

Reviews

Edited by David Stevenson

IMAX *Everest*. Produced by MacGillivray Freeman Films. Mountain footage filmed and directed by David Breashears. Camera assistant, Robert Schauer. Screened at Edwards IMAX theater, Irvine, California. Price of admission: \$7. Film time: 48 minutes.

E*verest*, the most popular large-format film of all time, features an ascent of the South Col route by Ed Viesturs, Jamling Norgay Sherpa (son of first ascender Tenzing Norgay), and Spanish climber Araceli Segarra. The cinematography and direction is by two award-winning filmmakers: Greg MacGillivray and accomplished climber David Breashears. Breashears, no stranger to Everest, made television history on one of his dozen expeditions to the world's highest mountain by sending the first live broadcast from the summit to television sets around the world. He has been dazzling audiences for 20 years, and this 70-mm film is no exception. Three months after *Everest* released, I went to see it on a Saturday morning—only to learn that all shows had sold out.

Part of the popularity, of course, is due to the public fascination with the May 10, 1996 tragedy that left five climbers dead and a sixth horribly frostbitten. The IMAX crew was on the mountain at that time, and with members like Breashears, Viesturs and Robert Schauer, their expedition was far and away the most respected and experienced. When disaster struck high on the mountain, Breashears was faced with a sticky decision: get involved with the rescue and risk the 5.5 million-dollar film project, or remain detached, preserve his group's resources and let the chips fall where they may. The story about how his crew dropped everything, offered up all their supplies and oxygen and marched up the hill to save lives is now history. They are remembered as heroes.

After the rescue, with supplies seriously compromised, the film crew exhausted, bodies of friends still frozen to various sections of the route, how does one inspire the team upward? I don't know how Breashears was able to keep focus, but against all odds, he made it happen. The pay-off is a nice long clip of Norgay Sherpa and Segarra climbing somewhere on the ridge between the Hillary Step and summit. This one shot is worth the price of admission.

But there are problems—"writing problems," as they say in the business. On summit day, Viesturs is nowhere to be found. Under strict orders from his wife, he sprinted ahead, tagged the summit and bailed. Thus, the conspicuous disclaimer: "parts of this film have been recreated." All the footage of Viesturs swimming through powder snow, presumably just outside a ski area somewhere, en route to the "summit," is a joke. The "summit" is a shocker, too: the camera angle is raked upward so as not to reveal higher summits in the background. Frederick Cook would have been embarrassed and any serious mountaineer will feel disappointed.

The story line suffers, too, though through no fault of the filmmakers. Most IMAX theaters (there are just under 200 worldwide) are connected to museums, and the museum directors often insist a scientific angle be woven into the script. But here it feels contrived and silly. I've seen this film twice and I still don't know what the story is supposed to be. Is this about Tenzing Norgay's son? About Viesturs? Why not just call it a travel log and let the images speak for themselves?

If you haven't seen it, *Everest* is well worth your time. If you have a choice of seats, go to the back row and sit dead center. The photography is outstanding, the soundtrack, with music from George Harrison, is inspiring, and once you realize the hell that this crew went through to bring back the footage, you'll leave with a lot of respect for the filmmakers.

MICHAEL GRABER

World Mountaineering: The World's Great Mountains by the World's Great Mountaineers. Audrey Salkeld, general editor. Forward by Christian Bonington. Mitchell Beazley: London, U.K. 1998. Numerous color and black-and-white photographs, maps, topos. 304 pages. \$50.00

Poring over maps and thumbing through old references in search of new projects has consumed hours of my life. This is the dreaming, scheming phase of climbing that is nearly as pleasurable as the physical act itself. The pastime also serves to ground me in the humble realization that climbing remains a passionate and compelling journey—a journey that has been perpetuated by kindred spirits for many, many generations. Practitioners current and past are still searching for the same essence: personal confrontation in wild places where we have only the illusion of being in control. Thus Audrey Salkeld's definition of the intangible urge to climb is as on-the-money as any I have encountered to date: "This is what climbing is most about—taking back the responsibility for one's own existence."

World Mountaineering provides a wealth of geographical and practical climbing information for a fascinating diversity of mountains, laid out in a concise and effective format. Many areas that have little previous documentation are covered in impressive detail. An amazing amount of research went into this book, and it has produced a work that can be read as much for pleasure as for trip planning.

But more importantly, it provides a wonderfully complete feel for the history, spirit and personality of each mountain described. The book accomplishes this by enlisting the insights and anecdotes of an impressive list of climbers with the necessary credentials to reveal the essential intricacies of the mountain they characterize. The book goes straight to the source for the pithiest information. Who better to describe the Eiger than Victor Saunders and Anderl Heckmair, or Everest than Peter Athans and George Mallory II, or Gasherbrum IV than Stephen Venebles and Robert Schauer? It's these candid and personal accounts by the individuals most familiar with the important routes on each chosen mountain that make this book a real treasure.

Fifty-two peaks are described, beginning with a locator map that seems of limited value in many cases. The map of the Grand Teton, for instance, is relatively useless as a reference tool and serves merely as an artistic adornment to the chapter. For those interested in climbing a particular mountain, the maps referenced later will of course be essential. An introduction and informative overview of the various facets of each mountain is followed by a chronology of significant ascents that very effectively summarizes the essential climbing history. But by far the most practical feature for each selection is the black-and-white photo with routes clearly superimposed. Written route descriptions are minimal yet valuable in that they provide an objective appraisal of route quality, greatly aiding one in choosing between the myriad possibilities on any given mountain. Finally, a collection of practical information, including how to get there, available facilities, climbing season, recommended gear, maps and guides, local language, rescue and insurance considerations and a hint of the red tape you might encounter, provides the logistical kernel to facilitate more detailed trip planning.