

of course, since it is a necessary component of a book aimed at a wider crowd. In writing to this audience, it is clear that Takeda is concerned with setting himself apart from your average weekend mountaineer. He employs the terms, “elite,” “hard core,” “tribe,” and so on, to describe his climbing circle. Although it is surely warranted for Takeda to avoid being compared to the novice mountaineers encountered in certain “epic” books, some readers may find that he crosses the fine line between useful clarification and condescending elitism.

Regardless of these shortcomings, the book is extremely insightful and entertaining. It is a genuine page-turner. Takeda’s writing strikes a refreshing balance between erudite and clear, factual and entertaining, humorous and solemn. The fact that the connection between the CIA operation and Takeda’s own experience is sometimes lacking—again, in many cases it is not—does not diminish the appeal of the individual tales. Certain readers, caught up in the adventure and beautiful language of the book, may not even be bothered by the fact that the focus is sometimes blurred. Others, such as this reviewer, may get hung up on it. Either way, in no other work will one discover such memorable mountain wisdom as why buying a single wall tent is like buying a bikini.

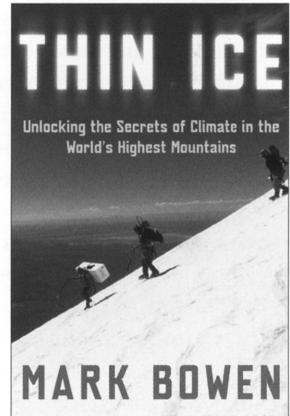
MARTIN GUTMANN

Thin Ice: Unlocking the Secrets of Climate in the World’s Highest Mountains. MARK BOWEN. NEW YORK: HOLT PAPERBACK. 2006. 320 PAGES. \$17.50.

Glaciers worldwide are dying. Our warming climate is killing them off drip by drip. While many climbers have developed an intuitive sense of this loss through repeat trips to familiar mountain ranges, Ohio State University paleoclimatologist Lonnie Thompson has made a career of studying them. *Thin Ice* is principally the profile of his many groundbreaking scientific research expeditions to glaciers around the world, though it also serves as well as a well-researched overview of global warming theory and a passionate clarion call for saving the world’s glaciers from almost certain destruction.

Thin Ice covers much ground, yet is a lively, approachable read. Author Mark Bowen, a climber (and sometime AAC member) with a doctorate in physics from MIT, writes with clarity and excitement, resulting in a book that details Thompson’s contributions to hard science while also providing the thrilling adventure of his expeditions. The coverage of climate change science is thorough, yet approachable to the lay reader, giving one a clear sense of how, when, and why scientists began to understand that something had fundamentally shifted in our climate system. He discusses how past climactic swings have affected civilizations and postulates about what the future might be like for us.

One can’t help but become fascinated with Thompson, his expeditions, and his revolutionary scientific theories. His under-funded, ragtag expeditions head off to areas thought to be of little consequence to the global climate system and attempt to drill ice in improbable locations with inadequate equipment. Yet they emerge with findings that shock the scientific world and spur new theories about how our climate system works. Because he chose



to focus on the regions others thought unimportant, Thompson's unique perspective allows him to gain insight into unresolved questions, ultimately developing a revolutionary theory that has the equatorial areas as the drivers of global climate, not the poles as the scientific establishment had long assumed.

Thompson emerges as a bit of an enigma. While he has spent more time at extreme altitude than most leading high-altitude mountaineers, Thompson doesn't consider himself a climber. He climbs the world's high peaks solely because that is where he can extract the longest, most complete glacial cores possible from temperate regions of the globe. Thompson clearly is moved by the changes occurring in the alpine environment, but his is the more detached perspective of a scientist. Yet Thompson is the person whose 2001 announcement that the snows of Kilimanjaro likely will be gone by 2015 shook the alpine world in a way no other has been able to do.

Climbers will appreciate *Thin Ice* for the detail Bowen includes about expedition logistics, what it is like to live for weeks in such high, remote terrain and the sublime beauty of these high places. Anyone who has struggled through the obstacles posed by climbing in the developing world will smile at many of Thompson's scrapes with recalcitrant bureaucrats, striking porters, and broken equipment. While science is the focus of the scruffy band of eccentrics Thompson has assembled, they feel strikingly similar to many climbing teams.

Bowen does not shy away from the politics of global warming. While he fairly covers the many theories and perspectives about climate change, one clearly understands that he believes this to be one of the most serious threats to our planet. Bowen also charts the role of politics in climate change science, for example documenting the many career moves of James Hansen, the scientist whose pronouncements about global warming draw the ire of Republican presidents from Reagan through the two Bushes, causing his funding to dry up at the Department of Energy and the Environmental Protection Agency. (On the day I began reading *Thin Ice*, Hansen was again in the news as the story broke over Bush political operatives without scientific backgrounds censoring reports by Hansen and other NASA scientists.)

Though Al Gore's *Inconvenient Truth* has gained most of the public attention about global warming, *Thin Ice* is a must read for climbers curious about the changes going on in the mountains, as well as for those wanting to gain a better understanding about the science behind these changes.

LLOYD ATHEARN

IN BRIEF: NOTES FROM THE BANFF MOUNTAIN BOOK FESTIVAL, 2006

The 2006 Banff Mountain Book Festival competition—the 14th annual—received 113 books from nine countries. Those were narrowed down to 29 finalists by a committee, and then to eight winners by jury members Audrey Salkeld, David Stevenson, and David Leach. Each fall, the festival brings the spirit of outdoor adventure and the tradition of mountain literature to Banff, featuring guest speakers, readings, seminars, an international book competition, a book fair, and book signings and launches. To see the 2006 competition results or to enter a book in an upcoming year, go to www.banffmountainfestivals.ca