

right onto the ice instead of left onto the rocks? The route he rejected became the regular one. Wiessner and Pasang Lama would almost surely have made the top, which would have been an astonishing achievement at a time when no other 8,000-meter peak had been climbed. Then they would have escorted Wolfe down to base camp, and we would not still be arguing about what happened and why. Wiessner thought the ice route, now known as the Bottleneck, to be dangerous. He was right: A serac collapse there in 2008 led to many more fatalities than were incurred in 1939. But he might well have reached the summit.

We may never have a truly definitive account of this fateful climb. Jordan's is certainly not it. But the book paints a comprehensive and endearing picture of Dudley Wolfe, a picture long overdue.

STEVEN JERVIS

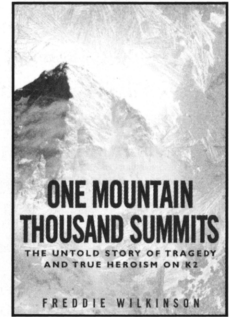
***One Mountain Thousand Summits, The Untold Story of Tragedy and True Heroism on K2.* Freddie Wilkinson. New American Library, 2010. 342 pages. Hardcover. \$24.95.**

If you're a reader of this journal, you know that K2 has some of the most storied literature in the canon of mountaineering. So why would anyone write another book on K2? Is there anything new to be told? We certainly don't need another pompous rehashing full of self-aggrandizement. Let me say right away, then, that this is a fantastic book. Freddie Wilkinson takes on an audacious objective and creates a truly engaging work. This book is in the top five of books written about K2, and is the best book I've seen about the current state of 8,000m climbing. That Wilkinson is a world class climber and conscientious working reporter adds tremendously. When he writes about hypoxia, exposure, knots, and cold fingers, he knows the ropes.

On the surface this book is about one of the deadliest events in Himalayan climbing. On August 1, 2008, more than three dozen climbers from 13 different countries left high camp for the summit. By the end of the next day 11 had perished. The author deciphers the tragic developments with the precision of an investigative detective. I can only imagine the volume of notes Wilkinson had to take, and I envision him trying to fit an oversized white board into his tiny New England cabin.

The tragic events of August 2, 2008, played out in living rooms around the world in almost real time, as satellite calls were made and web pages updated. There was a frenzy of Internet-driven media attention that ended up in major magazines and networks around the globe. Unfortunately, and predictably, no one could see the whole picture or know all the details. It's like when you're climbing in the dark and your world is only the jumping shadows in your headlamp's beam. Piecing together disparate reports from hasty reporting and foggy recollections is the author's greatest challenge. This quest consumed him for more than a year, as he pored through documentation and visited the survivors in order to ferret out what really happened.

The narrative includes captivating, sweaty-palm-inducing descriptions of serac falls, open bivouacs, black toes, and the angst of personal loss. But this book is much more than that. Wilkinson takes the sharp end and honestly, truthfully, and accurately describes the complex relationships between professional climbers, amateurs, clients, high-altitude porters, and climbing Sherpas. Beside the dynamics of current-era climbing expeditions, we also learn a diverse set of facts from Korean history to the workings of the Nepali school system to cognitive science.



These are not distracting but lend credence, context, and depth to the discussion at hand.

But primarily this is a story that delves deeply into the hubris, ethics, and racism that is consuming modern mountaineering. One of the thorniest questions is, what is a hero? Who were the heroes of that tragic event—were there any true heroes at all? As Wilkinson states, history is written by the white guys with the sat phones and the blogs.

Like a good climbing route, this book is honest, fearless, passionate, relentless, direct, and fully captivating.

CHARLEY MACE

***Fail Falling*. Royal Robbins. California: Pink Mountain Press, 2010. 190 pages. Paperback. \$19.95.**

Royal Robbins is writing his life story, and what a story it is. The whole project will stretch over eight chronologically ordered volumes. This one goes from 1950 to 1957; in that time Robbins becomes a legit climber. He starts with top-roping and small boulders, but by 1957 he's putting up the Northwest Face route on Half Dome. Along the way there's stirring climbing, life as a high school dropout in a fatherless household, car crashes, and Los Angeles in the blazing fifties.

The title of Volume Two is *Fail Falling*, which is not just a bold approach to climbing, but Robbins' credo. It means trusting yourself to succeed. He explains that "attitude makes all the difference between success and failure." His life story certainly demonstrates the benefit of grit and enthusiasm (along with really good balance). The book's many photos give you a lot of ropes tied around waists, trailing straight and clean through space, the only protection the gleam in the climber's eye. And these are first ascents done in sneakers—you'll see them wearing Chuck Taylors, not my first choice for the Steck-Salathé, but that's how Robbins did it. And with his introductions of fellow climbers from the era, a community comes alive.

*Fail Falling* is best in its extended descriptions of memorable climbs like the Northwest Face. Robbins can craft a narrative with depth of character and uncertainty of outcome. We can then sit back while his memory returns to the rock he consumed with ferocious skill. Robbins has the spotlight throughout but is generous in praise for the many people who helped him succeed. He makes it clear that his early climbing was enabled by a social structure that's no longer influential in American climbing: the climbing club. Robbins got his start with the Rock Climbing Section of the Sierra Club, which offered tutelage to beginners, guidance to youths, and organized outings for all. His subsequent prominence as an environmentalist-climber—he advanced the clean-climbing movement in word with *Basic Rockcraft* and in deed with the Nutcracker—likely owes much to this provenance. Robbins' evolution embodies John Muir's dream that the Sierra Club outings would take urban citizens into the wild and inspire them to take the wild under their protection back in the city. In *Fail Falling* the virtuous cycle from wild experience to environmental ethics spans the era of Yosemite's Golden Age.

*Fail Falling* brings to mind the old paradox, "Great men make history. History makes great men." Should we praise the individual for achieving in the circumstances, or recognize the circumstances that elevated the individual? The fifties and sixties combined the technological revolution of nylon ropes and lighter gear with an unprecedented expansion of disposable income and inexpensive transportation. *Fail Falling* shows that Robbins' generation and the Baby Boomers right behind

