

SOME RECENT CLIMBING BOOKS

Rock Climbing, by PETER KNOCK. A Foyles Handbook. (W. & G. Foyle, Ltd, 1963, 4s.)

Rock Climbing in Britain, by J. E. B. WRIGHT. (Nicholas Kaye, 1963, 16s.)

A Climber's Guide to Pontesford Rocks, by W. UNSWORTH. (Wilding & Son Ltd, Shrewsbury, 1962, 5s. 3d.)

The Craft of Climbing, by W. H. MURRAY and J. E. B. WRIGHT. (Nicholas Kaye, 1964, 15s.)

Artificial Aids in Mountaineering, by GEOFFREY SUTTON. (Nicholas Kaye, 1962, 9s. 6d.)

This group of books has a sort of sequence, and Peter Knock's book makes an excellent start. His descriptions of equipment are practical and up to date and his writing is clear and lively. The book is well produced, illustrated with drawings and photographs and at the price is good value for money. Though there is a chapter on climbing in the Alps this is strictly confined to rock routes.

Having decided to go climbing, Wright's book tells you where to go for the best climbing. He describes the climbing areas of Britain, recommending the most interesting routes for beginner and expert. A good feature of the book is the way he considers the crags in their situations amongst the hills and gives many combinations of rock climbs with scrambles and hill walks to produce satisfying mountain days. Though half the book is devoted to Scottish climbs local climbers will be disappointed to find that the Cairngorms receive scant mention. This is more likely due to unfamiliarity on the author's part, as he describes only those climbs he knows personally, than to the absence of good routes.

If you ever find yourself in the West Midlands and feel the urge to do a rock climb then the guide to Pontesford Rocks describes about fifty routes you can try out on this crag in Shropshire.

The Craft of Climbing is meant for the more experienced climber. The title is misleading in that the book as well as dealing with the finer points of rope management and snow and rock climbing has sections of a polemical nature about such matters as nationalism in Himalayan mountaineering and unreasonable use of artificial aids. The two subjects are mixed throughout the text and, along with the different styles of the authors, produces a book which is too disjointed for pleasant reading. The sections by Murray on snow climbing are very good.

If, after having read the previous authors' strictures on artificial aids, you are still determined to try this branch of the sport, then Sutton's book is a must. He makes a comprehensive survey of the equipment needed and gives a clear and detailed account of the techniques used.

P. F. H.

The Real Book of Mountaineering, by W. B. MCMORRIS. (Dobson, 1961, 10s. 6d.)

This is one of an American series designed to cover, for young readers, a "range of subjects in a virtually encyclopedic manner". The author's idea of what this should imply will not be that of any responsible mountaineer. Scarcely any climbing exploit is considered worthy of mention unless it involved sensation,

disaster or defeat. The book is less an attempt to instruct the young climber regarding what to do and what not to do than a glorification of those who tended to push their attacks beyond the prudent limits. The style is naïve and the line drawings do little to instruct the novice in good techniques. The short bibliography that concludes the book would direct the learner in the right direction, but there is no mention of Winthrop-Young.

Mont Blanc and the Seven Valleys, by R. FRISON-ROCHE and P. TAIRRAZ. (Nicholas Kaye, 1961, 45s.)

Between Heaven and Earth, by G. REBUFFAT and P. TAIRRAZ. (Nicholas Vane, 1965, 63s.)

Starlight and Storm, by GASTON REBUFFAT. (Kaye and Ward, 1968, 30s.)

Mont Blanc and the Seven Valleys is a background book, of interest to climbers as well as to the hill-walker making one of the simpler tours in the Mont Blanc area. It provides a particularly good introduction to many of the less-commonly visited valleys of Switzerland, Italy or France that penetrate into the Massif. There are 169 excellent photographs, mainly by Pierre Tairraz, to illustrate Roger Frison-Roche's text, which has been translated by Roland Le Grand and Wilfred Noyce. Apart from the topographical descriptions, the glimpses of the folklore of this remarkably compact area well repay the careful reader, who will however find occasional slips such as the location of the Giomein in Zermatt or the misdating of the first ascent of the Via della Peira as 1939.

But it is good to be taken again over the Col de Balme which the men of Argentière used to cross to tend their vineyards above Martigny, to stand by Lake Chécrouit and look down into the Val Veni or up to the Peuterey ridge and the Dames Anglaises, or, of course, to wander along the path to the Mauvais Pas, beyond the masses at the Montanvers, with its amazing expanse of mountain from the Dru to the Geant, above the Mer de Glace.

