Book Reviews

Edited by David Stevenson

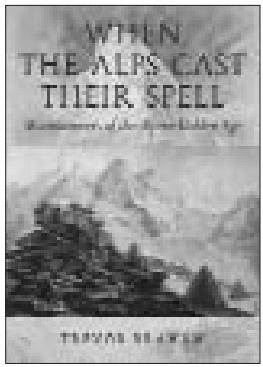
***When the Alps Cast Their Spell*: Mountaineers of the Alpine Golden Age. Trevor Braham. Glasgow, The In Pinn (Neil Wilson Publishing), 2004. 314 pages, colored plates. Hardcover. $30.00**

When the judges gave the 2004 Boardman-Tasker Award for the best mountain literature to *When the Alps Cast Their Spell*, they knew what they were doing. It is a gold mine of scholarship about a critical period in the history of mountaineering.

Today, when mountaineering in all its many emanations, exploratory, alpine, rock, ice, bouldering, and even indoor, is practiced around the world by hundreds of thousands of climbers, it is hard to realize that the gym rat as well as the alpinist evolved from a single source, a group of Victorian Englishmen. Although a few people had climbed a few mountains in various parts of the world, giving a claim by their various countries to early mountaineering achievements, the sport itself was invented by the British in the 19th Century.

There have been many books on the Golden Age. Most of the scholarly histories are long out of print, and many recent ones are superficial reads providing an overview, but lacking the depth necessary to give the reader a feeling for the richness of mountaineering tradition. *When the Alps Cast Their Spell* does provide such a feeling. It is not an easy book, but it is smoothly written and well researched. As a mountaineer who has climbed in both the Alps and the Himalaya and as a former editor of the *Himalayan Journal*, who also has lived in Switzerland for many years, the author is one of the few persons who could write such a book.

Braham starts with a succinct but thorough chapter on the beginnings of mountaineering. The heart of the book is chapters on seven mountaineers, five of whom epitomized the Golden Age: Alfred Wills, John Tyndall, Leslie Stephen, A. W. Moore, and Edward Whymper. Braham then discusses subsequent developments through chapters on Albert Mummery and Emmanuel Boileau. As Braham says in his introduction, he chose subjects to illustrate the history of mountaineering, not explain it. Historians have considered Wills' ascent of the Wetterhorn in 1855 to have opened the Golden Age, while Whymper's ascent of the Matterhorn ten years later closed it. Mummery and Boileau represent the next stage of mountaineering, pioneering new routes of increasing technical difficulty in which the challenge is more important than the summit, an era Sir Arnold Lunn called The Silver Age.



What comes through in the book is the similarity between these pioneers and modern climbers, not the obvious differences. They were on a pilgrimage and in their own way were overcoming difficulty, accepting risk, and pushing the envelope, as an extreme climber today does. And they were like us as well. As Braham writes, "There exist today mountaineers with Stephen's ethical

standards, Moore's exploratory ardor, Mummery's pioneering spirit, Tyndall's taste for risk, Wills' trust in guides, Whymper's craving to predominate."

Those familiar with this history will recognize many of Braham's stories. But he has combined well-known material with original research, making this an important book even for those who think they know the history. By describing the lives of these men, he gives a compelling picture of why, as well as how, the traditions of mountaineering arose.

Besides relating the accomplishments of the five principal subjects, Braham discusses the contributions of others, making his book a comprehensive history, not just a collection of biographies. There is concise but good coverage of the importance of W. A. B. Coolidge, the mountaineer-scholar about whom it was said, "The only way he knew how to bury the hatchet was in someone's back." When necessary, Braham chooses detail over simplicity, thus providing an extra richness to his account.

The chapter I most appreciated was about Emmanuel Boileau and the first ascent of the Meije, the highest peak in the Dauphine. Prior histories in English have not given this story the attention it deserves. When mentioned, it appears to be an afterthought. I have always been curious about the elusive Meije, on which the famous Emil Zigsmondy died. This book does it justice.

Braham covers alpinists who may have otherwise been omitted in the chapter, "There Were Many Others," which includes Leading Ladies, Eminent Europeans, and Great Guides. Again, like the first chapter, it is concise, dense, and informative. There also is an excellent bibliography and a thorough, accurate list of Alpine First Ascents from the 13th through 19th centuries. If this is not enough, one can read the chapter endnotes, a treasure trove of obscure but fascinating information.

