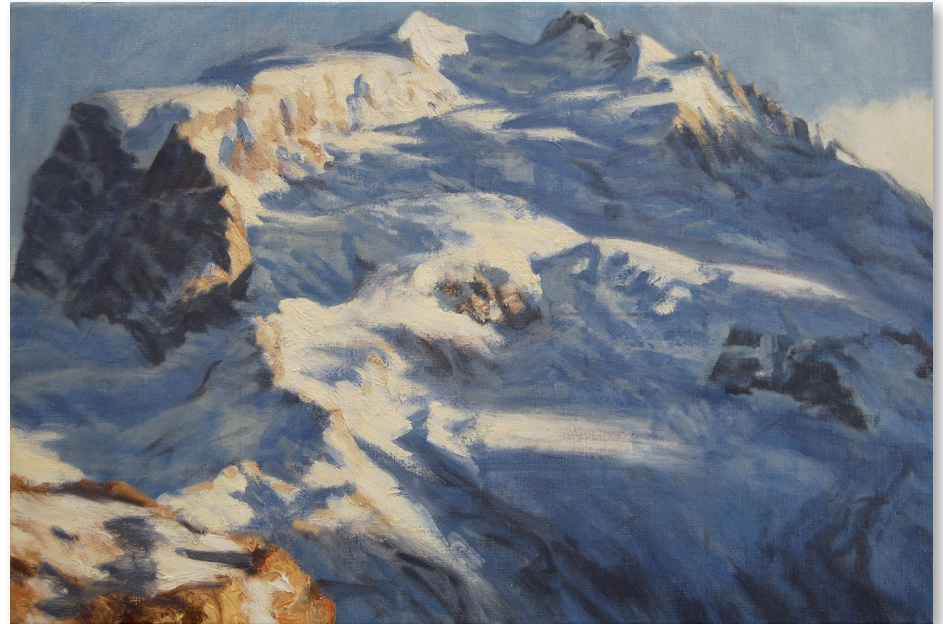
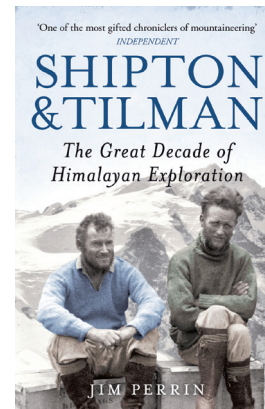

Reviews



Julian Cooper, *Monte Rosa*, oil on canvas, 61 x 40cm, 2012

Reviews



Shipton & Tilman: The Great Decade of Himalayan Exploration

Jim Perrin

Hutchinson, 2013, pp424, £25

Snowdon: The Story of a Welsh Mountain

Jim Perrin

Gomer, 2012, pp240, £14.99



Though both these books are by the same author, their subjects appear at first glance to be so different that to combine them in a single review might seem perverse. Not so. The prankster spirit of Perrin runs strongly through both works, puncturing mountaineering's myths and conceits in blends of merry revisionism and absorbing scholarship. And in particular there is the overlap between the course of Shipton's life, Everest, and the Pen y Pass set of Geoffrey Winthrop Young. With some relish, Perrin reduces George Mallory from demigod to a distinctly ordinary climber.

Shipton & Tilman is the more significant of the two books. Perrin has been poring over the lives of Eric Shipton and Bill Tilman for many years and his aim has been to reclaim the two mid-20th century mountain explorers from an Establishment within which, he says, 'they never truly belonged'.

With sweet timing this biography of a friendship appeared just as the Great and Good of British mountaineering were working themselves up into a lather over the 60th anniversary of the first ascent of Mount Everest – by an expedition that Shipton was due to lead until he was, as Perrin puts it, 'ousted by the shadiest politicking'. Thankfully, though, Everest 1953 is not the book's prime subject. Perrin's focus is on the 1930s, a decade when Shipton and Tilman formed perhaps the most productive partnership in the history of mountain exploration.

The key expeditions here are the entry to the Nanda Devi sanctuary in 1934 and the pair's extraordinary five months in the northern Karakoram along with Michael Spender and John Auden (brothers of the poets) in

1937. Shipton and Tilman wrote extensively about these journeys and both men have been the subjects of competent biographies. However none of this previous weight of words fills out the characters of this odd couple – Shipton a romantic with far-away blue eyes, Tilman a gruff iconoclast – with such a mix of fresh documentary research, philosophic rumination and mischievous conjecture.

Eighty years on, going to the mountains ‘Shipton-Tilman’ style is still regarded as an ideal. However that is not necessarily synonymous with ‘alpine style’, which often equates with hi-tech sophistication, speed and a narrow focus rather than a live-off-the-land simplicity. Shipton and Tilman were as keen as anyone on unclimbed summits, however Perrin contends that their achievements went beyond an exemplary style; through the qualities they displayed of skill, courage, fortitude, loyalty and humour their shared ventures took on the nature of a ‘moral quest’.

Shipton & Tilman completes a trilogy, a ‘happy’ final volume, he says, to follow on from *Menlove* (1985) and *The Villain* (2005) – the lives of both Menlove Edwards and Don Whillans both ultimately having an aura of tragedy. Perrin’s lavish use of footnotes to conduct a digressive running commentary on his own narrative (as per *The Villain*) will irritate some – by the time we join exotic 1960s women floating down Kensington High Street to the Biba store we’ve certainly strayed somewhat from the Rishi gorge in 1934. He may also overdo the portrayal of these two middle class young men as anti-establishment vagabonds, or even proto-hippies in the idea that they might have crumbled local hashish into their pipes as they mused by the campfire. However in reminding us of the satisfaction to be had from what Shipton called ‘travelling with simplicity’, Perrin pokes a well-aimed stick into the conscience of 21st century mountaineering, with all its commercialism and celebrity gatherings, and does so with literary élan.

It is necessary when reading Jim Perrin to be continually asking oneself, ‘what is he up to here?’ Who or what is being subverted? (The so-called ‘new nature writers’ – no names, no pack drill – are an amusing secondary target.) There is, it seems to me, a choice metaphor in *Snowdon* where Perrin is delighted by the sight of wild goats that raid the cottage gardens of ‘prissy Surrey retirees’ and annoy National Park conservationists. He describes the goats as ‘bold and playful anarchists of the hills’ – an apt self-portrayal of the author himself.

Snowdon, Perrin asserts, is ‘the British mainland’s finest mountain’, in comparison to which Scafell Pike and Ben Nevis are but ‘lumpen and uncouth masses’. He is uncharacteristically pragmatic about the mountain railway and other indignities inflicted by Snowdon’s sheer popularity, concluding that management and wardening have not only been inevitable but have proved minimally intrusive and valuable. But rest assured, this is just about Perrin’s only nod of approval to any kind of Establishment. Elsewhere he is busy hurling barbs at the English (only Edward I whose castles encircle Snowdonia gets grudging respect as a ‘tactically astute’ warrior king) and second home owners, and railing against the class prejudice that

afflicted climbing in Wales in the first half of the 20th century.

In Perrin’s sights in this last instance is the ‘self-professed elite’ that gathered at the Pen y Pass and later Pen y Gwryd. Though he acknowledges Winthrop Young was a more rounded and complex character than some of his (Young’s) smug, aggrandising writing suggests, Perrin condemns the Pen y Pass set as by nature exclusive and mythopoeic. One result of this complacency was that Welsh climbing lagged behind the Cumbrian version – ‘which was not so hide-bound by class issues and the assumption of superiority’ – for decades.

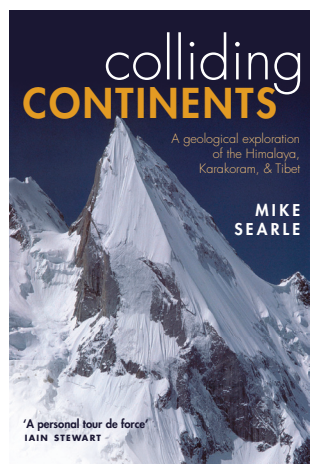
Turning to Young’s ‘Galahad’, Perrin says it is ‘simply not true’, as modern commentators have stated, that George Mallory ‘climbed comfortably at Hard Very Severe in Wales’. Mallory’s hardest verified route in Wales was an eponymous rib on the Nantlle Y Garn graded Mild VS on which the difficulties were led by H.E.L. Porter. ‘There is nothing whatsoever in Mallory’s climbing record to suggest that he was remotely capable of climbing at extreme altitude a cliff of the difficulty of the Second Step,’ says Perrin, dismissing Mallory’s record in Wales as, ‘a pleasant little V. Diff soloed to collect pipe; a one move Hard Severe where the use of an ice-axe – as was the case on Mallory’s ascent – reduces the grade to about Difficult; a debatable climb on Llechog and an easy Very Severe on the safe end of a rope’.

With such debunking of Mallory and the Winthrop Young clique plus the ‘reclaiming’ of Shipton and Tilman, perhaps these two books should have been made required reading for all those attending the various Everest anniversary events this year. Whether they would have caused much harrumphing in the bar at the Pen y Gwryd, who knows; perhaps more eyebrows would have been raised at Perrin’s disclosure that Jack Longland, as an 18-year-old freshman at Cambridge in the 1920s, was sexually involved with both Winthrop Young and his wife Eleanor ‘Len’ Young.

Perrin says he was ‘commanded’ by Longland to divulge these facts as widely as possible after his death (in 1993). Longland’s wife added further spice, telling the author how Young would come into the women’s bathhouse at the Pen y Pass and swing aside his trademark cloak to reveal himself naked underneath. ‘We would merely giggle at this,’ recalled Peggy Longland, ‘there was nothing there to make a girl feel afraid of on her wedding night.’

And all this in what is ostensibly the story of a Welsh mountain! The lesson is, when reading Perrin never skip the footnotes. And remember too that the old wild goat is out to get *your* goat.

Stephen Goodwin



Colliding Continents: A geological exploration of the Himalaya, Karakoram and Tibet

Mike Searle

Oxford University Press, 2013, pp450, £25.00

There is a famous line in Tony Hancock's iconic comedy show *The Blood Donor* where Hancock, having expounded at length and with gloriously ill-informed pomposity on the workings of the human body, is asked by fellow donor Hugh Lloyd: 'Are you a doctor then?' to which Hancock replies: 'No, I never really bothered.'

Now I was trained as a geologist and dabbled a bit years ago but my contribution to the science has not exactly been Nobel laureate material, and in presenting my credentials for reviewing this

book, I could with equal self-delusion make the same claim as Hancock. So be warned, what follows hardly constitutes peer reviewing.

Colliding Continents: A geological exploration of the Himalaya, Karakoram and Tibet charts the career of Mike Searle, a geologist who did bother – and on the grand scale.

Quick aside (bear with): in modern geology the overarching 'theory of everything' regarding the evolution of the Earth's crust over the last few billion years is that of Plate Tectonics. It holds that the crust is made up of several lithospheric (just Google it) plates of constantly changing shape and size each of which is being created by upwelling magma along one margin, a spreading zone (deep ocean ridges) and recycled back into the deeper layers of the earth, the mantle, along the opposite edge (subduction zone). Riding piggy-back on these crustal conveyor-belts are the continents, which, being made of lighter material don't get subducted. Thus the continents have been shuffled and shunted around the surface of the globe, constantly being separated and re-assembled in different alignments and groupings throughout most of geological time.

Back in the Cretaceous Period about 120 million years ago, India was joined to Africa and Madagascar as part of the super-continent Gondwana when a spreading zone started up beneath that plate separating India and sending it sprinting (geologically) northwards towards a subduction zone on the southern margin of continental Tibet. 50 million years ago India, to use a motoring analogy, rear-ended the Tibetan (Asian) plate and partially underthrust it, pulling down, heating up and deforming the rocks along this collision margin. Subsequent uplift, cooling and deep erosion during the last few million years has exposed these rocks in spectacular fashion in the form of today's Himalayan peaks and valleys.

This was the general theory that Mike Searle was armed with when first confronted with the scale and complexity of the Himalaya. A fair bit of geological work had been done in the region since the days of the Raj but

this had predictably thrown up more questions than answers and vast tracts of the range were (and still are) untouched.

Mike embarked on a 30-odd year odyssey to unravel the structural complexity of these mountains through many long and arduous field trips and expeditions, mapping, describing and sampling as he went – a body of work which beggars belief.

The story starts with his early work in the Oman then moves on to the Karakoram, Nepal and later South-east Asia. He does a pretty good job of combining his twin passions of geology and mountaineering and climbs with some pretty big hitters along the way, not least the Chamonix Bin Men: Mark Miller, Simon Yates and Sean Smith. Consequently the origins of the awesome granites of the Baltoro, Everest and Makalu are described in detail, interpretations often only made possible by careful sampling by Mike and his climbing partners despite being in mountaineering survival mode. Viz: we've got to get ourselves off this hill but let's just fill our rucksacks with rocks on the way down whilst making careful notes. . .

The nature of geological fieldwork requires detailed study of the rocks *in situ* and careful mapping of their juxtaposition and much of the book chronicles a series of marathon treks up remote valleys and across high passes from the Karakoram and Khumbu to south-east Tibet and the jungles of Indo-China.

