

At the 1980 AAC annual dinner, Brad motioned me over to his table and asked what I was up to the following year. I mentioned that I had a *National Geographic* assignment to climb and trek around Amne Machin, once thought to be higher than Everest. Brad's eyes lit up as brightly as the lasers he later used to pinpoint the exact height of Everest. He grabbed a napkin and sketched the area around the peaks in eastern Tibet, marking each summit's height in meters. He talked about his aerial reconnaissance there in 1948 as if it were yesterday.

When I returned from Tibet, I noted that Brad's sketch did not conform well with the features on the classified U.S. Defense Department map that I had been permitted to view by special permission from Secretary Caspar Weinberger, who served with me on an environmental board. Cap had stressed that no copies were to go to Tibet with me, because national security would be compromised if the map got into the wrong hands and the Chinese found out just how much ground information we really had from those U2 overflights. Thank God they never confiscated the napkin I took to Tibet with Brad's sketch. It held far more accurate information than the best official map.

Though some of Brad's photographs have been exhibited in prominent art galleries, he clearly states that he never took them for art's sake. He was merely making images of aspects of the natural world that fascinated him, such as mountains, glaciers, and rock formations. That Brad was able to complete and guide the production of this beautiful book in his 90th year is yet another addition to the voluminous chronology of his accomplishments that appears on the final pages.

GALEN ROWELL

Snow in the Kingdom: My Storm Years on Everest. Ed Webster. Eldorado Springs, Colorado: Mountain Imagery, 2000. 580 pages, color and black & white photos. \$29.95.

Figuratively, the dichotomous title of Ed Webster's book tells a lot about what's inside. The first phrase, "Snow in the Kingdom," is wonderfully transcendent and enigmatic, hinting at something both heroic and humble, powerful yet serene. The second half, "My Storm Years on Everest," made me grind my teeth just a bit the first time I read it. There is something self-absorbed here, like we're soon to find out a lot more about Ed Webster than we might have otherwise chosen to know. And so it goes with this book: the full spectrum is represented, from the quite nearly sublime to something else resembling the narcissistic. Constructed around a tumultuous four-year period of Webster's life, this 580-page autobiographical tome takes us from the life of a talented itinerant rock climber to one of the greatest Himalayan climbs ever, and covers quite a bit in between.

Webster completed the bulk of this book in 1990 during the trying aftermath of his final Everest climb, "... typing out the words in agonizing taps with my black mummified, frost-bitten fingertips." Whew. Unable to find a big book publisher interested in an Everest story or a mountaineering book publisher with a deal worth the trouble, Webster, after a further ten years of incubation, resolved to take the daunting path of self-publishing.

A predominant characteristic of this book is Webster's urge to tell us, fairly intimately, what's going on inside him. Truly expressing one's emotions and fears in written word takes courage. There are multiple layers around that true core of honesty that look like the real thing, but aren't, and it's exceedingly difficult to pierce through them. Webster doesn't shy away from trying, and my sense is that he wanders amongst these various layers, often almost gratuitously telling us about the time he had a certain feeling, yet on other occasions, more

simply and powerfully evoking those emotions. Throughout the book, some events do shine through as truly from the heart, and this is where his tale of his “storm years” essentially begins: his girlfriend, Lauren Husted, dying in his arms in the Black Canyon of the Gunnison in Colorado. He seeks to come to grips with her death, in part through climbing, sticking to his home turf, but within the year, Webster’s nascent desire to climb in the Himalaya manifests in his membership of the 1985 American Everest West Ridge Expedition. Though still greatly affected by the death of Lauren, he is now also simultaneously free to test himself.

Each of Webster’s storm years on Everest hearkens to a different type of expedition and a corresponding zeitgeist, all of which seem to be behind us. Large national expeditions tackling difficult projects are relics now, in that there are still large national expeditions but they rarely undertake anything ambitious anymore. They played an important role, however, in schooling Himalayan novices. The 1985 West Ridge group had quite a few first-timers who subsequently became players. First-time visitor Webster’s experience of the people, culture, sounds, smells, and sights of Nepal, along with the trials and tribulations of being a member of a large group, fill these pages. The first host of characters from the “storm years” includes well-known and soon-to-be-well-known climbers, Sherpas, personalities associated with the Himalayan scene who don’t actually climb, and a helicoptering rock star. Webster’s character sketches are strong and the dialogue is fascinating at times. He certainly has the people I know down pat. I really hear their voices when I read these passages and I surmise that this holds true with the others. A lot of this book is a travelogue, and although Webster’s descriptive language at times feels flat, or maybe too lightly considered, such as “...Wizard of Oz-like forest” or “In a jiffy...,” he’s gone to the trouble to blend in anthropology and natural history, so that a pretty good mental picture develops of these, from our perspective, exotic locales.

