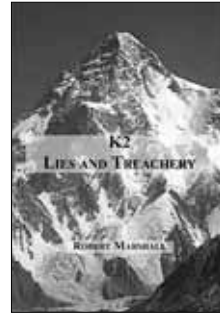
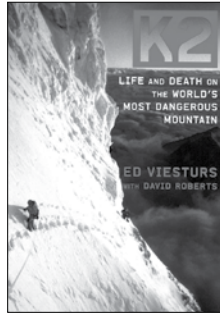


# BOOK REVIEWS

EDITED BY DAVID STEVENSON

***K2: Life and Death on the World's Most Dangerous Mountain.* ED VIESTURS, WITH DAVID ROBERTS. BROADWAY BOOKS, 2009. 342 PAGES. COLOR AND BLACK & WHITE PHOTOS. HARDCOVER \$26.00.**



***K2: Lies and Treachery.* ROBERT MARSHALL. CARREG LIMITED, 2009. 232 PAGES. BLACK & WHITE PHOTOS. HARDCOVER £20.00 (IN UK; U.S. PRICE VARIES, \$26.00 OR HIGHER).**

These two books, though different in approach, enrich the K2 literature. Ed Viesturs, one of the world's most accomplished high-altitude climbers, teams with David Roberts to focus on the "six most dramatic seasons in the mountain's history." These include the classic pioneering efforts in 1938, 1939, 1953 and 1954, and the disastrous 1986 and 2008 seasons, when a total of 24 climbers lost their lives. Viesturs' aim is not merely to tell the stories of those campaigns, but to "glean their lessons." This fine book, in Viesturs' evocative phrase, is a "hymn of praise" to K2, the most difficult and dangerous of the 8,000 meter peaks. It will absorb readers from start to finish.

The springboard for Viesturs was his own 1992 climb of K2. On his summit day, he made what he calls the greatest mistake of his climbing life. Instead of retreating in the face of deteriorating weather, he kept going. This was not the result of a decision, but the opposite, his "perverse inability to make a decision." He, Scott Fischer, and Charley Mace eventually summited in sunshine, but their descent into a maelstrom of clouds became a desperate epic, complicated not only by the storm and avalanche conditions that nearly engulfed them, but their moral obligation to assist the pulmonary edema-stricken Gary Ball down the mountain. Viesturs came away from that K2 experience a changed person, making a vow that he rigidly followed for 13 more years, in completing his quest of the remaining 8,000-meter peaks: *Your instincts are telling you something. Trust them and listen to them.*

Most readers will be familiar with the two American attempts on K2 in the late 1930s and the most storied of them all—the 1953 "Brotherhood of the Rope" saga—but Viesturs and Roberts add to our knowledge with their combined perspective. What makes this book so compelling, though, is how ably Viesturs uses his own K2 experience to assess, measure, and reflect on what his predecessors went through. We gain renewed appreciation of those magnificent efforts. His inclusion of entries from Dee Molenaar's expedition diary illuminates prior accounts of the 1953 expedition and shows his true grit. Clearly homesick, Molenaar felt the pull of his family, but refused to succumb to the "crumping" that lets the hardship and danger of expedition life drain a climber of ambition.

This book also provides a needed corrective to Putnam and Kauffman's *K2: The 1939 Trag-*

*edy* on the subject of Fritz Wiessner's leadership of that ill-fated expedition. The fact that Wiessner led from the front is consistent with other pioneering Himalayan expeditions, such as Maurice Herzog on Annapurna. In Viesturs' view, Wiessner not only made the right decision to turn back at 27,500 feet when his Sherpa companion, Pasang Dawa Lama, refused to go higher, but the morally responsible one. For this he rightly admires Wiessner more than if he had reached the summit. Finally, Viesturs powerfully describes the role of Sherpas on K2, both in 1939, when three of them did not return from a heroic effort to save the life of the stranded Dudley Wolfe, and in 2008, when Pemba Gyalje and his compatriots acted similarly to rescue climbers after tons of debris fell from the huge ice cliff above the Bottleneck, obliterating the fixed ropes. Two of the Sherpas died in the process. Their acts of heroism deserve to be as hallowed in K2's history as the 1953 expedition's valiant attempt to bring Art Gilkey down the Abruzzi Ridge.

