

Range of Glaciers takes the reader on a journey through time and space that chronicles the economic, sociological, and recreational history of these mountains and the activities of the men who explored them. Beginning with the first settlers, Beckey leads us through the early surveys and mapping projects that exposed the challenges the Cascades posed to cross-range railroads and year-round travel. Accounts of the two Northwest Boundary Surveys paint a detailed picture of the politics endemic to surveying such an “unnatural boundary,” as well as the problems of early mountain travel in the North Cascades. We next come to the

building of the railroads across the passes, and the excitement of a minor mining boom. Later, attention is turned to the development and evolution of tourism, and mountaineering on the volcanoes.

The search for a mountain pass useable year-round is a particularly interesting story from a modern perspective. Today’s highways, lazily crossing the Cascade passes, were once the scene of formidable railroad challenges. Beckey draws attention to the hardships of finding and building these passages, as well as how decisions made during the building of the railroads have had a permanent impact on our experience of the wilderness today. Tying past to present in this way makes the history particularly relevant to anyone who enjoys the wild spaces of the Cascades, and it is used effectively throughout the book.

Beckey also gives an interesting chronology of the early events and circumstances in the birth of Cascade mountaineering, including detailed narratives of early ascents in the range and the particular logistics needed to obtain them. Peppered throughout the history are specific (and often amusing) tactics used by the early mountaineers, such as the crevasse-crossing methods employed on the first ascent of Mt. Rainier. The logistical problems of gaining access to the mountains, and interactions with the Native American guides, are discussed in detail.

The writing in this book has a level of detail approaching that of a reference, which sometimes makes for dry reading. However, Beckey periodically relieves the monotony by including humorous anecdotes, such as Lt. Kautz’s descriptions of the crumbling volcanic moraines along the Nisqually glacier of Mt. Rainier as walls of “white granite”; and the whistling marmots he encountered as “mountain sheep.” Also, each chapter ends with a fine selection of historical maps, drawings, and photographs, which give one a visual sense of what was known and how it felt to be there at the time.

Range of Glaciers is a meticulously researched and thoroughly detailed book that will appeal to anyone with a love for history or for the Cascade Mountains.

DAVID BURDICK

Frank Smythe: The Six Alpine/Himalayan Climbing Books (Climbs and Ski Runs; The Kangchenjunga Adventure; Kamet Conquered; Camp Six; The Valley of Flowers; Mountaineering Holiday). FRANK SMYTHE. SEATTLE: THE MOUNTAINEERS BOOKS; LONDON: BÂTON WICKS, 2000. 944 PAGES. HARDCOVER. \$38.00

For anyone impassioned about bygone adventure in the distant ranges, The Mountaineers Books’ Omnibus series may be the finest way to make contact. The photograph- and map-rich volumes include one by the Austrian Kurt Diemberger, two by the American John Muir, and

fittingly, four by the prewar British climbers Eric Shipton, H.W. Tilman, and Frank Smythe. Many readers will agree that the early Brits, in their nailed boots and fedoras, largely shaped both the history and literature of modern mountaineering. England's postwar hardmen may have dispensed with step chopping and Sherpas on their own initiative, but they were hugely influenced by the rigid sportsmanship of their forebears. The world of contemporary climbing, with its stiff-upper-lip vernacular and alpine-style ethics, owes as large a debt to the early British pioneers as rock-and-roll pays to The Beatles.

As for knighted artists, Sir Christian Bonington had been particularly inspired by Frank Smythe's luminous career. Amazingly, Bonington's prodigious output is still eclipsed by the work of Frank Smythe, who published 26 popular books in two decades. Smythe may have been only slightly less active on the crags, but he died at a young 49*.

As a wispy youth, Smythe had been inspired by Edward Whymper's successes. So Smythe, too, began with the requisite alpine apprenticeship, picking Mont Blanc's Route Major and Sentinelle Rouge plums. Early on, a reader can discern one of the many shimmers to Smythe's aesthetic armor: unlike most British alpinists of the day, he climbed without guides.

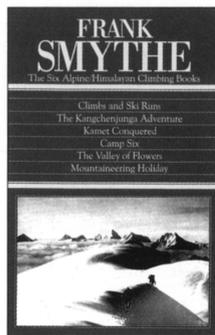
At high altitude, Smythe often slipped the leash and outdistanced even his partner Shipton. In 1931, Smythe made the first ascent of India's Kamet (25,447 feet), the highest peak yet climbed—until five years later, when Tilman bagged Nanda Devi, repeatedly called by the colonial-conscious Smythe the highest peak in the British empire. In the 1930s, Smythe kept up a dizzying agenda of climbing trips and his chronicles thereof: once to Kanchenjunga, twice to the Garwhal, three separate attempts on Everest, and a half dozen forays to the Alps.