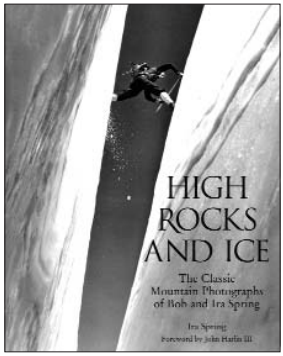
Besides facts, the book is infused with Braham's observations and judgments. He concludes, "Whatever might be the future of mountaineering it is to be hoped that certain essentials will remain. Such as the first spellbound moment of a youthful spirit stepping across the threshold into an awareness of the mountain world, and the birth of a desire to preserve what it has discovered."

While all forms of climbing have their own rewards, a knowledge of the heritage of mountaineering adds to one's satisfaction, as one becomes more aware of his or her relationship to the past. Braham's book is superb account of the pioneering era when mountaineering became a sport. Climbers unfamiliar with our rich traditions will obtain an understanding of them, and those who are well versed in the literature will gain new knowledge and insights. Every mountaineer should have a copy. It will almost make a rainy day seem worthwhile. Take it on your next attempt on Mt. Robson.

Nicholas Clinch

High Rocks and Ice: The Classic Mountain Photographs of Bob and Ira Spring. **Ira Spring. Foreword by John Harlin III. Guilford CT/Helena MT: Falcon, 2004. Numerous black & white photographs. 107 pages. $18.95.**

In his introduction to this most essential volume in Northwest climbing history, Ira Spring acknowledges that "My twin brother, Bob, and I did not deliberately set out to chronicle the 'Classic Age' of Mountaineering." Nevertheless, that's exactly what happened—and everyone who loves those glistening peaks is in their debt.



High Rocks and Ice provides a retrospective catalog of the work of this pair of legendary alpine photojournalists, whose passion for taking pictures was first lit in 1930 when Eastman Kodak celebrated its 50th anniversary by offering every 12-year old in the United States a free Box Brownie camera. The brothers took the company up on its offer and headed off to the mountains. Over the long course of their professional partnership, the Springs moved on to bigger and better (not to mention heavier) camera gear, publishing their superb black-and-white photographs in a wide variety of places, including the *Seattle Times, National Geographic, Life, The Saturday Evening Post*, and more than 50 books. Completed just before its author's death in 2003, *High Rocks and Ice* includes photos taken on Mt. Rainier (the most frequently depicted location in this book), Glacier Peak, Mt. Shuksan, Mt. Challenger, as well as a few assorted sites in the Olympics, Canadian Rockies, and Alaska. As John Harlin III observes in his Foreword: "So ubiquitous were the camera lenses of Bob and Ira Spring…that most of us who loved the Northwest's mountains in the second half of the twentieth century have trouble separating our personal memories from the images we've savored on the printed page."

Surpassing the historical value of the photographs, however, is a powerful emotional charge that comes off these pages, which some may mistake for nostalgia but is in fact *memento mori*, a reminder of the inevitability that all things pass. In the section titled "My Teenagers," we find a picture taken on Mt. Rainier in 1951, when the Springs hosted a group of four teens who were eager to assist the photographers in the arduous work of setting up shoots in the difficult glacier landscape. There they are, sitting joyful around the cook stove in a camp perched somewhere near the clouds. In the foreground, we are given the very picture of youth fair and carefree; in the background, the lambent ranges of eternity. If we climbed to this same spot today, we should expect to discover these young people still lounging among the boulders, still happy, still vibrant, still *there*—or so the photo seems to suggest. But of course this response is based upon a dark and delectable deception, one inherent in the very nature of photography, especially in the documentary style black-and-whites that were the Springs' forte. As Susan Sontag expresses it: "To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt." To reflect upon an artful documentary photograph only intensifies the effect. Nowhere is this more poignantly felt than in contemplating Ira's 1973 shot of Devi Unsoeld smiling in the immortal sunshine beside her father, Willi, on the slopes of Mt. Eldorado.

