

BOOK REVIEWS

After Everest. Tenzing, as told to Malcolm Barnes. Allen & Unwin, 1977. £4.95.

Tenzing, who is illiterate, has dictated his book to a skilful and sensitive amanuensis, who I feel has delivered Tenzing's message like a medium or good advocate, as he would have wished had he had the ability himself.

From being a simple yak-herder, the author became an outstanding mountaineer and leader of men, conquerer of Everest, honoured throughout the world and a hero, above all, to his own countrymen. Such fame almost overwhelmed this retiring and unsophisticated man; he was invited to many countries, he was awarded many honours and decorations including the George Medal, the Cullum medal of the R.G.S., the Hubbard Medal of the U.S.A., two Soviet Medals and the Star of Nepal. He was transformed from a peasant to a man whose name was a household word in every country. Attempts were made to drag him into politics, newspaper men tried to involve him in East/West confrontation, and large sums of money were offered to lure him into the film world, a great temptation to a poor man. Like many other people, some not so far from here, he worried lest the tourist traffic for which he was partly responsible, would destroy the old way of life and tempt young Sherpas away to try the 'good life'; and whether prosperity and western skills, especially medicine, would outweigh these disadvantages.

However he remembered the advice of Sir John Hunt to stick to mountaineering, and accepted the post of Director of Field Training at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute at Darjeeling. He has, he says, lived three different lives, as a peasant boy on the pastures, as a mountaineer, and as a teacher of climbers; each of them satisfying, happy and rewarding. He has a rich family life, has travelled to far distant lands, and met many people. He feels a lucky and happy man.

Tenzing's modest personality smiles out from this book. It is a very good read, and I recommend it warmly.

P.W.

Hamish's Mountain Walk. Hamish Brown. Gollancz, 1978. £7.50.

"Where lies the land to which the ship would go?

Far, far ahead, is all her seamen know."

If these lines strike a chord in you, read this book. If you know and love our hills, read this book. Read it anyway, for it will tell you things.

As everyone now knows, this is the book of Hamish Brown's traverse of all the Munros in one journey. He passed through some pretty remote places on the way, and has a heartening comment on that remoteness, "the best of defences in a lazy society, long miles of necessary self-propulsion." Some of the hazards of that means of progress are nicely summed up with words like *slaistery*, and this quote from Kipling:

"Hail, snow an' ice that praise the lord; I've met them at their work,

An' wished we had anither route or they anither kirk."

Some of the lonely spots are not as lonely as they were. Even the "sheep" road sign at Fasag in Torridon that someone modified into a mammoth was soon corrected by the bureaucracy. The book is full of interesting lore. I found it fascinating to read

new bits about areas I thought I knew quite well; to follow yet a different route to a hill already "done" several times.

Hamish Brown is a self-confessed elitist, the antithesis of the committee-directed, "properly" equipped person that some would have as the only frequenters of the hills. Read him on *rules*, "... a set of procedures which ultimately fail"; read him on the hazards of cooking with Zip firefighters in Knoydart. Just read him; you'll enjoy it.

D.G.H.

Everest, Goddess of the Wind. Ronald Faux. Chambers, 1978. £5.95.

Ronald Faux is the Scottish correspondent of "The Times" and an experienced mountaineer who has taken part in major ascents in the Himalayas, the Alps and in Norway. His book makes full use of the journalist's skills; never boring the reader and supporting the printed words with good lay-out, clear maps and diagrams and above all, breath-taking photographs for which alone the book would be worth having.

It relates the history of this greatest of mountains from its discovery in 1825 and naming after Col. Sir George Everest, a former Surveyor General of India; through every attempt at conquering it, until the fastest ascent in 1977 by a South Korean expedition. Many of these early attempts are today almost unbelievable. Mallory and Norton are shown in a photograph of 1922 at 27,000 feet dressed in tweed suits, felt alpine hats, First World War puttees and boots more suitable for Snowdon. Yet in 1924 Norton reached over 28,000 feet, and Odell spent 11 days above 22,000 feet and twice climbed to 27,000 feet without oxygen. On this expedition Mallory lost his life, climbing a mountain, as he said on his American lecture tour in 1923 "Because it is there" whether he ever got there – to the top, will never be known.

Though the main value of this book is as a history, and for its pictures, there are additional interesting chapters on the flora and fauna of Nepal as well as the Yeti and the people.

This book, of little over 100 pages, can easily be read in an evening but it will remain a pleasure and a source of reference for much longer.

P.W.

Mountain Adventures. Karl Lukan. Collins 2nd Impress. 1978. £2.50

My first impressions were that this book was well worth the price for the photographs but I do have some reservations. It is sometimes rather difficult to find what the photographs are, as they are not always beside the text describing them. The paragraphs in the various chapters jump suddenly in time and place and make disjointed reading. Although not a book on the technique of climbing, it does include some aspects of this and, in several instances, are either not clear (P 34 – Prussiker) or not safe (P 36 – 2 man roped party). As for the belay (P 75), it is both confusing and inaccurate. If anyone reads the book to learn about actual climbing, I would advise him not to try and unravel the illustrations but to buy something authentic on climbing techniques.

Despite these criticisms, there is much to enjoy and interest in the various stories and photographs.

T.C.W.

The Games Climbers Play. Edited by Ken Wilson. Diadem Books Ltd, 1978.

