

promise. It was also a promise I could not keep.” Later, after recounting the story of the catastrophe that unfolded on nearby K2 during their ascent of Gasherbrum IV, Child concludes, “My mental effort to give an element of order to this circle of life, death and mountains, came to nothing.”

The color photographs are well chosen; it is a pity there are not more. Unfortunately, they do not match the text owing to the usual constraints in book publishing where the color must be inserted between signatures. Two important appendices contain lists of first ascents of major routes on peaks bordering the Gangotri and Baltoro Glaciers.

*Thin Air* is an excellent book. Though Child did not win Britain’s 1988 Boardman-Tasker award (best mountaineering book of the year) he did receive an award for literary merit in 1987 from the American Alpine Club.

ALLEN STECK

*All 14 Eight-Thousanders*. Reinhold Messner. Cloudcap Press, Seattle, 1988. 247 pages, black and white and color photographs, route diagrams, map. \$35.00.

Messner has come a long way since I met him in 1976. I was then a shell-shocked dilettante on Alaska’s Kahiltna Glacier, marveling at the huge peaks surrounding our slightly smaller mountain of food and equipment, when Reinhold Messner skied into Base Camp. He had just soloed Denali.

He was generous, gave us his sled and left-over food, and seemed eager to chat. But I was awestruck and dim-tongued beside the shining protagonist—author of *The Seventh Grade* and that brilliant treatise on climbing ethics, *Murder of the Impossible*, whose prose was as direct and hard hitting as the routes he’d put up.

Messner shook his head as he saw our pyramid of supplies that had demanded an extra flight from our pissed-off bushpilot. Eventually he walked on, muttering *sotto voce* as he departed our over-indulgent company: “You Americans disgust me.”

Of course, he was right, our ethics were obscene. The next week our young team littered the well-worn West Buttress trail with caches of unneeded food and equipment. Never since have I deserved his disgust. The simplistic and light-weight Messnerian climbing style shaped my generation.

Most of his subsequent books have been milestones. *The Challenge* debunked the myth of expedition tactics with his cleverly juxtaposed siege-style failure on Lhotse, followed by his brilliant alpine-style success on Hidden Peak. *Everest* and *Nanga Parbat* furthered his critique of large assaults and the use of bottled oxygen. With each volume his prose grew more self-centered, even purplish. I myopically wrote off these misgivings to faulty translations, for who could question one who had given up everything—brother, wife, family—for an ideal strung high above the clouds?

After *Everest* and *Nanga Parbat* were published, the man behind the books appeared to be less the messiah and more the martyr. He lived in a castle. His profile in *Time* was entitled “King of the Mountain.” His success had become contingent upon an ever-burgeoning mountain of books and a dynamic media machine of his own creation. Could it be that my hero was turning into a parallel of the Ugly American?

Nonetheless, 100 years from now Messner’s name and lessons will stand out in Himalayan climbing. He was the first forthrightly to pronounce that the secret to climbing longevity and survival lies in listening to your intuition. Furthermore, he will be remembered because he has shown mountaineers how to utilize little gear and thus better to appreciate the mountain itself.

His latest book, *All 14 Eight-thousanders*, is haunted by a climber scarcely mentioned, whose achievements and ethical rigor seem to outshine Messner’s stardom. I refer of course to Jerzy Kukuczka and his completion of all 14: eight new routes, four winter ascents, one solo, and one ski descent. Although several of Messner’s climbs were new routes and solos, many were repeats of established lines. Furthermore, the unassuming Kukuczka—fond of vodka blowouts and living in a cramped tenement with his family in Poland—has never written any books about his 8000-meter peaks. To be sure, Messner crossed the finish line first, but this great achievement is a little sullied by a hyped-out media machine in need of constant feeding.

Otherwise, the structure of *All 14* is simple and serviceable. The chronologically-ordered stories are well illustrated. Incredible that he could even gasp his way up these peaks, let alone take good photographs, which are often more interesting than the rehashed stories from his previous books.

One interesting sidelight of the book is the short commentaries from such Himalayan masters as Kurt Diemberger, Hans Kammerlander, Oswald Oelz, and Chris Bonington. These give perspective and help to explain the author’s immense contribution. Sidebars from Riccardo Cassin and Doug Scott don’t pay homage to the grand master, a welcome relief. But most readers will guffaw at the commentary from Messner’s waifish young companion, Sabine Stehle (“to basecamp on three eight thousander expeditions”). She tells the reader that her boyfriend gets too much heat from the critics, and the accusations that she is Messner’s *dolce vita* are maligned gossip. Objectivity is thrown into the deepest crevasse here.

Otherwise, the appendix has interesting statistics of climbers who have climbed at least four 8000-meter peaks. The charts concerning success rates, number of expeditions, nationalities, and fatalities on the 8000-meter peaks are fascinating.

In the end, Messner’s respect of the mountains is a thematic pillar. For example, every chapter heading provides the original and indigenous mountain name, rather than surveyors’ more recent and canned label. Nor is Messner entirely blind to the contradiction and limitations of racing up all 8000-meter peaks. He writes: “Our generation, as I have often said, is not going to be measured by how many eight-thousanders we bagged and how fast we made the

climbs; we will be remembered for how intact we leave these mountains as places of opportunity for the next generation.”

The antecedent Messner—who was hero worshipped by a generation—would have disavowed the race to climb the 14 biggest and focused instead upon the overlooked difficulties of the 6000- and 7000-meter gems. Nonetheless, he could surprise us again. His recent advocacy of protecting the “White Wilderness” and his secretive search for the Yeti might eventually show us more of the original goods.

More than a dozen years have passed since the author shared his finest philosophy, not only with the mountaineering community at large, but with some Boy Scouts on their first expedition. I’ve had 13 years to work up a riposte to Messner’s parting shot on the Kahiltna.

“What is it about us that disgusts you, Reinhold?” I’d ask the next time.

“You are gross, self-indulgent, technophile and materialistic,” he might reply.

“Alas, Reinhold, that sums up your latest book.”

JONATHAN WATERMAN

*The Price of Adventure: Mountain Rescue Stories from Four Continents.* Hamish MacInnes. The Mountaineers, Seattle, 1987. 192 pages, black and white photographs. \$15.95.

*The Price of Adventure* contains stories of rescues on ten different mountains on four continents, South America, North America, Africa and Europe, plus New Zealand. For some mountains, the Petit Dru and Beinn Achaladair, for example, more than one rescue is recounted. A few of the stories are told by MacInnes himself, an experienced rescuer and mountaineer who pioneered new rescue techniques and equipment, but most are told either by a climber or a rescuer, or both. They are personal accounts, with considerable human drama, occasional triumph, and often tragic despair. Events are told with sufficient technical detail that climbers can follow exactly what happened in both the climb and the rescue operation, but not so tediously that nonclimbers would not enjoy the excitement and drama of the event.

This volume is MacInnes’ second collection of rescue stories: the first, *High Drama*, was published by The Mountaineers in 1980. *The Price of Adventure* is slightly shorter than its predecessor and, in my opinion, not quite as good. The descriptions in *High Drama* were somewhat richer in detail, but more importantly *The Price of Adventure* lacks the historical development found in the earlier volume, which begins with accounts of rescue attempts during the early years of climbing in the Alps and follows the development of rescue techniques as climbing became more technical. The collection of stories contained in *The Price of Adventure*, while no less compelling and exciting, are organized in a more hodgepodge fashion.

Though subtly portrayed, you find a bit more of MacInnes in this volume