In *Colliding Continents*, Mike describes these epic trips with a light, supremely readable style, never going into too much detail (a good thing, which many mountain writers could learn from).

Where technical detail is required Mike provides the reader with an extremely accessible overview of the geology and the modern scientific disciplines, geochronology, geophysics, geochemistry, that are used to interpret it backed up by a comprehensive glossary. Competing theories as to the origin, extent and role of the various large-scale structures that make up the Himalaya are clearly summarised; having French ideas blown out of the water always makes for satisfying reading.

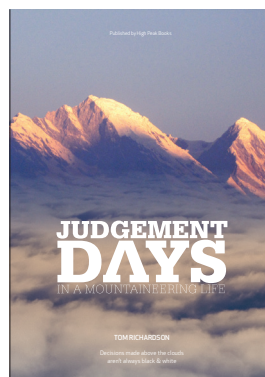
The penultimate chapter describes the catastrophic Sumatran earthquake of Boxing Day 2004 and the resultant tsunami that caused such devastation and loss of life around the rim of the Indian Ocean. Mike arrived co-incidentally on the scene shortly after and was able to make vital detailed scientific observations. This chapter details the geological setting for the disaster along with the causes and effects and makes for sombre reading.

Colliding Continents provided an orgy of catching-up for me and allows for frequent re-reading and dipping. There are minor quibbles of course: geology is a diagram-heavy science and some of the otherwise excellent illustrations, taken from previous publications, have incomplete keys and the mountain photos could have done with more annotation – but this is an editorial shortcoming (and don't worry, you're not losing it, Brad Washburn's vertical aerial shot of Everest on page 202 is printed upside-down).

But nothing can detract from the overall high quality of this book. For anyone even remotely interested in how our mountain ranges came

to be this is essential reading, and I can guarantee that geologists of all persuasions, from wannabe Hancocks to long-term pros will find it totally engrossing.

Bernard Newman



Judgement Days

Tom Richardson

High Peak Books, 2012, pp233, £12

Tom Richardson is one of those quiet unsung heroes whose book makes your mouth hang open more and more as you turn the pages and the breadth of his experience gradually dawns on you. In 35 years of mountaineering he has been on well over 30 trips to the greater ranges (often several in one year) and experienced more ups and downs in the mountaineering world than just about anyone else I know. The fact that he has survived them all unscathed, whilst

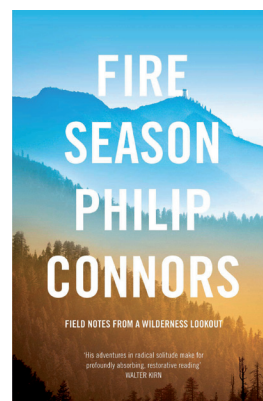
those around him have so often not, puts him in the perfect position to do what this book is designed to do – take a look back at the judgements mountaineers make and try to draw some conclusions from them.

From the opening chapter recounting his horrific avalanche experience in Glencoe (which resulted in three fatalities) Tom confronts the dangers mountaineers expose themselves to head on in a straightforward, easy to understand and honest manner. The book is essentially a very readable set of memoirs from a remarkable series of mountaineering trips. From leading commercial trips to 8000m peaks to enjoying low-level exploits with friends, Tom takes a look back at his experiences and reflects on the breadth and detail of mountaineering decisions he has had to make.

Circumstances are never the same and decisions are often not easy but they take on a whole new world of complexity when paying clients of limited experience are involved. Tom leads us through the minefield, recalling incidents such as being sworn at and abused by one client for making an obviously sound decision, to deciding to turn back with another client (and thereby sacrifice his own summit bid) perhaps 30 minutes from the summit of an 8000m peak, Cho Oyu. All returned safely on that occasion – a fact that I would guess has to be largely down to the wealth of experience that Tom has built up after surviving so many years up there in the big mountains of the world. A sobering element of the book however is the number of deaths that he refers to.

So what conclusions does Tom draw? Well quite a few actually but it would be a shame to list them all here. 'Take care' would perhaps be the generic recommendation. Beyond that you had better buy the book. I would recommend it as a good read packed with plenty of food for thought.

Mick Fowler



Fire Season, Field Notes from a Wilderness Lookout

Philip Connors

Pan, 2012, pp246, £8.99

Philip Connors is a man who notices things. For three months of the year over almost a decade he has observed thousands of acres of the first designated wilderness in the history of the world, the Gila National Forest, New Mexico. Enconced in his tiny 7-foot square lookout tower 55 feet above the ground he watches for the first indications of forest fires.

His life has not always been so solitary; writing for *The Wall Street Journal* for four years he lived the vacuously 'busy' life which tied him to a desk in New York; he relished the idea of a new and different challenge, prompted by a friend who invited him to share her lookout experience.

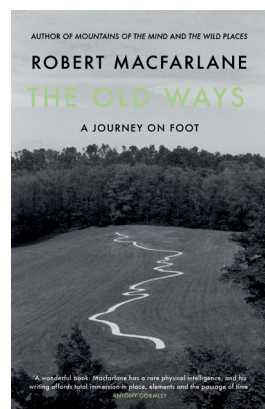
Fire watching is a dying art, as in our technologically obsessed society the few remaining fire lookouts will slide into obsolescence to be replaced by new, improved radio and satellite communications and even drone planes. What will then be lost is the vigilant presence of a group of people who have a deep intimacy with the wilderness landscape and an acute understanding of its needs – needs which are very often diametrically opposed to those of politically influential cattlemen and the industrial behemoths involved in timber production

Fire Season is much more than a diarised account of a season's work, written from field notes and memory. It is a series of cameos depicting the author's journey into himself and into the history of the landscape that surrounds him, redolent as it is with both creation and destruction. Man has made a comprehensive job of exploiting the natural world for his own ends and here the balance is somewhat redressed as Connors examines the rejuvenating impact of his surroundings, 'mind and body reunited on the top of the world' and, perhaps most controversially, the self-regulating destruction by fire that allows the forest to regenerate and without which this majestic habitat would slowly choke and die. Our inherent fear of fire and its power to destroy life and property, often seen only from the edges of urban developments, blinds us to the efficacy and, indeed, the necessity of the controlled burn. The long history of fire management, which is painstakingly, and often painfully, described, illustrates the difficulties in overcoming these prejudices.

This is not a narrative solely concerned with historical precedent, or with social critique, though both are prominent themes. It is a journal rich with observation and explanation, not least of the author's attempts to perfect 'the art of solitude'. Connors has worthy forebears in this practice – Norman Maclean, Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder – but remains self-effacingly

at their feet. He writes candidly of his failures in interpreting the life of the forest as well as his successes and he is often poetic – ‘Time shape-shifts from mistress to shade, caressing and haunting by turn’ – though occasionally overwritten. Although he may not have the high mastery of his craft evident in his literary icons he entertains and educates by turn, offering a seductive alternative to the stifling conventionality that insists on material, rather than spiritual rewards: ‘By being virtually useless in the calculations of the culture at large I become useful, at last, to myself.’

Val Randall



The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot

Robert Macfarlane

Hamish Hamilton, 2012, pp444, £20

In setting out to track familiar paths it is striking how often Robert Macfarlane, in *The Old Ways*, chooses to write about routes that are frequently lost: engulfed by water daily like the Broomway in Essex, swallowed by peat in the Hebridean moors, dissolved by the sea around the Outer Hebrides. Elusive paths suit Macfarlane’s meditative, digressive style. He shows the reader haunted, shifting landscapes and is endlessly fascinated by the lives of people who have made and used the ways he describes. The result is a

book crammed with anecdotes, thoughts and biographical sketches that can swamp the paths – the ostensible subject – even more effectively than the Essex tides. Where the quotations and references clear out the effects can be startling and moving, as in the brief closing meditation on 5,000-year-old footprints near Liverpool.

The ancient prints are, in a way, ideal subject matter for Macfarlane, marking the landscape with lost time and transient lives, unencumbered by social context. He considers them ‘among the earliest texts... Following them we are reading one of the earliest stories, told not in print but in foot-print.’ It’s a nice observation, but one that marks Macfarlane’s tendency to view every place as a writer. The biographies with which he peoples the routes are usually of writers, artists and philosophers. Where Macfarlane’s first book, *Mountains of the Mind*, sought the company of a host of Victorian adventurers, and his second, *The Wild Places*, was largely solitary, *The Old Ways* sees Macfarlane accompanied by various fellow wayfarers. They are almost exclusively artists and academics. In this company he shows a frustrating blindness to the ways in which paths are social and political as well as poetic. Where the book comes closest to politics this lack is felt most strongly, in Macfarlane’s curiously inconclusive escapade in the West Bank. He describes an annotated map shown to him by a Palestinian: ‘“Where Penny and Raja came under gunfire”; “Where I encountered an Israeli settler with a gun”; “Where I found a dinosaur footprint”. It reminded

me of Anne Campbell’s songlines on the Lewis moor: “Where the dragonfly had laid its wings out to dry”; Where the eagle had preened”.’ Well, to a point, the reader may feel. It appears not to occur to the writer that there could be a rather serious difference between such experiences. Such criticism may be misplaced, since the reader’s pleasure in *The Old Ways*, or their displeasure, in most cases will come down to style. This is nature writing with an emphasis upon writing. It’s even more consciously literary than *Mountains* and *Wild Places*, and every sentence is crafted to prove it. Macfarlane works the metaphor hard in all its forms. The closer to home the landscape, the denser the imagery becomes, as if writing about such places requires justification by poetry’s defamiliarising effects. Take this in the Downs: ‘Wild clematis smoked up the hedgerows. Creepers – bryony, ivy, honeysuckle, bindweed – slinked out along tree branches and hung down over the path like the slipped coils of snakes. Where rain had sluiced the chalk it was slick as silk.’ Whether this is good writing will depend upon personal taste. All that repetition of *l*, *s* and *c/k* sounds might be just the thing for helping some readers visualise a Downs morning. For me, it’s a bit distracting. I’m seeing smoke and snakes and silk, and a man at a desk, writing. Nor, given the extensive glossary provided, does Macfarlane seem entirely to trust his reader to keep pace with his vocabulary. The problem of over-writing is compounded by the book’s densely referential style, the quotes, anecdotes and literary allusions that fill up the pages impressively. We risk losing those elusive paths, their landscapes and, worse, all sense of narrative direction. The story the book wants to tell us is too often lost in the detail and while wandering by the way is fruitful and pleasant, in getting on for 400 pages a greater sense of progress might be expected.

The Old Ways offers accomplished prose and a pleasant, meandering and thoughtful read. It feels a little like a long, slow stroll in amiable company. But for a literature of walking, truly challenging or rigorous writing and thought is best sought elsewhere.

Kathleen Palti



Tibet: Culture on the Edge

Phil Borges

Rizzoli, 2011, pp208, US\$45

When photographer Phil Borges started work on this book documenting how climate change, development and religious devotion are interacting to change Tibetan culture he sought to avoid taking sides or apportioning blame. However after 18 months travelling across the Tibetan Plateau photographing and interviewing nomads, monks and farmers, he found the accusing finger pointing directly, and uncomfortably, at himself.

Seeing nomads and farmers forced off their land and realizing that Asia's water supply was under dire threat made him stop and reflect. What would happen as India, China and the developing world adopted Western consumption habits? Because of its combination of high altitude and low latitude, the Tibetan Plateau is heating up twice as fast the global average and glaciers disappearing at an alarming rate. Yet these are the glaciers that feed rivers such as the Brahmaputra, Ganges, Yellow River and Mekong upon which some two billion people depend.

'What ecological disasters and social disruptions are we facing in the years ahead?' Borges asks. 'Most important what can we do about it?'

What indeed! It's fair to say Borges does not give a detailed prescription, however in a subtle way his photographs of monks, nuns and pilgrims going about their Buddhist devotions against vast and mountainous landscapes coupled with explanatory captions help make his point that happiness does not of necessity lie with consumption and economic growth.

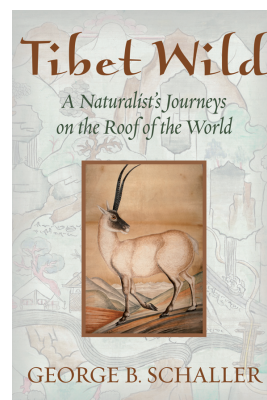
While hospitals, schools and roads built by China in Tibet can enhance the well-being of the Tibetans, by the same token Tibetan culture's foundational ethic, based on compassion and interdependence, could provide the holistic perspective that today's economies so badly need, argues Borges. 'In an ideal world these very different cultures could beneficially share their values and resources and become a model for cross-cultural cooperation and ecological sustainability.'

But it isn't an ideal world. And Borges's powerful landscapes and penetrating portraits make that point too, as does his book's title. Beijing's response to climate change and looming water shortages has been to create 'ecological reserves' at the headwaters of major rivers. As a result grazing land is being fenced off and hundreds of thousands of nomads paid to move into resettlement camps. One such camp spreads across two pages of the book; regimented boxes on a bleak plain; gambling, alcohol and divorce have become significant problems.

