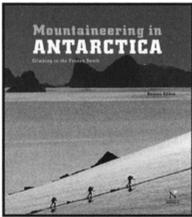


Ball, the Victorian guidebook pioneer? Or the mountain interests of people famous for other achievements, including John Ruskin and J.M.W. Turner?

Mountaineering provides no full meals, but it is a big, tasty plate of hors d'oeuvres. Above all, it reminds (or informs) us that climbing has a rich, long history. Every climbing gym should have a copy.

STEVEN JERVIS

***Mountaineering in Antarctica: Climbing in the Frozen South.* Damien Gildea. Éditions Nevicata, 2010. 192 pages. 200 color photos, 12 maps. Hardcover. \$49.95.**



In the last three decades, private ski planes and chartered sailboats have rapidly opened Antarctica's long-forbidden mountains to growing numbers of climbers. Every season now, hundreds of mountaineers fan ever farther, finding spectacular summits, some not even named.

With the exception of a few well-documented expeditions to Mt. Vinson, to other peaks in the Ellsworth Mountains, to the otherworldly big walls of Queen Maud Land, and to surf-pounded towers along the Antarctic Peninsula, most ascents have previously received little attention. Furthermore there has never been a single go-to source where mountaineers can document and/or research what's where and who (if anyone) might have climbed nearby.

This vacuum of information has suddenly been filled with the publication of *Mountaineering in Antarctica: Climbing in the Frozen South*, a long-term labor of love by Australian explorer Damien Gildea. Although at first glance this looks like another gorgeous volume for the coffee table, it encyclopedically details virtually every expedition that has made a known first ascent below the furious fifties. In addition to the obvious locations, Gildea has included the emerging alpine paradise of South Georgia, the weather-beaten South Orkneys, and such obscure and isolated specks as the Kerguelen Islands, Peter I Island, and the Bellany Archipelago.

Judging from its span of history—and its sometimes obscure and far-flung sources—Gildea must have spent years sifting through dusty files and fading memories, getting down much that could have been forgotten. His photographic research is similarly impressive. For some places just finding anything must have been difficult, but he almost always uncovered something dramatic. (Because a few of the pictures are my own, I have to acknowledge the possibility of bias, but except for the cover photo, mine are not a significant contribution and would scarcely shape a reviewer's opinion.)

One caveat is that *Mountaineering in Antarctica* might disappoint a reader hoping for an epic polar story like *Endurance* or *Mawson's Will*. Gildea wrote this book as a resource, and in places it reads like a textbook. He presents so much information about so many people and places that even part of a chapter can suffice for a sitting. Nevertheless, he has honed an engaging style that keeps his narrative from dragging—expanding his prose when events deserve more attention or efficiently summarizing events of lesser import or about which little is known. Dense as it is with information, it is anything but boring.

The book's cast of characters is remarkable, stretching back to 19th-century explorers and sealers and marching through a who's who of science, aviation, and mountaineering right up to the present, when huge overhanging walls are being climbed, sometimes solo. It

is revealing to read about familiar characters confronting such unfamiliar terrain.

Because the book is organized geographically, rather than chronologically, you can flip it open almost anywhere, encounter eye-catching pictures, and quickly read key history to give them context. One especially nice surprise is Gildea's generosity in describing special mountains that still have not been climbed. Many writers might have stayed mum.

The few big gaps in Gildea's coverage were beyond his control. Most notably, longstanding British and American protocols have precluded taxpayer funding for frivolous recreation like climbing. This includes scientists and support staffers who might want to bag accessible peaks. Some, like geologist Ed Stump and his guide/brother Mugs, skirted this by creatively choosing sites for "collecting samples." More commonly, people just climbed on the sly, leaving few records.

Secret climbing was likely most prevalent on the Antarctic Peninsula, where British Antarctic Survey teams have widely traveled for decades. Out of legions of possible first ascents, contemporary visitors can never know for certain which have already been climbed. This is a dubious destination for guaranteed "firsts."

"This lack of hard facts is not all bad," Gildea writes. "It creates a sense of mystery, a beautiful void where adventure is still possible for new travelers going south each year. Some [government-funded personnel] have deliberately maintained a silence...regardless of the authorities' views. [It has been] a means of preserving good experiences as they remember them, and not having their days of joy cast out into a world to be collected, bested and belittled by the latest record breaker."

Because Gildea often had to work from either too much or too little information, I caught a few slips, such as crediting the wrong people with first ascents of minor peaks. But nailing every detail would be nearly impossible for a work of this scope. Now that he has established himself as the Antarctic equivalent to Nepal's Elizabeth Hawley, however, I hope that he will keep track of corrections and new ascents and continue to maintain this precious resource he has created. No one else is getting it down.

My one disappointment is that although Gildea wrote sidebars about several key people, he barely mentioned Antarctica's private aviation pioneer, Giles Kershaw. Without Adventure Network, the company Kershaw founded, most of the cutting-edge climbs the author describes would not have been possible. Furthermore the harrowing story of this edge-of-the-seat "airline" is also one of the boldest, but lesser known, adventures of our time.

That minor point notwithstanding, Gildea's book is a triumph: a magnificent collection of pictures and history that may long remain the single best resource for anyone interested in the "Forbidden Continent."

GORDON WILTSIE

***Into the Silence: The Great War, Mallory, and the Conquest of Everest.* Wade Davis. Knopf, 2011. 672 pages. Black & white photos. Hardcover. \$32.50.**

I begin with a confession. Opening Wade Davis's *Into the Silence* for the first time, I found it difficult to believe that there was enough new left to be said about the celebrated English mountaineer George Leigh-Mallory, or about the Everest expeditions of the 1920s, to possibly justify the book's nearly 600 pages of narrative. After all, there are at least five worthy biographies of Mallory already in print, including Peter and Leni Gillman's excellent *The Wildest*

