

raderie as a primary motive among a new generation of climbers.

The Stanford Alpine Club deserves a place in the pantheon of elite university mountain clubs. Though it began much later than the better-known clubs in the east, the Stanford version spanned a critical period in the development of the sport. This book further illuminates that golden age of American climbing, and historians will want it for their collections. Other climbers and mountain photography buffs will also admire the book, although the hefty price tag may discourage some potential buyers.

DAVID REID

*Mystery, Beauty, and Danger: The Literature of the Mountains and Mountain Climbing Published in English before 1946.* Robert Hicks Bates, Ph.D. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Peter Randall, 2000. 228 pages, numerous historic photographs. \$40.

As an amateur (in the finest sense of the word) historian of the mountain scene, Dr. Bates learned his trade honestly, at the knee of Dr. James Monroe Thorington, another past president of The American Alpine Club, and the man who brought Dr. Bates into the Club.

In this well-produced volume, Dr. Bates has reproduced his doctoral thesis of 1946 in an updated and delightfully illustrated format. In bringing greater awareness to us of the classic literature of alpinism, our Honorary President brings us back to the earliest days of mountaineering—and does so in the words of the participants themselves, unabridged by subsequent editors. We read about Swiss (and Pyrenean) dragons from those who saw them (or imagined that they did). We can read the words—as they were long ago translated into English—of the earliest Swiss guides, and are offered intriguing glimpses of the mountain poetry of Thomas Moore, Matthew Arnold, William Morris, John Symonds, Percy Shelley, and a dozen others.

Dr. Bates takes us back in time to the original textbook of mountaineering, that written by Conrad Gesner in 1574, and brings new life to the more recent literary works of latter-day alpinists such as Clarence King, Jan Christiaan Smuts, and Leslie Stephens. It goes against the grain of human nature to endorse the work of a competitor in this sort of literary adventure, but Dr. Bates has given me no choice.

WILLIAM LOWELL PUTNAM

*El Capitan: Historical Feats and Radical Routes.* Daniel Duane. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2000. 35 black-and-white photos. 143 pages. \$24.95.

The endpapers of Dan Duane's book feature a double-page spread of the Grand Topo of El Capitan. Routes everywhere and behind each route a story. I find it striking that one can be considerably less than ancient and still remember gazing at all that rock when it had not a single route. Of course, the number of Americans serious about rock climbing in the early 1950s probably numbered less than the number of people to be found in the Berkeley climbing gym on a typical evening in 2001.

Duane is straightforward in indicating the limited aims of his book. It turns out to be a kind of history, but certainly not an inclusive one. After an initial chapter that chronicles his own initial experiences on El Cap—experiences I suspect that are closer to those of many, if not most, El Cap climbers than to those of the climbers he discusses—he moves on to Warren

Harding, Royal Robbins, Jim Bridwell, John Middendorf, Mike Corbett, and Scott Burke. Other climbers make their cameo appearances: Frost, Chouinard, Pratt, Herbert in the earlier days; Kroger, Davis, Porter, Child in the 1970s and '80s; Wellman, Croft, Florine, Gerberding, and Hill in the 1990s. But the bulk of the book is the result of research on, and interviews with, the six primary climbers.

As a graduate student at UC Santa Cruz, Duane taught creative writing, and he knows how to go beyond mere description to vivid evocation, especially when writing about things he has directly experienced, such as Camp 4, El Cap Meadows, descending in the night after a long day's climb. Unfortunately, there are many problems with the book—some factual, some interpretive, and some at the editorial level—that raise questions as to its overall reliability. I only claim knowledge of the early period, into the 1970s. Perhaps there are fewer problems as Duane's account moves closer to his own era.

Some of the misstatements of fact don't matter much, but others shouldn't be allowed to enter into the lore of climbing. Tahquitz Rock, for instance, is not "a small Southern California crag." It is nearly 1,000 feet high and by 1957 had 50 routes. It is mentioned in a section on Robbins, which has him meeting Frost, Chouinard, Herbert, and Harding while he was finishing high school. Robbins did meet Harding at about that time (the early 1950s), but the others did not even start climbing until about 1957 and did not really connect with Royal until 1959. It could also have been mentioned that by the time Robbins climbed the Northwest Face of Half Dome he had done first ascents of a quarter of the routes at Tahquitz Rock. Duane also has Robbins "hand-forging chrome-molybdenum pitons" for his Half Dome ascent. As it turns out, he never did make any pitons, while both Mike Sherrick and Jerry Gallwas, Robbins' unnamed companions on Half Dome, did forge a number of chrome moly pitons for the climb. Also, it was their example, along with that of Chuck Wilts, who first used chrome moly in his knifeblades, that later led to Chouinard's blacksmithing career.