Robert Marshall's *K2: Lies and Treachery* is concerned with a single K2 expedition, the Italian ascent in 1954, when Achille Compagnoni and Lino Lacedelli became the first persons to stand on the summit. What happened high on K2 the last two days of July stirred up a bitter controversy lasting over five decades. At the center of the storm was Walter Bonatti, in Ed Viesturs' estimation "one of the most phenomenally gifted climbers of all time." The trouble started with a selfless act of Bonatti and his Hunza companion, Mahdi, that made success possible. They carried up two 42-pound loads of bottled oxygen 2,300 feet to where it had been agreed the two summit climbers would place their highest camp. But when Compagnoni and Lacedelli moved the campsite just far enough away to prevent Bonatti from reaching it, he and Mahdi were forced to endure an open bivouac at 26,568 feet before descending the next morning. Both men survived the bitterly cold night, Bonatti remarkably unscathed but Mahdi with severely frostbitten extremities.

Then the lies started, with Compagnoni's dubious claim that he and Lacedelli had run out of oxygen 650 feet below the summit because Bonatti had used the precious gas during his bivouac, intending to go to the summit himself. In leader Ardito Desio's official account, the summit pair are described as yelling to Bonatti to "leave the masks" with the oxygen bottles, falsely asserting that this vital equipment was in Bonatti's possession, when in fact Compagnoni and Lacedelli had them. They also falsely claimed an earlier start time to fit the bogus oxygenless finish to the climb. Bonatti became the sacrificial victim of what amounted to a cover-up to assuage the consternation of Pakistani authorities about the permanent injuries Mahdi suffered. With astonishing dedication, Bonatti spent the next 50 years clearing his name and establishing the facts, finally officially accepted in 2007 by the CAI (Club Alpino Italiano).

This long battle was mostly fought alone, but Bonatti was fortunate that Marshall, an Australian surgeon who had never climbed a mountain, took up his cause. Marshall became so proficient in Italian that he was able to produce a better English translation of Bonatti's two prior autobiographical volumes and combine them, in 2001, as *The Mountains of My Life*, adding an important new section on Bonatti's writings in response to the attack on his character. It was Marshall's careful analysis of photos of Compagnoni and Lacedelli on the summit that buttressed Bonatti's contention that the pair had lied not only about their oxygen running out below the summit but also their placement of the highest camp and the start time for the summit. In this book, Marshall brings the story up to date with an exhaustive, comprehensive account, including the remarkable denouement.

After maintaining silence for all those years, Lacedelli startlingly revealed his own version in 2004 (published in English as *K2: The Price of Conquest*, 2006). Although he still claimed that the oxygen had run out below the summit, he conceded this had happened at a

point above which “the climb was less steep,” much higher than where he and Compagnoni had always claimed. This is a significant admission, because the final slope becomes less steep only after the low-angle summit ridge is attained, a few easy steps from the top. Aside from the oxygen issue, Lacedelli—unlike Compagnoni, who went to his grave in 2009 still proclaiming his innocence (Lacedelli also died last year)—confirmed Bonatti’s account in all respects. As inexcusably late as it came, no longer was it one person’s word against another. If this sounds like an arcane debate, it is not. It is much more, something that goes to the very core of mountaineering. Walter Bonatti should—and will—be remembered as much for his unyielding commitment to historic truth as his unparalleled genius as a climber.

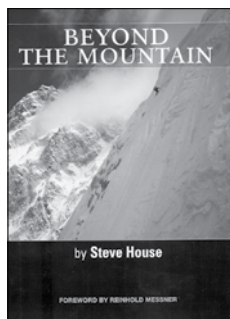
JIM WICKWIRE

***Beyond the Mountain.* STEVE HOUSE. FOREWORD BY REINHOLD MESSNER. PATAGONIA BOOKS; 2009. HARDCOVER. 285 PAGES. \$29.95.**

*Beyond the Mountain* is Steve House’s self-described tale of “Commitment on Steroids,” with selected insights into one of alpinism’s most accomplished characters. Why am I compelled to be such a smart ass and think of the book as “Beyond the Image”? Am I envious for short-changing my own commitment to alpinism, or am I just too far out of The Show to discern fact from fiction? So who is House House *beyond the image*? Is he our pop-culture icon, a self-created hero? Is the book any good? Does it answer any serious questions? Does it redefine alpinism, move the bar, or change one’s view of climbing? What questions has House’s career presented that *Beyond the Mountain* might answer?

