

Blackburn, she recounts, because "I had the need for courage and inspiration, and on the high mountains I find them as nowhere else." Isn't this one of the reasons we all climb?

For the student of Alaska climbing, many of the accounts will be familiar, either from earlier appearances in the *AAJ* or from the original books and articles themselves. Ricardo Cassin's story of the first ascent of Denali's south face and Art Davidson's depiction of the epic first winter ascent of the mountain are classics. Reading these accounts makes you feel that you are right there.

David Roberts' story of the 1965 ascent of the Harvard Route on Mt. Huntington ranks as one of the all-time great stories of Alaskan mountaineering. Royal Robbins' piece on his foray into the Kichatna Spires, Jim Bridwell's account of the climb up the east face of the Moose's Tooth, and Mike Kennedy's article on his new routes on Hunter and Foraker with George Lowe inspired many at the time of their printing. Frankly, they still inspire today. These people, both as climbers and writers, have set the standards for mountaineering in Alaska.

The award for endurance, patience, and questionable commitment goes to Johnny Waterman for his 144-day solo ascent of the southeast spur of Mt. Hunter in 1978. No one, except the few climbers who have climbed (or tried) Denali solo, and in winter, have come close to experiencing the loneliness and intensity Waterman experienced on his epic climb. Jon Waterman's excellent biographical sketch of Johnny helps us to understand, in a small way, what motivated such a person. After reading the article I came away with more respect for Johnny Waterman. At the same time I felt grateful my mountaineering career has followed a different path.

At \$16.95, *Alaska Ascents* is a deal compared to what one typically spends nowadays to buy a good climbing "read." When you consider that most of these accounts are excerpts from rare and out-of-print books, the value is immeasurable.

STEVE DAVIS

A Portrait of Leni Riefenstahl. Audrey Salkeld. Jonathan Cape, London, 1996. 312 pages, black-and-white photographs. ca. \$20.00.

In the 1920s, Leni Riefenstahl climbed the Vajolet and Sella Towers and skied and worked with Hannes Schneider and Sepp Allgeier in Arnold Panck's mountain films. In the early 1930s she collaborated with Bela Balaz, noted Marxist screenwriter and film theorist, on her own version of the mountain film *The Blue Light* (*Das blaue Licht*), which she starred in and also directed. She spent months on location in the fjords of Greenland acting in another of Fanck's mountain films, this one requiring extensive filming on crumbling ice floes, complete with polar bear action. The list of her partners seems a partial who's who among Europe's alpine elite: Luis Trenker (skier, climber, screen star, and later filmmaker and author), Hannes Schneeberger (skier, climber, and expert camera operator), Hans Ertl (mountaineer and cameraman) and Walter Prager (Swiss ski champion). But in 1932, this woman also wrote a note to Adolf Hitler, whose popularity was increasing, and requested a personal meeting. In 1933, as Hitler secured his powerbase, he decreed she would film the National Socialist party rally and he insisted she make another documentary of the Nuremberg party rally in 1934. That film, *Triumph of the Will* (*Triumph des Willens*), secured Leni Riefenstahl's reputation as a Nazi filmmaker for posterity.

Audrey Salkeld's *A Portrait of Leni Riefenstahl* explores the life, character, and context of this notorious woman in a level-headed and detailed manner without sapping the portrait of its coloration, whether darkly incriminating or vibrantly intriguing. By writing the biography, Salkeld hoped to resolve for herself whether Riefenstahl "was a player or pawn in the murky world of pro-

paganda politics." The answer to that question remains ambiguous. Salkeld's research undermines much of the innuendo and rumor surrounding Riefenstahl. The biographer argues convincingly against the popular notion that Riefenstahl orchestrated the Nuremberg rally, while not denying the filmmaker had unprecedented cooperation in filming it. The pageantry was staged by the Nazis for the party faithful and for the media—not staged by Riefenstahl for *Triumph of the Will*.

Riefenstahl's own memories and assertions, however, are also subject to scrutiny, and telling lapses emerge. During May of 1933, Riefenstahl insists she was "tucked away in the Swiss Alps," unaware of the increasingly virulent Nazi activities, including the book burnings. But the journal of Hitler's second-in-command, Joseph Goebbels, records frequent and friendly meetings with her. Goebbels even notes of her, "She alone of the stars understands us."

Riefenstahl's recollections, published in the U.S. as *Riefenstahl: A Memoir*, provide almost 700 pages of her story, told from her perspective. Salkeld takes these memoirs and (thankfully) condenses them. Salkeld adds commentary from Riefenstahl's friends, detractors, from Nazi architect Albert Speer, from Goebbels, Hitler, and from popular presses. The chronicle also covers Riefenstahl's life after the fall of the Third Reich. She was eventually cleared of complicity by de-Nazification courts. She pursued various unsuccessful film projects, worked extensively on still photographs of African tribes and, into her 90s, continued to deep sea dive and record her dives on film. Salkeld even includes various scholarly views of the artist's work and argues against Susan Sontag's notion of Riefenstahl's fascist aesthetic.

Salkeld's book also contains a fascinating portrait of Germany's film industry and specifically of the mountain film. Those familiar with German cinema between the World Wars (the Weimar years) know of the expressionist films such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (*Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, 1919), and the more realist later films, such as *The Blue Angel* (*Der Blaue Engel*, 1929). The mountain film has been relegated to cinematic obscurity, despite breathtaking mountain scenery and actors who were really skiers and climbers. These high action melodramas, although extremely popular with film goers, aroused the contempt of reviewers. Film historian Siegfried Kracauer would eventually suggest that, in their anti-rationalism and appeal to the heroic, they (along with much of Weimar cinema) were "proto-Nazi." Salkeld suggests, rightly so, that the mountain film has been unfairly marginalized and deserves reappraisal.

She makes the same assertion about Leni Riefenstahl. Salkeld provides a vivid account of the making of the *Olympia* films, Riefenstahl's brilliant documentary about the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Although warned by Goebbels, in 1936 the Reichsminister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, that any film about the Olympics should devote little screen time to the exploits of Jesse Owens and other black athletes, Riefenstahl features Owens, including the enthusiastic crowd chanting "Owens, Owens." Riefenstahl also provides glimpses of Nazi leaders. According to Salkeld, "[we] need to see him [Hitler] straighten and sniff as the magnificent young Jesse Owens storms yet again across the finishing line." Despite the magnificence of the athletes in the *Olympia* films, it is the art of the camera work and editing that genuinely astounds the viewer. Salkeld claims "the stifling of [Riefenstahl's] career was a personal tragedy, but it is worth venturing that posterity too is the poorer. Original talent is a rare gift."

A Portrait of Leni Riefenstahl emerged as the winner of the Boardman Tasker Award for Mountain Literature in October, 1996, and will intrigue mountain enthusiasts, film and history aficionados, and scholars. The front and back jacket designs provide visual pleasures that hint at the stimulating, often humorous, well-researched, and even-handed prose portrait of Riefenstahl contained within the covers.