

BOOK REVIEWS

Shackleton. Roland Huntford, Hodder and Stoughton, 1985, £30.00

The author deals briefly with Shackleton's early life, first of all at Kilkea in Ireland and latterly at Sydenham in London where his father had a doctors' practice. He left school at the age of 16 and joined the Merchant Navy, where he rose to be third officer on a ship of the Union Castle Line.

The book however is mainly concerned with his polar expeditions. The first was with Scott in 1901/03 when he was in the party which set a new record for 'Furthest South' of 82° 17' S, beating that of 78° 58' S set by Borchgrevinck four years earlier. The party endured great hardships and were greatly troubled by scurvy, especially Shackleton, who was, as a result of this invalided home by Scott on the relief ship in 1903.

Shackleton felt disgraced at being invalided home and determined to return to the Antarctic with his own expedition. He became Secretary of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, but much of his time was spent looking for backers for such an expedition. He finally succeeded in getting his expedition off the ground in 1907, largely thanks to the generosity of William Beardmore, a Dundee industrialist. The expedition was remarkably successful, although they did not succeed in reaching the Pole. They did, however, discover the Beardmore Glacier which they ascended to the Polar Plateau and reached 88° 23' S, only 97 miles from the Pole and that was 360 miles nearer than the achievement of 1903. A party also made the first ascent of Mount Erebus. Shackleton became a national hero on his return, but much of his time was spent travelling and lecturing to raise money to pay off the debts that his expedition had accumulated.

In 1914 he set off on his second expedition, this time with the aim of crossing the Continent from Vahsel Bay on the Weddell Sea to McMurdo Sound on the Ross Sea, via the South Pole. He was however destined never to reach Vahsel Bay. The ship was trapped and finally crushed by the ice of the Weddell Sea. The book describes the story of his incredible escape from this predicament — the patient wait on the ice as it drifted northwards, the journey in the ship's boats from the edge of the ice to Elephant Island, the very hazardous journey across the Southern Ocean to South Georgia and finally the first crossing of the mountains of South Georgia to get help from the whaling station at Stromness Bay. Then the remainder of the crew had to be rescued from Elephant Island, and after that it was across to the Ross Sea to go to the assistance of his back up party who had also got into difficulties.

Shackleton organised one more expedition, which set off in 1921, but unfortunately he died at Grytviken in South Georgia the night after they got there. Shackleton was buried at Grytviken. The expedition went on under the command of Frank Wild, who had been deputy leader, but little was achieved.

Roland Huntford's previous book about Scott and Amundsen proved rather controversial with his exposure of what he saw as the failings of Scott's expeditions. He does not spare Shackleton some of the same criticisms — the hasty way in which the expeditions were organised, the haphazard way in which he chose the personnel and the complete lack of suitable training prior to the expeditions. He clearly sees Shackleton as a better leader than Scott. Of necessity this book repeats a lot that has been written before but there is quite a lot of new material and it is a very readable book despite its considerable length.

G.E.

Ben Nevis: Britain's Highest Mountain. Ken Crocket. Scottish Mountaineering Trust, 1986, £14.95.

We are all familiar with the District Guide Books published by the Scottish Mountaineering Trust, and perhaps with their Climber's Guide Books, including one to the cliffs of Ben Nevis. This book is the first of what I understand will be a series of comprehensive descriptions of single mountains or small mountain groups. It is appropriate that the first is of Britain's highest mountain and one that has played such a dominating role in the development of Scottish climbing.

The major part of the book describes in some detail the history of climbing on the Ben from the 1880's to the present day. The first recorded ascent seems to have been a winter ascent of no.3 gully by unnamed climbers in the mid-1880's. The first rock climbs on the North Face and its ridges were made by Englishmen, the Hopkinson brothers, in 1892, but the members of the recently formed SMC started serious exploration of the cliffs in 1894. After that, as they say, the rest is history. It is a history involving the greatest names in Scottish climbing, and some of the great names from south of the border as well. The mountain has attracted its share of 'characters', all described with a wealth of anecdotes. Graham MacPhee, in 1931, was given the task of editing the new climber's guide and regularly motored from Liverpool in his Bentley for a week-end's climbing on the Ben picking up a companion in Glasgow on the way. A strange character was Brian Kellett who, whilst a forestry worker at Torlundy, made a number of first ascents in 1942 and 1943, often solo, before being killed on the mountain. The personalities of the climbers come through vividly in the telling, complete with the rivalries and animosities — sometimes trivial. Crocket describes the climbs and climbers in detail with many quotations from contemporary accounts in journals and books and the narrative makes fascinating and often exciting reading.