This book gives us a few powerful insights, the first of which is House’s assessment of his success in understanding and then articulating the age-old question of *Why*. In the book’s introduction House admits he failed to answer “why” and for the most part I agree. That said, he *is* successful in bringing the reader close to the experience of being in that moment of total awareness that high-stakes living on the sharp end affords. His narratives of soloing Beauty is Rare Thing on Denali and Hajji Brakk in the Karakoram are where we see the characteristic that is embedded in House’s DNA and defines great climbers, namely depth and intensity of focus. In these passages House brings the reader face to face with the ultimate free-soloist question—up or down?—when success, failure, and death are all that remain. While most shrink from the question, throughout the book House strives to re-enter this transcendent state of being, but then struggles for meaning when the edge grows dull from accomplishment.

What House wrote in *Alpinist* magazine a few years ago about his experience with Bruce Miller on Nanga Parbat in 2004 left me (and others) wondering if House had lost his moral compass. To apparently blame your partner for personal failure and not honor the commitment of the partnership was appalling. House explores this imbalance in *Beyond the Mountain* and comes clean with an explication of his state of mind. Ironically, when I heard about Miller saving House a second time after his 25-meter fall this March on Mt. Temple, I wondered how many times Miller would be called upon before he got credit. Fortunately, House had already resolved the earlier transgression in writing this book. Nonetheless, I would like to learn more



about House’s journey between those disparate states of mind: from blaming to honoring the man who most contributed to success on Nanga Parbat.

House has executed what others envisioned. For example, whose idea was the single-push ascent of the Czech Direct on Denali? While the book does not provide explicit insight, I believe the answer reveals a great deal about the Mark Twight–Scott Backes–House relationship. (Note: on their non-stop 60-hour third ascent of the 9,000-foot Czech Direct, this team cut about nine days off the first ascentionists’ time and four off the second ascentionists’ time.) Whoever of the three first believed it possible brilliantly envisioned success without the benefit of bivy ledges, or indeed, bivying at all.

One difference between Twight’s writing and House’s (in this book) is that while Twight challenged his own ideas, House expresses disappointment but little self-doubt. At times it seems that we are reading a re-telling of House’s journal, which makes me wonder how the story would have unfolded if he had honored the journal by using its original voice.

Is House simply hooked on the dopamine rush these intense climbs afford? The high that a climber achieves by living through such high-stakes experiences has an addictive quality that makes them incredibly desirable yet ever more difficult to re-create. This possibility becomes evident in House’s retelling of his and Rolo Garibotti’s one-day ascent of Mt. Foraker’s Infinite Spur. When that beautiful route went so easily, and they failed to be pushed, House and Garibotti left with both the experience and their relationship somehow diminished.

Is the book any good? I think so. Mostly because it is witness to the intense effort and commitment Steve House has brought to the project of building himself into a climber capable of succeeding on the toughest routes in the world. The Acknowledgments section alone makes the book worth purchasing. There we see the man, the authentic emotion, House’s character, and the value he places on those most influential to his development as a world-class athlete, alpinist, and man searching for acceptance and meaning.

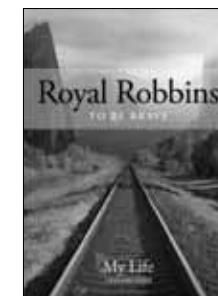
Whether *Beyond the Mountain* will change others’ view of alpinism depends on the era in which one enters the sport. As a teenager I found Messner’s *The Seventh Grade* among a pile of library books and was immediately transformed. Desmason’s *Total Alpinism* still makes my palms sweat. Will *Beyond the Mountain* have a similar effect on another young aspirant? Given my late middle-age stage in life, I don’t think I can know the answer, but I hope it does.

While he may have failed to answer “why,” *Beyond the Mountain* offers a glimpse of an answer through *knowing by doing*. That precept, *knowing by doing*, is rare enough, and we can only hope House will share more in his future work.

CHARLIE SASSARA

***To Be Brave, My Life, Volume 1.* ROYAL ROBBINS. PINK MOMENT PRESS, 2009. 221 PAGES. PAPERBACK. \$19.95.**

Royal Robbins was the outstanding climber of the Golden Age of Yosemite climbing. More important, he was the most influential. He was probably the first American-born climber to climb 5.9 on this continent. His uncompromising vision of how to approach the great walls, from Half Dome to El Capitan’s Nose and later the North American Wall, echo through the decades and speak to climbers to this day.



