

# Book Reviews

EDITED BY GALEN A. ROWELL

*In The Throne Room of the Mountain Gods* by Galen Rowell. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1977. 326 pages, 165 black and white photos, 48 color plates and two maps. Price \$18.50.

The pleasant anticipation aroused in me by the title and the magnificent photography was only partially satisfied by this book.

It is a combination of chapters on the history of mountaineering in the Karakoram Range of the western Himalaya interfused with an account of the 1975 American K2 Expedition's attempt on the northwest ridge of that peak. It includes a lot of interesting detail about early exploration and climbing there, as well as of some of the spectacular achievements since the Karakoram was opened again to climbing in 1974. This part is well worth reading.

One wonders, however, whether the author if he had been climbing in the 30's could make such an absurd statement as on page 203, "In pre-World War II America, the cardinal rule of mountaineering was to turn back before taking risks." I think even as competent and aggressive a climber as Rowell, had he been climbing then, would have been influenced as we were by the psychological climate created by the German high altitude mountaineering disasters on Nanga Parbat and Kanchenjunga.

The story of the 1975 attempt on the northwest ridge is a mixture of frustrations involving transport, weather, illness, severe route finding and technical difficulties, as well as serious internal dissensions. The latter occupy a major part of the narrative and are presented in overwhelming detail. After a while I found them boring and welcomed the interspacing of the historical accounts and those of the more interesting concurrent expeditions.

The chief contribution of this book is probably its clarion warning to expedition organizers and would-be participants. Under the best of conditions, a major Himalayan or comparable effort involves prolonged and intimate exposure of the members to each other under trying conditions. Mountaineering competence of a high order is essential, but reasonable compatibility, consideration for others, tolerance and a sense of humor are equally important. The larger the expedition the harder it is to meet these requirements.

Another contribution of the book is the appalling picture presented

by the flooding of the Baltoro by unlimited numbers of expeditions with their armies of porters. The ecological balance in this area, as in the Arctic tundra, is very fragile. Can we justify the current intensive pursuit of our sport in the Karakoram when it results in long-term destruction of the environment?

The fine black-and-white pictures and the color plates help the reader to forget his unhappiness with the detailed personality problems of the 1975 expedition. Leif Patterson was prophetic when he wrote, "The thought haunts me that not the ridge of K2 but our own disunity will defeat us." (That, sickness and an early departure from the mountain had much to do with it.) Greater understanding of the pitiful poverty of the Balti people and of the tremendous efforts of the Pakistani liaison officer in the expedition's behalf would have been welcome in the book. Rowell seems to have a bias against authority in the form of expedition leaders or alpine clubs, and some of his conclusions are questionable. There are minor errors, such as George Bell's picture being titled Art Gilkey, but Rowell writes vividly and the book, a major document in the history of K2, may some day well become a collector's item.

WILLIAM P. HOUSE

*Yurac Janka, Guide to the Peruvian Andes, Part I, Cordilleras Blanca and Rosco*, by John F. Ricker. Banff: Alpine Club of Canada, and New York: American Alpine Club. 1977. 180 pages, 4 maps (separate), 11 panoramas, 45 photographs, and sketch maps. Price: \$11.50.

Along with the Himalaya and Karakoram, the Cordillera Blanca stands in the first rank among the world's ranges in importance and attractiveness to mountaineers from all nations. This relatively small but magnificent range has a multitude of inviting qualities: high altitude (almost 30 peaks over 6000 meters (19,685 feet) with the highest peak at 22,205 feet); absence of political permission requirements; ease of access (as little as three days from the United States to Base Camp); a wide range of difficulty (from gentle snow walks to yet unclimbed faces and ridges, and major peaks with but a single ascent); good weather (as a rule, but not without exceptions); and the availability of an excellent corps of porters, the Andean equivalent of the better known Sherpas of Nepal.

This major new work by John Ricker, *Yurac Janka*, has finally provided the world with a replacement for the Kinzl and Schneider "bible," *Cordillera Blanca*, published in 1950. The generation which separates the two books has seen the volume of climbing grow from two expeditions during the summer of 1952 to nearly a hundred climb-