The nomads who have maintained the ecology of the Tibetan Plateau for centuries thus find their culture and its age-old connection to the land being disrupted by a policy created in response to a world burning too much fossil fuel.

Borges steers clear of politics; indeed he emphasises that at no time did those he spoke to offer any comments that were politically sensitive (very wise when their names and portraits were to appear in a book that would be printed in China). Rather, he hopes that this book will add to a growing voice for a reassessment of our social and economic assumptions. If only... Borges's photos and well-chosen few words certainly make a persuasive case, but at 45 US dollars a copy its audience is likely to be small, confined, one fears, to those looking for a touch of ethnic empathy to set beside the MacBook Air on the coffee table in Seattle or Islington. Now where was that finger pointing?

Stephen Goodwin



Tibet Wild – A Naturalist's Journeys on the Roof of the World

George B Schaller

Island Press, 2013, pp384 + 16 page colour insert, US\$29.95

Perhaps the saddest news to come out of Nepal in May 2013 was not the tantrums on Everest but the demise of Pilgrims Book House in the heart of Thamel. For 30 years mountaineers and travellers of every stamp have whiled away their Kathmandu downtime in its warren of incense-scented rooms, turning up obscure titles to bring home or cheap Asian reprints to

read in the hills. Then came the announcement: *It is with great sadness we now inform you that our beloved establishment is no longer, having burnt to the ground on May 16th 2013.*

One of the first books I bought from Pilgrims (for 149 rupees) was George Schaller's *Stones of Silence*, telling of six years of wildlife study in the Himalaya, notably his attempt to determine whether blue sheep are indeed sheep, or goats. The latter, Schaller concluded, though it wasn't in pursuit of an answer to this somewhat arcane question that I had bought the book. I wanted to learn more of Schaller himself. He was the field naturalist whom Peter Matthiessen had accompanied to Shey gumpa in Inner Dolpo, Nepal, and then portrayed as his somewhat grumpy Sancho Panza in *The Snow Leopard* (1978).

Schaller's purpose with *Stones of Silence* was, as he put it, 'to induce others to care for the dying mountain world of the Himalaya'. Through his work as a scientist he hoped to create an awareness of the threats driving such creatures as the Kashmir stag, Marco Polo sheep and the snow leopard towards extinction. And hopefully he has. As *Tibet Wild* informs, information derived from that trip with Matthiessen helped persuade the Nepal government to establish the Shey-Phoksumdo national park, 1,370 square miles in size.

Tibet Wild charts a more ambitious conservation endeavour: three decades of field work on the Tibetan Plateau, studying the migration of chiru (Tibetan antelope), trying to mitigate in the conflict between free-ranging wildlife and increasing numbers of settlers, and railing against the mass-poisoning of pikas by misguided officials who blame the tiny rodents for degraded pasture (when climate change and overgrazing seem the main culprits.) Chiru were being slaughtered for their ultra-fine and high-price wool (it cannot be garnered from live animals); Schaller not only argued for protected rangeland but also took on the (illegal) fashion trade, shocking New York socialites with the bloody realities behind their \$15,000 shawls.

Schaller is now entering his eighties and *Tibet Wild* has more of a personal testament about it than previous books where the animals themselves took

centre stage, be they gorillas, Serengeti lions or pandas. While the wildlife, notably the chiru and Marco Polo sheep, remain the purpose of these wanderings, there is more of the Schaller back story – a disrupted childhood in war-torn Germany and his beginnings as professional naturalist at the University of Alaska – and of his philosophical approach.

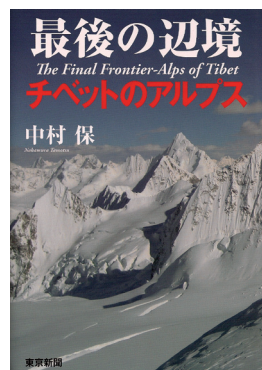
Prominent among the young student's early mentors were the naturalists Olaus and Mardy Murie who stressed that while conservation depended upon science, the preservation of the natural world was also a moral issue. Years spent in the Himalaya, and on the Chang Tang have seen a melding in Schaller of the Muries' wisdom and that of Aldo Leopold with Buddhist precepts, an understanding that we are wholly dependent on nature and have a moral obligation to discard self-indulgence and to protect life on Earth. He quotes the Chinese philosopher Laozi from the 6th century BCE: *The World is sacred, / It can't be improved. / If you tamper with it, / You will ruin it.*

If this isn't quite the Schaller one might expect from the irascible scientist depicted by Matthiessen, there is still the occasional impatience with reluctant crew members, though now also with trucks that seem forever getting bogged down or breaking down. The author's dry humour emerges as he records a search for the chiru calving grounds in 2005 where after a bad experience with 'undisciplined and obstructive' donkeys he opts for a Land Cruiser and truck. Both soon break down and days are lost waiting for spare parts. 'There is much to be said on behalf of donkeys,' Schaller observes.

While the book's subtitle describes its subject as a '*naturalist's* journeys across the roof of the world', the desolate landscape that has ensnared Schaller and the magic and travails of travelling across it will certainly resonate with mountaineers who have visited Tibet or Xinjiang.

'I have been a cloudwalker, up among the mountains, hiking, dreaming,' says Schaller. Some of those dreams, in the safeguarding of territory for the likes of chiru, wild yak and snow leopard, he has seen made true. It will be up to others (influenced, perhaps, by mountaineers who value the wild uplands?) to ensure Schaller's dreams endure.

Stephen Goodwin



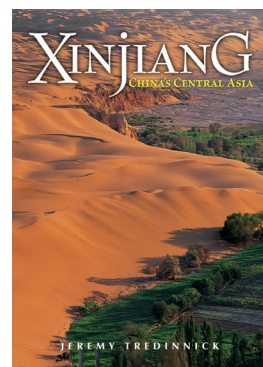
The Final Frontier – Alps of Tibet

Tamotsu Nakamura

Tamotsu Nakamura, 2012, pp480

'Tom' Nakamura has been a good friend of British alpinists and of this journal for many years, his superb photographs of the mountains of China and eastern Tibet an inspiration to ambitious AC members, not least current president Mick Fowler. Within this beautifully-produced volume are dozens more, caption after caption beginning with that alluring word,

'unclimbed', 'unclimbed', 'unclimbed', beneath peaks of snow and rock in the Nyainqentanglha East, Kangri Garpo and Hengduan mountains. Hopefully, one day, Tom will publish an English version of this Japanese language book. For now, only the captions are additionally in English, though as a source of ideas, that may be enough. SG



Xinjiang: China's Central Asia

Jeremy Tredinnick

Odyssey Books & Guides, 2012, pp480, £17.95

China's Xinjiang region is the size of Britain, France, Germany and Spain put together. The bits of most interest to mountaineers are on its periphery: the Altai in the north-east, the Pamir in the south-west and the Kun Lun and Karakoram in the south. The Tien Shan is at its highest on the border with Kyrgyzstan, though stretches for hundreds of miles eastwards towards the 'capital' Urumqi. Xinjiang boasts the world's second highest point, K2 (Qiaogeli) and its second lowest, Ayding Kol, a salt lake at the bottom of the Turfan Depression, 154m below sea level.

And that's only the topography. Equally entrancing is the cultural and ethnic diversity of Xinjiang, all explained here with detailed authority and gorgeous illustrations in what is claimed as the first dedicated English-language guide to the region. Officially it is the 'Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region', though as periodic outbreaks of ethnic violence testify – 21 dead in clashes this April – it is not as autonomous of Beijing as some would wish. Tredinnick does not duck the political history of the region, but he treads carefully, as indeed you will have to on any visit to the mountains of Xinjiang.

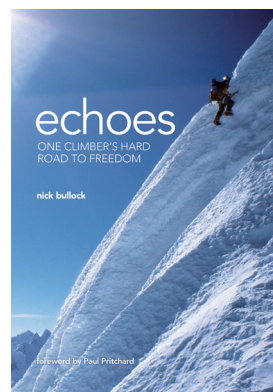
If you're bound, say, for the north side of K2 or the Gasherbrums, this guide is not essential reading, and the camel men certainly would not appreciate its considerable weight adding to the load as they criss-cross the surging Shaksam river. But if you are actually curious about the country that is hosting your adventure then it is well worth the £17.95 investment and some hours of study. Take it as far as the roadhead; on the long drive skirting the Taklamakan desert there is plenty of time to read about the Silk Road traders who passed this way, and the wildlife you might be lucky enough to see in the uplands.

For Alpine Club members there is also the pleasure of a special feature concerning one of our own – Eric Shipton and the extraordinary rock arch that bears his name. Just 25 miles from Kashgar, where Shipton served as the last British Consul-General from 1946 to 1948, the 500-metre arch is far and away the highest natural arch in the world.

Shipton would barely recognise today's Kashgar, apart from the Idkah

Mosque (largest mosque in China) and the remnant alleyways in its vicinity. The city is ballooning like so many others in China, and increasingly dominated by Han incomers. Here even Shipton might benefit from this impressive guidebook. Once over the Aghil Pass, however, and into the arid valleys of the Shaksgam and Sarpo Largo, he could put the book aside; the country of his *Blank on The Map* is as unchangingly wild as ever.

Stephen Goodwin



Echoes: One Climber's Hard Road to Freedom

Nick Bullock

Vertebrate Publishing, 2012, pp232, £20

Nick Bullock burst into the world of climbing writing with a stunningly original series of articles. They had an edge and a new set of metaphors that spoke with force, energy and authenticity. They also spoke of careful crafting and judicious editing, of a writer wanting not just to be a journal hack, but to be a good writer. One thinks of the earliest work of Ed Drummond, Greg Child, David Roberts or Jim Perrin. But this was not a predictable literary outcome in Nick Bullock's case. 'I was a teacher's worse nightmare.'

Leaving behind his early introduction to training, at the age of nine, in Cheadle Health and Strength Club, the teenage Bullock sought 'trouble and excitement' which veered between The Vibrators and the ferrets – punk and hunting. 'My English teacher told me I was worse than the real troublemakers. At least she knew what they were. But, she said, I was sly because she never knew what I was thinking. At the time I took this as a compliment.'

Attracted to climbs that scared him, Bullock's mind games continued on the rock as he needed to on-sight harder and harder climbs, resulting in huge falls and a reputation as a bit of a nutter. This is a book about getting out of prison, but at its end it is not altogether clear that he has. It is Bullock's experience of being a prison warder and latterly a prison PE officer that provides the metaphors for his experiences of suffering on Welsh rock, Scottish ice, then in the Alps, Peru and Pakistan. Basically, the way the metaphor works is to suggest that nothing is as bad as being in prison and on the mortgage-tied career route to a secure pension. But more than this, he questions whether his obsession with climbing can be understood by comparison with that of a persistent criminal: 'the thrill of the chase, the uncertainty, the tension and the excitement ... Crime or climb?' Certainly he recognises that in what he calls the 'psychological journeys' of his rock climbs 'some strange trait in my psyche was taking over'. 'An exceptionally driven personality' empowered by 'manic training', with a tendency to reject protection on the 'easier' sections of an E5 6b (*Ivory Madonna*, a girdle of the Cromlech walls) 'and – hey presto! – an epic is

guaranteed'. When he was a child, social workers began to take an interest in the number of times he appeared at A&E. There is clearly something troubling him about his 'ability to push on above spaced protection', delighting in it as he does. Although he uses these terms about the first six years of his climbing, it is evident to the reader that this attitude, which he admits 'has consequences', persists against stone and sérac fall in the greater ranges. I hope he lives.

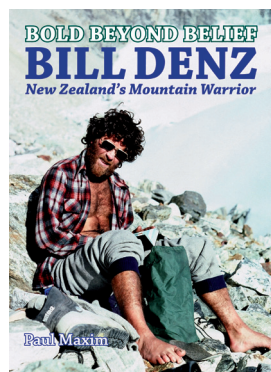
So this book is about knowing that he has been damaged by his 15 years' experience in prison. (He speaks of his job as a prison sentence.) Towards the end of his sentence he wonders if it is his mountaineering world that is actually the dream: 'Which of my worlds was the dream? I'd entered a space turned inside out, where everyday values were a sign of vulnerability, where the rules of survival kept changing.' But the metaphors don't work in reverse. 'Echoes bounced off the walls like the calls of climbers.' The climbers who are calling to him in this book are the reverse of the manipulative, mendacious characters he's been locking up. Indeed, it is one of them, Mark Goodwin, who harangues Bullock into becoming a writer and works with him on his first attempts. 'Working on words, with words, expressing emotions, sharing my experiences with others lifted some of the secrecy with which I had surrounded myself.' Then he travelled for the first time to Peru and he travelled and climbed with heightened perception 'knowing that I could – and would – write about it'. This is the gift of a different kind of seeing that is grasped by the real writer. So it is out of respect for this second theme of the book – its self-conscious writerliness – that one considers seriously just how good a book this is and what might be learned from it.

Firstly, what works in an article does not necessarily work at book length. A single pattern of metaphor can be overworked. On the last climb we are still getting 'little would they know the drug of my choice didn't come wrapped in foil'. An experienced book editor like Maggie Body would have been able to point out something of the reader's experience that might temper the writer's enthusiasm for his writing. There are no rules about this. It's about listening to book editors who read a lot of books of this kind and are thinking about the pacing of a whole book from a reader's point of view. There is clearly a second book to come since there are now 10 years of ambitious climbs seen through the words in Bullock's head. These two might have been better as one book, just as the second and third might work better as one.

