Colonel Strutt, editor of the *Alpine Journal*, railed vehemently against extreme climbing, whether death resulted or not. Climbing was a sport: large risks were not acceptable.

Climbing in America is scanted, and one might wish for more stories of the great climbs in our country a century ago. Unsworth ends his history with the first ascent of Everest in 1953, thus excluding some of the most remarkable climbs ever done. Space dictated this decision: one hopes he may be persuaded to write the next volume.

Unsworth also shows us that the best-known mountaineers could be petty, vindictive and arrogant—so what is new? They were often fiercely competitive even before the rise of nationalism earlier in our times.

Together with The Climber's Fireside Book by Noyce and Irving's The Mountain Way, Unsworth's book makes a fascinating collection of the facts and imagery of mountaineering. Too many of us ignore the past and are surprised to find how often it mirrors the future. There are lessons here which may soothe the controversies of today.

Buy, borrow, or steal this wonderful book; it will entertain and teach all of us.

**Charles S. Houston, M.D.**


When I was asked to review this book, I thought, oh dear, another book on women mountaineers by a man. But wait, reader, before coming to the obvious disparaging conclusions, until you've read David Mazel's insightful introduction. Here's a sample:

A good climber, after all, is commonly thought to be bold, skillful, self-reliant, courageous, and strong—all that men are "supposed" to be, and all that women are "supposed" not to be. When women climb well, and when they do so unaccompanied by men, they challenge not just individual male egos but the whole constellation of assumptions about gender in our society.

Mazel articulates an historical perspective of mountaineering and feminism ranging from the politically mild (in general) nineteenth-century women climbers to the outspoken Annie Smith Peck and Fanny Bullock Workman at the turn of the century. He highlights the cordée féminine begun with Miriam O'Brien and her Groupe de Haute Montagne friends in the Alps in the late 1920s which Mazel sees as a feminist utopia, "the women's rope-team, two friends linked together in a dialectic of mutual ambition and mutual support." Mazel interprets Arlene Blum's leadership to success on Annapurna in 1978 as
a watershed climb, a path-breaking model with wide implications mountaineers can learn from, men and women.

So Mazel’s Introduction is good, very good. And his choice of selections? Terrific! There are sixteen stories here, which sounds as if it should be ample, but the material is so excellent I was left wishing for more. Mazel writes, “I wanted this anthology to be a record of literary as well as climbing achievement.” He has admirably accomplished this.

This collection spans from 1850 to 1955. Some of the nineteenth-century women included are Meta Brevoort, Mary Mummery, and Mrs. E. P. Jackson. As a sample, here’s Gertrude Bell on her eventful attempt of the Finsteraarhorn in 1902. When, early in the climb, a rock damaged the rope: “... later I happened to pass the rope through my hands and found that it had been cut through about a yard from my waist. ... This was rather a nuisance ...” Later, after conditions had deteriorated: “But I think when things are so bad as ever they can be you cease to mind them much.” About the eventual bivouac: “It was really not so bad.”

Next comes Himalayan explorer, Fanny Bullock Workman, who would very likely have been a general if she hadn’t been a climber. Such military language as “conquest,” “conquer,” “attack,” dot the page. And the woman whose name seems destined to be linked with hers, although they saw themselves as rivals, was Annie Smith Peck, the goal-oriented feminist, first on Huascarán’s North Peak.

Moving into the Twenties and Thirties we have Dorothy Pilley, and cordée féminine exponents, Miriam O’Brien and Nea Morin. The collection closes with Gwen Moffat, Britain’s first woman professional guide, and Elizabeth Stark, leader of the first women’s Himalayan expedition in 1955.

What I liked most about this collection is that these women are telling stories of adventures they went out to seek on their own. They didn’t climb mountains by luck or chance or in some other passive feminine way that society would have preferred.

Here are some examples of this spirit:

- Freda du Faur: “Silently I gazed at the thin, jagged ridge in front of me leading up to Mount Cook. Then and there I decided I would be a real mountaineer, and some day be the first woman to climb Mount Cook.”
- Annie Smith Peck: “Above and beyond this, being from earliest years a firm believer in the equality of the sexes, I felt that any great achievement in any line of endeavor would be of advantage to my sex.”
- Nea Morin: “In the morning all [husbands and wives] assembled to discuss plans; with a warlike glitter in her eye, Micheline blandly announced that we were going off to do something quite on our own.”
- Miriam O’Brien: “I decided to try some climbs not only guideless but manless.”

These women made things happen.
Each climber is introduced with a short and expert headnote which gives
background and sets the scene.
There is a fine Selected Bibliography.
Two questions:
1) Which woman in history would you have liked most to have climbed
with?
2) Why aren’t women writing/editing books like this?

LAURA WATERMAN

_Beyond the Limits: A Woman’s Triumph on Everest._ Stacy Allison with Peter

What can you say about a book promoting Everest as “the world’s most
challenging mountain” and which provides a rare close-up of the elite
mountain-climbing world? Sounds a lot like 99 other Everest books, doesn’t it?
As usual for a book of this type, the author’s pre-Everest life is detailed, and
in this case detailed at too far great a length. The first half of _Beyond the Limits_
covers Allison’s early climbing days and the training climbs for Everest, as well
as dwelling at length on her abusive marriage. However, some well-written
climbing episodes also manage to come through.

On Mount Robson, in the Canadian Rockies, with Mark Meiner they are
among the lucky few who make Robson’s summit. However, having travelled
light, without food, water, tent or sleeping bags they are caught at the summit
in one of the mountain’s frequent storms. Robson is notorious for bad weather.
Allison’s description of the first night huddled in a snow pit and a second night
during their descent brings realism to the reader. On Pik Kommunizma, a series
of bad decisions which high-altitude climbers cannot afford to make resulted in
the death of an expedition member. Again, her mountaineering descriptions are
well thought out in tone and content.

On her unsuccessful attempt on Everest, Allison spends most of her time
wondering whether one of the other women on the expedition will beat her to the
prize of being “the First American Woman on Everest.” This time she has “seen the
light” and now climbs for herself (and that goal of being “The First Woman”) and
fits into the expedition better. There are still the interpersonal tensions and
complexities among the team members but now her perspective is better.

One can applaud her 1988 achievement of soloing the last bit to the summit
and the tenacity and strength required on a mountain like Everest. Her
descriptions of her teammate’s reactions to her success, particularly those who
were themselves unsuccessful, are particularly poignant.

Despite these moments, however, _Beyond the Limits_ really has little to
distinguish it from the many other books available on Mount Everest, other
books with more substance and climbing content.

BEV BENDELL