Though the book naturally is weighted towards a history of climbing on the North Face other aspects of the mountain are included. There are accounts of early visitors and of other modes and types of ascents. The Ben, because it is the highest point in Britain has attracted some very eccentric stunts — ascents by car or with various impediments like bedsteads and pianos — and of course it is the venue of the famous Ben Nevis race. There is a summary of the history of the observatory that was operated on the summit from 1883 - 1904 and there are appendices on Gaelic place-names, the geology, the flora and fauna, and on the mapping of the Ben.

The book is required reading for those interested in the development and history of Scottish climbing and I would recommend it to anyone interested in Scottish mountains because it is such a marvellous portrait of Ben Nevis written enthusiastically by some one who knows it well.

P.H.

Landscapes of Mallorca. Valerie Crespi-Green. Sunflower Books, 1984. £4.95.

Walking in Mallorca. June Parker. Cicerone Press, 1986. £4.95.

Mallorca, away from the beach resorts, is a beautiful island with fine mountains up to 4740 feet, a scale familiar to members. We have been several times for walking holidays on this island, but as in many Mediterranean countries, maps suitable for walking are difficult to obtain and not of the standard we are used to in Britain. Good road maps are readily available: Firestone 1:125,000, RV Reise 1:150,000 and Clyde 1:163,000. These are some help but the topographical detail and footpath marks are insufficient. It was therefore a great pleasure when the Sunflower 'Landscapes of ...' series began to appear. These admirable pocket books cover many Mediterranean islands and the near-Mediterranean Atlantic islands. As well as Mallorca they include: Corfu, Crete, Cyprus, Gran Canaria, Madeira, Rhodes and Tenerife. Guides to The Dolomites and South Tyrol are on the way.

These guides give a few car tours; and indeed in Mallorca, car hire is cheap and gives good access to the round walks. More important, 25 walks, some being open-ended; are given in great detail with accurate descriptions and sketch maps. As an example I quote Route 3, "The guard dog here is extremely menacing, and his chain is long; you can squeeze by just to the left of him". We, and another group from the Club on another occasion, found this just so! The walking routes are graded in difficulty — easy, strenuous, difficult, inadvisable in winter, only for experts and so on; but should present no problems for Club members. Advice is given on when and where to stay, and on using public transport, necessary for open-ended routes. Bus timetables are provided (which you are advised to check on arrival), there are line drawings, colour photographs, a fold-out colour map of the island, language hints and notes on items of interest en route.

All roads radiate from the attractive city of Palma, with its restaurants and services, and you need never visit the 'Ere we go' resorts such as Magaluf and Palma Nova. Advice is given on rights of way, and we have had no problems in this respect, though some members have had trouble with local farmers on Route 15. This is a first-class series and fulfils a great need for hill-walking holidays. We cannot praise them too highly.

June Parker's book is broadly similar, but for walkers only; and includes no car tours. It contains useful incidental information on language, food and local services. There is a good bibliography and sections on geology, natural history and rural industries. Walks are graded C to A + and reasonably accurately timed, as are Valerie's routes. The routes are within the capabilities of all experienced walkers. Sketch maps are more detailed topographically than Valerie's but no more informative.

In both books there are some minor inaccuracies which should not deter one, and sometimes new building can be confusing, as at the beginning of Valerie's walk 5 to El Teix (3500') and El Camino del Archiduque. The only tiresome inaccuracy we discovered was in June's book where the wrong KM stone was given as the starting point of route 27 to S'Alcadena (It should be K18). There are black and white photographs only.

We have used others of the 'Landscapes of ...' series with equal enjoyment, and recommend any members desirous of a relaxing hill-walking holiday away from the rigours of the Scottish weather, to take both these little books to Mallorca at Almond Blossom time. Don't forget your compass and sun-hat!

R. & P. W.

100 Best Routes on Scottish Mountains. Ralph Storar. David & Charles, 1987, £14.95

Typeset in Exmouth; printed in Hong Kong; published in Newton Abbot; the author an Englishman forbye. The critical faculties of the Scots-born reviewer, one who thinks he knows something both about book production and about the Scottish hills, are well honed.

He found the book totally recommendable, both for its form and for its content. Meticulous care has been taken with its presentation, it is beautifully illustrated, the sketch maps are immaculately clear and to the point, no misprint was seen, and the book is well printed and bound. (There is a headline oddity on pp.194-5, and a few page openings have no page numbers).

