

tion of his and Skinner's free ascents of four spectacular big walls: El Cap's *Salathé Wall*, the Southwest Face of Proboscis in the Northwest Territories, the North Face of Mt. Hooker in the Wind River Range and the Direct North Face of Half Dome. Ironically, all four walls were originally pioneered by Royal Robbins in the 1960s, and were then seminal climbs at the top of the scale of both difficulty and beauty. Piana's opinion that the freeing of these four routes make them the most important wall climbs in North America is a claim supported neither by history nor by the climbs themselves. Free climbing big walls had been established for more than a decade when the duo made its dramatic first free ascent of the *Salathé*, which is questionably the finest free-wall climb in the world, but historically represents raising the ante of an already established phenomenon rather than inventing a new mode.

But the gargantuan claims aside, *Big Walls* is a thrilling effort—a lavish coffee-table book bursting with shocking color photos and spirited writing. It is a must-read for anyone interested in the outer envelope of what free climbers have yet accomplished, and to those who aspire to reach similar heights someday.

JOHN LONG

A History Of Mountain Climbing. Roger Frison-Roche and Sylvain Jouty. Flammarion: Paris and New York, 1996. Hardback, large format, numerous color plates and photographs. 236 pages. \$65.

A history of mountaineering, lavishly illustrated, in a coffee-table format. No mean feat! The book gets off to a good start: the initial chapters are superb and justify the high-altitude price tag. Alpinism was born in the Alps, primarily in the Chamonix/Zermatt environs, so the French authors speak with considerable artistry on the highly contested first ascents of Mont Blanc and the Matterhorn. But following their nationalistic chronicling of European alpinism (including British, German, Austrian, but most enthusiastically, French) in the book's first half, they should have stopped while ahead. Once they launch into the book's second half and "Other Mountain Ranges," factual mistakes multiply like mushrooms after a rain. Ascents in the American "lower 48," the Canadian Rockies, and Alaska are conveniently described alongside exploits in the Caucasus, Andes, Africa, and New Zealand.

Chapter titles like "The French to the Fore" make it obvious this book was written for the French market. Yes, climbers are naturally competitive—with the mountains and each other—but as an historical constant, the theme of nationalism is stated ad nauseam. There is, however, excellent historical trivia: the precursor of the ice axe, a small hatchet, was called a *pioulette*, hence the term *piolet*. Grand Jorasse was the nickname of a chamois hunter and early guide on Mont Blanc named Lombard. Jacque Balmat's sick baby actually died the same day that he and Dr. Paccard reached the Mont Blanc summit (August 8, 1786), and Balmat hurriedly descended to be with his wife.

Numerous misspellings and factual errors interrupted my reading. Samples: Miriam (NOT Myriam) Underhill. Mick (NOT Mike) Burke. Hans C Christian Doseh (NOT Donseth) and Finn Daehli (NOT Doehli); and NOT ALL four Norwegians died on the descent after the first ascent of Great Trango (only the two with misspelled names died!). Likewise, Rand Herron was killed in a fall down the Second Pyramid at Giza, NOT down the Great Pyramid. Plus Heinrich Harrer "subsequently spent the next seven extraordinary years climbing in Tibet." No kidding? And Todd Skinner did have a partner on the first free ascent of the *Salathé Wall*: his name is Paul Piana.

The photos illustrating American climbing are generally weak. The start of the North America section—surprise!—offers photos of 1950s French alpinists logically juxtaposed with engravings of John Fremont and Major Powell. None of the '30s-era American rock climbers, K2 veterans, or Yosemite Golden Age-ers (except Harding) are seen. There is one photo of Skinner and Piana, and two of Lynn Hill. But the effect is slapdash. One paragraph describes the FA of Yosemite's Sentinel by Salathé and Steck in 1950; the next, the FA of Popocatepetl in Mexico in 1519 by the Conquistadors! The Cassin Ridge: two sentences. The FA of Hidden Peak by Andy Kauffman and Pete Schoening: two sentences. You get the picture. . . .

The history of the Alps (superbly illustrated and engagingly written) clearly came at the expense of an abbreviated world climbing history. Four sentences on Mt. Kenya; minimal descriptions of the 1938 and 1939 American K2 expeditions, with incorrect facts on the latter. Fritz Wiessner and Pasang Lama's descent was not caused "when Wolfe and two Sherpas were killed"—and actually, three Sherpas later died. There are multiple Everest errors. The benefits of breathing bottled oxygen while sleeping at high altitude was "discovered" on the 1922 Everest expedition by George Finch, Geoffrey Bruce, and the Gurka, Tejbir. To suggest it was "a French technique" first championed on Makalu is absurd! On the 1921 Everest expedition, Mallory and Bullock DID NOT immediately perform "a key task by climbing up to the North Col." Rather, they couldn't find the approach to the Col until after weeks of recon! It is Irvine's ice axe that was found by the First Step in 1933, NOT Mallory's and Hornbein and Unsoeld DID NOT meet another American team on Everest's summit in 1963; they met Jerstad and Bishop later, while descending the Southeast Ridge.

In the positive, women's alpine and Himalayan climbing achievements, from Annie Peck on Huascarán to Catherine Destivelle soloing the Matterhorn are given equal mention (as they should be), plus are well-illustrated. Artistically, numerous paintings of mountain scenery and climbing history, enchanting archival photographs of guides and gear, plus climbing-movie posters of K2, Tirich Mir and others add visual splendor to the book. Two useful appendices, "50 Great Names in Mountaineering" and "100 Key Dates," round out the story. Mountaineering is indeed "the pointless if wonderful struggle between humans and peaks," but someone on this team should have fact-checked with considerably greater diligence.

EDWARD WEBSTER

Deep Play, A Climbers Odyssey from Llanberis to the Big Walls. Paul Pritchard. Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1997. 16-page color insert. 192 pages. \$22.95.

Stories of a Young Climber: An Autobiography. Pat Ament. Two Lights: Boulder, 1996. 262 pages. \$15.95.

D *Deep Play*, winner of the prestigious Boardman Tasker Award for mountaineering literature in 1997, is a collection of essays, mostly short non-fiction accounts of "cutting edge" climbs by Paul Pritchard. The book is distinguished by two qualities: the nature of the climbs he describes and the impressionistic style in which he describes them. Of these two features, it is the nature of the climbs that leaves the strongest impression on the reader. In fact, one wonders if the award was made more in appreciation of the climbing Pritchard does and the sacrifices he has made to it rather than the quality of the writing.

The climbing is traditional in the best sense of the word: ground-up, alpine-style, minimal bolting, a penchant for new lines in exotic locales—Meru in the Himalaya, Mt. Asgard on Baffin Island, the Central Tower of Paine in Patagonia. The organization of the text is chrono-