Bullock is fond of similes but not yet their master. Take: 'At any moment I thought the wind, like a thrush, would get hold of me and smash me against a rock.' Does that really work for you? At first the intrusion of the gentle thrush seems a misprint. And this: 'A teacher's worse nightmare.' I offer these examples because 'there appeared to be those who thought you had to stick to the rules to get proper results – and that nothing else would do'. This is not about rules to be observed, but simply stopping to listen. Reviewers, too, should offer constructive criticism which this is intended to

do because, as I said, I'm an admirer of this new voice, its self-questing and its hard-earned freedom to live the joy, judge the risks, redefine integrity and authenticity – and that's just the writing.

Terry Gifford



Bold Beyond Belief: Bill Denz, New Zealand's Mountain Warrior

Paul Maxim

Maxim Books, 2011, pp328, NZ\$49.95

There is a famous Kiwi joke where the pilot of a plane approaching Auckland comes over the intercom and ends his announcement by telling passengers that if they wish to set their watches, 'the time is 1955'. New Zealand may be home to some beautiful country, friendly down-to-earth people who drop their vowels, the world's greatest rugby team and a lot of sheep, but it is also considered something of a cultural backwater. However, cultural isolation has never proved much of a hurdle for mountaineers – think Poles locked behind the Iron Curtain, or Russians in the stifling Soviet Union – and therefore it is not so surprising that New Zealand has always punched well above its weight in world mountaineering.

Since Ed Hillary stood on the summit of Everest a succession of Kiwi mountaineers have burst from their small islands to become influential on the world stage. Hall, Ball and Brice did some interesting personal climbing before pioneering high-altitude commercial expeditions, Lydia Bradey was the first woman to climb Everest without supplementary oxygen and Karen McNeill (sadly killed in Alaska) and Pat Deavoll have pushed the standards of lightweight alpine-style exploratory mountaineering in the greater ranges. Missing from this list is one Bill Denz, a man who despite my keen involvement in the sport and its folklore had slipped my radar, until *Bold Beyond Belief* came my way.

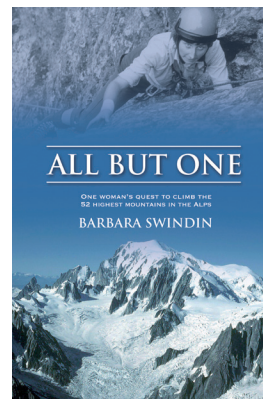
Paul Maxim's book is a rare thing – a climbing biography written by a protagonist, pitched at enthusiasts, that is good. Bill, it turns out, was a larger-than-life character who started to make his mark in the Antipodean mountaineering community in the early 1970s with a series of ground-breaking first ascents in the Southern Alps – initially in the Mount Cook region and later in the Darrans. Essayed both on ice and rock, in summer and winter, solo and with partners, Bill's new routes were for the most part harder and bolder than any done before. They marked a great leap forward in the standard of Kiwi alpine climbing and came with such rapid-fire frequency that the climbing community was at turns dumbfounded and inspired.

By the mid-70s Bill began to outgrow his native land and participated in

a Kiwi expedition to Torre Egger. It ended in tragedy when the youngest member of the team – 19 year-old Phill Herron – died after falling un-roped into a crevasse. Denz was deeply affected by this death and eased up for a while, but by 1977 he was again pushing up new routes in the Southern Alps. Then followed trips to Yosemite where he honed his big-walling skills before moving on to several Alaskan visits, returning to Patagonia, and a series of trips to Nepal. For me this is the most compelling section of the book, as these later trips on mountains far from home were all incredibly innovative in many different ways. The book gathers a tremendous narrative drive leading up to Bill's death on Makalu in 1983; however I am not going to go into more detail. I don't want to spoil your reading of this meticulously researched, well-crafted and beautifully produced gem.

Anybody who makes 13 solo bids to climb Cerro Torre, in two separate seasons, within one calendar year, spending many days on some of the attempts and reaching a highpoint 80m below the summit, is up with the all-time greats of the sport. Thanks to Paul for bringing Bill to life again and reminding us that there are always people out there who just get on with it. Truly legendary stuff!

Simon Yates



All But One

Barbara Swindin

Vertebrate, 2012, pp336, £24

This is not a book about climbing all but one of the 4000m peaks, despite its subtitle: 'One woman's quest to climb the 52 highest mountains in the Alps'. Only quite late in the book does this become a focus for Barbara's climbing. It is more the story of a remarkable woman and her mountaineering life.

All But One is also a book about women and their place in mountaineering. The introduction sets the scene with mini-biographies of some 'tigresses' of the Alps such as the much-married Lizzie Le Blond, first president of the Ladies Alpine Club. Passing references and other chapters reinforce Barbara's connection with an impressive history of women alpinists.

Against this background she sets her own achievements with a modesty that belies their scale. Granted the long summer holidays of a college lecturer, Barbara and her husband, Les, were able to climb extensively in the Alps from 1970 to 1995 including spring ski-touring excursions. The record of their climbs demonstrates clearly that mountaineering was the principal focus of their lives.

Barbara records how her first experiences in the mountains convinced her that this was the life she wished to lead, and soon Les was there to lead

it with her. However she found it far from easy. The book is peppered with references to her difficulties and to feelings of inferiority compared to the men she climbed with. Much of the interest of the book lies in the way she overcame those difficulties and feelings, qualified by her recurrent injuries and crises of confidence. Her delight in the occasions when she lived up to the expectations of others, and to her own ambitions, is touching. The cover photo says it all; the look in Barbara's eyes unites trepidation with determination.

There is an unflinching honesty, not only about her physical limitations but also her psychological struggles with 'vertigo' and a frustration that could result in outbursts of temper. This honesty extends to recognising her own position in relation to 'women only' ropes.

'Having climbed exclusively with men in the Alps, I was never in that totally independent situation,' Barbara writes. It is an ambivalent relationship. There are times when, 'I began to feel the need for food and rest, but Les was up front and determined to keep going.' Yet she is generous in her acknowledgement that, 'Without their support I would not even have achieved what I did.' Interestingly, despite an introduction to the Pinnacle Club, she never pursued the women-only route to any summits. The 'social conditioning' she recognises in her behaviour has a lot to answer for then and now.

It is as late in Barbara's narrative as 1988 that she observes: 'Without my realising it at the time, Les was subtly steering me towards increasing the number of Four Thousanders I had climbed.' The latter part of the book then focuses on that quest to climb the 52 giants of the Alps, and its ultimate failure by just one mountain. Yet it is a failure that does not negate the value of the experience. It was a tough road but one well worth travelling whether or not she arrived at the hoped-for destination.

Dave Wynne-Jones

Fred Beckey's 100 Favorite North American Climbs

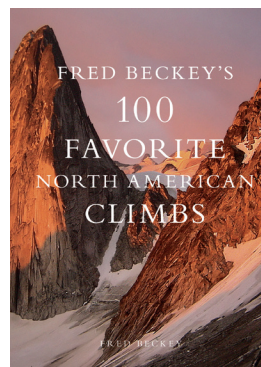
Fred Beckey

Patagonia Books, 2011, pp320, US\$79.95

Fred Beckey's 100 Favorite North American Climbs is the culmination of 75 years of mountain exploration by the most prolific climber in history. This carefully curated collection of classic climbs deserves a place on every climber's coffee table.

In Seattle, I had the pleasure of attending the standing-room-only signing of Fred's new book. The first question posed to the author was how he could possibly prune his list of favorite climbs down to just 100.

That's a great question – make that *the* question. Beckey is, after all, climbing's original Energizer Bunny. No human has done, or ever will do, more first ascents. When you gaze at aerial photos of classic North American summits – Slesse Mountain, South Howser Tower and Mt Goode come to mind – the sweetest lines are inevitably Beckey routes. After more



than seven decades of exploring the high and wild, Fred stopped counting his first ascents long ago; suffice to say the total is in the *thousands*.

I was therefore surprised when I realised that the majority of the climbs in Fred's book of favorites are *not* routes he pioneered. In fact, only 39 of the 100 climbs are Beckey first ascents. I assumed this would be a collection of Beckey's 100 favorite *first ascents*; rather, true to the book's title, it's an egoless compilation of Beckey's 100 *favorite* North American climbs.

I had a moment of total clarity while flipping through this lavishly produced climber's bible, as if I had just stumbled upon my to-do list for the next 20 years. (Like a real bible, it even comes with a built-in silk bookmark). Naturally, I started by counting the routes that I've already done. The good news is that I've still got 72 of Fred's favorites left to do. But more important than the number of remaining routes is that fact that mere mortals like me are actually *capable* of climbing most of them. Beckey's book is not a collection of high-standard suffer-fests to test the modern hard man. Rather, it's an egalitarian list of timeless classics that are realistic objectives for many climbers.

Consider the following stats: If you have general mountaineering skills and are comfortable on 5.9 rock, you can realistically climb 68 of Fred's favorites. Stretching your standard to 5.9+ gets you another five routes, and solid 5.10 leaders have business on 94 of the 100 climbs. Only six routes involve direct aid, or climbing at the 5.11 standard.

Most of Fred's favorite climbs can be found in the six areas: Alaska, British Columbia, including the Coast Mountains, Rockies and Selkirk ranges, Wyoming and Colorado, the Sierra, the Pacific North-west, and the desert south-west. In the foreword, Beckey writes: 'The span of my presented climbs ranges from the scalloped cornices of Mt Deborah, the ice-plastered faces of Mt Robson, the inimitable Bugaboos, the honed pinnacles on Forbidden Peak, the granite knobs of Charlotte Dome, to the dizzying sandstone of Zion.'

Beckey shares each of his favorite climbs with a uniquely historic perspective, and his command of geology is evident throughout the book. The climbs are beautifully photographed, but are not shown with route line overlays. Despite the aesthetic appeal of 'clean' photos, many leave the reader wondering where, specifically, the route goes. The photography is generally excellent, although the book's heft suggest that many of the photos should be larger. Other than those two nits, *Fred Beckey's 100 Favorite Climbs* is an inspiring piece of work that really has no equal.

We get to know the enigmatic nonagenarian through an introduction written by Canadian climbing legend and writer, Barry Blanchard. His artful prose chronicles Beckey's 75-year climbing career, highlighting form-

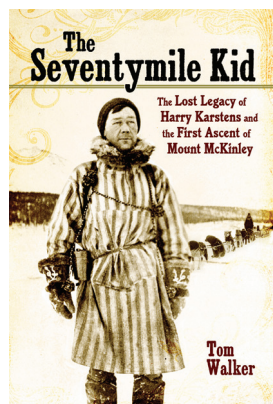
ative ascents, memorable anecdotes, and key partnerships. Blanchard's introduction provides context for the rest of the book, and helps us understand what it meant to be Fred Beckey in the North American Golden Age of climbing.

But in the end, it's really the selection of climbs that tell us the most about the world's most accomplished climber. Beckey's favorite climbs are defined by purity of line, position, and quality of movement—not difficulty. Fred's new book makes me really appreciate his innate ability to choose nature's most beautiful lines.

For the author, thinning the list down to just 100 had to be more difficult than the toughest line in the book.

Mark Kroese

(This review was first published in the 2012 American Alpine Journal. The editor thanks Mark Kroese and the AAJ for permitting its reproduction here. For the sake of consistency with the book title, we have kept to the US spelling of 'favorite' throughout the review rather than 'correct' it to English. This impressive book slipped the AJ radar when it was first published but came to our attention when Fred made a rare visit to the UK late in 2012, entertaining audiences at the Kendal Mountain Festival and, memorably, in the back room of the Old Crown pub in Hesket Newmarket, Cumbria. SG)



The Seventymile Kid
The Lost Legacy of Harry Karstens and the First Ascent of Mount McKinley

Tom Walker

The Mountaineers Books, 2013, pp304, US\$ 19.95

Oxford defines adventure as 'an unusual and exciting or daring experience'. The late 1800s and early 1900s in Alaska was a time when adventure was the order of the day. The frenzied opportunity of the Gold Rush and the Klondike, and the wild dreamers who came with it would in themselves assure us of more than a few great stories and myths. But add to this mix the magnificent Alaskan landscape and all stories –

even those that are true – become larger than life. From its towering peaks, endless glaciers, rugged tundra, bird-sized mosquitos, bears, swift rivers and fierce cold, Alaska represented true wilderness. Even to this day, it remains a place of extremes, and its landscape and remoteness is on a scale that is impossible to describe in words or capture in a photograph.

Into this arena stepped Harry Karstens, a rugged figure if ever there was one, and the subject of this new book by long time Alaskan local and author Tom Walker. Well-researched from a wide range of materials, Walker takes us on a journey through the life of a man who fled Chicago in 1895 after an altercation with his brother, joined the stampede to the

Yukon in search of gold, carved out a determined living in the north, and came to be the driving force behind the first ascent of Mount McKinley (Denali). It's a colourful story – some of it based on journals that had until now remained largely unknown – and full of twists and turns not unlike the ridge on Denali which now bears Karstens's name.

