

writing of John Muir. But Fiddler's *High Sierra* is very different. There are no signs of human existence; no distant tents, no people, no visible trails even. This is the timeless Sierra. Another example of Fiddler's unique vision is seen in his "Precipice Lake," a subject made famous in the Ansel Adams image, "Frozen Lake and Cliffs, 1932." Although the framing is nearly identical, Adams saw the full tonal scale in black and white, while Fiddler is drawn into ethereal emerald hues on submerged granite boulders.

Forgive the blasphemy of mentioning any photographer in the same sentence as Ansel Adams — I just wanted to point out that *The High Sierra* is a new look at a very familiar subject, and Fiddler does an excellent job at sharing his love for these gentle mountains.

MICHAEL GRABER

Defying Gravity: High Adventure on Yosemite's Walls. Gary Arce. Wilderness Press, Berkeley, California, 1995. Softcover, 194 pages. \$24.95.

Defying Gravity is a history of Yosemite rock climbing that provides easy reading and an adequate, if often-seen, selection of photographs. The author states in his preface that the book reflects his bias and is not intended to be a complete history. Instead, Arce claims, it is intended to be "a general outline of rock climbing in Yosemite." As such, it succeeds.

As *Defying Gravity* progresses, the reader gets a good idea of climbing in the Valley through the 1970s. The book quickly covers the climbs and tries to bring out the personalities of the climbers involved. Arce comes very close to bringing out the motivations of the main players such as Robbins and Harding. And yet, while we learn what people did and how they were viewed by others, we don't get a feeling for the climbers themselves, as we might if we had climbed with them. Take Harding, for instance: The less you know about him on a personal level, the easier it is to follow the lead of other writers. This Arce does, saying that Harding didn't care. But Harding does care and always has. This sort of complexity is almost impossible to describe second-hand, especially in an overview like this.

Defying Gravity does do a fair job of handling the many ethical debates of the various times throughout the Valley's history, such as *The Wall of the Early Morning Light* or Ray Jardine's chipping holds on *The Nose*. This may be the book's greatest strength. Though a contemporary climber, Arce has no first-hand experience of the sixties and could not, no matter how hard he tried, acquire the perspective of those who were there at the time. So while Arce may have missed many of the personal details, he was also not wrapped up in the often-petty and personal squabbles of the climbers. This is defi-

nately an advantage when trying to do an objective job of documentation. I like the even-handed way he describes the ethical debates.

On the positive side, I liked seeing the story of Sibylle Hechtel and Bev Johnson's first female ascent of El Cap. However, the majority of the earlier parts of the book are built on the works of others. As the book comes into the 1980s ("A New Generation") it becomes even more obvious that the author has based his account on events recorded in existing literature, particularly Wellman's *Climbing Back* or the "Hot Flashes" section in *Climbing*, and various reports from *Rock and Ice*.

Much has been done in Yosemite over the years that has not been written about. Some journalistic digging, including a good look into the contemporary climbing scene in the Valley, would have been refreshing. Here, the author lost many good opportunities to make his book something special. For example: I would like to have heard more about the climbs of Eric Kohl, who has done 23 Grade VI first ascents (16 of these solo, half of them rated A5). His record not only puts him in a special class within Yosemite, but also gives him world-class stature; yet Arce only mentions Kohl briefly. Also, the team of Steve Bosque and Mike Corbett accomplished many fine big wall first ascents throughout the Valley, but the only recognition Arce affords Corbett is for being "Mr. El Cap" (for his 41 ascents of El Cap by 25 routes) and for leading Mark Wellman up *Tis-sa-ack* and the *Shield*. I would like to have seen less space devoted to "The Free Salathé" and Mark Wellman's story, both parts of Yosemite's history well-documented elsewhere and that could easily have been condensed here. This might have left room for more original research by the author.

Defying Gravity does a good job of cataloging the known events in Yosemite's development as a climbing area. Most of the information in the book has been accessed from other references. The section "References and Further Reading" lists many of these, but curiously does not include either Chris Jones' *History of Climbing in North America* or Galen Rowell's *The Vertical World of Yosemite*, two books which give a great in-depth view of the times they cover. Some of the stories collected in these books are mentioned in "Further Reading" in their original form, such as *AAJ* articles from the 1960s that are difficult for the average reader to find. *The Vertical World of Yosemite* would have been a much more accessible reference.

Though there is not much in the way of new information here, this book does nicely condense much of Yosemite's existing climbing history into a single and affordable package. Arce emphasizes the more positive sides of human nature evident in Yosemite's climbing history, and to his credit, does not turn a blind eye to the environment and how climbing affects it. Finally, Arce places a high value on the tradition of ground-up ascents — the spirit of adventure in Valley climbing. *Defying Gravity*, with its smooth reading

and generally positive portrait of Yosemite climbers, will be an asset to beginning climbers, climbers new to the Valley, and especially for the general public.

ERIC BRAND

K2: The Story of the Savage Mountain. Jim Curran. The Mountaineers, Seattle, 1995. 271 pages. Black-and-white photographs, 16 in color, seven maps and topographical drawings. \$24.95.

Many are the books about individual expeditions to K2, the world's second highest summit. In recent years that number has proliferated in proportion to the reputation for ferociousness the mountain has earned. But there has hitherto been no book that tells K2's full story and that includes between its covers the sum of the ordeals and sacrifices endured by the people of many beliefs, languages, races and nationalities who have been attracted to K2 as by a magnet. Jim Curran's compact, informative and well-rounded account fills the gap.

In writing what clearly started out as a history, Curran, whether deliberately or not, has achieved three objectives of value to the reader: First, he makes available an almost encyclopedical and well-organized mass of history. Second, his text introduces a powerful cautionary element badly needed for future visitors to the mountain, and which contains valuable objective lessons. And third, he supplies a great deal of statistical data not previously available in any one volume.

Curran is well-equipped for his task. He has climbed on K2, albeit not to the top. He is the author of *K2: Triumph and Tragedy*, the intricate story of the multiple catastrophes of 1986. He has the qualifications of a good writer and he is also an excellent photographer. Equally significant, he is the veteran of much expeditionary climbing and his personal experiences have long since taught him what the game is all about. Whenever possible he interviews eye witnesses to important events, and where this is not possible he refers to the most truthful and accurate written records he can find.

As writer and chronicler, Curran's real strength lies in his ability to analyze complicated and unusually tangled events, to unravel the strands and to describe situations in straightforward terms that can be understood by everyone. As might be expected, Curran's story commences with the discovery of K2 by Lieutenant Montgomerie in 1856 and continues to the present (1995). Curran overlooks no expedition, however little known or unsuccessful. This attention to detail continues right up to the book's end, when the proliferation of incidents begins to overwhelm the lofty bastions of K2 and tests even