Near the end of the book is a 1950 image of the Quien Sabe Glacier in Boston Basin, North Cascades. In his commentary, Ira provides a sentence that could serve as the epitaph for what he calls the Classic Age of Mountaineering: "The last time I was in Boston Basin, the glacier was hardly there at all, reduced to a late-summer snowpatch, a vanishing memory of the Little Ice Age that began in the fourteenth century and pretty well petered out in the early twentieth." All things flow. Though the glaciers and climbers depicted in these pages may have vanished, something of them may yet be evoked by immersing oneself in the photos and vignettes found in *High Rocks and Ice.*

JOHN P. O'GRADY

***Mount Everest , Khumbu Himal, Rolwaling Himal I Khumbakarna Himal,* Satellite Image Map (1:1,000,000), Jan Zurawski.**

***K2 and the Baltoro Glacier in the Karakoram,* Satellite Image Map (1:80,000), Grzegorz Glazek. Both by the Polish Mountaineering Association with Geosystems Polska.**

For all of us who have traveled to, or dream of traveling to, these crowning ranges of the planet, who read and write about them, or who simply enjoy images of the world's famous ranges, these two new publications are real gems. They cause one to sit and stare for long periods, as the eyes grow accustomed to the amount of detail found on these moderate-resolution satellite images.

Using fairly recent color imagery (Nepal Himalaya, 2000) and black–and-white imagery (Karakoram, 2001), these new satellite maps show details that were available only to those savvy enough to find and use Landsat and SPOT satellite images. They show us an unadulterated and surprisingly cloud-free view of the mountains, free of the interpretation and cartographic license used by cartographers in compiling their maps (often from these same type of images).

Few traditional maps can rival the detail found on the Karakoram sheet. (Brad Washburn's collaborations with the Swiss are the only ones that come to mind.) This is clearly a case where less is more, and the lack of color enhances the shadows and aids legibility. This sheet makes use of the higher resolution French SPOT imagery, which permits greater detail and a larger scale compared to the data used on the Everest sheet. Distinct medial moraines and access gullies on the Trango Glacier are clearly identifiable, as are sharp ridge lines and crevasse fields on the entire sheet. For those planning a trip to the Baltoro Glacier, or any other subrange portrayed, this map will prove an essential planning and visualizing tool. It fills a void for detailed current maps of the region north of the Baltoro Glacier along the China/Pakistan Border. Sources used in labeling this sheet are remarkably inclusive, from the earliest Italian to the most current Japanese maps of the range. The text elements are legible, tastefully done, and unobtrusive. [A 1:1 scale sample of this map can be found on page 16 of this Journal—Ed.]

The Everest sheet, while beautiful, is nonetheless not as aesthetically pleasing and of the two probably less essential. The spectral band combination chosen for its natural color look is oversaturated and makes the green of vegetation the dominant element on a sheet where the white of the mountains should be (including four 8,000m peaks). This is understandable for a product destined for the mass market, where colors mimicking nature are more likely to be understood quickly by casual observers. The multicolor typography, with a large number of serif-italicized river labels, is distracting and takes away from the imagery below it. There is also an abundance of transparent lines that, while not as prominent, are not useful enough to warrant their inclusion. For the Nepal region in particular there is an abundance of easily available maps that already fill that niche. Jan Zurowski, the cartographer, uses several of these as sources for his place names, including the Schneider and Washburn maps, yet does not make use of the more recent Finnish/Nepalese-produced National Survey Department's 1:50,000 maps. These were likely ignored because they introduce new elevations for peaks whose heights have been set for several decades from earlier maps.

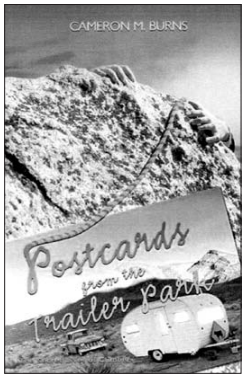
Both sheets have illumination from the south, which in the Northern Hemisphere creates problems of cast shadows on the northerly aspects so favored by alpinists. Details on these faces lie in

shadows and can be difficult to decipher. The southern illumination can also lead to an inversion of the terrain by some observers, with valley bottoms appearing as ridge tops. Fortunately, this can be fixed by rotating the map to show south at the top. The result is terrain relief that pops off the page.