There are three key sections to *The Seventymile Kid*. The first chapters cover Karstens's early days, how he overcame the many difficulties (and hard lessons) of the Yukon and Alaskan landscape, what must have been frustrating experiences with the Gold Rush, and gradually built up experience and a reputation as a solid, steadfast man of the trail. As Jonathan Waterman wrote, 'Karstens had tried his hand at placer mining, but was too restless and energetic for that type of stooped-over and confining work. He found his true calling out on the trail, mushing dogs and delivering mail over great distances, living the wide-open-and-fifty-below adventure of Alaska.' Walker then introduces the other key character of the story, which is Denali herself. Majestic and immense on the horizon – and unclimbed – it shone like a beacon, a point of Alaskan pride, calling out to everyone in the turn of the century's emerging golden age of exploration. Denali was waiting for suitors, and one by one they came. From Judge Wickersham's attempt, the tragic character of Dr. Frederick Cook (whose fictitious ascent still haunts the mountaineering world), the plucky Sourdoughs who planted a large pole on the north summit but weren't quite believed, and the very near success of Browne and Parker, Walker builds momentum and context for the first ascent to come. It makes for great reading, for this period marks some of exploration's high drama at its finest. Speaking of this period, a Philadelphia lawyer wrote in 1913 '...There is a perfect epidemic of denials. So much so that it would be more accurate to nickname the peak Mt. Denial instead of Mt. Denali.'

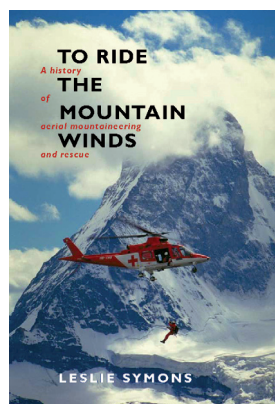
Hudson Stuck often gets the lion's share of credit as the leader for the first successful Denali expedition (the summit team was comprised of Stuck, Karstens, Robert Tatum, and Walter Harper) but it's clear from Walker's research that Karstens was in fact the true driver and backbone of the ascent in many ways. He and Stuck actually had a partnership arrangement, Stuck providing a lot of the public vision, and Karstens applying his deep experience and skill; it was an arrangement not without its frustrations. The actual first ascent was drawn and difficult, and was no doubt back-breaking and demoralizing at times. It must have been terrifying work with the homemade 'ice creepers' (precursors to crampons) and mukluks of the day, particularly the ascent of Karstens Ridge which had been shattered and broken by a huge earthquake the previous year.

To some extent, the denouement is the successful ascent itself, in other ways it is the aftermath. Walker shows us how an unresolvable rift developed quite quickly between Karstens and Stuck, largely as a result of the media of the day portraying the climb as the Stuck Expedition, and giving him most of the attention. The characters in this type of drama are often stubborn and proud, and I had a somewhat bad taste in my mouth as a

result of Karstens's refusal to even accept apologies and public acknowledgements from Stuck, who was both architect but also victim of a subsequent media frenzy. That Karstens never spoke to him again despite Stuck's efforts made me wonder if, regardless of Walker's praise, some of Karstens' relative obscurity in some circles was a result of himself. Climber/historian Chris Jones perhaps summed it up best: '[This was] exploratory mountaineering of the first order. The country was unknown, the conditions extreme, the equipment archaic. The pioneers relied entirely on their own resources for months on end. They played the game for keeps.'

The Seventymile Kid is a well-deserved tribute to a man whose recognition is overdue. It takes us back to a time unlike any other, where the lines between dog mushing, river running, hunting and mountaineering were blurred. It would be a while before the type of mountaineering we know today would come to Alaska. But the fire was already beginning to burn inside men like Karstens, drawn no doubt like all of us by the inexplicable lure of the heights for their own sake.

Jon Popowich



**To Ride the Mountain Winds:
A history of aerial mountaineering and rescue**

Leslie Symons

Sandstone Press, 2011, pp 304, £15.99

A first glance may suggest there is little in common between climbing a mountain and piloting an aeroplane, one being slow and laborious, the other swift and physically less demanding. Leslie Symons, an author who is fascinated by both activities, says that would be wrong because of the strong synergy existing between the two.

To Ride the Mountain Winds points out that mountaineers often need airmen to rescue them, just as airmen who crash in inaccessible places will rely on teams of mountaineers to ensure their own survival. From this necessity has grown a strong mutual interest to a point where, he says, the two activities are inextricably entwined.

Symons, an emeritus professor of geography, has traced a detailed and fascinating history of aerial mountaineering, from the pioneering balloon flights among the Alps in the 18th century and perilous adventures in flimsy flying machines, to the present time when the pilot of a microlight aircraft was able to fly within waving distance of climbers on the summit of Everest.

Inevitably, this is largely a story about mountain rescue and the increasing part that helicopters play in saving climbers from inaccessible and often dangerous situations. During the late 1960s, aerial rescues in the Mont Blanc region fluctuated around 100 per year; by 2003 the number had risen to almost 1,500. Without the swift evacuation of injured climbers

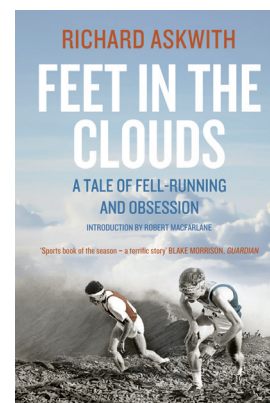
to hospital, the number of fatalities in the region would have been much higher.

Rega, the Swiss air-rescue service, with eight helicopter bases standing by in the mountains, saw a similar steep rise in the number of call-outs, which raises the question; does the certainty of swift rescue encourage climbers to attempt more difficult challenges than they otherwise might, knowing they could whisked into hospital within minutes?

Symons relates a large number of accident histories to illustrate the debt aviators and mountaineers owe one another, a debt that has increased with the numbers exploring the mountains and the development of more powerful and capable aircraft used in rescues. He points out, however, that whilst the risks taken by climbers were only occasionally incurred in giving help to people other than fellow climbers, aviators incur risk and provide service on a daily basis to a wider community of mountain users. Even so, aviators and climbers, he says, shared the same challenges in many of the emotions they experienced. They were subject to the same discipline of long and complicated training with meticulous attention to detailed planning. They faced the same inevitable hazards of wind and cloud, both equally alert to sudden and deceptive shifts in the air around them.

Both climbers and aviators will find much to digest and inform them in this story and may perhaps conclude that far from being separate they are, indeed, brothers and sisters under the skin.

Ronald Faux



**Feet in the Clouds
A Tale of Fell-Running and Obsession**

Richard Askwith

Aurum Press, 2013, pp362, £8.99

Feet in the Clouds was first published to little acclaim in 2004. A book describing the rigours and minutiae of an obscure activity like fell-running was never likely to have mass appeal. However, this book was different and by word of mouth with copies passed on, recognition of its special appeal grew. This latest edition is enhanced by Robert Macfarlane's introduction and a new epilogue by the author.

The tone of the book is set in the initial chapter describing an agonised fell racing day, lost, sprained ankle, cold, wet, exhausted but finishing with the words: 'This, I should add, is what I do for fun.' It describes how 'a 13 stone Southerner with weak ankles', the best years of his life spent smoking, terrified of heights and in his early 30s is introduced to the dark arts of fell-running.

Askwith hears about the Bob Graham Round, first completed in 1932 by Keswick hotelier Bob Graham to celebrate his 42nd birthday – 42 Lake-

land peaks in 24 hours, a startling feat that waited 28 years for a repeat. The BG is 72 miles in 24 hours thus only 'a fast walk' (so Billy Bland said dismissively and then proved it by walking round in 21 hours). So it is not a purely fell-running challenge and is accessible to anyone with the sort of qualities that come with a mountaineering background – that is, determination and the ability to endure pain. Gradually, the myth of invincibility has been eroded until now there are more than 1,800 members of the BG club. *Feet in the Clouds* chronicles Askwith's dogged attempts at entry, three ending in failure due to injury or atrocious weather before culminating in a successful round.

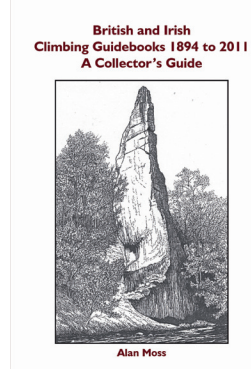
Parallel with the author's obsession with the BG is a more discursive narrative on all aspects of fell-running. Working through the sport's annual calendar, he describes events large and small, from well known classics like the Ennerdale and other intensely competitive Championship races to small local affairs where children's races are a feature.

Along the way we meet a cast of characters who perform heroic feats of speed and endurance below the radar of the sports pages. The Wasdale legend Joss Naylor deservedly receives a eulogy, but most are largely unknown beyond the narrow confines of their tribe. Some of their records set years ago remain intact, for example Billy Bland's 13 hours for the Bob Graham Round in 1982 stands unbeaten three decades later. Is this the case of the passing of a golden age or does it rather suggest a sport that was always esoteric becoming more marginalised than ever? Note is made of the general aging of participants, often continuing to compete late in life rather than retire and organise events as previous generations would have done.

Askwith recalls the bitter division between professional (guides) races and amateur events, an apartheid that amounted to an assault on local traditions and was so keenly felt by school children in local village junior guides races. AAA sanctioned 'amateur' road athletes received expenses paid into trust funds while 'professionals' in guides races were banned. Happily these issues were resolved years ago.

There are similar musings on risk and responsibility as the creeping menace of litigation intrudes upon the sport, and on what it takes, both mentally and physically, to be a fell-runner. Climbers and mountaineers will empathise with these demands. Askwith's book works on many levels but is driven throughout by his love of the sport. It stresses the sheer joy of running, absorbed in a wild environment, pushing back limits and of doing things one had thought impossible. We have much in common.

Alan Davis



British and Irish Climbing Guidebooks 1894 to 2011: A Collector's Guide

Alan Moss

British Mountaineering Council, 2012, pp422, £25

Guidebooks are often 'at the top of a climber's list of most evocative possessions'. So says Geoff Milburn in a short history that sets the scene for this compendious publication. I wouldn't disagree; the ticks, margin comments, rain crumples and withered bits of vegetation that served as page markers, turn a shelf of guidebooks into a memory bank of old friends, shared adventures, occasional rebuffs and yet-

to-be-fulfilled ambitions. But anyone who has more than a fraction of the 1,000 or more guidebooks catalogued here has gone beyond being a mere climber – indeed may not even be a climber – but is another type of obsessive altogether. He or she is a collector.

Alan Moss acknowledges that in the 21st century a bibliography of this sort should logically be a web application, dynamic and updateable. But he goes on: '... as all collectors will understand, the thrill of opening a book, the smell, or finding personal handwritten notes of previous owners, small keepsakes... all add to the thrill of collecting.'

Moss says he unashamedly regards this production – enhanced by drawings by Nigel Baker, guidebook covers, colourful club liveries, crag diagrams and mugshots of key editors – as primarily a book about books, 'assembled by a collector for those who collect'. True, this is probably the only significant audience for whom the £25 outlay is really worthwhile, nonetheless most users of climbing guides could derive a few hours of enjoyment browsing a borrowed copy.

The pleasure is similar to that of the tent/hut/car-bound climber on a wet day, piecing together the history, say, of guides to Yorkshire and North Pennines. I didn't know, for example, that the 1956 *Climbs in Cleveland* holds the pre-bouldering record for the UK's shortest listed route – *Jerico Wall*, just 9 feet. Moss has peppered the book with serendipitous observations of this sort.

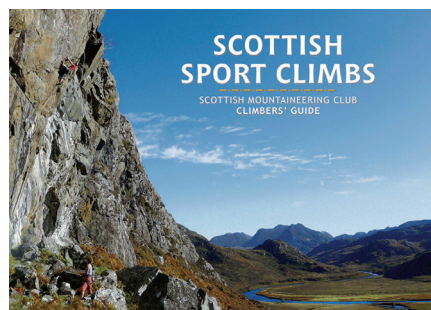
George Bower, author of the first FRCC guide, *Doe Crag*, in 1922 is singled out for his introduction to *Intermediate Gully*: 'There are members of the Club to whom "Intermediate" is more than a climb; rather its ascent is one of the solemn rites connected with the practice of a cult.' Bower had written to one 'disciple' asking about preparations for the climb. 'The reply came back by wire: "Train on Raw meat and Stout, use Bulldog buttons..."'

And so you browse on. Milburn's personal overview is similarly absorbing, leading us from the transition from peak-bagging to rock-climbing, from a time of curious titles like *Recollections of an Angler – Rambles Among the Mountains, Valleys, and Solitude of Wales* to one of web guides and

the prospect of a £30 guidebook just around the corner. Milburn describes the machinations of club guidebook politics, grades and the coming of the 'trade wolves' in the sixties; a highly readable history to complement Moss's exhaustive bibliography.

