

Everest: The Unclimbed Ridge. Chris Bonington and Charles Clarke. Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1983. 132 pages, black-and-white and color photographs, maps, bibliography. £10.95.

Chris Bonington's latest expedition account, *Everest: The Unclimbed Ridge*, co-authored with Charles Clarke, is the story of the 1982 British expedition to Everest's northeast ridge. This ridge is not to be confused with its far more familiar upper section, the scene of all those historic British attempts to reach the summit in the 1920s and 1930s and the way the Chinese ultimately succeeded (*i.e.*, assuming you are among those who would like to believe Mallory and Irvine made it, but do not). Instead, the proposed route of Bonington's small team was along the entire northeast ridge, rising nearly 7700 feet from the Raphu La (21,350 feet). Already a long route by the time the first serious technical difficulties—a series of rock towers—are encountered slightly above 26,000 feet, even when the top of the northeast shoulder (27,510 feet) is attained, the summit is still 1,500 vertical feet, and a mile, away.

With a team composed only of Bonington, Peter Boardman, Joe Tasker, Dick Renshaw and, in support, Clarke as physician and Adrian Gordon as organizational manager, one can think of no comparable attempt to forge a new route on the world's highest peak. Without denigrating Reinhold Messner's astonishing oxygenless, solo climb of Everest in 1980, it must be recalled that Messner was on a familiar side of the mountain that had none of the technical obstacles of the entire northeast ridge. Nor can the east face route climbed by the American expedition last fall, highly significant as it was, be directly compared with the northeast ridge because the east face's ferocious difficulties are all below 21,500 feet. Moreover, the Morrissey-led team used oxygen from their highest camp to the summit, while Bonington and his teammates were committed from the outset to an oxygenless ascent.

Bonington's team, though small in number, had the great strength of considerable common Himalayan experience among not only the climbers, but Clarke and Gordon as well, and a close-knit compatibility that all too often is not found in Himalayan climbing endeavors.

The two authors divide their writing responsibilities between organizational background, approach to the mountain and support activities, which Clarke takes, and events on the mountain, which Bonington describes. The early and even more recent mountaineering history of this side of Everest has been ably covered by other writers so the text happily is brief on this score. Clarke takes us succinctly through the expedition's early stages, but what we are really interested in is Bonington's account of the effort to pull off, if it had succeeded, one of the most remarkable climbs ever.

His narrative of the expedition's main events is heightened considerably by the use of extracts from Boardman's diary and, to a lesser extent, Tasker's letters. Just when the expedition is on the verge of mounting its first serious summit push, Renshaw is struck by an ailment that Clarke diagnoses as a stroke. A second, more serious occurrence below Base Camp leads to a decision that

Renshaw must leave the mountain to return to England. Meanwhile, Bonington's own reserves have been stretched to the point where Boardman and Tasker remain as the only strong climbers capable of a final try for, if not the summit, at least the top of the northeast shoulder, an 8000-meter subsidiary peak of Everest.

The book culminates in the events surrounding the disappearance of the two climbers at 27,000 feet. On May 17 Bonington and Gordon sight the pair in the gap between the first and second rock towers, but there is no response during subsequent attempts at radio contact. Finally, after several days of a roller coaster ride of optimism and fear, and absolutely no trace of the missing climbers, Bonington and the others are forced to conclude that Tasker and Boardman have fallen down the east face.

What is indelibly ironic about this book is that, if Tasker and Boardman had succeeded (or even returned from a magnificent effort), one or both of them most likely would have written this or a comparable book. Boardman and Tasker both were among the most accomplished mountain writers, the former with his *The Shining Mountain* and *Sacred Summits*, and the latter with *Everest: The Cruel Way* and *The Savage Arena*. One is reminded of the acute sense of loss when Wilfrid Noyce, perhaps the finest mountain writer of his day, was killed in the Pamirs with Robin Smith, also a gifted writer.

Although this is a slim volume, it is one of Bonington's best.

JAMES WICKWIRE

Everest: The Ultimate Challenge. Al Burgess and Jim Palmer. Beaufort Books, New York, 1983. 214 pages, color photographs, diagrams. \$27.95.

"I had chosen the Canadian expedition over the Lhotse climb because it was cheaper," candidly writes author Al Burgess, reknowned Himalayan mountaineer. True to current ethics, he espouses the lightweight style of trying to climb the world's highest mountains; lightweight the Canadian Everest Expedition definitely was not. Burgess had first been invited to join a concurrent lightweight New Zealand expedition to Lhotse but declined. At the last minute, when the Canadian expedition invited him, this most-experienced of high-altitude mountaineers, who has made his home in Canada, junked his principles. The Canadian expedition clearly needed someone with his knowledge, skill and experience. But it was a "grudging" acceptance. Although Burgess' heart was with the other expedition, he chose Everest with the Canadians because, he freely admits, of the cost benefit. Getting to the top couldn't hurt his career as a professional climber.

Tragedy struck the expedition: Three Sherpas and one climber were killed in two separate accidents in the Khumbu Icefall, three days apart. But, despite this and the defection of seven participants, the expedition succeeded in putting two Canadians on top. Burgess wasn't one of them—his oxygen delivery system failed near the summit. His international reputation tarnished, what should he