the outstanding humor and thoughtfulness of Mick Burke. He may have written too lightly of the importance of a professional nurse, Beth Burke, in residence at Base Camp. He may have failed to communicate the essential personality of many of the people on the expedition, but like the climb itself the book is a gallant attempt.

CHARLES H. KNAPP

Himalayan Odyssey, by Trevor Braham. 1974, London: George Allen & Unwin LTD. £6.50. 243 pages, 14 maps, 31 black and white illustrations.

Trevor Braham loves the mountains. He likes climbing; he likes climbers; he likes the geography and the people of the Himalaya, but he loves the mountains. *Himalayan Odyssey* is the gentle story of a life-long affair which has taken the author to every corner of the Range and which sustains him between climbs at his home in northern India.

Braham has been a keen observer of Himalayan climbing since a childhood infatuation with the mystery and glory of the mountains he could see from Darjeeling. He has been a participant almost as long. The book opens with a history of the Early Days. Braham recalls the advent of crampons and Vibram soles, carries on through the war years when activity slowed (but locals could "always snatch a few weeks' leave" for the mountains), to the post-war Golden Age and the present. Braham climbs each year, and the reader meets familiar climbers as Braham meets them; sometimes in the hills, often in the comfortable rooms of the Himalayan Club in Calcutta. Braham is the habitué, always the gracious host to sojourners.

The book is a loosely structured series of accounts of climbs. The climbing details are not really important as treated by the author, and the climbs themselves run together, but the places stand out. Braham has climbed in the familiar places and the unfamiliar ones, and he uses magical geographic names as one who possesses intimate knowledge. He always climbs in small, self-contained parties, usually on a shoestring. A number of his climbs served as reconnaissance for later, larger expeditions; others were first ascents never publicly acclaimed, but all were undertaken for the sheer joy of being in the mountains. It is a thoughtful book, leisurely in pace and reflective in tone. Braham refers to himself sparingly, but still manages to let the reader know a great deal about his thoughts. He notes that the presence of mountains gives him humility and "strips him of pretence." Clearly, he is writing in the presence of mountains. His style is dry, and the reader must meet him halfway or risk sinking too deeply into the armchair, but the rewards are real enough in Braham's insights, his unique perspective on Himalayan climbing and his excellent place descriptions. As a source for the region, Braham defers to Professor Mason, but belongs on the shelf beside him.

Unlike most Himalayan accounts, there is no climax to this book, nor is there really a start or finish. As a story of a life in the mountains, the mountains, not the climber, become the central figure. And an Odyssey? In a sense it is: Braham roams endlessly, but he is always on his way home.

ANDREW HARVARD

Big Wall Climbing, by Doug Scott. New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1974. 248 pages, profuse illustrations. Price: $12.50.

What a relief to see a mountaineering history book by an active climber! Doug Scott's big wall climbing has taken him to the Alps, Baffin Island, the Hindu Kush, Everest and Yosemite. This considerable cosmopolitan energy has been channeled into an enormous project: the world history of big wall climbing.

Dick Dorworth, a writer who climbed Fitz Roy and held the world's speed record on skis, once said he wouldn't read a book unless it was written by a high-level participant. He just wasn't interested in what somebody else had to say with second-hand thoughts and information. The problem with writing climbing history is that most of it must be second-hand, even for a prolific climber like Scott. James Ramsey Ullman, a fine writer, produced a simply horrible history of world climbing: *The Age of Mountaineering,* a book with glaring omissions and pompous platitudes written from no firm base of experience. Scott's book is nearly the opposite. He is not a highly skilled writer. Precise information is often obliquely hidden in his phrasing—a technical editor's nightmare. A strength emerges. It is like comparing a letter from home with a form letter from a real estate developer. Which one is better written? Which one rings true?

Scott's introduction is an overview of mountain adventure. But it is much more. Often I found myself stopping and smiling at a subtle theme. A phrase would ring so true that I'd stop and think awhile before jumping into the mainstream again.

The preface tells us why the book is not as tightly focused as we might wish. Scott was asked to up-date a book on aid climbing and he decided that the revision should have a strong historical basis. He focused on the development of big wall climbing and writes: "I cannot claim the book is free from personal bias, nor is it as objective as it might have been, for personal experience and interest have dictated the length and therefore the importance of some of its sections."

While the coverage of wall climbing is not as complete as it might have been, I found the self-indulgent sections, for which Scott apologizes,