Less well known is that it was Robbins who triggered the clean-climbing revolution in this country. After a trip to the U.K., Robbins returned home imbued with the ethos of using natural features and chocks to protect rock climbs. Chouinard and Frost immediately understood the implications, applied their design and production genius to improving the chocks available from the U.K., and commissioned Doug Robinson's seminal essay, "The Whole Art of Natural Protection," in the Chouinard Equipment catalog. This was followed by John Stannard, on the East Coast, publishing his brilliant newsletter, "The Eastern Trade." The revolution swept on, but it was Robbins who triggered it.

Thus an autobiography by Robbins is a must read for anyone interested in the modern history of American climbing. It helps that it is so well done and consistently engaging.

As a device, Robbins recounts his 1963 solo of Warren Harding's amazing route on the Leaning Tower in Yosemite. His clear descriptions of the technical aspects of the climb are accessible to the non-climber, but are gripping enough to satisfy the most experienced among us. Alone on the wall for days, Robbins looks back on his hardscramble youth, growing up in post-WWII Los Angeles. Always supported by his long-suffering mother but without a steady father figure, he recounts his youthful adventures, and misadventures, with an uncompromising eye and an amazing memory for detail. His discovery of climbing and his calling gives us a window for understanding his resolute character.

This is the first of a seven-volume undertaking. I look forward to the rest with great anticipation.

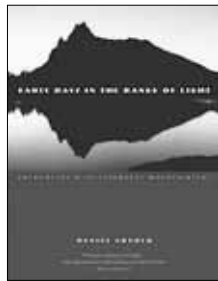
JIM MCCARTHY

***Early Days In the Range of Light: Encounters With Legendary Mountaineers.* DANIEL ARNOLD. COUNTERPOINT, 2009. 432 PAGES. HARDCOVER. \$29.95.**

When it comes to mountaineering literature, California's Sierra Nevada is perhaps the most storied of North American ranges. Not that other mountains lack narratives, but the Sierra seems to have attracted more than its share of gifted chroniclers, among them Clarence King, John Muir, and Francis Farquhar. Now add to this illustrious company the name of Daniel Arnold.

An accomplished climber as well as scholar, Arnold immersed himself for ten years in the history of Sierra mountaineering, reading all the classic texts, from William Brewer's *Up and Down California in 1860-64* to Norman Clyde's essays, as well as the old climbing accounts published in the *Sierra Club Bulletin*. From this veritable massif of alpine material, Arnold identified "the most adventurous climbs made by the most headstrong climbers," then spent four summers re-doing the routes himself, following in the paths of "the climbing ancestors."

Not only did he follow the exact routes of these predecessors, he did it on their terms, leaving at home modern climbing gear and opting instead for vintage equipment. Or no equipment at all. When John Muir made the first ascent of Mt. Ritter in October 1872, he walked 25 miles across rugged high country to reach the peak. Afterward, he walked back the way he came. He wore light clothes and carried only a tin cup, a notebook, and a bundle of bread. Arnold, in retracing Muir's route, did the same, right down to the bundle of bread. At one



point he reflects upon his efforts to meet the old-time mountaineers on their own ground, confessing, "In all honesty, my possessions were disconcertingly light—each easy step forward reminded me that I carried nothing to defend myself against the darkness and the cold."

The book presents 15 narrative accounts, "the most difficult and notable routes along with the stories of the men who climbed them." In each case Arnold deftly weaves his own story in with that of his subject. At times the writing is so seamless, the reader is almost charmed into believing that Arnold has dissolved the barrier of years and has joined the climbing ancestors on their historic climbs, "shamelessly eavesdropping on their hundred-year-old conversations." But more importantly, he treats each climber he writes about with a profound sympathy, which has the effect of shifting the reader's attention away from the technicalities of mountaineering to the complications of the human heart. Instead of rehashing the all-too-familiar myth of the hero-mountaineer, Arnold leads the reader toward those inexpressible privacies that abound in the souls of those who would climb mountains.

