

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Hermann Buhl: Climbing without Compromise* Reinhold Messner and Horst Höfler, Baton Wicks 2000, ISBN 1-898573-48-4, £16.99.

This book is translated from German; its authors' purpose is to rescue Buhl from what they see as the falsely romantic picture of him in *Nangba Parbat Pilgrimage - The Lonely Challenge*. Re-issued recently in English, the original German edition (1954) has Buhl as author. However, Messner and Höfler claim that the editor made very significant alterations and additions to Buhl's manuscript (now lost). In contrast the current text makes extensive use of Buhl's climbing diaries, which unfortunately are dry reading for the general reader, and there are also personal memoirs from friends and family.

Both Buhl and Nanga Parbat were iconic for post-war German and Austrian climbers. The expedition to Nanga Parbat (1953) was in memory of Willy Merkl, the German climber who died on the mountain in 1934. Buhl's achievement as the solo summiteer on "the Fateful Mountain of the Germans" made him famous. He died four years later: according to Messner "without doubt he was at the time *the* mountaineer in the whole world".

The book has some fine moments, in particular Buhl's account of his assault on the summit. From leaving the last camp at 6950m, the ascent and descent took 41 hours, including a bivouac at 8000m. "The thought of bivouacking at 8000m with no sleeping bag, no survival bag, not even a rucksack doesn't seem particularly strange to me: I take it for granted."

We have to admire Buhl's tremendous will power; but there are surprising aspects of the ascent. He set off alone at 2 a.m. because his climbing partner wasn't ready. "Otto tells me I said 3 a.m. yesterday. Thinking he'll easily catch me up, I pack provisions for the summit in Otto's rucksack." Otto never did catch him up, and Buhl was seriously hungry. He abandoned his own rucksack hoping to increase his speed. He left his ice-axe as a summit flagpole, descending with two ski poles. "That one small mistake in the equipment department could almost have been the death of me." He loses one crampon and is left "standing like a stork on one leg ... without the faintest idea of how I can get off the slope. With the utmost caution I finally manage to reach rocky ground again." Buhl had frost-bitten feet and subsequently lost two toes.

When the expedition returned, Buhl and the leader, Karl Herrligkoffer quarrelled over Buhl's right to give lectures. We can't today discover the whole truth, but it is clear from the personal memoirs that Buhl was a very strong individualist and not a team player.

In 1957 Buhl led an alpine-style expedition to Broad Peak. Buhl and Kurt Diemberger were the second pair on the summit day, and unusually Buhl wasn't going well. Diemberger asks if he may go ahead and Buhl agrees, sits down and waits for his return. But then "I notice how quickly Kurt is getting up the last rise. We did - the whole team - want to stand on the summit. I'll give it a go. I meet Kurt returning. When I tell him I still want to go he walks with me. At 7 in the evening we are standing on the summit. It is a solemn moment". They descend, carefully, by moonlight.

With some days remaining, Buhl and Diemberger attempted Choglisa. On the final ridge they were suddenly hit by vicious winds and a white-out. They had to retreat while their tracks were still visible as the ridge was heavily corniced. Diemberger was leading. "It was almost impossible for me to see. Crack! Something shot through me like a shock. I jumped to the right - an instantaneous reflex action, and followed the slope downwards a little way, shattered by what I had seen - the rim of the cornice, with bits breaking away from it. My luck had been in - I had been clean out on the cornice - what would Hermann have to say about that, I wondered." When Hermann failed to appear "I dragged myself a little farther. I could see his last footprints in the snow, then the jagged edge of the broken cornice. Then the black depths." Buhl's body was never found.

*Frances Macrae-Gibson*

*Nanda Devi: Exploration and Ascent*, Eric Shipton and H.W. Tilman, Baton Wicks 1999, ISBN 1-898573-43-3, £10.99.

*Eric Shipton: Everest and Beyond*, Peter Steele, Constable 1998, ISBN 0-09-478300-4 £18.99.

*Nanda Devi* by Eric Shipton was first published in 1936 and *The Ascent of Nanda Devi* by H.W. Tilman in 1937. They are both currently available in the authors' omnibus editions (Shipton *The Six Mountain Travel Books*, and Tilman *The Seven Mountain Travel Books*) but for those who balk at buying thirteen travel books at once, Baton Wicks have produced this new edition, with both books in one volume. They make a natural pair in respect of the subject matter, and afford an opportunity to compare the style of these two well-known climber-writers. A new introduction by Charles Houston, who was on Tilman's successful expedition, has more to it than a mere string of platitudes. An appendix details all the attempts on the mountain, and lists successful ascensionists and the fatalities.

Shipton describes the exploration of the area with Tilman, in particular the struggle up the Rishi Ganga gorge, where previous explorers had been defeated; the last four miles up the gorge took nine days. Black and white photographs dramatically illustrate the problems of the gorge. The expedition, which lasted from April to September 1934, cost about £300. When at the end of their five-month journey together, Shipton suggested to Tilman "Call me Eric", Tilman replied that it would sound ridiculous.