Speaking of pictures, photography has always been centrally important to Webster. In undertaking to self-publish *Snow in the Kingdom*, he resolved to make this book all it could be. This meant, in addition to many maps, diagrams, a huge bibliography, and a super-comprehensive index, generous portions of photography. There are four 32-page color plate sections. The reproduction quality is impeccable, including that of the innumerable black and whites sprinkled throughout the text, which, in a lot of books, come out looking like hell. Webster also weaves in hitherto unpublished photos, taken in 1924, that he received from the grandson of Noel Odell, the last man to see Mallory and Irvine alive. I don’t mean to give any of the photography short shrift—Webster knows what he’s doing with a camera and indeed I consider one of the photos to be a mountaineering icon—but in the end, it’s where this book is heading that drives everything.

The West Ridge Expedition lurches along, verging on, but never touching, the calamitous. Webster has suffocating panic attacks, exalted experiences, and arguments. He performs modestly well at altitude, makes an important new friend or two, and through it all, he comes out of it with a heightened desire to climb Everest. The reasons why he wants to climb it so badly now continue to be murky at best.

After Messner soloed the North Ridge/North Face in the monsoon season of 1980, a relatively short era ensued when the best climbers attempted Everest by “fair means:” small unsupported teams, no oxygen, no one else on the route. The north side was recognized as the best bet for this, and in 1986 it was the next stop for Webster—though not to climb it, but as a photographer for a character who popped up in that period, Canadian Roger Marshall, intent on a solo ascent. The travelogue picks up for this soloist and his entourage of three—Webster, his girlfriend, and Marshall’s girlfriend—in Beijing, then onward through Tibet, where they meet up with Marshall’s Sherpa friend, Pasang Norbu, who will be their base camp manag-

er, and finally to the storied Rongbuk monastery and base camp below the north face of Everest. The monsoon wears on, preventing Marshall from making any real attempt. European aces Beghin, Troillet, and Loretan arrive for their own lightweight attempt, putting more pressure on Marshall, a professional climber, to perform.

Though Marshall is not without his credentials, one begins to suspect that maybe he has become a hostage to his career. His initial bravado begins to wane. Body language in a photo of Marshall chatting with Beghin and Troillet reveals much about the relative confidence and caliber of each of these climbers. Webster, for his part, salvages the summer for himself quite nicely with a solo ascent of Everest's neighbor to the north, the 7583-meter Changtse, while Loretan and Troillet make their paradigm-shattering 43-hour round-trip ascent of the north face.

Robert Anderson, one of Webster's friends from the West Ridge Expedition, had a simple idea: to climb a new route by fair means on Everest's tallest and most remote escarpment, the Kangshung Face. Eighteen months after Webster bid farewell to Marshall at the north face, a team of four relatively unknown climbers (Anderson, Webster, Stephen Venables, and Paul Teare), Pasang Norbu once again, and a small group of trekkers, which included Norbu Tenzing Norgay, eldest son of Tenzing Norgay, rendezvoused in Tibet in March, 1988.

Foreshadowing what lay ahead, the approach to base camp became epic in its own right: a ten-day trek becomes 30, during which revelations surface that this area was likely the childhood home of Tenzing, something unknown to his family, with some intriguing possibilities.

I know this story well from reading Venables' book *Everest: Kangshung Face*, but still find Webster's account inspiring, as the team enters these remote valleys and then begins to piece together their route, the growing synergy in the team palpable. Though they are not without fairly extensive Himalayan credentials, a certain naïveté on the team is also their ally. They are not so seasoned as to think their task impossible.

The book starts to truly grab hold with the summit push. The team begins to fragment from the sheer physical stress after they reach the South Col via their new route. Teare descends, worried for his health, and on summit day Webster and Anderson are slowly left behind by Venables as they head to the top without oxygen, with no one else on the mountain. It's a fateful day for the three, decisions made with life-long ramifications. They are reunited after an unprepared night out above 8400 meters, Webster dutifully pulling his camera out one more time to snap the timeless picture of Venables, a human wreck, gamely attempting a victory smile.