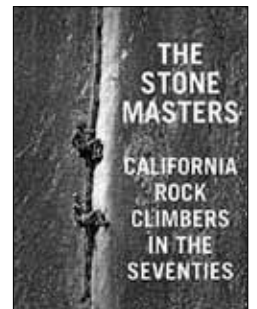
The most poignant character in this regard is the legendary Norman Clyde. Before he gave his heart to the Sierra, Clyde was married to a woman named Winnie Bolster, who died tragically young from tuberculosis only a few years after they married—"before he had the chance to do much more than feel the potential of their future, but apparently she remained with him all his life." Her spirit, it would seem, was his constant companion, unseen by the others who occasionally climbed with him, yet attending him to the end of his long days. A sad and moving story of love lost, to be sure, but Arnold also sees in Norman Clyde a cautionary tale for any creative spirit. When he wasn't out and about in the mountains, Clyde was holed up in his cabin, grinding away at his writing, struggling to get into words exactly how the Sierra made him feel. It was a lifelong labor, and he never really found the audience for his work that he hoped for. When he died in 1972 at the age of 87, he left behind reams of unpublished manuscripts. As Arnold sums it up, "To me, the strongest warning against Clyde's path is the simple fact that Clyde himself, who seems to have been better equipped than anyone to handle solitude and the unrelenting pressure of raw beauty, struggled so hard to find his place in the borderland between the mountains and civilization—and only surrendered to the peaks after exhausting the possibilities in between."

One comes away from this book with the uncanny sense that rare is the high Sierra peak that is not haunted. As Arnold so eloquently expresses it, "The mountains have a way of propagating human echoes."

JOHN P. O'GRADY

***The Stonemasters: California Rock Climbers In the Seventies.* DEAN FIDELMAN, JOHN LONG, AND OTHERS. T. ADLER BOOKS/ STONEMASTER PRESS, 2009. MANY PHOTOGRAPHS. 196 PAGES. HARDCOVER. \$60.00.**

"We made this book square, like a block of granite," said Dean Fidelman, the photographer. That's how much he and John Long, the writer, wanted it to reflect the experience of being a Stonemaster. It's exciting how well their big volume succeeds, by diving deep into the legend to locate the sparks that set a few high school kids so on fire



they ignited a generation. The story is vivid, thanks to the penetrating writing of their chief spokesman, John Long.

How did it all start? Long “organized a high school rock-climbing club for the sole purpose of enlisting a partner who had access to a car.” The club quickly sank under the weight of teen drunkenness when “a foreign exchange student from Hyderabad [India]—who’d shown such promise on The Blob earlier that day—was found wandering the desert in her panties.” But Long had already hooked up with Rick Accomazzo and “a powder-blue Ford Pinto we drove into the tundra over the next few years.” Step on the gas and wipe that tear away.

Fidelman’s iconic shots are everywhere, opening with John Bachar hanging oh-so-casually off the lip of The Molar for a dedication page. Yet they don’t dominate. Instead, their classiness is deliberately upstaged by snapshots that start out reflecting self-conscious poses from reading too much Herman Buhl, but soon dissolve into the warmth and plain goofiness of hanging out in Josh with your buds.

Likewise, Long is too good to just go big with his own language. The book sweeps together writings from many others who were there as the tribe swelled and became the statement, the identity, of a generation. Right away we get multiple views of climbing Valhalla, their initial entrance exam, from Accomazzo and Mike Graham. Plus rare writing from John Bachar, as he steps it up to the first solo of Butterballs, and sweet Tobin Sorenson going alpine.

The Stonemaster legend has loomed, creating a hunger for this book. It wouldn’t have taken much to satisfy the hunger, but we get filled right up by a rich choir of voices, set off by candid moments on Kodachrome.

It’s the start of an era of red two-inch swamis, worn like a pirate’s sash over painter’s pants, long hair, an insouciant stance. They might have been tempted to tighten that circle as more aspirants clamored. Instead, the Stonemasters did a remarkable thing. They threw open the gates and became a generation that wouldn’t quit until it had run itself out on enduring icons like Astroman, the Nose-in-a-Day, and the Bachar-Yerian.

“Dime edges,” we often say, when in truth most of them were larger coin. Long wryly acknowledges “centavo” size as they build early skill bouldering on Mt. Rubidoux before tackling the “holdless” slabs of Suicide Rock, where the drill stances were “round as a wine grape and smoother, too.”

The Stonemasters were the last great trad climbers, pulling the rope after a fall and trying from the ground or the last no-hands stance to send it straight through.

