

humorous. He says in the Introduction, "I am not the same person that I was in 1959." But the publication of *A Walk in the Sky* brings to us a vivid account of those days, twenty-four years ago, when eight young Americans and two Pakistanis decided that they could do without the elaborate financial and political support that was customary for most expeditions, and succeed they did.

Time and again, from start to finish, the enterprise barely surmounted a long series of hurdles that might have stopped it. As member, Bob Swift, said, the expedition was "at the precise limits of the equipment, finances, physical endurance and imagination we then possessed." After all, to reach such limits, but not to exceed them, is why people climb.

THOMAS H. JUKES

Kongur: China's Elusive Summit. Chris Bonington. Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1982. 224 pages, black and white and color photographs, maps, bibliography. £14.95

In an age when mountaineering is concerned primarily with approaching old problems in a different style—a new route, a harsher season, a smaller party, sans oxygen—it is stimulating when an expedition sets time back, undertaking real exploration before challenging a virgin summit. This was the mission of a team led by Michael Ward (overall expedition and scientific leader) and Chris Bonington (climbing leader) in getting to and climbing Mount Kongur and recounted in *Kongur: China's Elusive Summit*.

What a delicious opportunity this must have been, a kind almost overlooked in the contemporary scramble to raise the purely technical standards of climbing. The team was the first to visit a remote, long-closed and culturally exotic region (western Xinjiang) at a historic time when China was turning away from the traumatic path it had followed since 1949 and opening its doors to foreign mountaineers. During the 1980 reconnaissance, they were given virtual *carte blanche* to roam at will in fascinating high country, picking off a few satellite peaks. Then, in 1981, in clean style, with a four-man climbing team, they made the first ascent of a 7,719-meter mountain that refused to fall until the waning moments of the battle. Thanks to the efforts of a four-man scientific team, much valuable data on the effects of high altitude was also contributed.

Given these colorful and dramatic experiences, Bonington should have had a field day in the literary presentation of the venture. By almost any standard, the book is very good. But, I suppose, as is true with any well known and respected figure, we expect continued excellence. As I read, I couldn't shake the feeling that Chris had perhaps written one too many expedition books; his heart may well not have been totally in it. Even so, it is very good.

His books on Annapurna and Everest's Southwest Face have a vitality which the Kongur book lacks. The nuggets of quotable quotes are missing. I mention this because, after all, we buy books as much to get close to the author

as to the subject. Books were a frequent and cheerful conversational subject around the Rongbuk Base Camp which I shared in June 1982 with Bonington whose team had no less than four climber-writers. As on previous trips, Chris had his trusty home computer with him. A great deal of writing had been done on it. Rival author-climbers claimed the machine was programmed for every standard expedition subject. Hit the right keys and the sunset passage would zip forth; hit other keys and the incoming storm would print out.

There is a bit of truth in the jest. The book is a chronology, a reporting of a series of events. There is a lot of information on the life and scenes of Peking and Kashgar and on the Kirgiz—semi-nomads of the high Pamir. Although discerned with a keen eye, they are reported with a certain detachment, in long paragraphs that are little more than a sightseer's lists. I would have preferred that he be more personal and intimate, as in his previous books.

When Bonington does shine forth, it is fun. For instance, the passages relating the frustrations endured while trying to organize portage in remote areas through intermediaries, complicated by ignorance of the local language, were magnificent. So, too, his honesty about his own shortcomings. I liked the description of a high, miserable bivouac on Kongur.

Peter Boardman's diary selections are gently poignant. And the book teaches a lot about the world's best climbers in action: notably their midnight action (wrenched from warm sleeping bags) to evacuate tents that were situated on an avalanche slope, in favor of snow caves dug in the dark discomfort of frigid night.

The book is impressive in format. There are lots of lucid maps and sharp, four-color photographs, the most memorable being of Bonington himself, "a study in outrage," immediately after Boardman stepped through the roof of his snow coffin. The appendices are informative: team members, diary of events, medical science research, history of the Kongur area, fauna and flora, geology, equipment, food, photography, medical kit and a delightful description of that most anarchic of games, buzkashi. Best of all, the book is about a resourceful, stylish and quite happy expedition.

NED GILLETTE

When Men and Mountains Meet: The Explorers of the Western Himalayas 1820-75. John Keay. Archon Books, Hamden, Connecticut, 1982. 277 pages, black and white photographs, illustrations, maps, bibliography. \$17.50.

This is a book of the men who mapped, whored, botanized, ran guns, out-manuevered kings and plumbed the rivers of the Himalaya from 1820 to 1875. These are engrossing tales of adventure, easily more enthralling than modern, microcosmic accounts of Himalayan climbs. The mountains were unknown then, unmapped and unsafe. The attrition rate for the early explorers easily outweighs recent climbing fatalities in the Himalaya. Back then, in addition