In *The Ascent of Nanda Devi* Tilman describes the Anglo-American expedition of 1936, which culminated in the final ascent by himself and Noel Odell. After the successful bid Tilman wrote: "It is pleasing to record that in climbing Nanda Devi no mechanical aids were used, apart that is from Apricot Brandy. Our solitary oxygen apparatus was fortunately drowned, pitons were forgotten at the Base, snow-shoes and crampons were solemnly carried up only to be abandoned." Ice-axes and step-cutting were apparently permitted; not a helmet was in sight. Recalling the moment on the summit Tilman said: "I believe we so far forgot ourselves as to shake hands on it."

In 1934 Shipton and Tilman came and saw; in 1936 Tilman and Odell conquered. Both books are extremely readable and give a fascinating insight into

mountaineering in the thirties, but it is a pity that so many of the photographs in the first edition of Tilman's book\* have been pruned, for economy no doubt.

If your interest has been aroused by the Nanda Devi volume, you can proceed to a new biography of Shipton by Dr. Peter Steele, who is well qualified to write about life in high places. He gives a vivid picture of mountaineering and mountaineering politics of the day. Probably the greatest upset/milestone in Shipton's life was the appointment of John Hunt to lead the British Everest Expedition in 1953, after Shipton had been instrumental in the discovery of the route through the Western Cwm. Following that, Shipton had a spell at the Outward Bound School in Eskdale; he left there under a cloud because of marital indiscretions, after which he and his wife parted company. The final phase of his active career, exploration in Patagonia 1958-66, is described in a chapter appropriately entitled "Essays in Masochism".

Maps in travel books are a frequent source of irritation to an ignorant reader: in this connection Dr. Steele comes out well, whereas the maps in the Nanda Devi books are a mixture of the original with (appropriately) Imperial measurements and the new with metric measurements. A magnifying glass would be a useful accessory for studying the new maps. The proof readers have done their work well, but to the publishers of *Nanda Devi* a query - where are pages 23 and 24?

\*available in the Queen Mother Library of the University of Aberdeen

John Gibson

*Walking in the Alps*, Kev Reynolds, Cicerone Press 1998, ISBN 1-85284-261-X, £25.00.

Many members will be familiar with the very useful series, published by the Cicerone Press, of pocket-size guides to walking in various areas in the Alps, such as the Engadine or the Valais, and often authored by Kev Reynolds. Typically these give descriptions of a number of individual routes, with some broader detail on huts and valley bases. This current volume, however, is not intended as a *vade mecum* - indeed it would weigh down your rucksack by over a kilogram - but rather as an aid to making that tantalising decision of which Alpine region you will visit next. The whole of the chain is covered, in 19 sections ranging from the Maritime Alps in the West to the Julian Alps in the East. For each area there is a general introduction, often drawing on evocative descriptions taken from the writers of earlier ages of Alpine exploration. The main walking attractions are outlined, valley by valley, with clear synoptic maps. There are suggestions for multi-day tours, both those well-known such as the Tour of Mont Blanc, and those less frequented. More straightforward glacier crossings and peaks are included, and in the Dolomites *via ferrate*. A summary page gives details of location, principal valleys, principal peaks, centres, huts, access, maps and guidebooks, and further reading.

A perfect book for browsing beside a roaring fire in the long winter evenings, to plan next year's travels, or to recall those of past summers.

Lydia Thomson

*Regions of the Heart. The Triumph and Tragedy of Alison Hargreaves*, David Rose and Ed Douglas, Penguin 2000, ISBN 0140-28674-8, £6.99.

This is a fascinating, but disturbing, biography of the UK's foremost woman mountaineer. Drawing heavily on the diaries of Alison Hargreaves it portrays a charming child, delighting in both the big outdoors and success at school. As an adolescent, within easy reach of Derbyshire gritstone crags, she revels in success on routes of escalating difficulty. Frustrated at the inactivity imposed by an injury she takes a temporary job in an outdoor shop. There Alison finds herself in a new circle of acquaintances, and is thrilled to rub shoulders with some of her climbing heroes. As her fitness returns she finds her own climbing abilities attracting increasing recognition. She is hooked.

On her eighteenth birthday Alison moves in with Jim Ballard, the proprietor of the shop. She leaves school without sitting her 'A' levels, and begins to manufacture outdoor gear under her own "Faces" label. Her developing reputation as a climber and her engaging personality are good publicity for both the shop and the gear.

Living with Jim, working and climbing hard, Alison becomes increasingly isolated from former close friends and family. Against their advice she has been drawn into the trap of a personal relationship which allows her to develop her considerable talents in a thrillingly precarious world, but leaves her no easily acceptable escape route, should the dream turn sour.

Adding two children to her responsibilities brings undoubted delight, but, predictably, also adds to her problems. Whilst business at the shop is brisk Alison can climb mainly for pleasure, but when business slumps her climbing is seen as an expensive hobby. Only sustained outstanding success can justify it as a livelihood. She describes her first attempt to find fame and fortune in her book *A Hard Day's Summer*, when, with her husband and children camping in the valleys, she completed solo climbs of six classic Alpine north faces. Her subsequent triumph on Everest, so soon followed by her tragic death after reaching the summit of K2, caused a predictable media see-saw. Should climbing and motherhood be mutually exclusive?

Written by two climbers, *Regions of the Heart* tries to weigh the arguments in the light of Alison's own thoughts and aspirations. The picture that emerges is of a complex personality, who found in the mountains simplicity and release from the stresses of a difficult life. It provokes us all to consider what motivates our participation, at whatever level, in the sport, and the boundaries between selfishness and the will needed for success.

Fiona Cameron