The descent down the 3000 meters below the South Col after four days above 8000 meters without oxygen is an extended nightmarish ordeal that literally is unbelievable. It's every man for himself, but they stick together. Webster becomes the driving force, ferocious in his determination to not die on Everest. The fragmentation continues near the bottom, and finally, after 13 days on the mountain, Anderson, a half day behind the other two, enters Base Camp and manages, somehow, a perfectly droll comment. The book draws to a close a few days later when Webster, wracked with pain and anguish over the condition of his mutilated fingers, breaks down. Pasang, a man full of life, takes Webster aside and imparts simple clear wisdom, the reason to go on.

The end of *Snow in the Kingdom*, starting with the descent, is so powerful that it caused me to completely rethink how I felt about the first 90 percent of the book. The things that I had found so annoying at times—what I perceived as Webster's tendency to be facile and self-absorbed—I see now as important parts of the whole of who Ed Webster is, and that in turn account for why he became the person who, by the force of his will, got them down alive. While Anderson and Venables were perhaps fatalistic, Ed Webster was not about to let Ed Webster die. That we know all this about Webster is because the book is essentially self-edit-

ed. Much of this highly idiosyncratic book would likely have perished in the normal editorial mill works.

This misunderstood mountain, Everest, is often regarded by climbers today as simultaneously too easy and unattainable—on the one hand, no more than a disembodied summit that you bag if you're so inclined, or conversely, the province of mythic superclimbers. *Snow in the Kingdom* is only one of two books written by Americans about Everest worth owning. The other is Tom Hornbein's *Everest: the West Ridge*. The beauty of these books is that they tell stories of real people who were real climbers who saw Everest as a real mountain worthy of their efforts. The idea that you can go to Everest and take it on as a real climb may be a thing of the past, but the Kangshung Face climb Webster describes here shows us how it might be done.

MIKE BEARZI

Annapurna: 50 Years of Expeditions in the Death Zone. Reinhold Messner. Seattle: Mountaineers Books. 173 pages. \$24.95.

There are other Annapurnas in men's lives, as Maurice Herzog wrote, and Reinhold Messner has found many on Annapurna itself in this 50-year history of the mountain. This is really many books in one, each of them extremely worthy. On one level it is an examination of the progression of Himalayan mountaineering overall during the past half century viewed through the lens of Annapurna, on which many of the trends were set, from the siege-style first ascent of an 8000-meter peak, through the big-wall era that began on Annapurna's south face, to the lighter alpine-style ascents epitomized by Loretan and Joos's 1984 traverse and Messner's own Northwest Face route with Kammerlander in 1985. The one trend Messner pointedly observes Annapurna has avoided is the recent popularity of "consumerist" ascents by hordes of guided clients on prepared routes.

The contrast with Everest could not be more stark, but on another level this book reminds me of Peter Gilman's classic resource on Everest, containing not only wonderful stories and photos, but a complete database of routes, expeditions, and climbers as well. That this is not in the same large coffee-table format as the Everest book seems more a reflection of the relative marketability of these mountains than of the (high) quality of this book.

Along with the progression of climbing styles, Messner considers the evolution of expedition leadership as embodied by Herzog during the first ascent, Bonington in the big-wall era, and himself as a leader of a fast and light expedition. His own humility and compassion are remarkable in these portions of the book, as he resists the current tendency of certain writers (perhaps most notably David Roberts) toward self-righteous judgement out of historical context and out of the crucible of the death zone. Messner is able to recognize "the many truths" (as one section is titled) of such situations, and the conflicting motivations of all of the players. He gives a thorough and fair presentation of the controversies surrounding Maurice Herzog and his expedition tale. While noting the poignancy of the situation in which Herzog has few if any defenders left from vicious attacks, his resounding and well-argued conclusion is that Herzog needs no defense. Many of the charges leveled at Herzog, it turns out, involved things he had little influence over, as much of the control of the story (and the money) were in the hands of Lucien Devies, then-manager of the French Alpine Club. (Not only did Herzog's book inspire many of us to become mountaineers, the proceeds from sales of the book made a significant contribution to subsequent French expedition mountaineering.)

Herzog's is just the most complex of the superb portraits of great mountaineers in this