Bookended by W.P. Haskett Smith's *Climbing in the British Isles – England* of 1894 and *Winter Climbs in the Cairngorm* of December 2011, this is a catalogue of the books that have led us to criss-cross the country in search of beetling cliffs and cruddy outcrops on which to engage in an activity most regard as madness. Alan Moss, the BMC and all concerned deserve a round of applause.

Stephen Goodwin



Scottish Sport Climbs

Coordinating author Andy Nisbet
Scottish Mountaineering Club, 2013,
pp344, £28

Sport climbing may not be the cup of tea of some AC traditionalists, but when I hear that Doug Scott is not averse to clipping the odd bolt, then I think it's safe to assume this new departure for SMC climbers' guides

should have wide appeal. *Scottish Sport Climbs* appeared just as this *AJ* was going to press so there has been no time for a fully road-tested review; perhaps that is something the incoming editor can attend to for the 2013 *Journal*. Nonetheless, I thought it was a publication well worth drawing attention to.

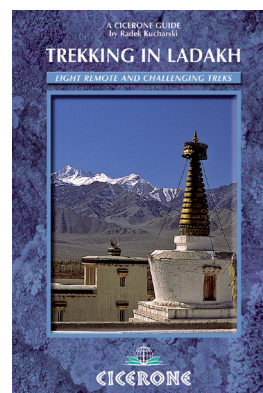
With hundreds of routes from the Central Lowlands to Caithness and the Islands clearly described and illustrated, this hefty tome is everything from a comprehensive guide for the dedicated sport climber (there's even a wee box for a tick and date by every route) to something for the glove box for those rare days when the high crags might be out of condition.

As Andy Nisbet observes, there has been some conflict between sport and trad climbing, but now that guidelines for bolting have been established – bolts in wild places or on existing routes are generally unacceptable – both aspects of the sport are flourishing. There are now more than 50 crags giving some 1,300 routes, and here they are gathered together – a tick list that should keep you busy longer than the Munros. SG

Trekking in Ladakh

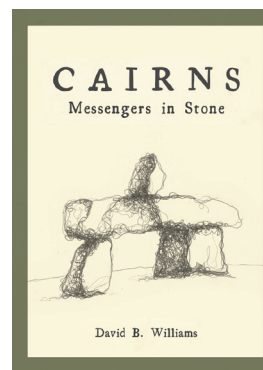
Radek Kucharski
Cicerone, 2012, pp384, £20

If you're off on a climbing trip to Ladakh, why take a trekking guide? Because as on most journeys to Himalayan peaks, what you're doing for



Buddhism in the region and its visually spectacular gompas and monasteries. SG

most of the time is not climbing but walking, day after gorgeous day of it if you're in Ladakh. And while you may not be following the entirety of any of the eight treks detailed in this chunky little book, the background information it provides to the geography, nature, and culture of this 'Tibetan' enclave of northern India is immense. Author Radek Kucharski covers everything from coping with Delhi to coping with altitude; several of these often remote treks – including the classic trek to Zaskar over the Shinkul La – cross passes exceeding 5000m. Kucharski clearly adores Ladakh and its people, and gives a careful exposition of



Cairns: Messengers in Stone

David B Williams
The Mountaineers Books, 2012, pp160, US\$15.95

Anyone fortunate enough to have seen the Ice Age Art exhibition at the British Museum this year will have been made wonderously aware that *homo sapiens* were producing imaginative works of art at least 40,000 years ago. David Williams contends that it is reasonable that such abstract thoughts of the early artists would have been preceded by cairns. Heaps of stones, he suggests, make a similar statement –

that is, 'I am here' – with far less effort.

Having disposed of the antiquity of cairns, Williams then has fun with a follow-up question: was the first cairn builder male or female? 'We have no way of testing this question... but I tend to think it was some guy.' The circumstantial evidence here is that men like to play with rocks, build things and throw stones.

Rest assured that most of Williams's research and reasoning is a good deal more fact based than this bit of genderist speculation, but his light touch persists and makes this little book far more entertaining than you might reckon 160 pages on piles of rocks has any right to be.

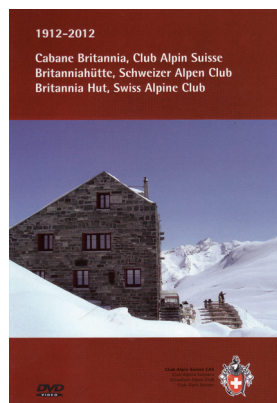
Williams wanders back and forth through time and place, from Bronze Age Mycenae where a heap of stones was a worshipful thing, to the forlorn cairns left by the Franklin expedition – one consisting of 600 to 700 bright red meat tins – and almost to my doorstep in Cumbria when he turns from the Gaelic-derived word 'cairn' to one with Old Norse roots, 'Raise' (*hreysi*).

You hardly notice it as you speed over Dunmail Raise on the A591 north of Grasmere but by the roadside on the pass is the burial place of the last king of Cumbria who died in 975. As Wordsworth put it: *that pile of stones/ heaped over brave King Dunmail's bones/ His who once had supreme command/ Last king of rocky Cumberland.*

So cairns have many roles: they may commemorate the dead or communicate with spirits, but mostly they simply show us the way, assure us we are not alone or lost. Each time we add a rock to cairn, we leave a little part of ourselves in the landscape, says Williams. 'Cairns are a sign of community – of hikers, of family, of humanity.'

It's something to think about next time you are tempted to boot some seemingly intrusive pile into contemptuous oblivion.

Stephen Goodwin



Britannia Hut: 1912 - 2012 Swiss Alpine Club, 2012

To celebrate the centenary of the opening of the Britannia Hut, the Swiss Alpine Club has published a history of the hut, written in three languages accompanied by a DVD telling the story since 1960.

Seeking contemporary revelations in the *Alpine Journal* Vol. 28, I came across a report of a lecture given to the Alpine Club on 7 April 1914 entitled 'Cross Country Gleanings'. J H Clapham reported that:

'The Britannia Hut as we found it, might well be used as an argument against climbing in a civilised country; there were fifty four people inside and for my part I preferred to roll up outside, in my spare clothes and a blanket when I could get it, until the Strahlhorn parties began to vacate the bunks in the early morning.'

Proof indeed of the popularity of the hut completed as recently as 1912.

At the inaugural meeting of the Association of British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club in December 1909, Clinton Dent was appointed president and among the guests was Edward Whymper.

By 1912 enough money had been raised by the ABMSAC to build the Britannia Hut; the plan was to present a hut to the Swiss Alpine Club as a token of gratitude for the hospitality received in Swiss huts. Further sums were contributed by the Alpine Club, Ski Club of Great Britain and the Ladies Alpine Club.

The Hinter Allalin site was an excellent choice for its spectacular position surrounded by accessible peaks, yet safe from the risk of avalanches. The building was to be a prefabricated wooden structure on a stone foundation, 9.4m long, 5.5m wide and 8m high.

The ground floor accommodation included warden's room, kitchen/dining room, a dormitory for 12 guides and on the first floor dormitories for 16 men

and eight ladies plus a small sitting room with books, a stove for winter and a washroom with a water supply.

Work began on 5 February 1912 and was completed and ready for occupation by 27 July, an impressive achievement indeed. The final opening ceremony took place on Saturday 17 August 1912.

To mark the event the ABMSAC privately published a slim volume entitled *Inauguration of the Cabane Britannia 1912 – In Memoriam: Clinton Dent 1912*, a copy of which I possess. The opening ceremony is described thus: 'the day was perfect, bright sunshine and a pleasant breeze and a cloudless sky. From six am the slow procession passed up the mountain from Saas Fee and by about 11.00 o'clock more than two hundred persons were assembled around the hut. Here they received on a big cardboard plate, slices of beef and ham spread out with *salades Italienne*, a piece of cheese, together with a great paper bag filled with chocolates, cigars, condensed milk, an aluminium cup, a tiny cow bell and a bottle of Muscat de Valais or for the teetotal, lemonade. All of this was followed by a banquet at the Dom Hotel, Saas Fee later that day'.

Such was the popularity of the hut, that the number of overnight visitors rose from 1,042 in 1913 to an all time high of 9,697 in 2009. These numbers match the history of the hut which has been modified three times, in 1928/9, 1951/2 and 1996/7 when the hut was completely rebuilt.

By 1970 the hut could be reached in less than an hour by the Felskin cable car and by 1990 it was showing signs of its age. With the number of overnights averaging 8,500 a year it was decided to build an extension that would effectively double the accommodation. This cost 2.5 million Swiss Francs of which 24,000 Swiss Francs was donated by ABMSAC.

To mark the 2012 centenary, solar heating panels have been installed to keep the temperature above freezing when the hut is not occupied. But the problems of climate change continue to affect the hut. Built on a rocky outcrop between the Chessen and Allalin glaciers it provides a clear example of global warming shown by the dramatic change in the access track from the Egginerjoch and problems of water supply.

Huts at this altitude (3030m) usually enjoy running water in summer months from an adjacent glacier. Initially the hut relied on melted snow, supplemented by surface water from the roof. In 1996 tanks of 20,000 litre capacity were installed, but in the winter of 2011, water was provided by using a snow mobile pulling a 350 litre tank on skis from Felskin.

The changes that have taken place in a period of a 100 years are enormous. Not only has the building itself changed, so too have the surrounding glaciers; even Alpinists have changed. The first generation spent several weeks in summertime, mountaineering, today larger numbers visit the mountains to ski, often for just a short period of time.

History shows that the friendship and commitment of British alpinists to the hut and the SAC continues with all these changes. What is the future for the Britannia Hut? Will the spirit of the mountains still haunt this magical place – in a century from now, will this haven of peace still exist?

John Innerdale

Letters from Everest**A First-Hand Account from the Epic First Ascent**

George Lowe

*Silverbear, 2013, pp176, £12***The Conquest of Everest****Original Photographs from the Legendary First Ascent**

George Lowe & Huw Lewis-Jones

*Thames & Hudson, 2013, pp240, £24.95***Penguins on Everest**

David Durkan

*Swami Kailash Publications, 2012, pp194***Everest: the West Ridge (50th anniversary edition)**

Thomas F. Hornbein

*The Mountaineers Books, 2013, pp304, US\$29.95***A Life on the Edge****Memoirs of Everest and Beyond (50th anniversary edition)**

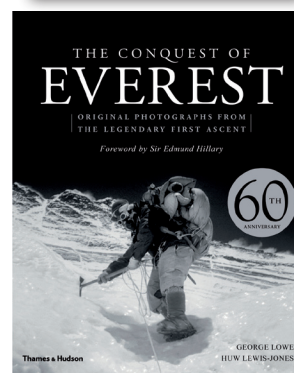
Jim Whittaker

The Mountaineers Books, 2013, pp320, US\$24.95

Every year brings new Everest books and 2013, as the 60th anniversary of the first ascent, was always destined to produce a heavy crop. This *Alpine Journal* includes reviews of eight 'E' books, but I don't claim that number is comprehensive. To spare my loyal reviewers I decided to take on the late arrivals and two re-issues myself, thinking they might be quickly disposed of. But not so. The two re-issues both concern the American Everest expedition of 1963 and I found myself re-immersed in the tensions of a 'team' split between the South Col-ers and Hornbein's West Ridges; the two George Lowe books fill out the engaging character of a man who, in Kiwi eyes, was an unsung hero of the successful 1953 expedition; and Dave Durkan's *Penguins*, part biography and part rant, provides a timely antidote to all the hype that once again surrounds the mountain.

If I could only recommend one of the five, it would *Letters from Everest*. Lowe, the last surviving member of John Hunt's climbing team, died earlier this year, shortly before this gem of a book was published. Historian and author Huw Lewis-Jones came across the first bundle of Lowe's letters while gathering material for the memoirs that are published under the disappointing title *The Conquest of Everest*. More letters emerged, forming a complete narrative of Lowe's days on Everest; an almost day-to-day account from an insider who had no wish, at the time, that his observations should be made public.

Lowe was writing for his family and friends back home around Hastings, New Zealand. Many of the letters begin simply, 'Dear Folks', others



'Dear Betty'. Lowe's eldest sister Betty was key to the whole dissemination project. She had the task of copying each letter twice by hand and then getting it typed up by a local lady. Extracts could then be read out at Lowe's tramping club and Betty had a mailing list of about 20 family and friends. Betty was enjoined to 'please be careful that copies don't get to the press!' Lowe had a fear of infringing the expedition's deal with *The Times*; by the end of trip he also had low opinion of 'news hawks' – James (Jan) Morris and, possibly, Ralph Izzard of the *Daily Telegraph* excepted – and particularly of the Indian Press, regarding it as 'very anti-British' and vituperative in the brouhaha over Tenzing's role.

The closing letters, when the team returns to a chaotic reception in Kathmandu, bring out an anger in Lowe that is totally absent from those sent by mail runner from the Khumbu. While all was harmony on the mountain, Lowe found some of the treatment meted out to Hunt and Hillary in Kathmandu to be 'highly insulting'. Yet even these letters are far from grumpy and Lowe wonderfully captures the farce as the team attends an investiture at the King's Palace, Hillary in ski trousers, Hunt in shorts, most

in tennis shoes, torn shirts and beards. 'Griff Pugh was most ludicrous in a pair of stripped pyjamas and four months of red hair over his ears. That, I am sure, will be the only royal investiture in such disreputable rig.'

