

## BOOK REVIEWS

*A Sunny Day in the Himalayas*. Peter Hillary. Hodder & Stoughton, 1980. £7.95.

A difficult book to review without seeming unduly hard on Peter Hillary. I got the impression it had been put together in a hurry to help defray the outstanding costs of his expedition attempt to climb Ama Dablam.

For fifteen chapters and 166 pages it is a fairly slim volume and we are well through the book (ch. 12) before we even come to the Expedition itself. The first chapters seem to be mere padding. The expedition eventually got off to a good start on a difficult and risky route up Ama Dablam and depending on how you view these things the 'Gods' were not unduly severe. The climbing party were swept off the face by an avalanche and one member killed. The others, all with some serious injuries, managed to beat an epic retreat and extricate themselves from a very dangerous and uncomfortable situation. Peter Hillary does give Reinhold Messner and his colleagues full credit for their help in the final stages of the retreat and all have recovered from their harrowing experiences.

This is probably a book mountaineers will read, therefore it would have helped one's judgement to have known the full extent of the party's injuries, as discovered after the retreat from the mountain – nowhere are these clearly stated. I doubt if there is sufficient of interest about the country to keep non-mountaineers enthralled. There are a few lovely pictures and some explanatory line drawings.

Perhaps since this young man was lucky enough to survive this unpleasant experience and to climb again, his next book will be of a somewhat higher standard.

A.F.G.C.

*K2 – Mountain of Mountains*. Reinhold Messner & A. Gogna. Kaye & Ward Ltd, 1981. £12.50.

K2, 8611m, is the second highest mountain in the world. It has a fearsome reputation and has claimed many lives since the first attempt on its summit in 1892. This is the mountain upon which Nick Estcourt lost his life. K2 was first climbed in 1954 by an Italian expedition.

K2 – Mountain of Mountains is the story of the successful 1979 ascent by Reinhold Messner's international expedition.

This is a book written in a rather unconventional style for a mountaineering book. The text is divided by magnificent photographs into four complete sections, two of which are by Messner and two by Alessandro Gogna. The weakness of the book lies in Gogna's sections.

Alessandro Gogna is described by Messner as "one of those people who knows what death is about and loves the world". His preoccupation with death, his worries about his health which amount almost to hypochondria and his worries about his relationships with other members of the expedition leave an uneasy impression on the reader. His style is rather florid but may not have been improved by translation.

Reinhold Messner's contribution is happier. He tells the story of the climb itself and gives some interesting information on the Karakorum and its inhabitants. His style is rather metaphysical and less practical than, say, Bonington's.

But one would buy this book for its photographs alone. It is lavishly illustrated with superb photographs – in fact, it contains some of the most impressive mountain photographs I have ever seen.

The rest of the book, after the main text, is taken up with a history of K2, information about successful ascents and a list of expeditions to the mountain between 1892 and 1980.

G.S.J.C.

*Classic Walks.* K. Wilson & R. Gilbert. Diadem Books, London, 1982. £17.85.

This book is a companion volume to *Big Walks* by the same authors. The walks described here are 'classic' in the sense of being typical and excellent of their kind but unlike those in the earlier book they are not necessarily long and strenuous nor are they all mountain walks. Indeed the book opens with one more or less at sea level, the walk from Kinlochbervie to Cape Wrath, but this surely must be considered a classic. Seventy nine walks are described throughout the British Isles, including nine in Ireland and about a third of them are in Scotland. The Cairngorms feature only one, the traverse of the Lairig Ghru. The character of the walks is very varied – coastal paths, ridgeways and ancient tracks, crossings of mountain and moorland – and illustrates the wide variety of rough walking available in Britain and Ireland.

The compilers have brought together an impressive array of over fifty writers to describe these walks and expeditions. The descriptions are brief but all give vivid accounts of the character of the walks and the impression which they make on the authors. The text is accompanied by many superb photographs, records not only of the magnificent scenery which make these walks classics but of people on the hills and in huts and bothies.

This book is not intended as a guide book; it is meant for browsing through and for firing the imagination. Of the walks included in this book I found I had done, all or in part, a third of them and on reflection I had to agree with the compilers that they should all be considered as classics. On the basis of this sample I would very much like to do the remainder. I tried to think of walks which I had done which they had not included, excluding those already described in *Big Walks* and I must admit there were very few which I would want to add. In fact the idea could be used for a hill walker's party game: list your seventy nine favourite walks and see how many are in the Wilson/Gilbert book. The collection could also be a goal for all those who enjoy ticking things off lists. I would like to christen the walks 'Wilberts' and one could collect these like others collect Munros except that the collection would appeal to those very superior walkers who appreciate quality in preference to the brute energetics of peak-bagging.