The beauty of these images and the advantages of satellite maps lie in their large amount of unedited details. These are not traditional maps in that they do not contain enough navigational information (such as a coordinate grid and magnetic declination) to be used for taking measurements in the field, and the information has not been edited. When the cartographer obscures the image with superfluous information already found on traditional maps, it is to the detriment of the user. While text elements are useful for identifying peaks, they should in my opinion be minimized, as these images are best enjoyed as images, and are attractive enough to stand on their own merit. With the increasing availability of satellite imagery it is likely that more publishers will venture into this genre of map. They would do well to use Grzegorz Glazek's K2 and Baltoro Glacier map as a model.

MARTIN GAMACHE

Postcards From The Trailer Park. **CAMERON BURNS. NEW YORK: THE LYONS PRESS. 2004. PAPERBACK. 279 PAGES.**



When I received Cameron Burns' book for review, I thought, "Piece of cake. It's 30+ short articles/stories/vignettes/essays about climbing. I can read a half-dozen, dash off 200 words, and I'm done." Well, *Postcards From The Trailer Park* is like that potato-chip ditty: "Bet you can't read [or eat] just one." I actually read the whole damn thing. PFTTP hasn't been off my nightstand in the two weeks since I got it.

While many of the essays are about the trips Burns has done and the people he's done them with, he is much more than an observer of the climber animal. He is a connoisseur of humanity and of his own surroundings. His descriptions of his surroundings, the recounting of conversations, and the ever-present exaggerations add up to very enjoyable reading.

Two of my favorites are his portraits of Fred Beckey and Warren Harding. Though completely different, both are presented with clarity, humor, and, yes, affection. "The Unbearable Greatness of Fred," is divided into two sections. The first, a scathing account of a '91 trip to Mexico with Beckey, presents a view unlike what those of us who have never met the man would have imagined. That said, in spite of a critical look at Beckey's personality, Burns's appreciation for Beckey's accomplishments is clear. The postscript, written three years later, after they became reacquainted and following several subsequent trips, ties things together in a way that resolves the bad taste from the Mexico trip. Here are two excerpts, the first from the third paragraph, the second from the last:

"Fed up with Mexican service, Fred Beckey stands up, grunts, farts, and heads for the door. Taken aback, Mike and I stare at each other. Beckey, a personal hero for both of us, is proving anything but a hero."

And, "…certainly, during these half-dozen or so other climbing trips, we didn't do a lot of climbing. But I'm incredibly glad I went with him. He is a genuinely great guy, and he

deserves a prominent position in every climber's pantheon."

That's the tip of the iceberg. There are stories about climbing Aconcagua with a "hideous blue and yellow" $45 Wal-Mart Wilderness Trails tent, "hoopsticking" desert towers in New Mexico, his first outdoor climbing trip with his then-fiancé (now wife) Ann, a hilarious account of a '93 ascent of El Cap, and the ultimate tick story, "Ticking a Few Routes in Montana." Just when you think you can't laugh any more, he hits you with another line that lays you out. Example:

"Tell 'em I watched a dozen ticks crawl up your shorts while you were climbing," my wife pipes up as I poke the keyboard. "Remember those nasty, tiny Coq Sportif shorts you had? Oooooh. Dunno what was worse: the shorts or the ticks…."

My wife is glad I finished this book. I kept waking her up at 1 a.m. laughing. Burns reminds me of my favorite partners. No matter what happens, they manage to find humor in everything. Guys like that make climbing trips a lot more fun, and life on the edge more bearable.

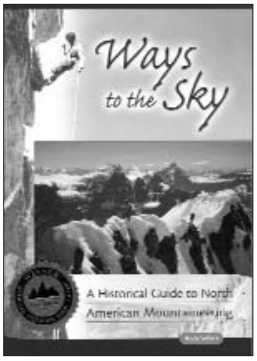
Al Hospers

***Ways to the Sky: A Historical Guide to North American Mountaineering*, Andy Selters. Golden, CO: The American Alpine Club Press. 334 pgs. 65 b&w photos, 15 maps. $24.95.**

When Jeff McCarthy returned this spring from the "International Festival of Mountaineering Literature," he remarked that "the Brits seem far more concerned with history than we are." Hard to argue with that, especially given that the first comprehensive book-length history of climbing in North America was written by Chris Jones—a Brit—in 1976. Here in the States guidebooks and instructional books compete for climbers' attention, followed closely, I suspect, by website chat rooms and forums. History accrues climb by climb in these *AAJ* pages, in magazine reports, and in very condensed form in *some* guidebooks. My general sense is that here in the United States we find something admirable in Salathé's brief query: "Vy can't ve chust climb?"

