

PREFACE

By coincidence I took over the editorship of the *American Alpine Journal* the year the American Alpine Club turned 100. To commemorate the occasion, we devoted 60-some pages in the 2002 *AAJ* to looking back on AAC history and on events in American climbing during that period. Now, just two years later, it's another big anniversary: the *AAJ* turns 75. But instead of devoting a chunk of the *AAJ* to hindsight when there's so much happening today, we've decided to celebrate the occasion by republishing every *AAJ* ever printed. This being 2004, the republishing will be electronic: we're putting all 75 years of the *AAJ* online and on DVD/CD, thus serving history while also helping climbers worldwide who are researching tomorrow's objectives. But I'll get back to that. First, since this is the only place you'll get to read about it, let me reflect briefly on the last 75 years of the *American Alpine Journal*.

The *AAJ* didn't spring to life at the Club's founding. Our gestation period lasted 27 years, during which time Boston's Appalachian Mountain Club allowed our outings to be published in a section of their journal, *Appalachia*. Not until 1929 did Volume I, Number 1 of the *American Alpine Journal* find its way into the mailboxes of our 193 members. From this time forward the Journal became the Club's chief production and one of its largest single expenditures, perpetually in need of—and receiving—subsidies to meet costs. But there was never a doubt about its importance. The new publication was the primary tool fulfilling our charter to “promote and disseminate knowledge” of the high mountains. The book rapidly became a focal point where members shared their enthusiasm and their climbing experiences.

It's a delight to look at the early issues of the *AAJ*. The intelligence and knowledge revealed in the articles, as well as their relaxed frankness—the confiding voices of kindred spirits—all have great charm. So too the crisp black letterpress type on creamy wove paper, the wide margins, the glossy black and white photographs. Such pleasing results did not come about by accident. The *AAJ* was fortunate to have been guided in its first four decades by a stellar group of scholar-mountaineers. Allen Carpé (editor of the first issue), Howard Palmer, J. Monroe Thorington, Bob Bates, David Robertson, and Francis Farquhar, to name six of them, applied their considerable talents to the Journal during these years. Their wide-ranging knowledge of mountains and much else, their discerning taste, and their literate prose, set a lofty mark. Thorington in particular stands out—not only for his lengthy tenure as editor (1934-1946), but for his wide-ranging interests and delight in all things mountainous, his literary inclinations, and his irrepressible joie de vivre. Under Thorington the Journal brimmed with fascinating new material on alpinism and worldwide alpine culture.

There are gems scattered about these early issues that have as much potential to charm and educate us now as they did the day they were printed. In 1956 Dr. Charles Houston offered words on how to select expedition teams: “Good health is imperative, but over and above these qualities is a sense of humor, strength of character, courage in the face of adversity, ingenuity, and consideration for one's fellows. . . . rock acrobats and entrepreneurs do not belong in the Himalaya.”

We come now to the man who, more than anyone else, is identified with the *American Alpine Journal*, H. Adams Carter, editor for 35 of the 75 years we commemorate. This multi-lingual, multi-tasking, one-man editing phenomenon took the helm in 1959. At the time of his passing in 1995, the *AAJ* had evolved into the climbing world's journal of record, the place

where each year the most significant climbs are officially set down in writing.

In the year Ad's first issue was published, the American Alpine Club had 518 members. The last issue he edited was mailed to a membership nearly five times that size; it is now over 7,000. Ad Carter's legacy to the American Alpine Club and to the climbing community was a superb mountain journal, reporting the deeds of new-route climbers from all countries, in all ranges: the only thing of its kind in the world. He said in a *Himalayan Journal* article 11 years ago that he did not know what the *AAJ* would be like after he left it, only that it would be different. It's a tribute to his vision that in the nine years since Ad's death it has *not* become that much different.

While we'd all like to cherish the *AAJ*'s legacy by owning a complete collection, the \$3,500-and-up pricetag on the used book market is a bit steep, especially if we need to have them shipped to, say, Bulgaria, home of climbers who put up one of 2003's great routes on Thalay Sagar (a feature story in this Journal). The next best thing is to slip a disc into your computer and pull up every page as you want it. This is coming soon, so stay tuned through your membership in the AAC or by periodically checking the AAC's website. The *AAJ* will also come online this year, which will allow you to do your research wherever you live, from Alaska to Zanskar.

In the meantime, we've compiled a comprehensive index to all 75 years of the *AAJ* and placed it on the Web, free to download (www.AmericanAlpineClub.org). This is without doubt the most comprehensive list of mountain accomplishments ever assembled: the ultimate research foundation for the digital *AAJ* library to come. But inevitably there will be flaws, and we invite you to help us in improving the index's accuracy and depth. Instructions are published with the index.

While there, you might want to download the *AAJ* International Grade Comparison Chart, which digests the international alphabet-soup of ratings found in our climbing reports into something intelligible across various borders and ponds. American Alpine Club members received a printed copy in the mail last winter.

Finally, a note about soul. The Climbs & Expeditions section of this *AAJ* (the heart of the book) expanded by over 40 pages from last year's, and yet the book's total page count had to remain the same. Sacrifices came by scrapping two feature articles, already written, and scrimping elsewhere, too. I bemoaned to Darío Bracali—a correspondent in Argentina—about needing to cut back on publishing some of the exploratory non-technical ascents of virgin peaks in his country, and he chided me with wise words that remind me of why I love this Journal: “A humble opinion from a reader/climber: Technical climbing is the exploration of difficulty. Before that, there must be the exploration of the world, the world that allows difficulty to exist. I believe both are parts of mountaineering, and that the journal would lose half its magic if it devotes itself only to technical stuff. I love them both, and I don't like to lose either. Your journal is one of the few today that shows us the always-broadening world. It gives us the information we need to go climbing!”

We welcome your feedback on where you think the *American Alpine Journal* should go in the next years. Please address your comments to aaj@AmericanAlpineClub.org. Or better yet, catch me in the hills.

JOHN HARLIN III