Until this re-engagement with the 'plainsmen', Lowe's letters convey a sense of delighted innocence: John Hunt is a 'wonderful leader' and 'all the boys are excellent types', the western climbers that is. Most of the party, he tells Betty, are ex-Public School types and 'the old school tie spirit keeps them all together like a Masonic craft. I thought it was very good to see.' Only Tenzing doesn't seem to share the team spirit. When, for a moment, on the South Col it appears Evans and Bourdillon might have summited, Hillary gives 'a great whoop'; but Tenzing loses his smile. 'The idea that anybody but Tenzing should reach the summit was not pleasurable to him,' wrote Lowe.

Jan Morris has written a foreword to the book and Peter Hillary an afterword. The credit though must go to Huw Lewis-Jones, as editor, who has brought this treasure trove of first-hand observations, from behind the lines as it were, to our attention.

Lewis-Jones was also the driving force behind the photo-memoir *The*

Conquest of Everest. Many of the photographs in this handsome volume were taken by Lowe on his trusty Kodak Retina II, and some have not been published before. The book forms a natural complement to *Letters from Everest* and also includes personal reflections by Ed Hillary (who supported the idea of the book when it was first mooted 10 years ago) and by other prominent Everesters. However, perhaps because we are becoming inured to collections of Everest photographs and anniversary reflections, none of this finery matches the freshness and excitement that sings from Lowe's candid letters to Betty as he and Hunt's 'boys' face the challenge of their lives.

There are more evocative photos in *Everest: The West Ridge*, though of a less imperial cast, children peer out of doorways and a street sweeper

goes about her early morning task, as well as more familiar shots of the Americans battling their dual routes up Everest and of course Barry Bishop's wonderful photo of Tom Hornbein and Willi Unsoeld following a snow crest with the rock of the West Ridge beyond, cloud welling over.

For this special 50th anniversary edition, Hornbein has expanded his classic tale to include a foreword by Jon Krakauer, a new 'one last preface' by himself and more photographs, some previously unpublished. The gentle mistiness that pervades many of the lowland photos and Hornbein's affection for the 'rivers and

mountains' poetry of Li Po reveal a mellower character than the pushy 32-year old idealist who would rather fail on the West Ridge than be the 9th or 10th or even the 1st American to climb Everest by the South Col. It was, quoting Unsoeld, 'the spiritual, moral and mountaineering correctness of the only route worthy of our efforts'.

For the reader, it is the division between the two camps over the labour and resources to be devoted to their separate ambitions that gives the book its extra drama, that and Hornbein's liberal use of radio communications, as when the West Ridgers are almost swept from their camp IV.

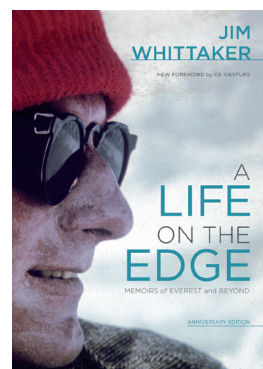
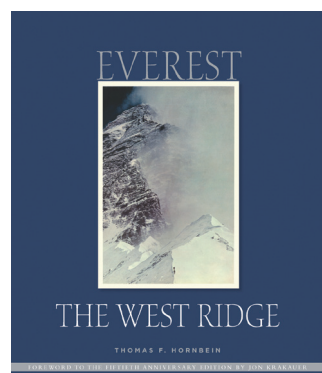
Prather (Base): You want the weather report? Over.

Unsoeld (4W): God damn! The tent's blowing away!

Prather (Base): Roger. The tent's blowing away. We'll stand by.

Unsoeld (4W): Stand by. We're headed over the brink!

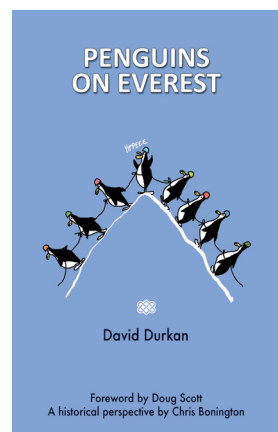
The straight man to the rebel West Ridgers was Jim Whittaker who on 1 May 1963 did indeed become the first American to the summit of Everest, via the South Col with Nawang Gombu. Three weeks later Hornbein and Unsoeld crossed the same point on their extraordinary traverse of the mountain. This anniversary edition of *A Life on the Edge* updates the very full life of 'Big Jim', leader of the successful 1975 American expedition to K2, friend of the Kennedys and boss of Recreational Equipment Inc (REI)



for 25 years. A new foreword has been added by Ed Viesturs who first summited Everest on 1990 International Peace Climb, organised by Whittaker. The Peace Climb chapter is perhaps the most interesting in the book, with echoes of 1963 as Whittaker has to play the diplomat amid the differing priorities of the Russian, Chinese and American teams.

If all this lavish mountain photography and Everest reverence is really too much for you, then Dave Durkan's your man. *Penguins on Everest* has no colour, except on the cover where it nicely illuminates the helmets of the

penguins, no glossy feel and precious little respect for anything that has happened on Everest in the last 30 years. Durkan is a passionate friend of Nepal – its people that is, to whom the book is dedicated, and not the government that he declares to be the second most corrupt in the world (after Afghanistan).



Durkan says he designed the book himself 'over bottles of red wine'. One wonders whether the 'editor', if there was one, worked under similar influences given the number of what we'll generously call typos. Certain facts have also received cavalier treatment. (Kurt Diemberger was not the leader of the 1957 Austrian Karakoram Expedition, Marcus Schmuck was.) But minor carpings count for little against the jerky energy of Durkan's narrative. We're jolted through childhood – an Irish-Catholic boy growing up in Protestant Wales – military service as a telex operator in the Gulf, at RAF Valley and Allied Forces Northern Europe HQ near Oslo during the Cold War; through relationships, civvi life

in Norway, a 'pretend hippie' trail to India, and eventually to Nepal, with more than 30 visits over a 35-year span. The most constant feature is that he is a climber. After a brief canter through the 'why climb?' question, he concludes: 'Me, I climb, because I am.' Whether this is a deliberate adaptation of Descartes's *cogito ergo sum*, or just nonsense, I've no idea.

By this time the reader has a good picture of Durkan's freewheeling take on life and political standpoint on issues such as industrial war machine and foreign aid and development – 'different names, same purpose – to siphon billions of dollars into political and corporate bank accounts'. No surprise then that he is scathing about commercial mountaineering.

The most disturbing two pages of the book reproduce a list from the Himalayan Database of all the Nepali nationals who have died on Everest

up to spring 2012. There are more than 80 names: Sherpas, Tamangs and others who were paid to take risks labouring in pursuit of the essentially frivolous ambitions or vanity of wealthier foreigners.

'Everest by the trade route is the geriatric golf course of mountaineering,' Durkan says. He acknowledges that these 'expeditions' (he prefers the description 'package holidays') provide work and income for Sherpas and guides but questions why this group of workers should be any more emotionally protected than others whose jobs are bypassed. Pointing out the hundreds of Himalayan peaks still to be climbed he urges guides and Sherpas to 'challenge the market, as well as yourselves and your clients, by asking them to leave the mindless rut of Everest – and start mountaineering.'

The penguins? Well, they make a jolly cover cartoon, tethered in line like that famous Ralf Dujmovits 'snake' photo of 2012. But Durkan says he chose the title without reflection just before printing. And he apologises to any penguins who might feel slighted by association with Everest tourists.

Stephen Goodwin



Everest 1953: the epic story of the first ascent

Mick Conefrey

Oneworld Publications, 2012, pp322, £20

Historic events invariably unleash a glut of books that analyse and dissect every aspect of any tragedy or triumph, with Everest long established as a prime candidate for treatment. More than 40 books and a mountain of articles, journals and mentions in dispatches have been devoted to this one summit, casting a long shadow over British mountaineering literature. Here is yet another. *Everest 1953* – is claimed by Mick Conefrey as an epic story that, far from adding to a glut, is the first

account devoted to this one expedition since the official version by John Hunt in 1956. But the background to a majestic achievement was an expedition steeped in dissension, clashing personalities and an Establishment riding roughshod towards an ambition to win the highest point on earth for Britain. It draws together much that was already known piecemeal, but with fresh material added from private records and diaries, making one clear and compelling narrative.

Conefrey, author and film-maker, studied the huge volume of detail surrounding the expedition and claims to have found answers to some unanswered questions. Eight British forays were made before the Second World War, making Everest an unspoken British preserve, with the mountaineer and explorer Eric Shipton regularly numbering among those reconnoitring or attempting it. Although Shipton took part in five expeditions to the mountain, he was better known as an explorer who much preferred filling blanks on the map by small, self-contained groups rather than taking

summits by siege with large-scale expeditions. He worked in the diplomatic corps as Consul General at Kunming in south-west China until the Chinese expelled the entire consular staff. His return to London coincided with attempts by Campbell Secord, an old mountaineering companion, to negotiate with the Himalayan Committee, successor to the Everest Committee of the 1920s, for help in a organising a reconnaissance expedition to the Nepalese flank of Everest.

Shipton, whose reputation and experience would help with raising funds, accepted an invitation to lead the expedition. The recce was successful. Shipton and Ed Hillary, making his first appearance in the Everest story, explored the formidable Khumbu icefall and returned to London declaring that a route through it to the summit was feasible. Unfortunately for Britain, the mountain was already booked in 1952 by the Swiss and so began a year of wrangling and internal political manoeuvres.

Basil Goodfellow, an official of the Alpine Club and the Himalayan Committee, invited the Swiss to step down in favour of the British moral right to attempt Everest. There was general shock and outrage that the Swiss had dared trespass on 'our mountain'. The Swiss were not intimidated, perhaps recalling the generations of English mountaineers who had felt free to help themselves to first ascents of Swiss summits. Goodfellow then suggested that Shipton, fresh back from reconnoitring the route the Swiss intended to take, might join the Swiss expedition as leader? The Swiss replied they already had two leaders and if Shipton joined the team it was their man who should be in control. Shipton was less worried about his status on the team but insisted that if he went, two New Zealanders, Hillary and George Lowe, should also be included. Tense negotiations followed in the Travellers Club in London but failed despite the consumption of 13 bottles of alcohol and numerous cigars.

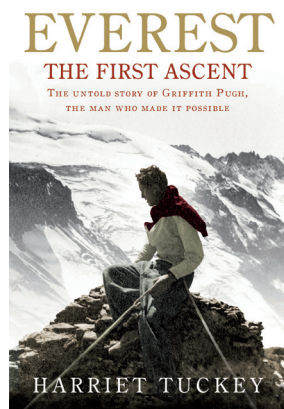
The Swiss set out for Everest as the British team, under Shipton's leadership, headed for Cho Oyu. It was to be a training expedition gaining useful information on how to deal with the problems of high altitude. But as the Swiss failed by only a few hundred feet on Everest, the British failed completely on Cho Oyu. Shipton's mountaineering pedigree might have been impeccable, but reports coming back from Cho Oyu suggested he was too disorganised, too soft and clearly had no enthusiasm for a 'national' expedition. The climbers had reached the proposed southern route on the mountain and found it impossible. A ridge on the Tibetan side of the mountain offered a better possibility, but Shipton, knowing there was no chance that the Chinese would allow the climbers to cross the border, refused to risk an illegal attempt.

Conefrey gives a full account of what went wrong on the Cho Oyu expedition and how Shipton's relaxed and 'democratic' style of leadership caused what one observer called 'one of the black holes in the history of post-war British mountaineering'. What followed traces a lamentable lack of understanding among the Himalayan grandees. Shipton acknowledged that he might not be the man for the job. He was getting older, was averse

to large parties and disliked the nationalistic element in mountaineering. He implied he was slightly bored with Everest and that new thinking was needed. Such honest self-criticism threw his detractors who missed the chance to allow Shipton an honourable exit to the project. Exactly why his resignation was not immediately accepted remains unclear. Instead, the grandees persuaded him into the job.

Barely a month later the Himalayan Committee performed its spectacular volte-face. Shipton, bitterly disappointed, resigned and Colonel John Hunt was appointed to the invidious position of leading an expedition whose strongest members were loyal to his predecessor. But Hunt proved to be a sensitive team leader who answered the Himalayan Committee's search for someone utterly focused on winning, who shared the sense of ownership of Everest and who was demonstrably well organised – a good description of Hunt but not of Shipton. Had Hunt accepted a poisoned chalice or the chance of a lifetime? The answer came eight months later on Coronation Day. This is a timely and fascinating amble down memory lane through some of the most significant moments in British mountaineering history.

Ronald Faux



Everest – The First Ascent

The untold story of Griffith Pugh, the man who made it possible

Harriet Tuckey

Rider, 2013, pp432, £20

Elsewhere in this *AJ*, Harriet Tuckey has written an illuminating article about the key role played by her father, the physiologist Griffith Pugh, in assuring the first ascent of Everest in 1953. The article is wonderfully detailed and contains fascinating revelations about the controversies over the two kinds of oxygen equipment used during the expedition, the open-circuit sets worn by Bourdillon and Evans when they went to the South Summit and the

closed-circuit sets used by Hillary and Tenzing.

