

In addition to Jennifer Ridgeway's classic essay, all the writing is up to speed. I liked the interview with John Russell, whose images had registered with me in the past but not his name (probably because he's not a climber). And it's always good to hear from John Sherman, though one doesn't know whether to be happy or sad that he seems to still be living in his van. Cory Richards' short essay, "Perspective," is an absolutely first-rate rendering of the artist's long road.

Looking at the photos, I discovered surprising aspects of my own tastes: liked a lot of the kid photos, didn't care too much for animal shots, liked the ocean and surfing shots, (though I almost never go there and don't surf). Despite a longstanding admiration for the work of Greg Epperson and Cory Richards, the climbing shots didn't do as much for me as I thought they might.

Everyone with a pulse will have their favorites; if at least two big handfuls of these photos don't work for you, there's probably not much hope: try a blood transfusion or at least get up off that couch.

DAVID STEVENSON

***Grasping for Heaven: Interviews with North American Mountaineers.* Frederic Hartemann and Robert Hauptman. Foreword by Jan Reynolds. McFarland & Company, Inc., 2010. 224 pages. Paperback. \$35.00.**

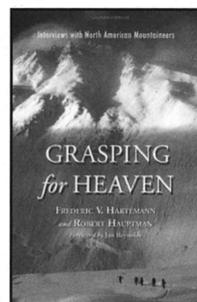
This book transcribes conversations with 16 climbers and three historians, almost all North American and Himalayan mountaineers. The conversations are interesting because the persons being interviewed are accomplished and articulate and because Hauptman, who conducts the interviews, is generally very well informed, that is, well read in mountaineering history, and this keeps the discussions at a reasonably sophisticated level.

I like the book best when we hear from folks who have until now more or less slipped under my radar: Charlotte Fox—I love her takes on Jon Krakauer and on Sandy Pitman—the late Christine Boskoff, and Carlos Buehler, for example.

Likewise, I very much enjoyed the inclusion of Elizabeth Hawley, Maurice Isserman, and Audrey Salkeld (who together raise questions about the *mountaineer* and *North American* in the subtitle). Although Hawley is the subject of a recent book by Bernadette McDonald (who is flatteringly mentioned enough times to deserve her own interview), she is not someone whose own voice has been widely heard until recently.

Isserman comes across as particularly wise, reminding me to return to his excellent Himalayan history, *Fallen Giants*, co-authored with Stewart Weaver. Discussing why so many Himalayan peaks were first climbed in the 1950s instead of the 1930s he observes that "mountaineers were willing to assume greater levels of risk than were previously thought appropriate. . . . What's a poor decision for one generation of climbers has proven to be within the spectrum of acceptable risk for later generations."

The average age of the interviewees is 63; thus the lens is mostly retrospective. Furthermore, quite a few of these subjects have written books of their own or had books written about them or both. Perhaps the *mountaineer* in the subtitle is a tip-off to some kind of generational divide: who thinks of themselves as *mountaineers* today? I doubt that Steve House does, but then he's not included here. In fact, I was surprised (maybe a little *alarmed*) when Hauptman admitted that he hadn't heard of House and Vince Anderson's Rupal Face climb. I suppose this speaks to the book's generally historical, rather than contemporary, perspective.



Question: What do these have in common: Mount Si, James Tabor, Nanga Parbat, Willi Unsoeld, Grand Jorasses, Les Droites?

Answer: They're all misspelled in the book. It seems doubtful to me that Hauptman himself does not know the correct spelling of these, so, can we no longer get an editor or proof-reader who knows or will learn these things? I fear this situation will only worsen in the future.

Many of the subjects are, well, the *usual subjects*, climbers who have been in the spotlight (our somewhat dim spotlight, anyway) for a long time: Roskelley, Ridgeway, Houston, Wickwire. These are, of course, some of the most interesting and storied fellows in our pantheon, but we know their stories, don't we? There is perhaps a hint of diplomacy or perspective from them here that may have been absent when we last heard from them. Like any good book, one of the effects of this one is to remind the reader to return to some of these subjects' earlier works, and, my quibbles aside, I expect to return to this book in the future as well.

DAVID STEVENSON

Pilgrims of the Vertical: Yosemite Rock Climbers and Nature at Risk.
Joseph E Taylor III. Harvard University Press, 2010. 384 pages.
Hardcover. \$29.95.

Taylor's unique book stems from an earlier article that has evolved to 276 pages, with another 72 of notes. *Pilgrims* is intended as both a detailed climbing history and an environmental essay. We traverse a myriad of anecdotes and details as climbing mutates from Victorian beginnings through bucolic Sierra Club stewardship to the extreme sacred practices of our current vanguard. Few have worked this hard to write the American Climbing Story. The text is strongest and most interesting as a standard history, specifically up to about 1960. Bringing us to the current day, the second half is more ambitious and apparently difficult for Taylor to resolve. He is a bit of a climber but more an environmental historian. Accordingly, Taylor is trying for much more than climbing history.

He sketches how climbing has mirrored the general social forces of each era. In recent decades top participants—think Robbins or Harding—have helped foster a seldom-questioned image of climbing as rebellious but also elitist. The story behind this essentially Romantic image presents many serious issues. Taylor holds all accountable in a sympathetic and humorous near-polemic, while warning of climbing's heavy use of the natural world—the pinning out of cracks, climbers' trails, uncontrolled camps, chalk on everything, crowds abounding.

Taylor loves to point out how in the Sierra Club days climbing was vigorously heterosocial, but when the new assumption of risk reached serious extreme, women were whisked out of "harm's way" in a Byronic runaway toward chimerical icons on high. Taylor then shifts gears from his rigorous, friendly perspective on our early years to a more skeptical gaze at modern climbers, which may be more emotional on his part. His sympathy ends; he smells a rat.

According to Taylor, climbers began to feel that authentic experience is based on the proposition that only risk and suffering bring genuine "passage," and that passage is the point. Risk and suffering become an ideal, rather than a ubiquitous but temporary part of growing up and of the cycle the individual takes in his society everywhere. He admits having bought into such rites of passage as

