

because at its core it is an anthropological treatise. By detailing what he knows, then learns, about the Inuit (and that is a considerable amount of information), Waterman paints a wholly consuming portrait of an underdocumented race of people.

When Waterman began his epic, six-stage trip, he assumed he would learn a few things from the Inuit. He saw “The People” as holding the secrets to survival on this far northern land. He was not prepared for the harsh realities he witnessed and heard about during his trips, including the mistreatment of children, women and animals, the sexual abuse, the murders, and all sorts of cultural aberrations. “For example, they can tell you everything about that soap opera,” Waterman told me during an interview about *Arctic Crossing*. “But most don’t even know their own native language. I had kids ask me ‘What is that, that boat that you’re paddling?’ Their forefathers invented kayaks and they’d never seen or heard of them before.”

On the other hand, Waterman also came into contact with a life force that could not be denied. This book tells it all, in riveting detail, capturing the full range of Inuit experience. It is definitely not a romantic wide-eyed portrait of an indigenous culture often considered more innocent than our own. But because it doesn’t shrink from describing cultural practices—such as the beating of dogs—that even many Inuits themselves despise, it treats the people as wholly complete beings, and the culture as the complex set of behaviors it really is, rather than the idealized form of life we would prefer it to be.

“Time and time again I’d just be brought up short. I’d be tempted to come to a [negative] conclusion about these people,” said Waterman, “and then suddenly they’d do something wonderful like feed me, or offer me help. Which really showed me they had my best interests at heart. I’d show up in a camp, and while they wouldn’t ask questions, they were gracious and made me laugh and gave me a place to sleep.” Waterman became more than just a student of The People. He became a curiosity, an inspiration, and finally, a friend.

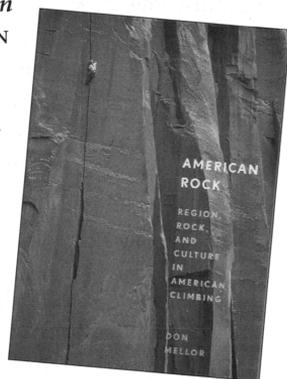
There’s no hiding it: I’m a fan of *Arctic Crossing*, and of Waterman’s style. He’s a careful, considerate writer, with a keen eye for detail and the ability to mix his own story into a picture that is far greater, longer, and deeper.

CAMERON M. BURNS

American Rock: Region, Rock and Culture in American Climbing. DON MELLOR. WOODSTOCK, VERMONT: THE COUNTRYMAN PRESS, 2001. 303 PAGES. \$28.

Don Mellor lays it out straight in his introduction to *American Rock*: “This is a book about American rock climbing. It’s a celebration of the rich diversity in American climbing experiences, and it’s an attempt to stand in the way of the insidious homogenization that is erasing the regional distinctiveness in every facet of American culture, rock climbing included.”

From this premise, *American Rock* heads into a wandering 300-page journey that attempts to talk about everything from Robert Underhill’s 1931 ascent of Mt. Whitney’s East Face to access problems at Hueco Tanks. For the most part, Mellor pulls it off, and the book provides a good look at the history, culture, geology, and eccentricities of almost every major climbing area in the U.S.



While emphasized in the introduction, Mellor's abhorrence with the homogenization that he sees in the sport is not leaned on very much in the body. Neither is any other central theme. Instead, *American Rock* reads like a compendium of essays on the American climbing life in its many facets, leaving readers to form their own conclusions.

The book begins with a quick history of climbing in the U.S. and then moves into a section on climbing media and current trends in the sport. Chapter two is a geology lesson, and it is not until chapter three on page 65 that the book gets into a groove. There, Mellor starts an eight-chapter tour of more than 40 climbing areas from the Shawangunks to Joshua Tree. A wrap-up chapter, "Cherishing the Resources," talks about current threats and issues in American climbing (e.g. the Wilderness Act of 1964, raptor nesting closures).

This bits-and-pieces style produces a book that at times feels disjointed and superficial. With only 300 pages to tackle a monumental subject, *American Rock* is not an encyclopedia on climbing in the U.S., but instead serves as an introduction to its constellation of areas, people, and subcultures.

But it is this same tell-all style that makes the book an overall success. There are a few holes here: almost no coverage of Montana, and minimal attention to Devil's Tower; Mellor may disappoint flatlands climbers like myself by not giving any ink to Midwestern areas such as Devil's Lake. These quibbles aside, the book is thorough, well written, and a first-of-its-kind. It will no doubt expand the consciousness of newbies and serve as a great refresher course for climbing veterans.

STEPHEN REGENOLD

Vertical Margins: Mountaineering and the Landscapes of Neoimperialism. REUBEN ELLIS. MADISON: THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN PRESS, 2001. 240 PAGES, PAPERBACK. \$21.95.

Reuben Ellis' goal is both an admirable and daunting one: "to understand the world we live in," as Ellis paraphrases Edward Said, "we should seek out connections between culture and empire, geography and literature." Ellis explores the interlocking themes of mountaineering, the motivations of those who climb, and the language that they use to describe it. According to the author, climbing cannot be done—or read—in isolation. It must be placed in its appropriate geographical, historical, literary, and political contexts. Thus, mountaineering in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and its literature can only be understood in the context of that time. And, since British and American climbers belonged to nations that were busily expanding their dominions over peoples in the developing world, so, too, were climbers, in a sense, imperialists. Under the guise of scientific exploration, foreign investment, and nationalism, American and British alpinists climbed. Hence, these climbers were not motivated solely by a spiritual need to be in the mountains or a desire for sport. Rather, at the turn of the last century climbers were carrying the banner of their ascendant nations in the "vertical margins" of their respective empires: British climbers in East Africa and the Himalaya, American climbers in that American "sphere of influence," Latin America. However, Ellis tells this interesting, albeit complex, story in a way that likely will alienate the average reader of mountaineering

