

gymnastically superior activity.” If that happens, Ken Wilson’s next book on difficult British rock climbing will have yet another interesting story to tell.

CHRISTOPHER JONES

Pure and Perpetual Snow: Two climbs in the Andes of Peru. David Mazel. The Free Solo Press, Alamosa, Colorado, 1987. 136 pages, 22 black-and-white photographs, 1 illustration, bibliography. \$10.95 (paper).

I enjoyed Mazel’s small but personable book about climbing Alpamayo and Ausangate in Peru’s Cordilleras Blanca and Vilcanota. The text alternates between experiences on his own guided climbs and extensive research about the history and culture of Peru’s mountains and people. A rough map would have been useful.

In the last ten years, not many books in English have been written on Peru’s Andes. The two that come to mind are John Ricker’s *Yuraq Janka*, guide to the Cordillera Blanca, and Jim Bartle’s *Trails of the Cordilleras Blanca and Huayhuash of Peru*. Mazel adds a short, fun work to this list. On a month’s journey, the author joined the American Alpine Institute’s guided itinerary but failed in ascending the southwest face of 19,100-foot Alpamayo. However, he succeeded in climbing the less visited 20,945-foot Ausangate in the Cordillera Vilcanota.

Mazel gives a fascinating account of the history of Andean climbing, focusing on such pioneers as Annie Peck, Georges and Claude Kogan. But he does not omit the climbs of the ancient Indians, who built structures for religious observances at 20,000 feet. He covers the disastrous earthquake of 1970, which killed 67,000 people in the Callejón de Huaylas below the Cordillera Blanca.

The author discovers, as many do, that the joys of the Andes lie not only in the ascent itself, but in the valleys, villages and ruins below the mountains. Peter Getzel, a wonderful American anthropological researcher, who has made the Andes his life work, and archeologist Johan Reinhard help convey some enlightening religious relationships that Peru’s people had to the white ranges.

JOHN A. REHMER

Angels of Light. Jeff Long. William Morrow, 298 pages. \$18.95.

Jeff Long has written a climbing Western, with philosophical overtones. Yosemite Valley provides the setting and much of the substance of his exciting and extravagant novel. This is not the Valley that seemed, to a member of the discovering party of 1851, to be a “fit abode for angels of light,” but the tourist-ridden, climber-infested scene of the last two decades. Long knows his Valley-dwellers well. And one of the pleasures of the book is his description

of their eating, smoking and sexual habits.

“Expatriate rabble with their hair in leonine disarray,” they are compared to mountain men of the previous century, “outcasts from society, discontented with the world, comforting themselves in the solitude of nature by the occasional bearfight.” The author also of the book *Outlaw: The Saga of Claude Dallas*, Long appears fascinated by those who live at or beyond the fringes of society. His climbers are essentially loners with shadowy backgrounds. Their social connections are fleeting, always subordinate to the big walls to which they are drawn. Long calls them “fundamentally peaceful folk,” but often they are suspicious of outsiders, coarse in sensibility as well as language, rough with women and hard to like.

Although they have the energy as well as the skill to undertake the hardest routes, many of the book’s subjects seem burned out—emotionally exhausted. This is particularly true of “Bullseye” Broomis, an older climber of metaphysical bent, who with his dog Elmer inhabits a wheelless VW van on the outskirts of Camp 4, where all the others live, and true also of the protagonist, John Dog Coloradas, “Grandson of a Chiricahua Indian shaman, half Indian and magician himself.” John seems to come right out of *The Bear*, Faulkner’s tale of a vanishing wilderness and the men who vanish with it. Haunted by the death of a climbing partner in South America, he pushes himself onto the cliffs long after his desire has lost its freshness. “All the mountains,” Bullseye tells him. “They all been climbed.” What John really wants is to get out of the Valley. When he and his girlfriend Liz along with the ingenuous teenage rock wizard Tucker escape to Reno, there’s a brief idyll.

In view of the intrinsic interest of his subject, I regret Long’s decision to propel his plot by means of a vengeful drug runner whose contraband the climbers have snatched from a cold and sinister lake, where it was submerged in a fallen aircraft. This criminal’s intervention only intensifies the book’s harsh and violent tone, while cluttering the action with sensational and sometimes improbable events. There was plenty going on without him, and I would have welcomed more character exploration of the climbers: of John’s guilt, of Tucker’s nightmares, of the motives of John’s antagonist, the villainous Matt Kresinski. But Long nevertheless does some nice things with this smuggler, making him brutal without being sadistic. He is a giant of a man, who embodies a fierce retribution for the fecklessness of the climbers’ lives. (In a particularly ugly episode, Kresinski has led the desecration of the corpse of the smuggler’s brother.) Yet “Liz had never encountered a more genuine person” than this ruffian—a dismaying insight, in view of her close relations with the Camp 4 climbers: Another outlaw, he is still, in her eyes, more human and domestic than they.

Long has a taste for the patterns and resonance of myth. The Amazonian Liz is drawn to men who are “larger than life”—an apt description of many of the book’s characters. They’re not always easy to believe, but they are impressive. From the first sentence they are compared to “mythical heroes.” There are deliberate overtones of Greek mythology, Arthurian legend, and the

Bible—all testimony to the book's greater ambitions. "Snake Lake," the repository of the drugs that precipitate the book's many deaths, is clearly a source of evil. ("There was no escaping the lake," Long tells us toward the end.) Liz, a trusting Eve who harbors visions of life on an Oregon homestead, discovers the drugs, only to have her knowledge abused by the climbers. At the book's violent climax, John hears a rope slither across the snow with the sound of a snake. The commanding feeling has been one of *hubris*, from the very first sentence of the book: High on El Cap, John is compared to Icarus, who flew so close to the sun that his wings melted, and he fell into the sea.

Although such elements expand the novel's purposes, Long's surest touch is with the climbing scenes. There are two long ones on rock, which maintain vividness while conveying a sense both of anxiety and of exhilaration. The air is thin in these passages, the rock hard, the ground a long way down. Even better, perhaps, is a harrowing account of an ice pitch so unprotectable that the belayer simply steps to one side to make way for the unstoppable leader, should he fall.

Using it like a carving knife, he whittled a minute notch in the verglas with the hammer's pick. Then he set a pencil point's worth of pick on the notch and pulled down on it. It held. Like a curator brushing dust from a pre-Columbian pot, Bullseye exacted an equally tiny hold from another patch of verglas with his ax.

Scenes like this are sure-fire; some of the others are too ambitious for the book's structure. But better to try too much than too little. And Long is never dull: He keeps you with him all the way to the snowy shoot-out at the end.

STEVEN JERVIS

Going Higher, the Story of Man and Altitude. Charles S. Houston, M.D. Boston, Little, Brown and Company, revised edition, 1987. 324 pages, 39 black-and-white illustrations, bibliography. Price \$10.95.

This is the second revision of the book originally entitled *Going High*, which was published in 1980. The back cover states that Dr. Houston "believes strongly that medicine must be made intelligible and interesting to the general public" and the book succeeds admirably in this respect. Charlie Houston has an enviable reputation in both mountaineering and medicine. He began climbing in the European Alps in 1925, was a member of the first successful ascent of Nanda Devi in 1936 and leader of attempts on K2 in 1938 and 1953. He describes himself as an internist and long-time family doctor. Few can claim to have as much experience in the medical problems of high altitude.

The book is in three sections. The first chapters are an entertaining account of the history of man's attempts to climb (or fly) higher and higher. This is followed by four chapters introducing the reader to the physiology of respiration and circulation and how these adapt to high altitude. The remainder