Steve Roper’s slim volume, *Camp 4*, gestated 30 years before committing to history the Golden Age of Valley climbing. He got it so right, reflecting by turns the serious and farcical, all with painstaking accuracy. A hard act to follow. All the more interesting then that we waited out the same delay in documenting this next great era, one that couldn’t really be contained by the walls of The Gulch. Hardly a tombstone, this volume cracks open with the invitation to make your own mischief and keep it real.

I keep returning to Long’s piece that opens the book, “A Short History of the Stonemasters.” Like a solo on the sax, it has evolved over the years since it was first published with subtle twists and big surprises. By the time I encountered them in the Valley, the Stonemasters were already a movement at flood stage and had recruited the best of the Bay Area boys, like Dale Bard and Werner Braun, Ron Kauk and John “Yabo” Yablonski, not to mention sweeping in their King-of-the-Valley predecessor, Jim Bridwell.

The brilliance in this volume calls out its dark side, which surfaced with a couple of bod-

ies shattered by long falls, the early death of Tobin Sorenson, and a sick obsessiveness oozing out of Yabo that even the strong medicine of climbing itself could not hold in check forever. Lynn Hill digs into the story of sparring with Yabo as no 18-year-old girl should have to, yet so many do. Emotional blackmail forces her hand, and in the heat of the moment they end up practically soloing a line that is lost forever. But its acid-etched tale could be the strongest piece in a very strong book.

*The Stonemasters* scatters a lot of gripping writing among grainy snapshots and epic landscapes. It also innovatively uses a lot of short snippets culled fresh from tossed-off posts on SuperTopo.

Okay, so I’m kind of smitten by the Stonemaster legend. It is truly a thrill to trace their roots, exposed as never before in this excellent book.

DOUG ROBINSON

*The Last Of His Kind; The Life and Adventures of Bradford Washburn, America’s Boldest Mountaineer.* DAVID ROBERTS. WILLIAM MORROW, 2009. 352 PAGES. HARDCOVER. \$25.99.

I never understood Bradford Washburn.

Or rather, I never understood his place in the climbing pantheon. I always thought of Washburn as a remarkable photographer who happened to climb a dozen (or so) prominent peaks; a genius mapmaker who happened to climb a dozen (or so) prominent peaks; a great writer, a careful naturalist, a serious scientist, a devout museum guy—who happened to climb a dozen (or so) prominent peaks. Even a wingnut who battled other wingnuts about the activities of the ultimate wingnut, Dr. Frederick Cook.

As biographer Roberts makes clear, Washburn certainly was a climber. He was, in fact, just a big kid who carried on doing everything we all do as youngsters (exploring, climbing, taking pictures, and writing about our experiences) for much of his adult life.

Today we’re used to 12-year-olds training in gyms and becoming 5.12 climbers by their early teens. That’s not how it used to be, especially in the climbing-naive 1920s and ’30s. For precocity, though, Washburn’s life was a surprising exception.

His writing career started as an eight-year old, in 1918, when he was living with his family in New York. He penned a piece about fishing on the docks along the Hudson and East rivers that was published in *The Churchman* in 1919. An interest in geography was in full tilt by the time he was in fifth grade, and by 14, if not earlier, he was drawing maps and plotting routes around New Hampshire’s Squam Lake, where his family had a cabin. He also had a thirst for knowledge about the natural world, and as a young student wrote school papers on subjects as esoteric as ferns.

He was introduced to climbing at age 11, finding that the higher he went, the less hay fever bothered him. He shortly thereafter climbed Mt. Washington, and in the summer of 1926 he spent a month climbing difficult technical routes in the Alps, as well a few of the highest peaks, with a guide. Roberts observes: “In one month, at sixteen, Brad had amassed an alpine experience that could be matched by no more than a score of American climbers of any age.”



By the time he was 17, after a second season in the Alps, he had written his first book—*Among the Alps with Brad Washburn* (published by Putnam). By the time he was a Harvard freshman, he had a professional lecture agent. In Washburn's teens, Charles Lindbergh's Atlantic flight stirred an interest in aviation (Washburn learned to fly at 24). In his early 20s, he was courted by *National Geographic* and other publications.

The die had been cast.

Exploring, climbing, writing, flying, and an insatiable curiosity about unknown places were to make this life remarkable in many ways. And while he originally looked to the Himalayas, by the time he was partway through his undergraduate education, Washburn had figured out the final, crucial element to his career, a vast area where he could do all of the above with the style of a born Olympian: Alaska and northwestern Canada.