Selters does a good job of explaining why it may not be quite enough to "chust climb." His Introduction begins with a line from Rita Dove: "If you don't look back, the future never happens." The Introduction bears close reading, for here Selters lays out his parameters, his vision, his questions, and even his definition of and "rules" of mountaineering.

Selters sets out to give us "the story of original-style mountaineering." He then asks what the phrase means. He lays out three admittedly broad parameters: one, the territory is the "higher peaks" of North America (so the Gunks and Yosemite, for example, are excluded). This parameter is also exemplified by references to particular climbers in the indices: in this tome Robbins garners six; in Jones' book Robbins gets 31; and in Roper's *Camp 4.* (Although I found it unavoidable to compare Selters' book to Jones', it's not fair, since each is indispensable.)



Second parameter: "Climbs that have been done predominantly free." Fair enough, I suppose, but he implies that climbs that did employ aid do not count as "progress." He adds that big-wall climbs in Alaska deserve a companion volume, but includes some anyway, all but ignoring their use of fixed rope, which, after all, is not exactly "direct aid from anchors to make progress." Thus, by his

own criteria Selters probably should have left out the first ascent of Mt. Dickey by Roberts, Rowell, and Ward, but he rightly calls it "one of the most demanding climbs of the decade" (note the 30-year gap between its first and second ascent, just last summer!). Similarly, he mentions that on the first ascent of Mt. Kennedy's north ridge fixed rope was used between camps, but doesn't mention that an astounding 8,000 feet of it were placed on a route of about 6,000 vertical feet.

Third Parameter: He wished to understand "the progression of our mountain routes." This is really the issue he's grappling with: what is *progress*, "what yardstick do we measure with?" It's a charge he does not take on lightly, and despite my quibbles here, handles nicely throughout. Nonetheless, this concern with progress occasionally gets muddied: "the truest measure of mountaineering progress, then, is the evolution of the idea of mountaineering." Huh?

Selters does a good job of allowing chronology to structure the text. Logical enough you say, but easier said then done when you consider the importance of place and the force of personalities, either of which might compete with chronology as organizing principles. Chic Scott's *Pushing the Limits: The Story of Canadian Mountaineering* (2000)—a terrific book—suffers a bit from this; too often it's hard to be certain if you're traveling through time, space, or personalities—the book succeeds by its sheer thoroughness.

Particularly smart is Selters' breaking the book into four periods, which although tied to chronology are conceptual: I. "Discovery by Summiting," II. "Adventure Realized," III. "Better that We Raise Our Skill," and IV. "When 'Why' Disappeared." The introductions to these periods are fine essays and, coupled with the equally fine epilogue, comprise a thoughtful overview of our arena.

It's not just in the introductions and overviews that Selters' thoughtfulness is revealed. Smart, hard-earned observations abound throughout. For example, he remarks about Cheesmond and Freer's disappearance on their 1987 Hummingbird Ridge attempt: "For many climbers, their deaths peeled away a layer of denial that says, if you're good enough mountaineering is essentially safe. When climbers this good are killed, the core of the game is laid open, and we see all-too-mortal hearts perhaps playing the odds too many times."

Peter Croft notes in his Foreword that the book not only introduced him to "new chunks of history but also helped to fire up recollections of my own." I agree. One of the book's great strengths is that even though much of the early history ought to be familiar to me, I feel that I am being re-shown freshly through Selters' vision. One way he has accomplished this is by a terrific selection of photographs, clearly reproduced, that were new to me. Another way is through the closing section of each chapter: "mini-portraits" of representative climbs from the era. There I felt the book was at its freshest and most exciting. Selters chose these with "a bias to routes that haven't seen as bright a spotlight as our best known classics." I had done a few of the routes and knew of few others, but a surprising number were peaks that hadn't appeared on my radar screen—a gift, to be sure.

