

field is *White Limbo*, the provocatively named account of the successful 1984 Australian ascent of the North Face by mostly a new line.

What is most appealing about this book is the unusually productive combination of superb mountain color photography and Lincoln Hall's excellent, tightly written account. In most books of this kind, either the writing or the photographs predominate. Here, there is a remarkable balancing of the two with—of all things—a nearly flawless tracking of photos and text event-by-event.

Hall writes from the compelling perspective of one who had strong ambitions for the summit, but was sensitive enough to his personal limits, due to old frostbite injuries, to turn back just below the Yellow Band. He could only watch three of his companions go on toward the summit. It must have been disappointing to Hall, but when the exhausted summiters returned to high camp, he provided the essential support that saw Greg Mortimer, the most seriously affected from the altitude, successfully down the mountain. Andy Henderson was not so fortunate. With severely frostbitten fingers, he turned back a mere fifty meters below the summit. Once back home, Henderson underwent extensive surgery on his damaged hands.

That the Australians ever got themselves in a position to make a summit push is remarkable. Early in the expedition, avalanches nearly wiped out their Camp II on the face and buried a cache of gear at its base. Tim McCartney-Snape had to resort to cross-country ski boots, establishing a unique altitude record for such footgear.

The Australian climb was carried out in the finest style above the highest fixed ropes at nearly 24,000 feet. No oxygen was used by any of the climbers, making it, after Messner's solo ascent, the only time a new route has been completed on Everest without the benefit of supplementary oxygen. Hall's book is more satisfying than simply another recounting of a successful climb, mainly because of the strong message one draws from the pages of *White Limbo*: It is possible to climb an Everest with a small group of friends who have an experience imbued with happiness and mutual respect.

JAMES WICKWIRE

First on Everest: The Mystery of Mallory and Irvine. Tom Holzel and Audrey Salkeld. Henry Holt, New York, 1986. 322 pages, black and white photographs. \$19.95.

In 1971 when Tom Holzel first proposed his theory that George Mallory may indeed have reached the summit of Everest in 1924, the climbing establishment—particularly in England—scoffed at the idea. Aside from disbelief about the physical feat itself, Holzel was attacked for his suggestion that Mallory could have left his strong, but inexperienced young companion, Andrew Irvine, near the famous Second Step (28,280 feet) to make a solo bid for the top. This behavior, it was argued, was highly unlikely, if not inconceivable, when considering the ethics of the day.

Aside from an ice axe that Wyn Harris found in 1933, just *below* the first step (28,000 feet), a rock feature some lateral distance down the northeast ridge from the Second Step, no trace of Mallory or Irvine was ever found, that is, until rumors surfaced in the early 1980s of a Chinese sighting at 26,600 feet on the northeast ridge route of the dessicated body of a climber garbed in tattered, outdated clothing. Unfortunately, from the standpoint of mountaineering history, the Chinese climber, Wang Hong Bao, was not able to verify his claim to have seen the body of an “English” (as he referred to it) as Wang was killed in 1979 in an avalanche below the North Col during a Chinese–Japanese reconnaissance of Everest. Wang’s alleged discovery, coupled with Messner and Habeler’s first oxygenless ascent of the mountain in 1978 and subsequent other such ascents including Messner’s astonishing solo in 1980 of a new route on the North Face, suddenly converted the wildly speculative to the possibly probable.

Holzel and Salkeld’s well-written and documented account, however, is not merely a regurgitation of Holzel’s earlier Mallory-ascent theory in the light of recent events. It is much more. Based partly on recently available letters and diaries, the authors delve more deeply into Mallory’s background than his previous biographers, presumably in an effort to explain why it just might have been possible—even in 1924—for Mallory to have fulfilled his life’s ambition. What emerges from the material that the authors weave together is something far more significant than demonstrating that Mallory possessed the sheer physical ability to climb Everest. It clearly appears he had that enormous wellspring of mental tenacity and drive that now is taken for granted as perhaps the most essential ingredient of successful high-altitude climbing.

Without question, Mallory was the dominating force on these early Everest expeditions. After two defeats (that is, if the brilliant reconnaissance of 1921 can be called a defeat), Mallory became convinced that his best chance to reach the summit was to use supplementary oxygen on his last attempt. The debate among British climbers in the 1920s whether oxygen should be used on Everest had been waged on both ethical and physical grounds depending upon one’s point of view. In a letter to his wife, Mallory wrote:

The gasless party has the better adventure [and] it is naturally a bit disappointing that I shall be with the other party. Still, the conquest of the mountain is the great thing, and the whole plan is mine . . . and will give me, perhaps, the best chance of all of getting to the top.

Significantly, Mallory goes on to confide to his wife that “it is almost unthinkable with this plan that *I* shan’t get to the top; I can’t see myself coming down defeated.” [Emphasis in original.]

That Mallory possessed the requisite willpower to carry him that last thousand feet to the summit is reasonably clear. It now remains to subject Holzel’s conjectural account of the events of June 8, 1924, at and above the Second Step, to a modicum of critical analysis. Whether it is credible that Mallory and Irvine separated after surmounting the Second Step is not easy to evaluate. It is entirely

possible that this occurred, though, particularly when the earlier precedent on the same expedition is taken into account: Norton's solo attempt on the summit after an extreme sore throat and cough stopped Somervell. So for purposes of what follows, it is assumed that Mallory and Irvine agreed to separate.