The deeds he performed there, we know well: Mt. Crillon in 1934, Lucania in 1937, mts. Marcus Baker and Sanford in 1938, Mt. Bertha in 1940, Mt. Hayes in 1941, Mt. Deception in 1944, Mt. Silverthron in 1945, McGonagall Mountain in 1947, Denali's West Buttress and Kahiltna Dome in 1951, and Mt. Dickey in 1955, to name the most prominent. Roberts tells the stories of these climbs—and his subsequent years as a father, mapmaker, Everest height-adjuster, and museum director—richly, in detail, and expertly placed within their historical context.

But *The Last of His Kind* has its uncomfortable moments for even sporadic readers of mountain literature. Roberts spends considerable time covering climbing history that has been repeated dozens of times (the history of the 8,000-meter peaks, for example). The ascent of Lucania gets its own chapter. There are lengthy descriptions of other climbers' careers (e.g., Terris Moore) that, though related to Washburn's trajectory, seem superfluous. At times I felt like I was rereading James Ramsey Ullman's *High Conquest*.

While Roberts does a terrific job of assembling Washburn's personal story, what's covered at times seems unbalanced (Brad's broken engagement to an Eleanor Kelsie covered most of eight pages). The epilogue hints as to why.

Roberts knew Washburn, and he is not just his biographer, but was a friend, student, and, as he calls himself, protégé of the great man. As a mountaineering publisher friend recently pointed out, "It must have been incredibly difficult for David to write that book. Even if Washburn wasn't there, he must have felt Brad looking over his shoulder."

This sense is the source of the epilogue's awkwardness. It describes the Washburn–Roberts relationship and is part memoir, part celebration, and part justification as to why Roberts was the man to write this book (even though several other Washburn biographies exist). Thirty-one pages long, it leaves the reader with the impression that Roberts feels he's the heir apparent to Washburn, which, though plausible enough, gives the reader pause after 300 pages of expert, if occasionally bumpy, storytelling.

Quibbles aside, *The Last of His Kind* is a great read and offers the details necessary to fully understand Washburn—who he was, how he was raised, what motivated him, how he achieved so much in so many fields, and how he sat at this great intersection of the things he loved as a boy. And how he put them to use to ultimately join the pantheon.

CAMERON M. BURNS

*Pickets And Dead Men: Seasons on Rainier*. BREE LOEWEN. MOUNTAINEERS BOOKS, 2009. 189 PAGES. PAPERBACK. \$16.95.

After Bree Loewen graduated from college with a degree in philosophy at age 17, she spent four years as a climbing bum and ambulance jockey. We meet her at age 21, when she was rescued from a training climb of Mt. Rainier in a "highly televised extravaganza less than a month before [being] hired to rescue others." *Pickets and Dead Men* is her first-person account of the three seasons she spent as a climbing ranger on the highest mountain in Washington State.

The book is arranged in rough chronological order, detailing her experiences as a female ranger in a male-dominated industry. Her adventures are numerous and eclectic, and the bulk of the book is comprised of her stories. She describes participating in dangerous, high-profile rescues, cleaning the outhouses at Camp Muir in her "out-on-the-town" jacket, routefinding in some of the world's most extreme mountain weather, determining which breakfast burrito is most satisfying after a 24-hour shift, and accidentally climbing solo in whiteout conditions. Several themes become clear, including Loewen's struggle to gain the respect of her male coworkers, her constant internal self-doubt, and a continual pondering of that never-ending question: Why am I here? She touches on both the macabre (excavating bodies from crevasses) and the whimsical (she hopes her last mortal thought will be about white chocolate macadamia cookies). Her engaging prose is often underscored with a reverence for the mountain on which she lived, worked, and played.

Loewen's candor, utter lack of pretension, and matter-of-fact honesty make *Pickets and Dead Men* funny, poignant, and entertaining. But while her wry bluntness and self-deprecation in presenting her own quirky perspective endear her to readers immediately, there's also a danger to her casual prose: she uses the same unfiltered language to describe multiple real-life situations, co-workers, and climbers, but with a less-than-humorous undertone. Of her fellow climbing rangers, for example, she says "the intolerance, egomania, and 'lone wolf' attitude... led to many awkward situations involving offensive language, uniform requirements, substance and beverage regulations, and sometimes a lack of human decency." Names have been changed, but strong personalities and delicate situations are sometimes portrayed as more one-dimensional than we know them to be in real life.