My only real complaint is that although Selters brilliantly chooses passages to quote, he rarely provides their sources. It's not that I doubt his accuracy; it's that the book doesn't facilitate further research very well. Not every reader will care, but people interested in history tend to be interested in the primary sources. Although Jones did not footnote his text (for which I'm grateful) he did provide a precise and thorough list of references at the end of each chapter.

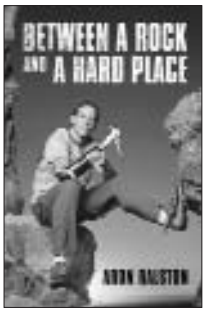
To return to Selters' choice of Rita Dove's words as an opening epigraph, like most readers I am not personally pushing the future of our "life game" (Selters' term). But I am pushing (very

gently) the future of my own climbing, and this book both helps me contextualize where I've been and gives me much to dream about in the years ahead.

If I had to choose a single volume as a cornerstone for a young climber's library, this is the book. *Ways to the Sky* joins Jones' *Climbing in North America*, Scott's *Pushing the Limits*, and the ubiquitous Roper and Steck's *Fifty Classic Climbs in North America* (1979) as the foundation for understanding where we've been, what we value, and what might yet be possible.

David Stevenson

Between a Rock and a Hard Place. **Aron Ralston. Atria Books: New York, 2004. 354 pages, with 16 pages of color photos. $26.00**



This is the book about the guy who cut his arm off, by the guy who cut his arm off. His name is Aron Ralston, and he's alternately gritty and dorky, inspiring and annoying. The fact that you already know the story is the first crux for this narrative: Aron goes canyoneering solo, gets his hand stuck and suffers, cuts off his arm, and walks out. The second crux is for the author to stretch this grisly incident into a book-length tale. How well the writing meets these challenges depends on the reader. If you've picked the book up for alpine adventure, you'll be disappointed, but if it's fortitude and resolution in the wilderness you seek, this is your book.

Ralston's first chapter describes the hike and then the tumble with a chockstone that shackled him to a remote canyon wall. The shock of not getting free is agonizingly well described, and we settle in with Ralston for a long, cold desert night in his "glove of sandstone." But now the writer reaches back into his past, stretching the incident into a full 300-page book, and it's here the reader begins to feel the washboard road rattling the suspension of narrative. He's in his mid-twenties, and while his life has been interesting, he's not exactly Ulysses. Ralston brings us through his youthful exploits in the mountains, including some rookie suffering we all recognize: postholing pointlessly for miles—and some we probably won't—chasing a bear who took his food in the Tetons. We travel with Ralston through various mini-epics, a major life change from an engineering career to living in Aspen, and arrive at his goal of climbing all Colorado's 14,000-foot peaks in winter.

There is much to like in this enthusiasm, and much to admire in his re-invention of himself as an endurance athlete. However, for you climbers there are apt to be some awkward moments, as Ralston stretches chilly days on basic peaks into long drama. He's hiking snowy summits, and rambling along ridgelines with one eye on his website and one eye on his stopwatch. Our narrator becomes that recognizable figure: the frenetic, gear-store geek, fixated on abstractions like "fourteeners," and painfully eager to share the video and the jpegs from his latest escapade. That gets a little old.

Of course, they say character is fate, and it's the very momentum of a young man's hyperenergy, an engineer's attention to detail, a neophyte mountaineer's bad decisions, an egoist's self-regard, and an endurance athlete's appetite for punishment that tumbles him into trouble and then enables him to survive. Ralston, you see, is his own perfect storm. That's what saves him and ultimately saves this book.

What I like about *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* is Ralston's strong writing skills, his

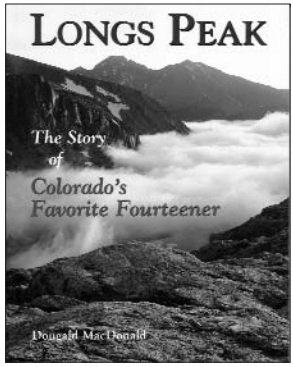
self-deprecating humor, and his ability to share lessons from his accident without preaching. We have to tolerate the title as a pun too obvious for a publisher to forego. Ralston reminds me of Joe Simpson, without the technical ability but with the inclination for accidents, because he never presents himself as a hero, never shapes his story into a Christian allegory, and retains a sense of humor no matter the mess he's in.