Another odd collection of non-facts occurs in connection with Bridwell. Duane goes to his home, "one of the very few modest houses in Palm Springs," which he says is close to the Tehachapi Mountains and which is watered by High Sierra snowmelt. All this is in the middle of one of Duane's more evocative passages, and he clearly is out to set up a vivid contrast between the glitter of Palm Springs and the unpretentious Bridwell, who well remembers his roots in Camp 4. But Bridwell doesn't live in Palm Springs. His home is in Palm Desert, a community some distance away and completely modest. Both towns sit below Mt. San Jacinto, much more impressive than the Tehachapis, which are over 100 miles away, and neither community drinks water from the Sierra Nevada. Admittedly, this has nothing to do with climbing, but regrettably it compromises Duane's credibility. For the record, it should be noted that Robbins was 22 when he climbed Half Dome, not 21; the *North America Wall* of El Capitan was climbed in 1964, not 1963; Charlie Porter finished the route that Robbins started to the right of the *North America Wall*, not Jim Dunn; Layton Kor climbed the Titan, not the Fisher Tower, which doesn't exist; Chouinard's article, "Coonyard Mouths Off," was published in 1972, not 1970; and Liz Robbins is from Modesto, not San Francisco.

Matters of interpretation by their nature allow for a number of different versions and are hard to pin down. It is also hard to feel confident about the motives, goals, and emotions (or their lack) of personalities as complex as Robbins and Harding, even for those who know them. At the same time, the supposed conflict between Robbins and Harding has too much dramatic appeal to be ignored. In my view, Duane isn't the first writer to go astray here, but neither does he approach the subject with any trepidation. This is not the place to give my account, but based on what I know of both men I might caution that even their own words are

not always consistent with their other words and actions, and their own memories are often forged in their preferred images of themselves. And so it is with all of us. As it happened, Robbins and Harding probably had less interaction with each other than any other pairing of the leading climbers of the day, and that had more to do with the logistics of life than any feelings one might have had about the other. There were (and are) many differences between the two men, but there were many differences between all of the climbers of that era. To put matters in perspective, however, it should be noted that when Harding set out on El Capitan, a climb that would require 125 bolts, only about 85 bolts had been placed in all of Yosemite Valley and fewer than 20 on any particular climb. So the issue of bolting on a large scale had to be worked out. It wasn't a matter of rules, as Duane keeps mentioning; it was a matter of style, just as an emphasis on free climbing (which often enabled one to bypass existing bolts) or hammerless climbing was a matter of style.

And then there is this statement: "A love for the sport, therefore, is a love of extreme physical discomfort and a hunger for jobs so stupidly difficult they can obliterate your self—the ostensible point of the whole enterprise." And, "doing things the hard way makes you a better, stronger person." This may be so for some climbers—who knows?—but these claims do not reflect the beliefs and attitudes of the climbers I know. Quite the opposite. We shared a love of climbing because it was so much fun, both physically and mentally, and we felt so free. Climbing didn't obliterate the self; it made one feel extraordinarily alive and in the present. Physical discomfort was sometimes an undesired consequence, but no one lamented its lack on many fine routes or sought out ways to be more uncomfortable. And if a pitch was stupidly difficult, then the task was to make it easier, if it could be done in good style, with imagination, with grace. Were we better, stronger people? Not likely, but probably we liked ourselves more because we had had these experiences and felt we had accomplished something. But especially in the earlier days, our accomplishments were accomplishments (for the most part) only in our own eyes, and that was cool. Climbing is like jazz. If you have to ask what the meaning is, you will never know.

As to the problems in editing, I wouldn't normally mention them except that problems of this kind seem to be more and more common in climbing literature. The mistakes that really make a difference in this book are the misspelling of the names of ten climbers. It really isn't that hard to find the correct spelling of someone's name and add it to one's spell check (although as misspelled names become more common it becomes harder to find the correct spelling). The misspelling of ten names also occurs in a context where not all that many names are mentioned and where it is rather hard to misspell Frost or Robbins or Davis or Porter or Child or Hill. Several photographs are also mislabeled. A nice shot of Robbins on El Cap Spire is identified as El Cap Tower, even though the route is correctly identified. A scene in Camp 4 identifies a climber as Frank Sacherer but, alas, it is not he. And a shot of Burke working his way up a big offwidth claims to be on the *Nose*. Perhaps my memory is rusty, but I don't remember any pitch like that. It looks horrible.

Despite all my carping, I have no doubt that many will find this book a pleasure to read. I did as I quickly went through it the first time. I did wonder why Duane had decided to discuss certain climbers and certain scenes rather than others, especially since the text adds up to a rather short manuscript, but a writer should write the book he wants to write, right? And now I wonder whether this really is the book Duane wanted to write.