Her trademark honesty does not waver in the Afterword, when Loewen offers her conclusion: "Neither of my twin philosophies, that shared hardship increases camaraderie nor the doctrine 'that which doesn't kill you makes you stronger,' worked out for me. The mountain irrevocably broke me in many ways, but it also kept me focused on what I wanted in my life: good friends to grow old with.... If this experience had been the sum of my life, then this book would have outlined a tragedy. Fortunately, it was only a summer job I had for three years in my early twenties."

Readers—especially those well-versed in the challenges that come with choosing climbing as a lifestyle, rather than a hobby—may have mixed feelings about the ultimate conclusion of *Pickets and Dead Men*. But the real value of the text isn't in the message; rather, it's in the playfulness of the stories, and in the simple bravery it took for Loewen to tell her truth. Spending her summers on Mt. Rainier as a climbing ranger might not have ultimately been right for her, but luckily for us, that summer job left Loewen with some wonderful tales to tell.



CHARLOTTE AUSTIN

*Hooker & Brown.* JERRY AULD. BRINDLE & GLASS, 2009. 240 PAGES. PAPERBACK. \$19.95 (CANADIAN).

So few mountaineering novels exist that it feels wrong to make generalizations from such a small sampling. Nonetheless, *Hooker & Brown* is more ambitious than most. This is a serious literary novel that tells the story of its first-person narrator, known to us as Rumi, the Ruminant, not after the “Sufi poet of love,” but because as he begins his season of working trail crew he appears to his co-workers as a deer in the headlights. The book is organized by the seasons and Rumi climbs in all four, the climbs being part of the structure that supports his quest for self-understanding.

The novel takes its title from the mythical peaks, Hooker and Brown, “observed” by David Douglas during his early 19th-century exploration of the Rockies as the highest peaks on the continent. By 1902 the search was given up, but Rumi, enamored of the history of exploration and of the idea of blank spaces on the map, seems to want to will the peaks into being. Early on, Rumi’s glimpse of a peak hidden in the clouds arouses his curiosity and desire and leads him on the path to the legendary peaks, as well as the actual rock and ice of Mt. Assiniboine. As he proceeds throughout the year, this is just one of many quests he undertakes; he also climbs more, works the trail crew, deliberates whether to return to graduate studies in geology in the city or surrender to the mountain life. He also pursues, but not very aggressively, the Interpreter, a young woman who longs for a small mountain lake, as Rumi longs for Hooker and Brown.

Rumi’s fascination with early 19th-century explorers is passed along to readers through journal excerpts of David Thompson, David Douglas, Arthur Coleman, and Norman Collie. Rumi also tells stories of these to the Interpreter, who likes her history in story form. No small part of this book’s charm comes from its respect for this history and Rumi’s deeply felt connection to it: “I want to follow Norman Collie’s path. Collie followed Arthur Coleman, who followed old Indian maps. Coleman found the pass but no mountains fitting the descriptions of Hooker and Brown.” And from an earlier observation: “Coleman and I are connecting.... [He] wandered out into the wilderness—an impulse that strikes me as boyish and uncomplicated. That’s the life I want.”

Rumi’s travels (and Auld’s—doubtless this is writing of the kind that blurs the fiction/nonfiction boundary) create a wonderfully, deeply felt sense of the Canadian Rockies. Many of the places he describes I know from experience and from reading, and I found myself cross-referencing one of my favorite guidebooks, Sean Dougherty’s *Selected Alpine Climbs in the Canadian Rockies*. Auld’s story, as a story of place, so lovingly and accurately evokes those mountains that I found myself wanting to follow Rumi as he follows the explorers.

The book opens and closes with descriptions of climbs, and there are more in between. There is never a doubt that Auld knows exactly of what he speaks, but better yet is that he gives it to us fresh: it’s familiar, but we never saw it in quite this way. For the author of a book so filled with history and topography (in other words, it’s *discursive*), Auld has a very light touch—Rumi’s story and his voice carry us through. The book will appeal particularly to those of us who have struggled to find balance between the siren call of the mountains and the traditional *adult* worlds of schooling and careers; in other words, to all of us.

