

thought of spending the rest of one's life in a rocking chair in Warren Harding's Rock of Ages Home for Old Climbers.

ALLEN STECK

A Lifelong Love Affair with the Mountains. John Filsinger. A. G. Hallidin Publishing Co., Inc., Indiana, PA 15701, 1991. 380 pages, 944 photos (301 in color). \$29.95.

This profusely illustrated book is a personal document covering a half-century of climbing and mountain treks among the ranges of the U.S., Canada, Mexico, the Alps, Spain, Peru, Japan, and Nepal. The author's first-described climbs are during World War II, in Mexico's Sierra Madre Oriental and Jamaica's Blue Mountains, where he served as cryptographer in the U.S. Army. During a subsequent career as teacher of English and Spanish language and literature, Filsinger's summers off allowed him to pursue his mountain odysseys across the globe. Many of his climbs and trek leaderships have been with groups from the Colorado Mountain Club, Iowa Mountaineers, and Mountain Travel USA. Readers acquainted with members of these organizations will enjoy meeting them again through Filsinger's accounts. The book provides both active and retrospective accounts of his travels, and includes his mountain poems, many of them previously published in climbing periodicals.

Filsinger's informative and sensitive writing rings a bell in this reviewer's own retrospections during mountain travels in some of the same areas. Filsinger's initial love of nature and the mountain world similarly came from Thoreau's *Walden* and the writings of John Muir. The book will be particularly enjoyed by those whose prime climbing was during the 1930s through 1960s, a generation whose perspective was tempered—and probably enriched—by a greater familiarity with mountaineering history and literature.

The book is rich in descriptions of personalities, including meetings with several world-class climbers in their own mountain domains. The author emphasizes the rewarding aspects of friendships gained in the mountains, often among peoples from other cultures and with different professional backgrounds.

Among the most significant of the author's experiences are those which occurred while leading five expeditions into the Andes hinterland. He describes—with saving humor—the frustrating exigencies confronted by him and César Morales, a Peruvian official, while pioneering the complex procedures of launching large-scale expeditions in that country—on the eve of the subsequent voluminous rush of mountaineers from all over the world to Peru's magnificent cordilleras. In 1971 and 1972, he and Morales led Mountain Travel's initial climbing treks through the Cordillera Blanca and Cordillera Vilcabamba, the former on the heels of the great 1970 earthquake in northern Peru, which killed 67,000 and left 600,000 homeless. He describes trekking through the rearranged mountain terrain there and portrays the physical and human devastation of the great avalanche that fell from the upper west face of

21,837-foot North Huascarán, which completely buried the town of Yungay and most of its citizens.

At the back of the book are a glossary of mountaineering terms, detailed supplementary notes amplifying references in the text (including some covering the achievements of distinguished mountaineers he's met in his travels), and photo credits and detailed photo captions.

The book may be ordered directly from the author at RFD #3, Box 262, Clearfield, PA 16830, for \$32.00 postpaid.

DEE MOLENAAR

The Ascent. Jeff Long. William Morrow, New York, NY, 1992. 284 pages. \$20.00.

Jeff Long's second novel describes an attempt on the north side of Everest. The route, the "Kore Wall," is "an imaginary monster," but it often feels very real indeed. One of Long's strengths is his ability to make the mountain a ferocious mass of rock and ice, hurling debris upon its puny challengers. The cold, the wind, the whole hostile environment are rendered with vividness and force.

The expedition is called the U.S.U.S. (us, us!), and some of its members seek only material advancement. The worst of the lot, alas, is its leader, "an accountant who had somehow ascended to the presidency of the American Alpine Club" and whose true objective is a cabinet post in Washington. At the other extreme are the central figures, Daniel and Abe, with their deeply personal goals. Their relation begins with one of the finest sections of the book, a harrowing overture in which Daniel's young climbing partner, Diana, dies in a crevasse, while the badly injured Daniel is saved. Diana's death is prolonged; toward the end she eerily breaks into song. And all the while Abe, age 17, is keeping futile watch over her. Nearly twenty years later Abe has almost forgotten Daniel, but Daniel has secretly maintained the connection (his name is Corder: cord-er) and recruits Abe for the expedition. He wants—he needs—to reach the top with him: "Same day. Same rope." Abe, who has had trouble making connections of his own, accepts this one.

The Ascent is nothing if not ambitious. It links the expedition with the tragedy of Tibet itself: "a graveyard and gulag garrisoned by Chinese troops and overrun by 7.5 million Chinese colonists." Thus Long brings to Base Camp a Tibetan monk, Wangdu, savagely tortured by the Chinese, who are determined to keep him in the country, alive or dead. Wangdu becomes a touchstone for the moral qualities of the climbers; some take risks to defend his ebbing life, while others betray him with little conscience. Long implicitly associates the ravaging of Tibet with the worst aspects of this American attempt on Everest, which is pointedly described in the language of sexual and military assault. While the expedition has a spiritual meaning for Abe and Daniel, for others it is driven by the most worldly considerations. "We're in the latest Rolex commercial," the leader proclaims at one point. One of the two women in the group has garnered