Tuckey has, in the article, effectively summarised a central element of her biography of her father, an aspect that will appeal to anyone interested in high-altitude physiology, mountaineering history and the story of Everest, which presumably will include most Alpine Club members. But there is far more to the book than that. It is the product of 10 years of meticulous research that results in a full portrait of Pugh both as scientist and researcher with an astonishing track record; and of Pugh the man. Here Tuckey is uniquely placed to give us the unvarnished truth about a character who was habitually outspoken, abrasive, self-centred and eccentric. In so doing her book becomes a personal quest to lay bare and resolve

her own conflicting feelings about a father who was at times absent and remote, at others selfish, egocentric and bullying towards both his wife and his children, Tuckey included.

Pugh was an accomplished ski-mountaineer who had learned to climb and ski in the Alps during the 1930s, when he was in his teens. He qualified as a doctor in 1938 and became a captain in the Royal Army Medical corps upon the outbreak of World War Two. He served in the Middle East, Greece and Iran. He wanted to join the Commandos but was posted to the newly-established mountain warfare training school in Lebanon, where he served with distinction as both instructor and research scientist and took part in gruelling week-long mountain patrols with his trainees.

From there he developed a specialist interest in nutrition, clothing, altitude problems and related subjects. In 1950 he joined a new research unit at the British Medical Council, building enough of a reputation for Mike Ward to seek his advice before the British Everest reconnaissance of 1951. In 1952 he accompanied the Cho Oyu training expedition where he conducted field tests on oxygen equipment and was consequently invited to join the Everest expedition the following year. During the preparations he carried out further experiments and made vital recommendations over the oxygen equipment, as Tuckey sets out in her article. Expedition leader John Hunt expanded Pugh's role beyond managing the oxygen equipment, seeking his advice on clothing, equipment and hygiene, all of it equally important. The expedition medical doctor, Mike Ward, was unstinting in his admiration for Pugh's work, proclaiming it essential in ensuring the expedition's success. The scientific lessons learned on Everest in 1953 were applied during the ascents of further 8000-metre peaks in the ensuing decade.

Yet Pugh received almost no recognition in the two best-known accounts of the 1953 ascent. He was made into a figure of fun in the official expedition film, *The Conquest of Everest*, shown throughout Britain the following year and was virtually written out of Hunt's best-selling book, *The Ascent of Everest*. Rather than properly credit Pugh's vital role, Hunt preferred to emphasise team spirit, discipline and semi-mystical spiritual qualities exhibited by his team. Where Hunt did acknowledge the importance of the scientific preparations, he claimed most of the credit for himself.

Ward badgered and chivvied Hunt to set the record straight over Everest, with only scant success. To this day, at least to the public at large, he remains a shadowy and unappreciated figure. In 2003 a BBC film *The Race for Everest*, shown on the 50th anniversary of the first ascent, did not mention Pugh at all. The most recent account of the 1953 expedition, *Everest 1953*, (reviewed above), gives him only a few paragraphs – an astonishing lacuna in a book purporting to tell the story of the 1953 triumph anew. The author misleadingly refers to Pugh as a 'non-climbing member' of the team, overlooking his vast mountain experience before and during the Second World War.

Such snubs followed something of a pattern throughout Pugh's life. In

1960-61 he was the scientist on the Makalu expedition led by Ed Hillary. It was a near-disaster, largely because Hillary ignored Pugh's recommendations on how to acclimatise to high altitude; and in his book about the attempt, Hillary (like Hunt) claimed most of the credit for Pugh's important scientific findings for himself. In 1968 Pugh became embroiled in the controversy over the staging of the Olympic Games in Mexico City. He pointed out the stupidity of holding endurance races at an altitude of 8000 feet and argued that British athletes should spend at least a month at altitude before the games to acclimatise. British and international Olympic officials tried to suppress his views but he was proved right. In the international research community, however, his reputation was high, not only for his work on high-altitude physiology, but also for pioneering studies on hypothermia among both seafarers and hill-walkers. He died in 1995 at the age of 85.

All of this Tuckey relates with passion. The book is beautifully written and she marshals her evidence meticulously and persuasively. She uncovers her father's disrupted childhood at the hands of dysfunctional parents, treatment that rendered him cantankerous, unfeeling and even cruel towards his own family, but also gave him the vision and determination to pursue his scientific goals. The book was so long in the writing partly because Tuckey faced her own struggle over feelings towards her father, but the outcome is a triumphant resolution of her quest. The book succeeds on numerous levels, from an exposition of the technicalities of high-altitude oxygen equipment to a profound and affecting account of a daughter's relationship with her father and her discovery of both the truth and a measure of peace.

Peter Gillman

Everest

RGS/Ammonite Press, 2013, pp288, £40

It is hardly surprising that the 60th anniversary of the first confirmed ascent of Everest has generated several books, and behind this one is none other than the Royal Geographical Society, partner of the AC in the Everest attempts. The concept is an excellent one, essentially telling the story pictorially, from 1921 to 1953, of the exploration, the many unsuccessful attempts, and the eventual first ascent of Everest, using a compilation of photographs, a fair proportion of them being 'Ones that Got Away'.

Any photographer, editor or publisher will understand that term: the pictures that were shot for a project but which, for one reason or another, were not used at the time. Typically it covers some gems, merely overlooked or ignored for 'political' reasons, yet years later, re-discovered and seen in retrospect to be really interesting images. Thus the photographic files of the RGS have been trawled, apparently by RGS personnel, and turned up a diverse collection, many of them familiar to AC members if not to the general public, but some that I've not seen before; such images as Jack Long-

land demonstrating the pole vault to mystified Tibetans and Tom Stobart and George Lowe butchering a yak for fresh meat.

This is a very handsome, large format (12" x 10") coffee-table tome and the treatment is almost completely pictorial, apart from an excellent if somewhat moralistic foreword by Jan Morris – *the last hurrah of British Imperial Glory* – and a business-like introduction explaining the Mount Everest Committee (AC + RGS) and lauding the work of the notable photographers John Noel and Alf Gregory. Unfortunately the other Everest professional photographer, Frank Smythe, is not mentioned in this context, although some 27 of his pictures are reproduced. As with all the expedition members, Smythe was under contract to the Committee during his three expeditions, and forbidden to access his own pictures for three years, but he was never the 'official photographer' as were the others. Most photographs – there are more than 400 of them – are the work of 27 other members of the various expeditions, ranging from George Mallory to George Band. In theory, all these photographs should have been inherited by the MEF, of which there is no mention – a notable omission.

Each expedition is covered with its own folio of pictures, led by a 200-300 word résumé of what transpired. The photographs themselves are mostly monochrome of course, and all are excellently reproduced in the original sepia of the pre-war pictures, apart from the odd hand-coloured image. Some colour appears for 1953; only many years later did we discover that Kodachrome does fade, a shame because it is now easy to bring such images back to life. But the layout – clean and cool with plenty of space in exhibition style, is almost puritanical, usually with one image per page and many in album-style, 18 thumbnails to a double page spread, typically the more obscure and thus the more intriguing images. For design and production, full marks.

The earlier pictures, both in Tibet and Nepal, well illustrate the wonder of encountering a virtually unknown land, a strange people... and a huge mountain. The excitement of the expedition members shows through and actually recalls the indelible memories of my own first Himalayan experiences. It is especially intriguing to overview the gradual transition, over 30 years, of the Everest expeditioners from explorers to mountaineers, as exemplified in their photographs. Photography, still not easy in 1922, became less and less difficult, and by 1953 was able to illustrate serious climbing action. Pictures by Alf Gregory and George Lowe stand out as being especially telling, several portraying with sensitive eye Hunt's tiny interlopers almost lost in the vast, white bowl of the Western Cwm, the pristine 'Valley of Silence' for the Swiss in '52, but by 2013 tragically the scene of human greed and aggression. So far, so good.

As a young working photographer, I was always taught that while a photograph may be worth 1,000 words, with the right caption it may be worth 2,000. The publishers tell me that the target readership for this book is *anyone* interested in Everest, in mountain climbing or in photography. What a pity then that the captions, penned by the publisher but necessarily based on



RGS titles, explain the obvious rather than inform, and are couched to suggest a juvenile readership rather than that of interested adult mountaineers, geographers, travellers or photographers. I'm sorry to say that the captions add little or nothing to the pictures, indeed I cringe every time Everest is 'conquered', while I despair when 'Mighty Everest is tamed at last'.

Every writer makes inadvertent mistakes which usually come to light on re-reading several days later, or when the proof-reader takes over. But there is so little excuse in an expensive publication

of this calibre, such that I can only trust readers will forgive me for pointing out just a few of the more obvious examples of inane captioning and lax proof-reading.

Throughout the book, obviously approximate, rounded heights are translated into exact – and thus incorrect – equivalents; for instance 17,000 feet becomes 5181 metres. This unthinking, but no less annoying fault is common in poorly-proofed mountain books.

Opposite the foreword on page 7, a full-page picture of the Kangshung Face seen from the Lhakpa La is captioned merely *The reconnaissance expedition's camp at 20,000 ft. (6096 metres) on New Year's Day 1921*. However the 1921 Expedition left Darjeeling in May 1921, while there is no mention that this is Everest itself; indeed, it's the mountain's first appearance in the book! Essentially the same image but without the camp, appears on page 11, though now the mountain is mentioned.

A classic case of omission, one of so many, appears on page 97 beside an excellent portrait of Kellas Peak, but the caption merely states the obvious, that this is ...*where the open upper glacier is reached*...

On page 127 the caption claims that the subject is *Thyangboche*, but it happens to be Phortse village, a different place altogether

The picture on page 129 is patently not the *Khumbu Ice Fall*, as claimed, and is exactly the same location as that on page 131 captioned ...*snow-clad peaks in the Everest region*... It looks to me suspiciously like the head of the Hongu valley.

On page 132, in the picture of the Khumbu Ice Fall shot from the lowest slopes of Pumori, *Everest (L)*... No it isn't, it's merely the West Shoulder, the mountain itself is invisible.

There is a group photograph of the 1953 team on page 136, in which Griff Pugh becomes *Lewis Pugh*, a family name on his birth certificate, yes, but which, his daughter assures me, was never used from babyhood. The northern flank of Ama Dablam dominates the nice picture on page 157 that has a foreground figure, holding a rope, posed on some rocks. The caption explains that it's *Tenzing on the summit of Chukhung, (5,913m)* – it's actually 5,857m. the little training peak below Nuptse. But there's no mention of the imposing main subject of the photograph. Might not readers want to know?

Page 170 and facing pages 172 and 173, all illustrate the Lho La with Changtse beyond, seen from the area around basecamp and the foot of the Icefall. In the former image Changtse is named as *Everest*, while on the latter pair of very similar pictures, it's unnamed and on 173 reversed left to right. All obvious mistakes.

The imposing fang of Khumbutse dominates George Lowe's fine colour picture spanning pages 198-199, showing a party on the lip of the Western Cwm. The caption however identifies the peak as *Lingtren*, which while actually appearing, is some way beyond and away on the left hand margin.

The page 217 illustration shows Camp V, not ...*at the very base of the Lhotse Face*... but below the convoluted southern face of the West Shoulder.

While the thumbnail on page 282 is said to be ...*Everest rises against the deep blue sky*... as seen from Thyangboche, it is actually Lhotse and Nuptse that are illustrated, as only the hardly visible final 200 metres of Everest itself appear over the summit crest of Nuptse, as should be explained.

And so on.

One is forced to make comparisons with what are, to my mind, the definitive, illustrated, historical Everest books – those by Peter Gillman, George Band and Stephen Venables (respectively, *Everest the Best Writing and Pictures from Seventy Years*, Little Brown 1993; *Everest: the Authorised History*, Collins in association with MEF, AC & RGS, 2003; and *Everest, Summit of Achievement*, RGS 2003). While all three volumes cover up to the present day, or at least up to the time when real mountaineering on Everest was overtaken by tourism, they cover the pre-war and '53 expeditions with authority and an understanding of the game, of the topography and of the mountain that is lacking in the reviewed volume.

As a simple, clean and beautifully produced folio of historic photographs, this is a valuable addition to Everest bibliography, but it is disgraced by the captions. Why did the editors – or the RGS – not commission someone who knew the place, or at least the subject, to draft the captions and check the proofs? There are enough of us around.

John Cleare

The Boardman Tasker Prize for Mountain Literature 2012

Winner: **Cold Wars – Climbing the fine line between risk and reality** by Andy Kirkpatrick, *Vertebrate Publishing*

Others shortlisted: **Here, There and Everywhere** by Jim Curran, *Edgebrook Publishing*, **Into The Silence** by Wade Davis, *The Bodley Head (Random House)*, **The Challenge of K2** by Richard Sale, *Pen & Sword*, **Fiva An Adventure That Went Wrong** by Gordon Stainforth, *Golden Arrow Books*, **The Wild Within** by Simon Yates, *Vertebrate Publishing*. There were 22 entries.

Judges: Bernard Newman (chairman), Shannon O'Donoghue and Lindsay Griffin.