At nearly £18 the book carries a hefty price tag, but it is worth the money for its blend of imaginative and evocative writing and also the illustrations.

P.H.

*Walking in Scotland.* Edited by Roger Smith. Spur Books, 1982. £4.95.

This book aims to provide an introduction to 'the infinite richness and variety of Scotland's Walking Country'.

It can perhaps be fairly defined as a 'potted guide', including advice on transport and accommodation, information on local history and geology and notes on the walks themselves. This is in sections which cover all Scotland's Regions, with the exception of the Northern Isles. The routes are defined rather sketchily, so a map of the area described is an essential accessory while using the guide. Despite these limitations it is likely to be of value to those visiting an unfamiliar part of the country and wanting to get the maximum out of their stay.

Good features are an introduction emphasising mountain safety and the need for proper footwear and clothing, and the repeated warnings on the ease with which the wilderness, so strongly recommended for enjoyment and exploration, can be destroyed for ever by 'developers' with their bulldozers.

R.P.

*Grampian Ways*. Robert Smith. Melven Press, 1980. £8.95.

An entertaining and easy to read book covering all the Grampian Passes, starting with the Causey Mounth in the east – the original route from Aberdeen to Stonehaven; to the farthest west, the Road to Atholl, through Glen Garry and the Pass of Drumochter, now mostly covered by the railway line to Inverness.

Robert Smith obviously has a great love for the history of the region, and recalls that the Mounth tracks were used from Roman times, through to Bruce, Montrose and the Covenanters, and not least by Queen Victoria on her expeditions along her favourite hill paths – quoting her enthusiastic comments on the scenery. He mentions too, the tragic deaths of 5 hillwalkers one winter's day on Jock's Road, illustrating the harshness of the north east climate.

The passes are quite graphically described, each chapter has a simple map though I found a one inch map in hand made the routes easier to follow. The author has included many of his own photographs which one can only wish were in colour.

*Grampian Ways* will not only appeal to the hill-walker who can tread the tracks but to the reader who appreciates the wildness of this area of Scotland's countryside, enjoying its legends and history.

J.J.

*Cold Climbs*. Compiled by Ken Wilson, Dave Alcock and John Barry.  
Diadem Books, 1983. £17.95.

This splendid book is both an exciting account of sixty-five notable snow and ice climbing routes in Great Britain, forty-seven of them in Scotland and also, read as a whole, a fascinating history of the challenging and addictive sport of winter climbing from the days when the early pioneers were keeping their hand in for the Alpine season to today's climber ascending the old routes in record time and attempting harder and harder new climbs with the benefit of modern techniques and equipment. From the exhausting ambidexterous chipping of steps by Raeburn "the only way to make an impression on this toughest of snow is to cut a groove with the blade and then drive the piece out with the pick", to the front-pointing crampon and curved hand-pick technique of the modern climber.

The early pioneers of winter climbing were followed in the thirties by a small group of influential Scottish climbers who began to show the potential of the Scottish mountains in winter. After the war there was a renewed interest in snow and ice climbing with strength and resolution still the main criteria for success but gradually, as the equipment and resultant techniques improved, there were astonishing advances. The classic gully climb, Point Five, on Ben Nevis was first climbed by controversial seize tactics lasting five days. The second ascent took seven hours and now it has been soloed in less than an hour. However, the essential attraction of winter climbing for the enthusiast remains the same, the hostile environment, the short winter day, the often unpredictable conditions, the challenge and the exhilaration of success and all this is captured in this fine book.

*Cold Climbs* is the latest in a series on aspects of British mountaineering. The standard of writing is very high, much of it being commissioned from climbers recording their experiences on repeat ascents and the contributors include many of today's top climbers as well as legendary names from the past.

The price is high but this is an exceptional book profusely illustrated with spectacular photographs, both black and white and colour. It will appeal to, and inspire, the growing number of winter climbers and give much vicarious pleasure to the armchair enthusiast who enjoys epic accounts of struggle and adventure.

E.F.J.