Do not be misled by the title, This is not a compendium of pastimes like Piton Darts or Putting-the-Boot played in and around the base on wet days or long evenings, nor even of mountain frivolities like Blind-Man's-Bluff-on-the-Cornice indulged in to while away the tedium of a boring ascent. It is in fact an anthology of articles on climbing inspired and guided, according to the editor, by an article – reproduced in the collection – which first appeared in "Mountain" in 1967. In this essay climbing as a pastime was viewed as a set of games which could be arranged in order of increasing difficulty of achieving the objective but of decreasing complexity and rigidity of the unwritten, but accepted, rules by which the game is played. The games, as the author of the article classified them, ranged from bouldering to climbing big and distant mountains. This concept of games with rules led on to a discussion of the ethical background to climbing. With this essay as a starting point Wilson has compiled a collection of writings which reveal more of climbers' attitudes to, and impressions of the sport than of technicalities of the craft; the mountains themselves hardly figure except as the arena in which the games are played.

There are just under one hundred and thirty articles almost all taken complete from magazines or club journals – a mere half dozen or so appear to be extracts from books – and thereby reveal a facet of the literature of climbing which few members other than the most avid reader would come across. The anthology is about climbing as distinct from hill walking and about hard, modern climbing at that. The majority of the contributions were first published in the 1970's and only about ten appeared originally before 1950. They therefore represent the attitudes of the post-war generation of climbers up to the present day. These attitudes do differ from those of the previous generation of climbers whose writings influenced me when I first started climbing in the late 1940's and which are represented in this collection by extracts from books by Frank Smythe and Colin Kirkus. I would have liked to have seen more examples of that generation the better to have made a comparison, but Wilson has not set out to provide a history of attitudes to climbing and the anthology as it is, provides a fascinating insight into the minds of those climbers who tackle these extremely difficult and arduous climbs.

American and British authors are represented and among the latter are Scottish writers. There are two articles by Tom Patey and five by Robin Smith – both tragically killed in climbing accidents – including the latter's 'The Bat and the Wicked', one of the most entertaining climbing articles I have ever read, which was first published in the S.M.C. Journal.

Though most of the contributions to the book relate to hard climbing there are sections devoted to the use of mountains as training grounds i.e. as the location for what are generally termed 'Outdoor Pursuits', and to mountain safety. For example there is an excellent account and discussion of the Cairngorm tragedy of November 1971 when six members of a school party died of exposure in a blizzard on that mountain, which bears on both these aspects of mountain activity. This series of articles should be of particular interest of those Club members who are involved with taking parties of young people to the hills.

Like any anthology it is meant to be dipped into; it cannot be easily or enjoyably read from cover to cover. Because of this and it is quite a thick book, I imagine there will be a problem for the librarian to get it back onto the shelves for the next reader.

P.R.H.

"Trango" The Nameless Tower. Jim Curran, Dark Peak 1978. £6.95.

A story of the second attempt on this small but spectacular rock tower partway up the Baltoro Glacier in the Karakoram Himalaya. After Doug Scott's epic on the Ogre most people will have heard of the region. Likewise most will have heard of Joe Brown and will approach an account of an expedition including Joe and Martin Boysen with some considerable interest.

The account reads well, is a masterpiece of understatement as regards the climbing itself, but the reader's interest is well held to the final conclusion. As so often happens with some of our famous climbers writing about themselves, there are too many derogatory remarks as regards fitness and organisation or as they would have us believe, lack of it, some of the humour too is pretty 'basic' nevertheless the tale goes well.

There are some excellent photographs and some not so good. I found it annoying to constantly have to turn back to an index at the beginning to find out what all the colour illustrations were.

Generally an interesting well produced book, but at £6.95 one which I am well pleased to borrow from a library shelf.

A.F.G.C.

Collins Guide to Mountains and Mountaineering. John Cleare. Collins 1979. £7.95.

This large book claims to be a complete guide to the principal mountain ranges of the world. Major peaks and other features of each range are listed, with notes on centres, facilities, guide-books and maps. Thus the two pages on Scotland reveal that Some Important Mountains include 1 Ben Nevis 2 Ben Macdui 20 Lochnagar 71 Liathach 117 Sgurr Alasdair (nine such are named, the numbers appear to be due to Munro). The SMC, JMCS, and BMC own seven huts, and it is traditional to climb from "bothies" or "howffs". Fort William, Aviemore, Glencoe, and Glen Brittle are the only centres named, and access is said to be often difficult (to the centres, not the hills). Rather more useful is the information on guide-books and maps (here the author records that the OS maps "still suffer from recent metrication").

That all sounds rather critical, but I enjoyed reading and looking at, this book. The photographs are very good. The diagrams seem adequate and of course if one's interest is aroused regarding a particular region, a starting point is given to enable guide-books and maps to be located. Anyhow, it's there in the Library for browsing through, or for more serious initial consultation if you're thinking of going anywhere from the Punjab to Patagonia. It's a *macro* mountain book in contrast to *Hamish's Mountain Walk* which is full of *micro* mountain detail.

D.G.H.

CONTRIBUTIONS -

The Editor welcomes a constant supply of material for the Journal. The main articles, by tradition, should be from 1500 to 3000 words in length. However, smaller articles would be appreciated particularly for the Notes section, Black and White photographs need not be larger than contact prints and it is helpful if the negatives are available. It would be much appreciated if all contributions could be typewritten "fair copies". The Editor reserves the right to edit, abridge or omit material submitted for publication.