

Book Reviews

EDITED BY JOHN THACKRAY

Quest for Adventure. Chris Bonington. Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1981. 448 pages, black-and-white and color photographs, maps, glossary, bibliography. £19.95.

Climbers will know something of Messner's solo ascent of Nanga Parbat, just as sailors will know of Chichester's single-handed circumnavigation, but few sailors know much more about climbing than climbers do about sailing. And few of either know the first thing about trans-Atlantic ballooning or Yorkshire cave diving. Bonington has gathered this sprawling range of postwar adventuring under one cover and has unified it all by looking at the shared motives of serious adventurers. At bottom, they're kindred spirits, all driven by "the competitive urge to be first and the need to plumb their own personal unknown." They just use different techniques. While Bonington writes lucidly and intelligently about technique, he is equally interested in comparing the personalities of those who dedicate their lives to—and risk them in—adventuring. The approach makes for a unique and valuable book.

Bonington divides *Quest For Adventure* into oceans, deserts, rivers, mountains (including his own 1970 ascent of Annapurna), the Poles, air, space, and beneath the earth. Although he discusses in detail at least one expedition in each area, the bulk of the book is weighted toward climbing and deep-water voyaging.

In those two sections—well over two hundred pages—stories about Herzog, Hunt, Bonatti, Buhl, and Hillary; Ridgeway, Blyth, Knox-Johnson, Lewis, and others are told with an easy-going expertise and a sharp sense of drama. These are real page turners, no small feat when you're talking about a voyage that took two years. Where possible, Bonington has interviewed the participants, and gives us candid glimpses into their characters. When, as in the Annapurna South Face climb, *he* is the participant, we get a clear sense of the constant grueling pressure on the large-scale expedition leader.

Stories about the more obscure expeditions (Thesiger's Arabian Desert trek, three polar crossings by different means, cave diving at Keld Head, the first trans-Atlantic balloon crossing, and the moon landing, if that can be called obscure) are sometimes told with a bit less vitality. Sometimes the story line sags into reportage, sometimes we just aren't given enough information. This does no real damage except in "Rivers." Contrasting the large expedition with the small assault style, he tells of John Blashford-Snell's massive, military-supported at-

tempt to run the Blue Nile in inflatable boats. Led by this Kiplingesque figure in a pith helmet, the expedition was attacked twice by bandits, a man was killed by the river, and Bonington himself, along as a reporter, very nearly drowned. This is great stuff, but given short shrift in only half a chapter; the rest is devoted to the late Mike Jones' kayak attempt. Most readers would probably trade Bonington's account of the moon landing for more about the Blue Nile.

In his introduction, Bonington defines adventure as a sustained endeavor, freely undertaken and involving some risk. Risk—more specifically, sudden death—weaves its way like a theme in and out of his narratives. The death of Günther Messner by avalanche, death in a submerged cave, Bonington's own close call, the death of his friend Ian Clough by avalanche, and the subsequent deaths of nearly all his Annapurna climbing partners are treated sensitively yet without romanticism or euphemism. Death is simply part of the definition.

Though *Quest For Adventure* looks like the big handsome gift books that appear around the holidays, the extent and quality of the text make it more than that. But when books approach \$40.00, one tends to be picky about things like photographs. Here the quality is uneven. To be fair, many of the photographs are excellent, and one can't complain that Chichester's self portrait at sea is discolored or that Kon-Tiki wrecked on the reef is badly focused. But there are clinkers when there needn't be and, sometimes, they are given two-page spreads.

But what really stands out in a book that embraces something as big as postwar adventure is the author's approach. By choosing to see the human face on each expedition, Bonington has written a kind of celebration of individual effort against nature's hostile places.

DALLAS MURPHY

Expeditions to Nowhere. Paddy Sherman. The Mountaineers. Seattle, 1981. 226 pages, black-and-white photographs, maps. \$14.95.

Care to travel far and fast? Then read *Expeditions to Nowhere*, a summary account of expeditions undertaken during two decades of climbing on three continents. In just a few hundred pages, Paddy Sherman manages to take the reader on climbs of Alpamayo, Illimani, Huascarán and Aconcagua in South America; Kilimanjaro and Kenya in Africa; and Alaska's Mount McKinley, among others. Far from being monotonous, these expeditions come in all shapes and sizes: one is an assault on the Saint Elias Range with sixty other climbers in celebration of Canada's Centennial and another is a jet-set tour of South America and Africa condensed into one.

Seasoned climbers will be disappointed by the lack of actual climbing described in the book. Sherman has stuck to the trade routes and does