

the unavoidable carelessness of his clothes. He was a member of the Alpine Club and had just successfully ascended the Matterhorn. His guides were walking behind him with the ropes coiled round their shoulders, holding their axes, their iron-spiked poles and all that was required to attack a wild peak. These three resolute sunburnt faces were resplendent with the joy of their triumph over great difficulties. The guides entered the hotel and the Englishman remained for a few moments on its threshold, leaning against the wall with complete unconcern, looking perfectly carefree, just as if he were coming from his club in Pall Mall.”

Does that give you a lump in the throat, a nostalgic buzz in the soft tissue of the brain? Then Ring’s is the book for you. I prefer the grit and irony of Fleming.

JOHN THACKRAY

Hermann Buhl: Climbing without Compromise. Reinhold Messner and Horst Hofler. Translated by Tim Carruthers. Seattle: Mountaineers Books, 2000. 205 pages. \$24.95.

U ntil this book, the only written material that was available for most of us on the life of Hermann Buhl was Buhl’s own autobiography, *Nanga Parbat Pilgrimage: The Lonely Challenge*, which was originally printed in 1956. Messner and Hofler obviously felt it was time to delve deeper into the life of this man who for many of us became the prototypical mountain hero with his solo ascent of Nanga Parbat in 1953.

Buhl was pushing the limits at a time when the distinctions between free and aid climbing were just being drawn. He is known less for his few first ascents than for the style and conditions in which he completed his climbs. He was a loner, despite his many climbing companionships, a fact that led both to his willingness to push ahead on Nanga Parbat and to his condemnation by the expedition’s organizers afterward.

Messner and Hofler draw on diary entries and letters by Buhl, in addition to other sources not available in English, to give us a portrait more human and fallible than the usual climbing biography. And, of course, they tell us more about those last days on Broad Peak and Chogolisa, where Buhl’s career ended, along with his footprints, at a broken cornice.

Probably European readers more than American will enjoy the long descriptions of climbs on peaks with names like the Totenkirchl, the Schlickerzinne, and the Praxmarerkar Spitze, but as Buhl’s climbing pilgrimage moves on to more familiar routes and peaks, we begin to see that he was not only talented but possessed, a combination that lends itself to notable achievements in any endeavor. He was likely to do things faster, or in worse weather, than they had ever been done before, often solo.

Although a book like this tends to rehash many tales that have already been printed elsewhere, it does give an opportunity for the publication of photos that may not have appeared before, and that give us a wider view of a life that inevitably includes time not spent in a bivouac or on steep faces. My own favorite is one of Buhl and his wife looking lovingly at his new car, a Volkswagen on loan from the factory for his lecture tour.

But, first and foremost, Buhl was a climber, dedicated and focused; and it is that fact, that life, that this book celebrates.

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