. Perhaps it is just a bad patch? One hopes so—thank goodness there is no falling off in quality of the excellent photographs.

The most original idea was Erich Neubauer's review of the North face Cima Grande in the years 1975, 1999, and 2050—does he really mean it, one wonders? I suspect not, but at least it makes a change in a sport which is so often given to looking back, rather than forwards.

Original too, in their way, are the short features about obscure mountains in far away places: Lapland (Jan), Demavend (Feb), Turkey (Apr), the Sahara (May), Mexico (July) and Bali (Dec). The Sahara notes deal actually with the Hoggar and are well illustrated.

In the April issue Dietrich Hasse writes about bivouacs on the Dru, but, oh dear, what can one think of titles such as *The Beautiful Summits of Switzerland*, *Wandering in Valais*, and *Mountain Tours with Children*? (The last not a useful training feature, but a guide to walks and scrambles for very young children with their parents.)

There is a very full obituary of Jorg Lehne in the September issue, by Dieter Hasse and Dr G. Leukroth.

Walt Unsworth