

American climbers' truck crash of that era in Nepal: the climbers made no restitution to the dead Sherpa victim's family.)

Clearly, Bates' life is one of prolonged series of meetings with beloved mountains and remarkable men such as Brad Washburn, Ed Hillary, Ad Carter, Willi Unsoeld—and too many others to name. The only flaw of the writing is the author's inability to issue judgement, skepticism, or critical thinking about any of his friends or acquaintances. ("If he can't say something nice, he says nothing at all" writes Houston in the foreword). Bates writes a chapter about their post 1938 K2 overland journey, but omits the story about one of his teammates killing a man in India. Or what did the author—an excellent judge of character—really feel about Ronald Reagan while shaking his hand in the White House? These omissions are deliberate statements about a forgotten age of gentlemen mountaineers, when their restrained politically correct behavior ruled the hills.

Bates' life is, after all, inspiration. His only illnesses from ages 8 to 84 have been a passing influenza and arthritis; he describes 40-footers into crevasses (on goldline with a monster pack mind you) tied into only a waistloop, elephants stepping two feet from his sleeping head, and remarkable meetings such as Heinrich Harrer thanking Eric Shipton for "getting him out of jail," Shipton, not knowing Harrer, replied that he'd never gotten anyone out of jail. Read the book if you want to know Harrer's reply.

The Love of Mountains Is Best—with its sweeping gesture of goodwill to all, and its utter selflessness—stands alone in modern mountaineering literature: for it is a book about rightness of mind and how to conduct oneself nobly in the mountains of the world.

JON WATERMAN

Spirits of the Air. Kurt Diemberger. Translated from the German by Audrey Salkeld. The Mountaineers, Seattle, 1994. 304 pages, numerous photographs, maps and other drawings. Appendices: a metric conversion table, chronology of the author's important climbs and expeditions, brief note on mountaineering terminology, and selected bibliography. \$27.95.

Kurt Diemberger's mountaineering and expedition filming accomplishments, spanning nearly 50 years, are a marvel to behold. His autobiographical *Summits and Secrets*, published in 1971 when Kurt was 39, established him as a mountaineering writer of considerable talent. By this time he had already participated in first ascents of two major peaks Broad Peak (8047 meters) and Dhaulagiri (8167 meters). The 1957 ascent of Broad Peak was accomplished in alpine-style, without either oxygen or high-altitude porters, quite an achievement for this 4-man team consisting of Diemberger, Hermann Buhl, Fritz Wintersteller and Markus Schmuck. Later, in 1978, he added Makalu (8463 meters) and Everest (8848 meters) to his 8000-meter peak list; and Gasherbrum II (8035 meters) a year later. It was on this French-led Everest

expedition that Kurt made film history by producing a sync-sound film on the summit.

Diemberger became the cameraman of choice for many international expeditions and between 1982-86 journeyed several times to K2 with the Englishwoman Julie Tullis; together they established themselves as the only 8000-meter film team, Kurt with the camera, Julie in charge of sound. They climbed K2 in the summer of 1986, but as they retreated to high camp on the Abruzzi Spur they and five other mountaineers were imprisoned by a catastrophic week-long blizzard. Diemberger's *K2-Traum und Schicksal* appeared in 1989. A major portion of this excellent book, later translated into English, also by Audrey Salkeld, as *The Endless Knot, K2—Mountain of Dreams and Destiny*, was the compelling description of events leading to the tragedy where all the trapped climbers on the spur perished, with the exception of Willi Bauer and Diemberger himself.

In the opening pages of *Spirits of the Air*, the author remains tormented by deep psychological as well as physical wounds from the K2 events. He sits at a Nanga Parbat Base Camp, nursing his discolored toes. "I am looking up at the dark blue trapezium [of Nanga Parbat]," he agonizes, "in shadow now: some day I'd love to go up there . . . will I ever stand on the top? And, if I do, will I come down again—or stay up there for ever?"

