

sometimes differ from each other within a few pages. Nanda Devi is 7817 m on page 311 and 7891 m on page 326. Kamet is 7756 m on page 311 and 7891 m on page 320. On page 306 it states that "Kenneth Mason noted in 1860 that a survey *khalasi* (peon) carried a signal pole to the top of Shilla Peak in the Zaskar Range, east of Spiti, at an altitude of 7092 m." Obviously the "that" is misplaced, since Colonel Mason could not have noted anything 27 years before his birth. There is, however, an error of fact, since Shilla is now known to be 6191 meters, as stated on page 319. Twice T. Graham Brown is credited as being leader of the 1936 Nanda Devi expedition, which he was clearly not. And as splendid as Sherpas normally are, on that expedition we did not have "six very experienced and reliable Sherpas." Of the six, only two porters got as high as Camp II and that only once. The myth of Himalayan glaciers being the longest temperate valley glaciers of the world is again stated on page 140. As any American mountaineer knows, there are at least a dozen much longer ones in Alaska and the Yukon.

This is, however, nit-picking. *The Himalaya, Aspects of Change* is a very useful and provocative book.

H. ADAMS CARTER

Learning to Rock Climb. Michael Loughman. Sierra Club, San Francisco, 1981. 141 pages, black-and-white photographs, line drawings, glossary. \$9.95 paper. \$17.95 cloth.

Like many climbers in the late fifties and early sixties, I learned to climb from books. More precisely, I learned to climb in spite of books. I could never reconcile my experiences on the rocks with the descriptions I read. Why wasn't I able to move rhythmically, link my movements, keep my hands low? Why was I straining? When I looked at a handhold, my mind feverishly reviewed the veritable Kamasutra of hand positions I had read about. Surely it was wrong to simply glom it onto the rock!

Twenty years later, I realize that the books I read, as well as almost all that have followed, presented the components of technique without ever achieving an integrated vision of technique itself. I am told that there is a Chinese proverb which says that one can know all the parts of a carriage and yet not know what a carriage is. This proverb characterizes the failings of most books on climbing. You get a chowder of equipment, knots, belaying and rappelling techniques, followed by a stew of hand and footholds. Then you are invited to partake of an age old wisdom: "Keep Your Weight Over Your Feet." For extra confusion, you may be treated to some rules that just beg to be broken, such as not crossing your feet on a traverse and maintaining three points

of support at all times. Usually, you are given some drawings to digest. These linear oversimplifications are about as useful as pictures of Superman flying—the dynamics of the situation are not revealed. Finally, a few hero shots of the author and his friends are included, without commentary, to show that climbing is impossible after all.

Royal Robbins' *Beginning Rockcraft* (1971) and *Advanced Rockcraft* (1973) gave the first complete account of American rock-climbing technique, emphasizing simple methods of broad applicability. *Advanced Rockcraft* was the only authoritative source on big wall techniques and an important voice in the promotion of clean-climbing methods. Robbins didn't have any new insights to offer about free-climbing technique, but his comments on the psychology of competition, leading, and soloing remain the most incisive words written on the subject. A story at the end of *Advanced Rockcraft* is the best account I've ever read of the inner experience of a difficult lead.

In the intervening years, a succession of authors, some well-known, some obscure, have been bursting through already opened doors. Finally, eight years after *Advanced Rockcraft*, we have the first fresh view of the subject: Michael Loughman's book, *Learning to Rock Climb*.

Most climbing manuals begin with a caveat: You can't learn to climb from a book; competent instruction is essential. Having thus suggested that his book serves no useful purpose, the author gets on with the job of dispensing information the reader cannot use. It is typical of Loughman's insight and thoughtfulness that he takes the time to define his audience and elucidate what his book has to offer:

"This book is designed to help you bridge the difficult gap from beginning to a level of expertise that will get you into the circle of good climbers doing hard climbs."

