

*The Selkirks—Nelson's Mountains.* John F. Garden. Introduction by William Lowell Putnam. Footprint Publishing, Revelstoke, BC, 1984. 144 pages. 119 color photographs. 1 map. \$29.95 (Canadian).

In his introduction, Bill Putnam says, "This is the book I once set out to write." Would that he had, rather than leaving the task to John Garden! The author's prose, when it is not absolutely leaden, is awkward, puerile, and unintentionally ungrammatical. *Vide* a sentence like, "To each climber, different rational, different feelings, and different reasons are entertained." Or, "As I became involved in mountain activities, many including family and friends, have expressed their fears of venturing into what they consider to be an entirely hostile and dangerous environment." Not surprisingly, the best prose is found where the author quotes at length from Howard Palmer's descriptions of his first ascents of Mount Sir Sandford and Mount Adamant. But, of course, one can savor writing of *that* quality by reading Palmer's book rather than this one.

One could perhaps excuse such bad writing if the experiences and exploits being described were of a spectacular or significant caliber. Not that the Selkirks should be scorned by the dedicated amateur mountaineer, but the few ascents actually described in any detail in this book are standard routes. In his foreword, the author lists as an objective "to present the human dimension of the alpine experience". Only once does he even try—in writing about an ill-considered and unsuccessful attempt on the fabled northwest arête of Mount Sir Donald. But his account is replete with "exciting", "enjoyable", "impressive", etc, and his partner never takes on an identity. Although I, too, have had an epic or two on that mountain, I was appalled to read that this party of two, staring at first light from the Uto-Sir Donald col (*not* the Wheeler Hut 4000 feet lower), would find it necessary to turn back at two P.M.(!) with the summit still an hour away. And then they failed to get off before nightfall forced a bivouac! True, it is of such ill-fated adventures that great tales are told. Too bad one wasn't.

A few more caveats, should the prospective reader need any. The text is studded with factual information, mostly of an historical nature, information which is more effectively and completely presented in other works, such as Esther Forbes' *The Canadian Rockies: Early Travels and Explorations*, (1969). There is evident an undertone of Canadian chauvinism. This, despite the fact that much of the exploration and most of the major ascents in the Selkirks were achieved by Americans.

The photographs are absolutely stunning. As mentioned in the heading, there are 119 of them, all of excellent quality. Most are landscapes, in keeping with Ruskin's dictum that mountains are the beginning and end of natural scenery. The few climbing shots appear to be "posed", and thus lack the "heart-in-mouth" quality typical of the best of this genre. The photographs of wildlife are particularly remarkable, as good as any National Geographic has printed. And anyone who can make Ross Peak (!) and Mount Green look like giants of the Karakoram knows how to use a camera! Would that he were half so able with a typewriter. What we really have here—stripped of all its

unfulfilled pretensions—is what Edmonton publisher Mel Hurtig once described to me as “a coffee-table book”. So, for \$30 Canadian (\$22.50 US as of this writing), you can impress your guests with gorgeous pictures of some mountains you may have climbed.

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