Ralston's ordeal itself is strikingly well told, and the book becomes powerful as his frustration becomes responsibility, and ultimately psychological transformation: "You created this accident…you have been heading for this situation for a long time." The excruciating dismemberment is only part of his story. Ralston's sandstone prison is a venue for life-altering contemplation, and even if his guiding texts are lyrics from Phish or lines from *The Matrix*, the reader is privileged to witness a stirring change as this young man has the strength to learn about himself, about love for his friends, and about motivations for outdoor accomplishment healthier than altitudes and firsts.

American Alpine Journal readers will find this a Pop-Tart of a book: not really fresh or really filling, but tasty in the right spots and warming evidence of one person's ability to take a terrible situation and mold it into something constructive and uplifting.

JEFFREY M. MCCARTHY

Longs Peak: The Story of Colorado's Favorite Fourteener. **DOUGALD MACDONALD. ENGLEWOOD, CO: WESTCLIFFE PUBLISHERS, 2004. 240 PAGES. PAPERBACK. $24.95.**



From a speeding airliner high over the American West you gaze down upon many mountains. But even the ones that should be familiar are flattened and can be devilishly hard to identify. Recently I flew from Oakland to Denver. Partway into our descent, probably around 25,000 feet, I looked out and spotted a highly distinctive peak. I blurted out: "God! Look at that!" My seatmate must have thought I was seeing an engine on fire. No, it was that massive, beautifully shaped mountain known as Longs Peak. It must have been 40 miles distant, yet my ancient brain cells had instantly recognized it.

Dougald MacDonald has produced a riveting book about Colorado's most splendid mountain. He begins with a step-by-step account of a hike up the "tourist" route, and we are swept along as if we had a guide hiking with us. This adventure, the Keyhole Route, is not exactly a stroll, as it involves a 4,850-foot elevation gain and a 15-mile round trip. This well-crafted introductory section makes the reader long for more. And you'll soon get it.

Most mountains have little recorded history. We may know who made the first ascent, or be aware of a few notes from this Journal, but let's face it: no book could be written about 99.99% of the world's peaks. But because of its prominence and height (14,259 feet) Longs lured many early adventurers, and their exploits have not faded into obscurity. MacDonald tells of the "discovery" of the peak in 1820, the controversy surrounding the first ascent, the explorations of Enos Mills in the early 1900s (he climbed the peak nearly 300 times), and the 1925 incident where Agnes Vaille died during a winter ascent.

Accounts of some of the famed routes on the east side of the mountain form the core of the book. The Stettner brothers and their 5.8 route in 1927. Bob Kamps and Dave Rearick's "sneak" ascent of the Diamond in 1960. Royal Robbins and Layton Kor climbing two routes on the Diamond in a four-day period in 1963. The first winter ascent of the Diamond, a five-day effort by Kor and Wayne Goss in 1967. The exploits of modern-day speed climbers (Tommy Caldwell and Topher Donahue did five Diamond routes in a single day!). A fact I was unaware of: there are 75 separate routes on the eastern escarpment of the mountain. Fascinating stuff!

Other sections of the book deal with accidents (54 dead so far), winter climbs, geology, and natural history. This last topic, though well done, seems out of place here, since little is specific to Longs Peak. Three full pages about quaking aspen and elk? Better to have omitted this and inserted more climbing history.

The many photographs are sublime, especially the ones by Topher Donahue. Some of the color shots are of startling definition, a far cry from so many cheaply prepared mountain books. Oddly, the photographers are not credited next to their photos; you must get this fine-print information at the end of the book. A minor flaw in MacDonald's near-perfect tome.

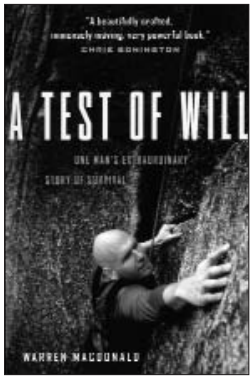
Steve Roper

In Brief: Notes from the Banff Mountain Book Festival 2004

Twelve years ago North America launched its first mountain literature event: the Banff Mountain Book Festival. Each November the festival celebrates the world's best mountain and adventure travel stories through readings, presentations, seminars, book signings, a book fair, and the presentation of internationally recognized awards for mountain literature.

