

*Footloose in the Himalaya*. Mike Harding, Michael Joseph. Viking Penguin, New York, 1990. 242 pages, 6 sketch maps, numerous color photographs. Hardbound. \$29.95.

The book's jacket tells us that Mike Harding is one of the United Kingdom's "leading entertainers." At first one might well wonder what a Brit television personality could possibly have to say about the world's highest mountain range that is worth reading. But when Harding journeys "footloose in the Himalaya," he manages to see and record his first visit to the mountain kingdoms of Zaskar, Ladakh, and Nepal with an English eye that is at once both keen and refreshing.

As the realization of his lifelong dream to visit the Himalaya, Harding's trek was ostensibly made for a television film project. As a conservationist as well as an entertainer, Harding was interested in the commercialization of the Nepal Himalaya, going there to document on film the tragic consequences of pollution, deforestation, and erosion. An experienced and insightful traveler, he is not your typical Himalayan climber bent on "attack and conquer," but rather explores the world as a sensitive and thoughtful journeyman. His writing is a welcome change from the usual expeditionary cookbook: "I came, I climbed, I suffered."

With a fine command of English, he balances rich description with English wit, as he discovers the magic and anguish of this wonderful part of the world. Repeatedly, he agonizes over his inability to meet a schedule or a time commitment. Early on, encountering a local airport clerk unimpressed by his catastrophic (to him) loss of his luggage, Harding listens to the clerk say:

"Today this is very important and regrettable. Tomorrow it will not be so important. Also, are many other things important to many other people. Life is always thus."

"I hadn't expected a debate on existentialism this early in the day," replies Harding.

Accepting the long, inevitable delays, the debilitating gastro-intestinal infections, his often strenuous physical efforts, the common day-to-day personal inconveniences, and the occasional rude cultural shocks, Harding makes every effort to be a "traveler." He persistently endeavors to understand and experience his host culture, as opposed to being the "tourist" who expects constant entertainment from the new environment while dragging along all the trappings of home. In the process, Harding is not blinded by the unrelenting beauty of the landscape or the gentle friendship extended to him. He sees the magnificence but does not miss the tragedy of human suffering and senseless pollution so prevalent in this struggling society.

There are over 150 color photographs reproduced throughout the text. Most are adequate, some are stunning. They suffer somewhat from the lack of high resolution in the printing. The book, of the 8 x 10 inch format, fits somewhere between coffee table and bookshelf and is a little awkward.

If there is a shortfall in *Footloose in the Himalaya*, it could be that Mike Harding presents a picture of a marvelous culture and environment on the cusp of rapid change. Much of the change involves the loss of tradition and natural

beauty, the violation of qualities that promoted the proliferation of tourism in the first place. To this, there are no simple solutions, and none are presented here.

Harding sprinkles comments and anecdotes about the human condition into the travelogue, including a comparison of the sexual habits of the Sherpas and the English. There are also philosophical tidbits and the unfolding tale of personal growth during his travels. He comes up with a book that does, indeed, fulfill his role as entertainer, but not without informing and enriching the reader. Emily Brontë said it well, "What have these lonely mountains worth revealing? More glory and more grief than I can tell." *Footloose in the Himalaya* has a lot worth revealing. It is a delight to read.

GARY RUGGERA, M.D.

*High Asia: An Illustrated History of the 7,000 Metre Peaks.* Jill Neate. The Mountaineers, Seattle, 1989. 213 pages, 140 photographs, 79 in color, 57 maps, and end papers. \$46.00.

This extremely valuable resource book names 446 peaks between the heights of 7000 and 8000 meters. An impressive list in order of altitude tells what peaks have been climbed, when, and who made the first ascent. 177 are still unclimbed. The main part of the book gives detailed descriptions, when available, of all these peaks, often with photographs, summaries of early attempts or the story of the first ascent; also regional bibliographies. Jill Neate separates the mountains into sections: Assam Himalaya, Bhutan Himalaya, Central and Western Nepal, Himalaya, Kumaon and Garhwal Himalaya, Western Himalaya, Greater Karakoram, Lesser Karakoram, Hindu Kush, Pamirs, Tien Shan, China and Tibet. She adds a general bibliography.

This book is clearly the result of devoted and accurate work; it reads well. The author thanks Eugene Gippenreiter for updating sections on the Pamirs and Tien Shan, and Michael Ward for similar help with peaks in Tibet and the Kun Lun. Short biographies of twelve climbers or explorers, such as Claude Kogan, Tom Longstaff and Abalakov, add color to the sections, while the photographs are a major asset to the text. This is a first rate piece of work. It will be poured over by climbers and would-be climbers for many years to come.

ROBERT H. BATES

*Sherpas.* James F. Fisher, Foreword by Sir Edmund Hillary. University of California Press. 19 color plates and 104 black-and-white illustrations. Paperback.

To the best of my knowledge I have never met James Fisher. Nonetheless, I feel a certain parallelism in our karmas. He first visited the Sherpas in Solu-Khumbu in 1964 when he helped to construct the Hillary schools. I first visited them in 1967, just when the first effects of these schools were being felt. He also visited them in 1978, while, in 1979, I went to Phaplu to visit the lamented "Hostellerie des Sherpa," a chimerical luxury hotel constructed by a then 24-year-old Sherpa