

BOOK REVIEWS

Into the Silence: The Great War, Mallory and the Conquest of Everest, Wade Davis, 2011, Vintage Books; £12.99, paperback, pp. 655, including annotated bibliography and index. ISBN 9780099563839.

I first saw this book in the café at Ballachullish and wondered why we needed another on Everest. When later, I bought it, I found that my initial opinion was too hasty. This book links the early expeditions to Everest with the First World War experiences of those involved. Many of them served throughout the war in some of the most difficult situations. Yet the narrative is more than two stories intertwined. The early exploration of Everest took place from Tibet, and the book deals sympathetically with that country's move into the twentieth century. Another theme is the work of the Survey of India: several strong members of the expeditions worked for this organisation. Thus, the need for over 600 pages of content.

This book is written by a Canadian, and I think that is one of its strengths; the author can look at the story from a different perspective to many previous writers. With the material supplied by Wades' researches, the reader may form a different view of Mallory to that offered by earlier biographers. The attitude of some of the English climbers towards anyone outside their clique makes uncomfortable reading. It was a depleted pool of available climbers after the losses of World War One. Those Scottish climbers chosen were coming to the end of their distinguished mountaineering careers. Unfortunately, they suffered from ill health from the onset of the first expedition, and sadly for Kellas it would prove fatal.

This book could be the first you might read on the topic and you would be well informed by the end of it. Even if you have read many books on this epoch of mountaineering history, you will look on the characters in the saga more sympathetically by the end of it. The annotated bibliography allows the serious reader to delve even further

into this fascinating subject. This book deserves a place on your book shelf.

MARK PEEL

Mountain Holidays, Janet Adam Smith, 1946, J.M. Dent; republished 1996 Ernest Press; £12.50, paperback, pp. 194, including index and additional illustrations. ISBN 0948153458.

This delightful book is by one of my alpine heroines, though a modest and self-deprecating one, whose love of the hills shines through all. Janet Adam Smith was the daughter of the Principal of Aberdeen University and sister of George Buchanan Smith (see “The Cairngorm Club and the First World War”, this issue). She grew up in the Chanonry, Old Aberdeen, and was introduced to the hills by Easter family holidays in Arran. After her first steps in the Alps, she decided, “*to extend my skill so that on my next Alpine climb I should be less of a passenger and more of a partner*”. She would take the night train to Speyside, walk through the hills alone, and arrive home the day after her luggage. She vividly describes the great passes of the Cairngorms, “*with two tops, and two struggles*”, and her nights at Maggie Gruer’s cottage in Inverey - the Maggie Gruer whose chair is now owned by the Cairngorm Club. But as well as in Scotland, she climbed each summer before the Second World War in the Alps, with her husband Michael Roberts, and writes with a clear-eyed joy of their days there with school parties around Val d’Isère, of wanderings across the Italian border in the days when Mussolini was in power, and of climbing big routes with the guide Othon Bron of Courmayeur. The thrill of the summits, the pleasure of moving on each day to new country, the warmth of the valleys and the local people, are all intermingled. She also describes two Winter holidays: ski-touring through a landscape only beginning to be touched by winter sports.

You do not need to be an ace climber to enjoy this book, although you will enjoy it even more if you know the countries and follow her

exploits on a map. Although her life was touched by tragedy (her brother was killed in 1915, during the First World War; Othon Bron fell into and was killed in a crevasse below the Dent du Géant and in 1939, soon after the book was first published, Michael Roberts died), the enduring feeling is of joie de vivre. As she says, “*One of the main points of holidays is to free you from the humdrum worries of our working lives*”, and she certainly succeeds!

LYDIA THOMSON

Scottish Hill Tracks, ScotWays, the Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society, 2011, The Scottish Mountaineering Trust; £18, pp. 251, including maps, photographs and index. ISBN 9781907233166.

This is a real treasure trove of a book for walkers, runners and cyclists alike. First published in 1947, it is now in its fifth edition containing 344 routes, criss-crossing Scotland's hill country from the Borders to Caithness. Divided into 24 sections, the book really comes into its own in giving details of new routes you may not have been aware of and for planning multi-day adventures. Each chapter gives a clear and excellent overview (at a scale of approximately 1:650,000) of how you might connect different areas together and highlights routes that might otherwise go unnoticed in the high detail of an OS map. Looking at the red spider web of routes spreading out over uncharted (or charted) territory can cause the reader to get a distinct case of itchy feet.

The sections are well illustrated by colour photographs which give a good feel for the terrain encountered. Each route is given its own detailed description with useful information on the condition of the paths and bridges on the route, as well as river crossings and alternatives for rivers in spate. This made it a great resource for me in planning my route on The Great Outdoors (TGO), coast-to-coast challenge in 2017.

The selection of routes in the guide comes from the collective judgement of past and present editors as to what offers a good day out.

Often the routes have historical associations. Many are in countryside of scenic merit and are often in terrain that can be wild and challenging. There is also a great breadth of coverage in the routes, from the rolling high country of the Southern Uplands, the hill ground of Central Scotland and along the Highland edge.

The cost, £18 (£15 for ScotWays members) of the book is a little bit pricey, but with the proceeds going towards charitable causes, as well as the continuation of its publication, it is still a good buy and a great source of inspiration.

IZY KIRKALDY

The Walker's Guide to Outdoor Clues and Signs, Tristan Gooley, 2014, Sceptre; £10.99, pp. 437, paperback. Ebook available. ISBN 9781444780109.

I don't know any walker willing to add to the weight of their rucksack without good reason. However, if given this book as a present, as I was, a walker is unlikely to leave it unread on a bookshelf. There is too much compelling information. The author's aim is to increase the fascination of walking by encouraging constant observation and interpretation. An explorer by temperament, Tristan Gooley published an earlier book "The Natural Navigator" and runs courses encouraging the detection of clues in the natural world. In this book the preparatory work involves reading about every aspect of the natural world. Some of this is to help in navigation - but the charm is in exciting curiosity. Having mastered the chapters on the stars and the moon, you will be first in line for a night walk. The author advocates the same approach in cities - where every road name must be considered, and no graveyard should escape detailed attention. The chapter on birdsong neatly bridges these areas and quoting from Jon Young the author writes, "*The birds are practically drawing a map of the immediate landscape for us to use. Here is the water, here are the berries, here are the cold morning-stilled grasshoppers*".

Embedded in the text are attractively drawn diagrams and a few black and white photographs. Two of the photographs are in the first of two chapters on Borneo and yes, you are encouraged to explore the whole world, although in fact this volume is more relevant to the Northern hemisphere. By page 371 you should surely have compiled your own checklist - but for convenience one has been included. Now you have only 4 appendices to master. For example, a list of sun-loving plants and information about shooting stars. There is a danger that you will become the slowest walker on any outing as you put the principles into practice. If there is a pub quiz, you will be forgiven, as you reel off your new-found knowledge.

MARION WHITE