

a certain dullness. Giving the climber this much detail before he arrives at the cliff takes some of the magic and some of the soul out of the climbing. On the easier climbs where technical demands are not high, charm is correlated highly with mystery. There is little doubt that Allen Austin could *not* have had the splendid adventure he describes in his account of Clachaig Gully had he read a book like this before he went.

Likely *Classic Rock* will serve the socially useful purpose of funneling the majority of route baggers onto the fifty-five climbs listed, making them even more classic than they are now, and leaving the lesser-known gems for those of us insiders who prefer a little more peace and quiet. For those who prefer a somewhat less prescribed approach, who have a predilection for the less-trodden path, the book serves the purpose of telling you the climbs to avoid (particularly on weekends and holidays). There are other commendable ways that *Classic Rock* can be used. Enough detail is given that you will be able to bone up sufficiently on each climb to talk about it confidently and authoritatively—*without the necessity of ever actually having done it*. Another possibility is to buy the book but not read about a climb until *after you return*—thereby preserving the sense of the unknown whilst still availing yourself of the opportunity for coffee-table reminiscence.

ROBERT GODFREY

The Big Walls, by Reinhold Messner, Translated by Audrey Salkeld. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978. 144 pages. Price \$19.95.

The immediate impression is good. Here is a handsome book about some of the most interesting climbs on record, and a book, moreover, by Reinhold Messner, who is arguably the most successful climber on the world stage today. We start in the Alps, make a quick swing into South America, and end up in the Himalaya, and in so doing are taken up not only the Three Big Walls of the Alps, but also the Three Big Walls of the World. When the reader gets down to the substance of the book, however, he may be in trouble. Is this a book in the great climbs format? There are photodiagrams of the climbs, with the usual dotted lines and notes on equipment and so forth. But the amount of detail is woefully inadequate, and no one would embark on any of these climbs without seeking better sources. In this an autobiographical work? There is quite a bit of personal anecdote, yet so many of Messner's major climbs are omitted, while relatively unimportant ones are included. Furthermore, Messner has written a book on the Rupal Face of Nanga Parbat, and the treatment here is brief.

What is the theme, the connecting link, between these Big Walls and the histories and personal experiences that Messner weaves into his book? Are there, in fact, Three Big Walls of the World—or is it just

a handy concept around which to structure a book? Messner is a prolific writer, and a good one, and in the last analysis it seems that here we have an author in search of a subject. Lash together some old Alpine chestnuts: Matterhorn, Grandes Jorasses and Eiger, add a dash of obscurity (Monte Agner), pull in Aconcagua for flavor, top off with Nanga Parbat, (a summit), and Dhaulagiri, (barely got off the ground), and serve to an eager public. Wait a minute, you say, if there are Three Big Walls of the World, and Messner did not get up Dhaulagiri, is one of the Big Walls still unclimbed? No, it's simpler than that: the Eiger does double duty—it's both one of the Three Big Walls of the Alps *and* one of the Three Big Walls of the World. Messner dreams up the concept, fishes around for some handy slides, dashes off the prose, and he is in business. If the whole book took more than a couple of months I would be amazed. And to add to the insult, many of the pictures are ludicrously tipped, and the translation is quite abominable.

Having said all this, I must admit that I nonetheless enjoyed the book. Parts of it are quite awful, as in the ten or so pages excerpted from his mate's diary on Aconcagua, and yet Messner definitely does have something original to say. For this reviewer the interest does not lie in the descriptions of the climbs, but, as in his *The Seventh Grade*, in Messner's reflections on present-day climbing. There are provocative pieces on success and competition, on record seeking, on the need for training, on current expedition philosophy, and on the stresses under which the foremost climbers operate. The section entitled "The Will to Survive" chillingly begins: "Experience shows that of the most successful mountaineers of any generation, only half die from 'natural causes.' The others plunge to, freeze to, or otherwise meet, their deaths in the mountains. Alpine history confirms this situation as a brutal reality: it used to make me think of giving up big mountaineering."

CHRIS JONES

Mountain Passages, by Jeremy Bernstein. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1979. 278 pages. Price \$12.50.

In *Mountain Passages*, Jeremy Bernstein has collected eight of his articles—previously published in the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times Magazine*, and *Mountain Gazette*—on climbing and mountain travels. Bernstein, a physicist by profession and an exceptionally talented science writer, has climbed for seventeen summers in the French Alps under the careful supervision of Chamonix guides, and his essays center, understandably, on the Mont Blanc range. He does range afield in a biographical sketch of Yvon Chouinard and in a lengthy account of a drive from France to Pakistan with his long-time climbing guide Claude Jaccoux and Jaccoux's wife Michele, but the focus of his attention is on the history of climbing in the French Alps and his own tours with Jaccoux and others.