

rance and carelessness result in numerous small errors too. Anyone who calls a glacial *moraine* "a long tongue of ice licking its way down the valley" or writes of the "ore-like rock of Everest's *summit*" should not write about mountains or mountaineers. Willi deserves better.

ROBERT H. BATES

High Adventure: A Biography of Reinhold Messner. Ronald Faux. Victor Gollancz, North Pomfret, Vermont, 1982. 180 pages, 45 black and white photographs, 2 maps. \$22.50.

For many years, I have been a Reinhold Messner buff. I think that I have read almost everything he has written, including a delightful and perhaps not so well-known guidebook to the celebrated *vie ferrate*—the so-called 'iron routes'—that have been nailed into the Dolomitic faces to give adventurous tourists a sense of what climbing in the Dolomites is like. In fact, I once helped to lash together some unpublished material of Messner's to make an article about him which appeared in one of the previous incarnations of *Geo Magazine*. I have never met Messner, so I really do not have much of an idea of what makes him tick. One has the impression that he has, or could earn, as much money as he needs to live as well as he would like to, without having to drive himself the way he does. He seems persuaded that he can be the first person to climb *all* the eight-thousand-meter mountains. And perhaps he can. But then what?

In any case, given all of this, I was extremely eager to read Ronald Faux's book. Faux is a British journalist who works for the *Times* of London and who specializes in reporting about mountaineering for that newspaper. He was in Base Camp when Messner and Peter Habeler returned from their oxygenless climb of Everest in 1978. The book, he claims, is based on "extensive interviews" with Messner. In short, on the face of it, Faux would seem to be splendidly positioned to produce a really first-rate book about the man who is, arguably, the best active mountaineer in the world today. The only problem is that Faux can't write or, at least, write well enough.

Faux belongs to the "It was a modest smile but a significant one for the future." school of literature. (This ghastly sentence is the terminal one of Chapter Three.) Take this sentence: "Whatever darker subconscious motives were now driving him, if indeed there were such egocentric forces pushing him along, it was too late now to turn back. Climbing was dyed deeply into his nature and he was as committed to going forward as he would have been after starting an irreversible pitch." The "dyed deeply into his nature" is really the *je ne sais quoi* that gives that sentence its peculiar charm. Perhaps I will use it in my next book.

Faux is also a sensitive observer of the human scene. Of the Sherpas who accompanied Messner on his unsuccessful attempt on Makalu—one of the few times that Messner failed to climb something he started out on—Faux reflects:

"Seventy-five pence a day for dangerous work. They enjoyed it. The pay was high by Nepalese standards. The price of an average Mercedes would make a villager in Nepal an extremely rich man, comfortable for the rest of his days." There is much food for thought in this perceptive observation. If Ang Dorje did not actually want to *sell* his Mercedes, he could drive it down from Namche to the Dudh Kosi and take a swim. Or take Faux's comments on the apparently endless stream of women who make the trip to St. Magdalena in the Villnöss in the South Tyrol where Messner lives. "From women," he notes, although how, one wonders, does he know, "the reaction was usually an inquisitive stare. Was there something darkly attractive about a man who lived constantly in the shadow of such danger, who thought perceptively about the motives for his adventures and wrote about them with great frankness?" This weighty question is, needless to say, never answered by Faux and the reader is left, in a manner of speaking, hanging to a vertical wall of suspense by his merest pitons. In fact, the real trouble with Faux's book is that, after reading it, one does not have the feeling that one knows much more about Messner than before, especially if one has read Messner. While, for my taste, Messner may carry on a little too much about "the Death Zone" and the like, at least he writes with simplicity and clarity about both his life and his feelings about the mountains. There is no indication from Faux's book that he spoke to any of the other people, such as Messner's family or his former wife, Uschi, or Peter Habeler, with whom, it seems, Messner will no longer climb, who have played an important part in his life. All one has by way of external comment are some singularly vapid observations by Messner's current girl friend, one Nena Holguin, such as "Sometimes I feel so squelched by this man, but then I know that is what I want anyway—a strong man, a single separate identity." Who cares what *she* wants. Let her write her own book. It is to read about Messner that we are going to pay our \$22.50—yes, \$22.50—for a 180-page book with mediocre black-and-white pictures. Alas, Faux seems incapable of telling us anything about Messner that is not obvious. When I finished his book, apart from a great sense of relief that I did not actually have to buy it, I was reminded of a review that one of the New York food critics gave of a pretentious and over-priced French restaurant in Princeton. The critic wrote, "Princeton has long needed a truly first-rate restaurant. It still does." Someday, someone may write a decent biography of Messner but this ain't it.

JEREMY BERNSTEIN

Total Alpinism. René Desmaison. Granada, London, 1982. 202 pages, black and white photographs. £12.50.

Total Alpinism is certainly a book to read. It is like sitting down with one's best pal and listening to him tell about his latest wild climb. This book is a combined translation of *La Montagne à Mains Nues* and *342 Heures dans les Grandes Jorasses* which René wrote at the peak of his climbing career in the early