

We miss here the humane wit and self-mockery of a Tilman, or the love and malapropulous comedy of Mazeaud (who sees his hungover companions "happily chatting and vomiting" on a ledge below,) but we also miss a certain amount of point at the same time. This book is, apparently by design, an illustrated argument about the role of style and the role of difficulty in the concoction of grandeur; about what it may mean to be the world's best living mountaineer. One who expects a good climbing yarn might well look elsewhere, for *The Seventh Grade*, as yarn, is barely readable. It's quite another story; possibly a useful set of program notes for astounding climbs to come. As the man fares, so fares the mask. We plan to be listening when the mask elects to speak again, in however private a voice. Consider this: Messner reflects on the Nanga Parbat ordeal, that "Accompanied by a man like Peter Habeler, I would risk trying an 8000-metre peak, having an equal chance and less risk than when attached to a great expedition with all its customary ballyhoo." Promised then; and now performed. Messner is a practical prophet, as good as his word. Not a bad yarn, at that.

GEORGE LOWE *and* MARSHALL RALPH

Modern Snow & Ice Techniques, by Bill March. Manchester, Cicerone Press: 1973. 76 pages 7 photographs. \$3.00.

This is the best manual on ice-climbing technique to hit print since the technical ice revolution began in the mid-sixties. Ten years ago Yvon Chouinard was refocusing his innovative attention from big-wall rock gear onto ice climbing. The droop he forged into the pick of his Simond axe became the model for a whole generation of ice gear that quickly revolutionized the technique of ice climbing. Security *and* speed of front-pointing were both improved so much that a decade later we are still exploring the limits of the possibilities opened up by this advance. Not until now, however, has there been a useful manual written by one of the modern ice climbers about the technique involved.

This is a functional book by a man who knows how: small, inexpensive, and unpretentious, containing the complete essence of modern ice technique in a few well chosen words backed solidly by experience. March is one of the leading Scottish ice climbers, and it is natural that his approach should reflect Scottish ice conditions and attitudes. Scottish ice is steep, often confined in gullies, and harder than the usual Alpine ice but not as brittle as the typical American frozen waterfall. Consequently, March emphasizes front-pointing with short-handled tools and describes placing his points on the ice where Americans will often need to kick harder to set their points in denser ice.

The discussion of front-pointing is excellent, really the heart of the book, beginning with the shape of tools before applying them. March

is not afraid to name advantages and shortcomings by brand, and to support the dampening qualities of a good wood handle. There is a detailed discussion of the pros and cons of different methods of tying the axe or hammer to one's body versus the danger of poking holes in oneself, clinched by the wry observation that a sliding wrist loop adversely "affects compass!" However, his drawing (p. 27) of the single axe anchor position incorrectly shows the spike of the axe resting on the ice, a common mistake which weakens the pick's crucial bite into the ice. Just the opposite, pulling gently outward on the bottom of the shaft, will seat the toothed pick most securely. Several photos show this clearly.

French technique is not as well organized. This subtle and elegant way of climbing flat-footed on intermediate slopes of softer ice really deserves a chapter to itself. Instead, March has integrated French techniques into smooth progression with front-pointing, which emphasizes the way technique adapts to steepening angles but not how it changes with the hardness of the ice. I would rather front-point on ice of only 35° to 40° if it is brittle, but I will gladly French-step at 55° when my points will penetrate securely on softer ice or frozen snow. March neglects to mention that a longer axe (70-80cm.) is necessary for good French technique. But we can easily excuse the emphasis on techniques more suited to Scottish winter, as long as we remember French for ourselves on those beautifully crunchy mornings in the Tetons and Palisades.

March's respect for the varied dangers of ice climbing is worth noting, especially by Americans coming to it from the more secure rock. He devotes a lot of space to self-arresting and belaying, while clearly pointing out the limitations of each: self-arrest is as chancy on hard ice as ice-axe belaying is in soft snow. Warnings about incautious glistening and moving together while roped are well taken. It is impressive to hear a modern hard man's technical excellence balanced by such caution. I would modify his emphasis to rate self-belayed prevention ahead of the self-arrest, scratch sitting hip belay anchored to an ice axe in favor of the more reliable boot-axe belay, and junk the Clog deadman, which can fail suddenly, in favor of the much more reliable fixed-angle MSR snow fluke, Larry Penberthy's redemption for his useless "ice axes."

Five years ago March's countryman Johnny Cunningham said in an interview, "cutting steps in ice is immoral." March adds to this, observing that the chest sling on the hammer, ". . . could be a method of resting on long steep ice pitches or used as a position to place ice screws. Etriers may also be used in conjunction with the hammers which would be used as temporary aid points. Both these methods are unethical and retrogressive as they complicate a fast clean technique of climbing." Bravo. I hope they're listening in Calgary.

Thanks for the book, Bill. It's not elegantly done, but it is packed

with well-distilled experience. I learned a lot. It's a pleasure to have a manual to recommend when everything else is out of date.

DOUG ROBINSON

Advanced Rockcraft, by Royal Robbins. Glendale, California: La Siesta, 1973. 96 pp. 26 photos, profuse sketches.

This important book on rock climbing technique appeared more than two years ago. Blame for failure of this journal to review it promptly must rest squarely on the book review editor: me! The two-year wait is not entirely bad, however. It allows us to view the book in a much better perspective. Subtle strengths and faults are not always apparent to a reviewer who receives a pre-publication copy and writes about it from a single, usually hasty reading.

Advanced Rockcraft is the best climbing technique book to appear in the English language. This is partly due to the author's wide knowledge of his subject, partly due to his hard work, and partly due to the structure of the book. It deals with a tight subject in a loose manner. In all too many informative books, editors without first-hand knowledge of the subject try to drape the author's material onto a framework that doesn't quite fit. Square facts are bludgeoned to fit round holes. To its credit, this book has not been tightly edited. The author's gut feelings come through in descriptions of equipment and technique. Photos are not always related to text material, but the frequent, instantly readable sketches by Sheridan cover the subject so well that photos need only be window dressing.

Other reviewers have taken the author to task because his own actions have not always been what he suggests to others. The alternative is to lower ideals because they haven't been attained in the past. That Robbins has used or removed more bolts than he thinks correct in hindsight is not something that needs to be dealt with in an instructional book. For instance, in this bicentennial year we should remember that Jefferson often tried to short cut the very democratic processes he helped to create, but we must be thankful that he didn't feel compelled to water down the Declaration of Independence because he couldn't live up to every word himself. In fact, Robbins handles the chapter on values exceptionally well, refining a few of the unqualified statements he made in *Basic Rockcraft*. The instructions he gives would-be climbers are a careful balance of some social order with enough individual freedom. This is a critical crossroads where most previous books have taken a wrong turn which points the reader, distantly but inevitably, toward the dead-ends of safety fetishism, regimentation, and reliance on equipment instead of self.

Robbins' chapter on "Leading" has absolutely nothing in common