Loughman's method is very simple: The novice should hang out at bouldering areas and hone his skills on boulder problems. Experienced climbers will help him in this situation and he will develop the level of skill necessary for him to be an acceptable second. To help the beginner to develop technique, Loughman begins with an exposition of climbing movement that is brilliantly illustrated with sequence photographs of Amy Loughman climbing unroped on various problems at Indian Rock in Berkeley. These photographs are unique. They illustrate the fundamental principles of body position and weight transfer that every experienced climber knows, but which no one has described before in the literature. The pictures are stylish and, when combined with the commentary, very informative. The only artificial note is that Ms. Loughman resolutely insists on smiling, even in the midst of strenuous mantles. Nonetheless, these pictures and the accompanying text constitute the only genuine description of basic climbing technique in print. There is

an equally lucid account of elementary crack climbing methods. Let us compare Robbins and Loughman on the use of the feet in off-width cracks:

Robbins: (Describing a narrow off-width crack climbed with the left side in) "The left foot is inserted at knee level with the toe pressed sideways against one wall and the heel sideways against the other . . . and the right foot gains purchase similar to the left but at the edge of the crack, or by pointing the toe down and the heel up and wedging against opposite walls."

Neither here nor in the rest of the description does Robbins ever mention moving up!

Loughman: "*Your outside leg is the key to off-width technique. It does the work of lifting your body. The foot spans the crack between the heel and toe, the heel lifted above the toe if possible and turned somewhat into the crack . . . it is important that your knee be turned out . . . so that there is space for it when you move your foot higher . . . your inside leg and arms . . . support you while you move the "outside foot to a higher heel-toe jam."*

Dale Bard has already written about crack-climbing technique in the Chouinard catalogue, so Loughman's clarity is not quite as unprecedented in this example as it is in the rest of his descriptions. Still, Loughman's chapter on free climbing technique, entitled simply "Movement," represents a new level of insight, comprehensiveness, and simplicity. It also constitutes the whole story. In keeping with the current emphasis on American rock climbing, Loughman describes no aid climbing techniques at all.

Learning to Rock Climb possesses some other substantial virtues. It unites a sense of history and tradition with a clear view of the current state of American rock climbing, and it maintains a fervently minimalist approach to equipment and procedure. The history and tradition that appear are, of course, Californian. Coloradans and New Yorkers may not be pleased, but at least this book attempts to forge some links with the past. Finally, by using an obviously excellent woman climber to illustrate proper technique and procedure, the book quietly but firmly warns against sexual stereotyping.

The book does have one failing. Loughman owes his readers a warning that he never quite manages to articulate. An expert climber is, among other things, one who is lucky enough to have survived his inexpert beginnings and who has learned from the mistakes a beginner

inevitably makes. It is almost impossible to become expert without taking risks, and in most cases the beginner will not recognize the danger. Knowledge of technique and procedure is essential but far from sufficient to guarantee safety. The emotional control needed to perform safely in dangerous situations comes only through the experience of bad situations, followed by introspection, and the determination not to repeat errors. Even so, a momentary failure of will can precipitate a potentially fatal episode. In *Advanced Rockcraft*, Robbins writes about these emotional factors with great intensity and honesty, and his few paragraphs on the subject, together with the story, "Fantasia," are among the most important words an aspiring leader can read.

In any highly developed field, a good book on the basics should not only inform the beginner but should also stimulate the expert. *Learning to Rock Climb* is such a book. Certainly, you can recommend it with confidence to your friends who are beginners. Moreover, Loughman's organized panorama of techniques may move you to contemplate your own climbing habits. His book made me think and, finally, after all these years, I understand what those other climbing manuals were trying to say.

RICHARD GOLDSTONE

Climbing and Hiking in the Wind River Mountains. Joe Kelsey. Sierra Club, San Francisco, 1980. 400 pages, illustrations, diagrams, maps, bibliography. \$8.95.

Joe Kelsey, the author of this book, is perhaps better known as a humorist and the talented and irreverent editor of the late, much-lamented *Vulgarian Digest*. He appears to us now in a serious work, an excellently done and much needed guide to the Wind River Mountains which is thorough and up-to-date and clearly the result of many years of study and research. The book includes hiking and trail as well as climbing information—from the simplest scrambles to the hardest technical routes. The absence of photographs has drawn some wishful comments from climbers I've met; but, thanks to the fine line drawings by Jan Olsen, the book stands up well without them.

Kelsey has come up with a new wrinkle on how to present first-ascent information—in the back of the book, together with a bibliographical reference list. This arrangement is an improvement over the common practice of including first ascent data along with the route descriptions.

Finally, the book is made to be tough. At the end of a summer's heavy use, my copy held up impressively—quite a plus in these days of so many poorly-constructed books.

RICHARD DUMAIS