

Kraus pioneered the theory that exercise, in and of itself, is healthy. Although this is taken for granted today, some of Kraus's teachings on back pain was news to me but certainly rang true. Schwartz's efforts in sifting through medical jargon and explaining the medical concepts in a clear fashion are remarkable.

The final part explains how Schwartz came to write the book. As so many patients before her, Schwartz came to Kraus as a skeptical yet desperate back pain sufferer. The story of Schwartz's relationship with Kraus is, in and of itself, touching. It also reaches beyond this last section of the book. Schwartz weaves images of her interviews with Kraus into the narratives of his earlier life. This duality of stories throughout the book is quite powerful.

My only genuine complaint about the book is the title. As far as I'm concerned, "Into the..." has been overused on the cover of mountaineering books. But one should never judge a book by its cover anyway. Schwarz's achievement is nearly as remarkable as the life of Hans Kraus. His was a story that had to be told, and Susan E.B. Schwartz has done so in a most graceful way.

MARTIN GUTMANN

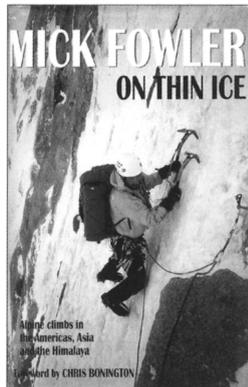
On Thin Ice: Alpine Climbs in the Americas, Asia and the Himalaya.

MICK FOWLER. FOREWORD BY CHRIS BONINGTON. LONDON: BÂTON WICKS, 2005. HARDCOVER. 24 PAGES OF COLOR PHOTOGRAPHS; 18 MAPS/DIAGRAMS. 224 PAGES. £18.99. \$45.00.

This, Fowler's second book of climbing memoirs, picks up more or less in 1995 where his first book, *Vertical Pleasures: The Secret Life of a Tax Man*, leaves off. The subtitle of the first book speaks to one of Fowler's great charms: he's a working person like most of the rest of us, with limited vacation time and two children. Both books are essentially a series of trip reports; thus the greatest strength here is that these are reports of amazing climbs done in pure alpine style on spectacular peaks such as Taweche, Changabang, Arwa Tower, and Siguniang.

At the book's center is his 1997 climb on Changabang's north face. The expedition was made up of three pairs of climbers with Roger Payne and Julie-Ann Clyma on one line and, as it turned out, Andy Cave and Brendan Murphy sharing a line with Steve Sustad and Fowler. Far less than half of the 35 pages of this account are devoted to the actual climbing. Fowler is particularly good with the preliminaries—dealing with bureaucracy and acclimatizing, but toward the end of his description of the climbing I was surprised to realize they had been on the line for 13 days. The sense of duration is lost in his relatively compressed accounting. The hardest thing for writers to describe about climbing seems always to be the actual climbing.

Fowler sets a very high standard for the purity of his climbing style: "the sense of exploratory, adventurous climbing was seriously compromised by us following Andy and Brendan up the face." This despite seeing no other Westerners since very early on the approach. Fowler's description of the climbing is generally casual until the end, when events turn undeniably grim. Yet, the continuous difficulty of the climbing comes through in subtle moments such as: "Steve eased the belay strain by tying his rucksack into ice screws and sitting on it with his legs dangling free"—which made me realize I'd never placed a screw so solidly in my life.



If his self-deprecating writing style may sometimes prevent us from understanding just how difficult the climbing is, the photographs are consistent reminders. The photo “Day 4 pitch 1 [Changabang]” is captioned “Glassy icefields became both taxing and boring after a time.” The “taxing” aspect is obvious, but “boring”? It would keep my attention. The 24 pages of photographs are consistently excellent both in their composition and reproduction, yet miniaturized to fit as many as six frames on a page—this is not a coffee-table book, but one wishes it were.

Fowler writes in an understated, self-deprecating style that has been a staple of British climbing writers going back to its inception. He invokes the old bad boy image on the book's first page by recounting the anecdote about Al Rouse “reputedly drinking vomit from Noel Odell's Everest boot.” But Fowler's close to 50 years old and not much of a bad boy himself. I have always enjoyed this stance as a way of having ones' cake and eating it too. They're doing these very imaginative, very strenuous climbs and pretending it's nothing, all a lark, but still worthy of cranking out a couple books describing them. Fowler bemoans (humorously!) his lack of physical conditioning throughout, yet when climbing seems capable of summoning the strength and endurance of superheroes. Wish I knew how—reminds me of an old cartoon showing a math problem which includes as a variable the words “and then a miracle occurs” in order to produce the correct result.

Finally, the Changabang climb turns desperate with Fowler and Sustad falling after summiting and Murphy swept away in an avalanche on the descent. Very little is said about Murphy's death. In the account's closing moments Fowler asks “was it worth it?” and gives us a nine-line answer that we've heard before, perhaps even in our own heads. It's not the most introspective of answers and yet has the great advantage of being, at least, true.

Another strength of the book is the diagrams and the footnotes. The diagram “The Torture Tube, Bivouac no. four” on Taweche has to be one of the most horrifying climbing drawings I know, ranking up there with the diagram from an old edition of Wilkerson's *Medicine for Mountaineering* depicting a technique for removing an impacted stool.

The book opens with a description of receiving the “Mountaineer's Mountaineer” award in 1989 and closes with him winning both the Golden Piton Award from *Climbing* and the Piolet D'Or for his and Paul Ramsden's remarkable climb of Siguniang, at 6,250 meters, the highest peak in the Qionglai Range, China. Fowler describes their route, The Great White Dyke, as “a long vertical basalt dyke stuffed with ice which at several points looked very steep.” The diagram notes, more precisely, 5 meters of 95 degrees around bivouac number four! (*Alpinist* #1 features a photo spread of the route which does it justice.) If there was any doubt, this book confirms that all these awards were very well deserved.

On Thin Ice, which received the best-book award for Mountain Literature at the Banff Mountain Book Festival in 2005, is inspiring at every turn. Fowler's humility is a nice touch and while I believe it's genuine, this is no ordinary bloke, this is a truly extraordinary climber.

DAVID STEVENSON