

Book Reviews

EDITED BY DAVID S. ROBERTS

High and Wild: A Mountaineer's World, by Galen Rowell. San Francisco, California: Sierra Club Books, 1979. Price \$29.95.

"Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it"

GOETHE

Galen Rowell wrote these words at the start of his diary in 1975 on the way to K2, and they apply to much of his life and writing. This is his finest book to date—a beautiful, sensitive mixture of adventure, daring, and philosophy seasoned with a touch of sadness. For Rowell is the mountaineer manqué—his pride of conquest has become mellowed by growing concern for the environment he sees being destroyed by those who love it. Self-described as a juvenile delinquent growing up in Berkeley, he is now a mature 38, with many outstanding climbing achievements and a growing list of writing and photographic triumphs. He went early onto the beautiful granite of Yosemite and defined that turf in a collection of tales by the Camp Four cooperative (*The Vertical World of Yosemite*, 1974). His awareness of the fragility of the mountain world (even of granite) led him toward increasing environmental awareness and activity. He has not taken extreme positions nor has he given up his own journeys to the unknown wild places. He has visited some of the most beautiful and least trampled parts of Alaska, made some breath-taking new ascents, including a reckless speed climb of Mount McKinley, everywhere noting how the act of visiting and describing a mountain inevitably leads to its change. He went on an unfortunate expedition to the world's second highest mountain and wrote an unusual, revealing, encyclopedic book which some found biased and overly candid. Since then he has been once or twice a year to the Himalayan ranges and Alaska, and has done some of the incredible "big walls" along the Baltoro Glacier which are Yosemite on a grander scale and seemed virtually unclimbable.

Many of these adventures and his emotions are described in this beautiful book of short essays and magnificent photographs. They are a mixture of derring-do, meditative musings and environmental alarms. As few are willing or able to do, Rowell tells us how he feels and why, without macho conceit or self-consciousness. These are thoughtful papers,

self-questioning, sensitive and humble and they cover the world of climbers. It is by far his finest work and rivals any other in print; it will stand equal to Tom Hornbein's splendid *Everest: the West Ridge*. It's a book to be read again and again and to feast on in times of despair.

CHARLES S. HOUSTON

Everest: Expedition to the Ultimate, by Reinhold Messner. Translated by Audrey Salkeld. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979. 254 pages. Many photographs in black-and-white and in color. Price \$16.95.

The Lonely Victory: Mount Everest '78, by Peter Habeler. Translated by David Heald. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979. 224 pages. Photographs in color and in black-and-white. Price \$10.95.

Everest addicts have their choice of two descriptions of the first ascent without supplementary oxygen by each of the two mountaineering stars involved—Peter Habeler and Reinhold Messner. Starting these volumes, I soon discovered that to find out what really happened one had to read both. Each is extremely egocentric, and the two have a dichotomous set of deleted incidents. Messner, for example, states that the only reason Habeler stayed with him was that no one else wanted to climb with him and goes on to describe Habeler motioning "Let's go down" with every step to the summit on their final day. Habeler doesn't dwell on these incidents, but describes a bizarre pact the two made: The summit was so important that either would leave the other to die of his injuries rather than miss the final step. Habeler then describes with some relish the snow-blind Messner's fears that Habeler may hold him to his word and abandon him during the descent.

Neither really describes the larger expedition they were a part of. This is a shame since it was a marvellously heterogeneous group of men ranging in age from 24 to 54 and abilities from the world's best to the types one would expect to meet on a Genet-guided McKinley trip. Yet these men had a good time together, put ten people on the summit spanning almost the entire range of their age and experience, and contributed to Messner's and Habeler's own success by putting in much of the route, the highest camp and even many of the footsteps Reinhold and Peter followed to the summit. Their leader, Wolfgang Nairz, clearly is a virtuoso to have so successfully balanced such disparate ambitions. A book by him would be required reading for any Himalayan aspirant. The most stunning advance on Everest recently, in my own opinion, has been Nairz's and Herrligkoffer's abilities to arrange multinational expeditions that work—French, Germans, Austrians, Italians and Poles reaching the summit.