The literal and figurative high point in these six books is Smythe's first attempt on Everest in 1933, *Camp Six*. (Early editions of it are still available for \$20: proof positive that Smythe's books experienced numerous reprints.) This touchstone mountaineering tale has little of the disaster yet all of the durability of such later classics as *Annapurna*, *The Mountain of My Fear*, *Minus 148*, *Touching the Void*, and *Into Thin Air*—no doubt candidates for a future *Omnibus of Accident-Prone Expeditions*. The expedition's isolated fatality, sadly announced by Smythe: the mysterious crevasse disappearance of Policye, the Tibetan dog.

Caveat emptor: the politically correct modernist, while pining for a body count, might cringe at the imperialism of these British Grandfathers of Mountaineering. Readers will find unabashed whippings of thieving porters; the criticizing of uncovered sewage in monastery streets; vaunting about their telephone cable strung from basecamp up into high altitude; and, by story's end, the proudly announced telegram from the King of England, along with a wireless message ordering the Everest army back home.

"Nevertheless"—as they would say, poised over their basecamp teacups while debating the English plantations in Kenya—Smythe's pen builds suspense through the poky approach and camp buildup as he and Shipton climbed higher, looking for signs of Mallory. Even without the editor's subtle footnoting, even without the discovery of a naked body, Smythe's sleuthing was incredibly close to the mark.

As he climbed higher, cut off from all the approach-march colonialism, Smythe's description of the terrain and his lurking doubts ratchet up the narrative. The pacing of *Camp Six* is clearly the work of a gifted writer; but then, even more unexpected, after Shipton turned back, Smythe's



voice breaks through the time barrier. For a dozen stellar pages, Smythe becomes an ageless narrator, his observations oddly of a piece with those famed alpinists (but not so talented writers) who climbed a half century later. Other readers might also wonder if these latter-day authors were so inspired by Smythe that they couldn't help borrowing some of his prose.

As he boldly soloed into the Death Zone, he details an unseen companion—decades before these high-altitude doppelgangers became stock partners in mountaineering narratives. In two other passages, he lucidly describes overflying UFOs—spiking *Camp 6* book sales among the paranormal crowd. If not for unstable snow, forcing him back down, Smythe could have made history. During the descent to basecamp, he frostbit his feet badly enough to raise pus-filled blisters on his toes. He experimentally took his first whiff from an oxygen bottle and thought it unnecessary. Starved from high-altitude deprivations, his legs shrunken to sticks, he climbed back up without complaint, as if the mountain shrouded in white monsoon might actually give him another chance. Everest, he wrote, had beaten them.

Smythe used the whipping as empowerment. Like Shipton and Tilman, his lightweight expeditionary climbing and writing career surged. He let go of imperialism. In subsequent writings, he denounced bottled oxygen, pitons, and guides. One can't help but think, given the evolution of this visionary climbing purist, that if Smythe had been given the opportunity to grow old, he too would have cringed in 1953 as two oxygen-masked men, amid a plodding army of Brits, caused the anticlimactic subjugation of the world's highest mountain.

*On page 941, the editor successfully baited this reviewer [who grabbed a magnifying glass] to read the tiny, unasterisked footnote: "Smythe continued to climb during the war post-war years until his death in 1949 (to be summarized in a later volume)."

JONATHAN WATERMAN

Mountaineering: The Freedom of the Hills, 7TH EDITION. STEVEN M. COX, KRIS FULSAAS, EDITORS; CHAPTERS BY MEMBERS OF THE MOUNTAINEERS. SEATTLE: THE MOUNTAINEERS BOOKS, 2003. 575 PAGES. HARDCOVER, \$37.95; PAPERBACK, \$26.95.

I took the Seattle Mountaineers' basic climbing course in 1970, at the age of 16. The course textbook was *Freedom of the Hills*, and I did my homework from a copy of its second edition, the one with the blue cover. Somewhere along the way I lost that copy. So when I was asked to review this new edition I was glad to find my wife's third edition (the green one) and compare them side by side. The older book takes me back to memories of knickers and Goldline, my first moves on rock, and a bunch of old guys in metal helmets tapping in pitons till you get that high ringing sound. The new edition reminds me that much has changed; that there is considerably more that must fit between the covers of any text that tries to be comprehensive, as *Freedom* always has. The most visible theme spanning the 30 years that separate these editions is The Mountaineers' fierce dedication to alpine mountaineering and to good information.

The particular strength of *Freedom*, now as in the earliest editions, is the sense that it is written for the well-rounded mountaineer—one who is faced with rock, snow, and ice, and who also has to venture into the wilderness in pursuit of his or her summits. Who may even get wet.