First, what can we make of Holzel's assertion that the two climbers actually succeeded in climbing to the top of the Second Step? Odell's eyewitness account is to be given great weight, but even he is not entirely sure that he saw them on the Second, not the First Step. The author admits that the French attempt, via the northeast ridge in 1981, casts some doubt on his theory when Marmier, the French leader, told him that it may well have been the First Step on which Odell saw the pair because of a similar snow patch that the French encountered. Having opened the door to reevaluation of Odell's pivotal sighting, Holzel slams it shut by assuming, without further discussion, that it was the Second Step all along.

With due respect to the Chinese who climbed the Second Step with considerable difficulty in 1960, even at the cost of the lead climber's severely frost-bitten toes because his boots were removed, and the nine-person Chinese team that repeated the climb in 1975, it can be assumed that Mallory's prowess as a rock climber exceeded the Chinese standards. As the 1975 Chinese left a wire ladder on the final steep section, the Japanese were able to use the ladder five years later, thereby negating any positive implications from their success on the Second Step. The only other team to climb the Second Step, the Catalans in the 1985 post-monsoon season, "were of the impression that it was perfectly feasible for Mallory and Irvine, climbing the ridge when relatively clear of snow, to have reached the summit." Although it is far from clear (based on personal experience on two expeditions in which I have been to 8000 meters and above on Everest's North Face in both the pre-monsoon and post-monsoon seasons) that pre-monsoon conditions are easier, the opinion of the Catalans should be weighed carefully. More snow cover on the rock portions of the Second Step is possibly offset by the Catalans climbing without oxygen at this extreme altitude. Thus, their experience may have been comparable to Mallory's.

Assuming that Irvine was assisted down the Second Step with the aid of a rope from Mallory, he reasonably could have descended along the northeast ridge past the First Step to the slabs where, if the evidence of the ice axe found in 1933 is to be accepted, he slipped and fell the thousand feet or so to the relatively gentle area near 26,600 feet where the Chinese climber spotted an "English" body eight years ago. This accounts for Irvine, but what about Mallory?

Holzel, who alone authored the first chapter, "The Mystery" and the last chapter, "The Clues," gets quickly past the first piece of business: Mallory's transfer of Irvine's partly used oxygen bottle to his own pack with the successful switch of the connecting hose from his own spent bottle to Irvine's. But, after getting Mallory above the Second Step, Holzel's conjecture is flawed by misunderstandings about the physical nature of the final pyramid and he resorts to unnecessary speculation about Mallory's last movements. These, ironically,

have the effect of undermining his own theory. For instance, the ground above the Second Step is easy, particularly if one climbs diagonally across the final pyramid as the Chinese did in 1975, and presumably the Catalans in 1985. The precise route that the Chinese took in 1960 remains unclear.

That Mallory, with the aid of oxygen, could have reached the summit in a few hours is probable. In 1984, Phil Ershler (using oxygen) and John Roskelley (climbing without) took about eight hours to climb from our high camp at 26,500 feet to 28,000 feet at the base of the final pyramid. They had climbed at Roskelley's pace *sans* oxygen although they were delayed in climbing the steep Yellow Band that bisects the Great Couloir at 27,200 feet. Yet, when Roskelley turned back a scant thousand feet from the summit, Ershler was able to climb the last section (quite similar to what Mallory would have encountered) in an amazing one and one-half hours.

Holzel questions whether Mallory could have made it down the final pyramid safely and speculates about a possible glissade. He also suggests that Mallory would not have been able to make it down the Second Step because of frozen hands or lack of strength, forgetting that a few paragraphs earlier in his account, Mallory had a rope which he used to lower Irvine down the Step. The questions and speculation are unnecessary.

However kind subsequent events have been to the Mallory-success theory, all but one team that climbed the Second Step have endured a bivouac on the way down. Only the Chinese in 1975, who placed their highest camp above the Second Step, avoided this. Although still a matter of conjecture, it seems likely that Mallory died of exposure on the way down.

As related elsewhere in this issue of the *Journal*, the 1986 expedition that the authors mounted to search for the remains of Mallory and Irvine did not uncover any additional evidence, such as cameras with undeveloped film, to shed light on the greatest mystery in the history of mountaineering. Mallory and Irvine's final hours more than likely will remain just that.

JAMES WICKWIRE

Island in the Sky: Pioneering Accounts of Mount Rainier, 1833-1894. Paul Schullery, editor. The Mountaineers, Seattle, 1987. 200 pages, black and white illustrations, 1 early map. \$10.95 (paper).

Schullery, a former National Park Service seasonal naturalist/historian and the editor and/or author of several other books and numerous articles in outdoor-history journals, has here compiled accounts of fourteen selected explorations and ascents of Mount Rainier—plus a fabricated legend of an Indian's ascent—prior to establishment of the National Park in 1899. The literary style of the 1800s enhances the enjoyment of this thoughtful choice of accounts of those pioneering efforts, when the elements of discovery still prevailed in the first climbing done in the Pacific Northwest and in the new sport of mountaineering.

The volume begins with Dr. Fraser Tolmie's 1833 botanical excursion into the northwestern foothills of the present National Park, where, accompanied by