The contents of the book are nicely structured. Each of the 100 routes is accompanied by all relevant, and no irrelevant, information. The narrative about each uses economy of words but the facts essential for route following are in each case preceded by a paragraph of more general description of the location, in language that is never extravagant, usually just right. The English author almost justifies the label,

given him on the blurb, of 'Scottish Walker' when he invites enjoyment of a 'glorious stravaig' on the Grey Corries ridge. Another ridge, on Beinn Dearg Bheag, is, on the other hand, interestingly described — in his native idiom? — as exhilarating narrow!!

The author's inevitably personal choice of just '100 best' particular walking/scrambling routes needs no defence. Nor do the parameters for his choice: all the routes go over 2000 feet; involve no climbing with a rope; start and finish at the same (accessible by car) place; are encompassible within a single day; and are 'rated' for grade, terrain, degree of navigational challenge and line-of-escape potential. They cover all the hill areas of Scotland (7 are in the Cairngorms).

Greatly daring, but with advice and most usefully, our English author gives the meaning, and simple phonetic guidance to the pronunciation, of all Gaelic names relevant to his routes. (But most Club members would hesitate over Storer's Stoochke before cross-referring to Adam Watson and then finding with some relief that the stuaic is 'commonly' called the *Stooie!*)

The book was planned not for the rucksack but for 'whiling away many an hour in planning, anticipation and reflection'. It will do just that, affording pleasure and instruction to all ages and stages of Scottish-hill lover — not best perhaps to Munro baggers because of the 22 out of the '100' best routes being on hills *under* 3000 feet.

H.M.R.W.

Footnote: H.M.R.W. also provides a modicum of comfort to those who might have been dissuaded from attempting the traverse from Corroul to Dalwhinnie, not as described in Ralph Storer's book, but based on the following information - Editor:-

In at least the first edition of Wilson and Gilbert *The Big Walks*, the magnificent traverse that takes in the four Munros immediately to the north of Ben Alder (Walk 22 in the book) is described as 'an exceptionally long and serious walk over remote mountainous country' and the distance is stated to be 28 miles. That sounds forbidding. But no one need be unduly daunted by the distance, which one of the book's compilers, with friendly grace, acknowledges to be only between 24 and 25 miles. "The walk is across three of my old one-inch maps and this is probably where the error arose".

Speyside Railways. Rosemary Burgess and Robert Kinghorn. Aberdeen University Press 1988, £6.50.

This book is an interesting guide to the railway lines and stations along the valleys of the Rivers Spey, Fiddich and Isla. The routes covered — from Boat of Garten northwards to Craigellachie, and there branching to Elgin and Lossiemouth and to Keith Junction — were the preserves of the old Great North of Scotland Railway, but some Highland Railway Stations on the periphery, such as Fochabers Town, Burghead and Hopeman, are also dealt with. While the work does not basically deal with hill-walking, it will be of interest especially to older members of the Club, many of whom will have travelled on those scenic lines *en route* from Aberdeen to the Aviemore area, to traverse the Cairngorm tops, or go through the passes, to Braemar. (One may still go by rail to Aviemore from Aberdeen by the longer route *via* Inverness, but, with some good connections there, the current time-table shows a remarkably frequent and speedy service). It might be recalled that James A. Parker, a prominent Club member and author of the earlier editions of the *SMC Guide to the Western Highlands*, was from 1906 until 1922, the Engineer to the Great North of Scotland Railway.

The stations and other facilities are described in great detail with information given about the present use of such buildings as remain, after closure of the lines. The

only section of line still in use as such is of course that between Keith Junction and Dufftown, along which travel occasional 'tourist' trains such as the 'Northern Belle' from Aberdeen and others from further afield. The Speyside Walkway, formed out of parts of these lines, is usefully described, as are interesting features — historical and otherwise — of various towns which the lines served. There are no fewer than 126 photographic illustrations, and 17 maps.

Inevitably there is the occasional slip, such as the photograph (No 50) of Knockando Station with a train in it, captioned as 'November 1986'. I suspect that this should read 'November 1968' and that the train is an excursion ran in that month by the G.N.S.R. Association. Moreover, as sometimes seems to happen in local histories, there is some over-simplified criticism of a modern public authority — for example the statement on page 30 dealing with the Craigellachie to Boat of Garten section that 'by the 1960s it was obvious that BR was trying to close the line'. In fact, in 1959 several new passenger halts were opened, and in the line's last years the diesel rail-bus which then worked the service had some of its journeys extended south to Aviemore and north to Elgin from Craigellachie, all this presumably to suit the convenience of passengers and gain additional traffic. But that said, the book remains a most attractive and valuable account of Speyside's railways.

L.McA.

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.