Last year 137 books were entered in the 11th annual competition in Banff. A committee selected 32 finalists, which were then submitted to an international jury that included UK-based mountaineer and author Colin Wells; Lisa Christensen, a writer and curator with Banff's Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies; and writer, editor, and adventurer Donovan Webster.

The Jon Whyte Award for Mountain Literature, sponsored by the Whyte Museum, went to *Life and Limb: A True Story of Tragedy and Survival Against the Odds* by Jamie Andrew, Piatkus Books (UK, 2004), a book that jury members found had a "compelling and agonizingly suspenseful quality about it." It told the story of Andrew's rescue after five nights trapped by a storm on Mont Blanc. Frostbite injuries are horrible and debilitating. But what happened to Jamie Andrew in January 1999 transcended alpinists' worst fears. Storm-bound for six days in what proved to be a very effective wind tunnel near the top of the north face of the Droites, he developed injuries so serious that he subsequently lost his feet *and* hands to amputation. His climbing partner Jamie Fisher lost his life. It's a grim, ghastly tale and a scenario most climbers would file under "Nightmare." But what the jury found extraordinary about Jamie Andrew's book, which recalled his terrible ordeal and its aftermath, was that it wasn't depressing at all. Instead, it was gripping, intriguing, and often very funny.



Nearly half the book is concerned with the climb on the Droites and the terrible situation in which the climbers subsequently

found themselves. In Andrew's deft style, the tale has a compelling and agonizingly suspenseful quality about it. Andrew skillfully maintains a page-turning impetus by leavening the horror with retrospective vignettes from his climbing life.

What also distinguishes Andrew's book from most in what might be termed the "Triumph over Adversity" genre, are his insightful observations on life and society in general. And Andrew is not afraid to laugh at himself: "Tales of mastering the art of rolling your own fags without fingers, how to sup a spillage-free pint, or wipe your bum without hands are the kind of thing that rarely find their way into medical textbooks."

What shines through in this unexpectedly enjoyable book is the writer's extraordinarily positive attitude. It would have been all too easy to lapse into gushing sentimentality, but Andrew staunchly resisted this. Instead, like Joe Simpson, Andrew discovers a latent talent for writing that only a mountaineering epic seems to have allowed him to uncover.

Other books considered by the Banff jury and of interest to our readers include:

The Best Book—Mountain Exposition award went to Will Gadd for ***Ice & Mixed Climbing: Modern Technique***, The Mountaineers Books (2003). A blend of step-by-step instruction and real-life stories, the book was described by jury members as "utterly bang up-to-date, as Gadd's still at the top of his game." The judges found the book to be well laid-out, accessible, and very thorough.

The Big Open: On Foot Across Tibet's Chang Tang, Rick Ridgeway (National Geographic Press) describes a journey across Tibet's northern plateau in search of the calving grounds of the chiru, an endangered antelope. Ridgeway was accompanied by Conrad Anker, Jimmy Chin, and Galen Rowell—Rowell's last big adventure. The jury commented that it was "a great story and cause." The cause is the group's discovery the Chinese government plans to create a national preserve.

The Fellowship of Ghosts: A Journey Through the Mountains of Norway by Paul Watkins (National Geographic Press) describes a solo adventure through the Rondanne and Jutunheimen mountains of Norway and makes connections between the landscape and mythical presences. The jury called it an "almost perfect blend of personal experience and historic reflection."

In the Ghost Country: A Lifetime Spent on the Edge by Peter Hillary and John Elder (Free Press) retraces Scott's epic but tragic journey to the South Pole as the backdrop for Hillary's own autobiography. Jurists remarked that "weaving literature, adventure lore, and Hillary's experience achieves something remarkable."

Everest Pioneer, the Photographs of Captain John Noel by Sandra Noel (Sutton Publishing, UK) collects the official Everest photographs from the 1922 and 1924 expeditions. The panel found the photographs superb and were impressed by the excerpts from John Noel's own writing.

The 12th annual Banff Mountain Book Festival will take place in Banff, November 2-4, 2005. For anyone interested in submitting an entry into the competition, contact banffmountainbooks@banffcentre.ca. A new Mountain Writing Program offers up to eight established writers an opportunity to develop a major essay, memoir, or book project on a mountain theme.

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