The photographs of the Mont Blanc region by the Tairrez family of Chamonix have long been famous, and the selection in *Between Heaven and Earth*, in which the pictures overshadow the text, demonstrate that fourth generation Pierre is adequately upholding the reputation. He is responsible for most of the 104 monochrome and eight colour plates. It is somewhat difficult to judge the latter, as the colour reproduction could be better, but most of the black and whites capture the feeling of rock and snow completely.

There are photographs of a Matterhorn traverse in addition to those covering such notable climbs in the Mont Blanc area as the South Face of the Aiguille du Midi and the Bonatti routes on the Drus. The text is largely that prepared as commentary for the film "Entre Terre et Ciel" which many will have seen in Chamonix on a wet day. As such it does not, when read, match up to the photographs. But for these alone the book is well worth study—although the price is high.

Starlight and Storm was first published in France in 1954 and in England in 1956, and has now appeared in a second English edition. It is a non-technical account of the author's impressions during his ascents of six of the great alpine north faces—Grandes Jorasses, Piz Badile, Drus, Matterhorn, Cima Grande di Lavaredo and Eiger. The text is very short, no more than 170 pages of about

240 words, and while some of the 40 photographs are excellent, others are disappointing, in that the opportunity is not taken to relate them adequately to the routes. The appeal of this book must be not to the climber who is looking for information about the climbs discussed, but to the general reader with an interest in the approach of a great climber to his early climbs.

The Mountaineer's Companion, edited by MICHAEL WARD. (Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1966, 50s.)

In the 600 pages of this compilation, many memories of outstanding moments in the hills are revived, and it is to be hoped that at least some of the short extracts from classics of mountaineering, and from accounts of recent major ascents, will encourage the reader to turn to the originals. Perhaps the chief criticism of what is essentially a bedside book is that some of the items are rather short—sometimes barely two pages—and therefore scarcely adequate to introduce the author. The section dealing with Everest, on the other hand, covers the subject adequately, with quotations from leading participants in all the important expeditions.

Several glaring misprints have slipped into the text: Bennen certainly was not avalanched on the Hant-de-Cry in 1846, to cite one double error. But probably there are equally obvious mistakes in this *Journal* and your editor-reviewer, reminded elsewhere in this most enjoyable *Companion* of the feud between Coolidge and Davidson regarding their mis-spelling of mountain names, can only recommend it to all members as an excellent introduction to many of the best books about mountains.

Climbing Days, by DOROTHY PILLEY. (Secker and Warburg, 1965, 42s.)

Mountaineering in Scotland, by W. H. MURRAY. (J. M. Dent, 1966, 8s. 6d.)

New editions of two mountaineering classics fall to be reported. Thirty years have passed since *Climbing Days* heralded the penetration of the Alps by women. Then it was outstanding in the current alpine literature: it still reads well. It was started when the author was in China, homesick for European hills. *Mountaineering in Scotland* was written in even more restrictive circumstances, in a German prison camp after the author's capture in the North African desert. Now it has appeared as an Aldine paperback, with the 1962 revised text but without the plates of the earlier editions. It is, of course, the story of the initiation of modern rock and ice climbing in Scotland in the 1930's. Nothing more needs to be said about either of these books—they are essential reading for all with a real interest in climbing and climbers.

The Ascent of Dhaulagiri, by M. EISELIN. (Oxford, 1961, 25s.)

This is one of the standard accounts of the first ascents of the great mountains of the world. Dhaulagiri, one of the eight-thousanders, was climbed by a Swiss Expedition making use of aerial transport. The Pilatus Porter plane proved somewhat unreliable and eventually crashed, but not before making a successful landing on the 5,700-m N.E. col. On Friday, May 13, 1960, six men, including

two Sherpas, reached the summit: ten days later other two of the party of 13 gained the 8,222-m top, by way of the four ridge camps above advanced base on the N.E. col. This is a good account of a successful expedition, without any climbing mishaps, by the 28-year-old leader.

Americans on Everest, by J. R. ULLMAN. (Michael Joseph, 1965, 50s.)

This official record of an expedition which included the first traverse of Everest joins those of earlier British and Swiss expeditions in providing a factual account of the planning and organisation of a considerable exploit. But, like several of its predecessors, it gives a somewhat impersonal impression of the proceedings, and one must once again await with some impatience the personal accounts of members of the summit parties. For this highly successful expedition put two two-men parties on the North Top by the South Col route and a third (Unsoeld and Hornbein) by the West Ridge, with a descent to the South Col.