The title of the book is taken from an old Eskimo proverb: "Only the Spirits of the Air know what awaits me behind the mountains" . . . a fine metaphor for all that is uncertain and unknown in a mountaineering life. *Spirits of the Air* is similar in structure to Diemberger's *Summits and Secrets*, but far more episodic, almost disjointed in some respects. Ascents of Makalu and Everest, exploration and climbing in the Hindu Kush (including some re-worked material from *Summits and Secrets*) and travels in Greenland interspersed with miscellaneous vignettes: filming arctic reindeer in Lapland and a 6-meter boa constrictor in the Amazon rain forest, spending a night on Stromboli, visiting with his mother-in-law in Porto Maggiore, flying in a private jet over the High Sierra and Grand Canyon, just to mention a few. Most of these vignettes are quite delightful digressions among Diemberger's genuine mountaineering accomplishments, but some seem superfluous such as the author's lengthy story concerning a visit to Atlanta on a filming assignment.

A notable facet of Diemberger's writing is his fervent sensitivity to people, places, things. Nearing the summit of Makalu, he says "I . . . am deeply moved at the sight of this fierce, lonely, beautiful ice-covered structure, rising nakedly into the clear blue sky and wrapped around by the intermittent sparkle of thousands of tiny, floating ice crystals." He creates this image of Death Valley's sand dunes, "Bushes, once engulfed by the moving crests, have emerged years later on the opposite slope as wooden skeletons, spreading stiff branches, like fingers in hopeless defence." During his expedition to Makalu, he retreated to a rhododendron forest to recuperate from a pernicious high-altitude cough, "Then I felt the forest around me, this magic forest with all its beauty. And only

then did I begin to experience solace . . . as if love was streaming towards me from all sides.”

While *Spirits of the Air* has its faults, Diemberger’s passion for adventure and joy in companionship is as intense as ever. If his writing conveys such a richness of form and essence, it is due in no small measure to the translator. Though there are minor problems with translations that are too literal, Salkeld is basically this marvelous filter into which the German flows and from which the English appears, miraculously mirroring the original text in passion, cadence, and content.

If we must choose between Diemberger’s writings, then *Summits and Secrets* remains the most impressive collection of mountaineering writing. But then, for sheer drama concerning those fateful days in 1986, nothing can compare to *K2-Traum und Schicksal*. In the last analysis, though, Diemberger can be immensely proud of all three of his books.

ALLEN STECK

Heroic Climbs, Chris Bonington, general editor. The Mountaineers, Seattle, Washington. 1994. 224 pages. \$32.00.

Heroic Climbs is an anthology of forty narratives and photographs by climbers (“the foremost mountaineers of our times”), organized by mountain region: The Alps, Europe Beyond the Alps, North America, Southern Hemisphere, and High Asia. *Heroic Climbs* has a pedigree longer than Lord John Hunt’s titles; foreword by Hunt; Bonington as general editor supplies the clearly competent introduction and conclusion; Audrey Salkeld, as editor, contributes most of the regional histories, with support provided by the Alpine Club and the Royal Geographical Society. Nine others are listed as editors and art directors of one sort or another. This is a large-format book with nicely designed and reproduced color (or should I say *colour*?) photographs. It also functions well as a general history, though does not seem to have been meant as a reference work. The U.S. title *Heroic Climbs* may be more catchy than the British edition’s *Great Climbs*, but the latter is a more accurate description. Without geography to structurally hold the book together, the thing might very well explode under the weight of its own ambition, except for the way in which its well-chosen subtitle and theme, *A Celebration of World Mountaineering*, holds it all together.

The first section, The Alps, has a fine range of selections (though I doubt many French climbers would agree, Destivelle being their only representative). Lily Bristow’s journal entries from 1893 on the traverse of the Grépon provide the opening—a bit out of synch with the rest of the selections, the next nearest is John Hunt’s memory of the Meije in 1927. Rob Collister’s traverse of the Pelvoux, a modest excursion in this company, is a particularly well-observed account. Marc Twight receives the attention he deserves with his story of a modern alpine route on the Aiguille des Pèlerins. As much as there is to admire in his climbs, there’s hardly much celebration in his telling of them—he relies