

Other Books Reviewed

Michael Baker

Few readers indeed would call themselves 'tourists'; rather, they would say 'travellers', though the distinction nowadays is blurred. Three recent publications of or about real travellers exemplify the difference. Ney Elias, writes Gerald Morgan in the book of that name, received as much publicity and adulation in 1873 as did Stanley. Today he is unknown. Partly his approach to travel must be the cause, for he excluded any element of the personal from his writing. After his crossing of western Mongolia he wrote that it would be tedious and uninteresting to give a personal account of his journey. That was after travelling some 5000 rigorous miles frequently involving considerable peril. His biographer illustrates the modesty of the man with the story of a dinner given in honour of a traveller who boasted the magnificence of his achievement in crossing a certain pass. Elias made no remark until pressed by his host, he admitted having crossed it eighteen times, sometimes in winter.

It chanced that one of Elias's expeditions, the Burmah-Yunnan Mission of 1874, crossed the path described by Dorah de Beer who, in 1938, travelled to Li-Kiang to seek the route up the snow mountain Yalung Shan. Her *Yunnan, 1938* is a nostalgic story recorded only because it seems to her to be an account of something which could not now occur. Published some thirty-three years after the event, it is a pleasure to read.

Michel Peissel is a different sort of traveller. His publisher calls him 'one of the last true land-explorers', a curious and half-guarded claim. He does not make it in his book *Lords and Lamas*. Besides, he too is a great traveller. He recounts in strikingly personal style a journey across Bhutan.

Elias was always against the adventurous type of explorer, and would have had a low opinion of the kind of modern traveller who makes much play of his misadventures. Peissel, however, manages to convey the impression of amiability and goodwill rather than sternness.

From New Zealand, Paul Powell, the author of *Men Aspiring* entitles his new book with the greeting given by his wife after he had spent nine days on Mount Aspiring in a snow-cave. It is apt, if ungainly, for the book has, as an underlying theme, the part played by various shelters, or the lack of them, in the climbing career of an active man. This book is highly recommended.

Some old American wine has reached the Club in new bottles, being two books which were both fully reviewed when first published. They are Miriam Underhill's *Give me the Hills*, and *Everest, the West Ridge*, by T. F. Hornbein. The former now carries an additional chapter on the New Hampshire four-thousanders and more photographs; the latter, originally 'large, glossy and

very expensive', has shrunk in size and in textual matter. Hornbein's story is unchanged. At £3.50 it is still very expensive. Less expensive is a new and authoritative book from the United States, Bradford Washburn's *A Tourist Guide to Mount McKinley*, which is a workmanlike but pleasantly illustrated work, part chronicle and part guide, with a useful bibliography and a most helpful daylight-and-darkness diagram.

The magazine *Ascent* 1971 contains a review article by David Roberts, which sets out the nine deadly sins of instructional mountaineering literature. This ought to be compulsory reading for all writers of such works; it gives a precise critical criterion. The instructional works which have reached the Alpine Club in 1971, deserve measurement by this yardstick. *Alpinisme Moderne* (text French) claims to be 'Manuel complet que tout grimpeur débutant ou chevronné voudra mettre dans sa bibliothèque'. It is a translation from the Italian book *Alpinismo Moderno*, and is out of date, particularly in the sections dealing with snow and ice techniques, as a glance at any recent text will show. Rébuffat's latest, *On Snow and Ice and Rock*, now in an English edition, lacks none of the quality of earlier works. The author appears to recognise that while many beginners will be prepared to read a manual on climbing purely for instruction, few will do this after being introduced to real climbing itself. Something more is needed. Rébuffat gives the extra by the occasional personal reminiscence and by the glossiness and excellence of his photographs. James Lovelock's *Climbing* also attempts to enliven basic description with personal reminiscence. His is a light-weight book. One wonders whether techniques which in the performance are so simple as not really to merit more than a glance, are in the description almost impossibly difficult to convey with accuracy to the reader. Like the elephant, some things are easy to recognise but difficult to describe. And, incidentally, is it worth treating wooden axes with an occasional dose of linseed oil to keep the wood in good condition, as Mr Lovelock claims? Your reviewer believes that Mr Tiso some years ago exploded that myth with a controlled experiment.

Of G. Joubert's book (in French) *Pour Apprendre soi-même à skier* kindly presented by the author, your reviewer can do no more than observe that while admiring the diagrammatic representation, the English reader might query the need to illustrate certain ski-ing postures with photographs of gentlemen clad only in underpants . . . and ski-boots.

Philippe and Claude Traynard are the authors of an excellent work, called *Cimes et Neige* giving full guide-book advice for the ascent on ski of 102 peaks in the Alps. Each route is fully documented with heights, times, access routes and descents, all well described, with a small diagram and an informative photograph. One of the merits of this book is that there is absolutely no need for cross-reference. Written in French, it is a planning work and not a pocket guide—which is a pity.

Expedition Reports, of which a substantial number are received each year by the Club, rarely achieve a standard of publication or literary excellence which compels their mention among the reviews, but the Japanese Antarctic Research

Expedition's 1968-9 which traversed Syowa (South Pole) is one such. Leaving scientific conclusions aside, the Radio, Equipment and Provisions Reports make interesting reading. Can it really be that the No 2, twelve-man day ration pack consisted of, *inter alia*, 'Soy sauce 46L, garlic, a proper quantity' and 'concentrated whisky 150L?' The 'Behaviour Report', too, is a classic of its kind, and contains a short chapter on excretion; 'partly because we had not met any severe blizzard, not only we never thought excretions a hard thing, but it was one of our biggest delight'. There is also an unarguable thesis on rest: 'Rest is part of a work and resting is to conquer the fatigue, that is, to refuel the strength for next work. Therefore rest should be considered an indispensable part of work'.

This article cannot close without an acknowledgement of one whose title a scrutiny of the list of books received will not reveal. It is written, and illustrated, in Japanese. Usually, such works conceal at the back (which is probably at the front anyway) a crib which assists the ignorant European in placing it. This one reveals nothing, and will doubtless keep the librarian responsible for the catalogue turning in his bed long after your reviewer has sunk into a long and dreamless sleep.