The chronicler, a professional writer, is certainly an experienced and senior mountaineer whose earlier books will be known to most members, but because of an unfortunate disability which developed during the year of active preparation, he was unable to get far beyond Kathmandu. So his record, however well written, is inevitably somewhat second-hand.

The leader was Norman Dyhrenfurth, who had had considerable Himalayan experience, but several of the other 19 members of the party were on their first expedition outside North or South America. It was a well-organised and competent party, which concentrated on the main task of reaching the top by the South Col, and had, as its reward, the almost last-minute, brilliant traverse as a well-deserved bonus, because of the magnificent efforts of the small team who were all that could be spared to reconnoitre the West Ridge. Unfortunately, the collapse of an ice wall on the Khumbu Glacier during the initial approach to the Western Cwm cost the life of one of the party. Miraculously, his American and Sherpa colleagues on the rope were not seriously injured.

As is the custom, more than one-third of the book is concerned with technical accounts, by the responsible officers, of many of the administrative and scientific aspects of the expedition. The quality and presentation of the photographs unfortunately fail to attain the high standard that might be hoped for in a book of this importance. The end-paper drawings, however, give, as no map could, a wonderful impression of the whole area.

Mountaineering, by ALAN BLACKSHAW. (Kaye and Ward, 1968, 42s.)

The young climbers of the immediate post-war period seeking instruction were well served by John Barford's Pelican *Climbing in Britain*, published in 1946, but this has long been unavailable and the many attempts to fill the gap scarcely met all the requirements. In 1965, however, with the approval of the B.M.C. and A.S.C.C., the first printing of this most adequate replacement came from Penguin, who reprinted it with revisions in 1968, and now a hard-cover version has been made available by Kaye and Ward.

This training manual on hill-walking and climbing in Britain, with an introduction to alpine mountaineering, should be required reading for every novice and most

experienced climbers. It is impossible in a few lines to detail the topics covered in the 500-odd pages—they range from equipment and technique, through advice on where to climb, to a glossary of mountain names and a short bibliography of climbing books. There are odd remarks that might be misconstrued. For instance, there is in fact, as stated, access for cars to the Zermatt camp site—but there is still a prohibition on taking a car beyond St Niklaus without permission! But this is scarcely a climbing matter.

The descriptions and explanations of the procedures recommended in different circumstances are clear and comprehensive, and the equipment needed is adequately detailed. It was good to read that climbing nails “have certain advantages over the vibram sole on greasy rock or on hard snow or ice, and their value must not be overlooked, particularly for Scottish conditions”. Most accidents in the hills arise because of inadequate adhesion!

CAIRNGORM GUIDE-BOOKS

THE third edition of the S.M.C. guide, *The Cairngorms*, Sir Henry Alexander's classic, revised in 1950 by W. A. Ewen, has been out of print for some time. A new edition is in preparation and will be published by the Scottish Mountaineering Trust, who have taken over responsibility for all the guide-books from the Club. There are, however, still available the two volumes of the *Climbers' Guide to the Cairngorms Area* by Malcolm Smith. Those members who did not buy Vol. 1 (The Cairngorms) and Vol. 2 (Lochnagar, Broad Cairn, Clova) when they appeared in 1961 and 1962 under S.M.C. auspices will find that they now must pay 20s. and 18s. respectively, some 10s. more each than the original prices.

These pocket-size guides provide a complete introduction to the worthwhile climbing and scrambling in the Cairngorms Area. It would probably astonish the pioneers to find that of the 337 pages of route descriptions, only 70 deal with Lochnagar.

The stimulus given to climbing in the area by the author's achievement in producing such excellent guides and meeting an obvious requirement is illustrated by the number of new routes described in the S.M.C. Journals since they appeared. In the May 1968 issue, over 30 new climbs are listed and a revised edition will undoubtedly be called for as soon as this one is exhausted.

CLIMBING JOURNALS

WHILE this *Journal* has failed to meet several publication deadlines over an unfortunately long period, there has been piling up on the reviewer's desk—and the Library shelves—such an accumulation of Journals of Kindred Clubs that it has become manifestly impossible to find space even to mention them, far less refer to their contents. We can only express our thanks to all the clubs who have sent us their publications.