

Mont Blanc Massif, Volume I: Selected Climbs. Lindsay Griffin, general editor
Les Swinden. Alpine Club, London. 268 pages, 30 diagrams (topos), 87
black-and-white photographs with route markings.

This is the third updated edition of the first of two volumes of selected climbs in the Mont Blanc massif. It is addressed to the serious alpinist with major experience on difficult and dangerous terrain. Though not comprehensive, it lists enough climbs to occupy a climber for a lifetime: over 230 climbs are listed of which more than 200 are in the TD-ED (extreme) categories. The format is such that the book will easily fit into a pocket and the plastic cover helps protect the book from the elements. This, in a word, is a book for specialists.

Beware, however! Before the contents can be studied intelligently it is imperative to read the author's preface and general information, else the text is difficult to relate to the photos or diagrams. In short, you must figure out what makes this book tick. But eventually you learn that, except for the index, which should be at the book's end and not hidden between the text and the topos and photographs, the logic is excellent. As with a computer you need only adjust your mentality to the idiot box. Once that is done, the guidebook is superb.

This volume covers the ground from the Col de la Bérangère to the Col du Géant, thence from the Col du Géant to the Col de Talèfre, in short the high points on the great Pennine divide between France and Italy. The author and editor are careful to state that, unlike the Vallot guide, this is not an all-inclusive work. Its distinction, however, is that it lists all classic routes from easy to extremely severe. The selections are excellent. The route descriptions are clear, and the gradings correspond, where applicable, with the reviewer's recollections. Unlike some other overdetailed guides, the comments are of a general nature, thus providing just enough uncertainty for the user to retain the spirit of adventure.

The author repeatedly indicates that one of the major dangers in this massif is the extremely treacherous weather which can transform an easy ascent, like the ordinary route on Mont Blanc, into a perilous nightmare. A fair-weather rock climber can here perform outlandish stunts so long as the sun shines, but when storms arise, the Mont Blanc massif will test the skill, spirit and resourcefulness of the best veteran mountaineers.

If you wish to climb without a guide and know little or no French and want to climb in the Chamonix area, this book is a must. In many respects, it has higher quality than the Vallot, its French language rival.

ANDREW JOHN KAUFFMAN, II

Mount Kenya. John Reader. Elm Tree Books, London, 1989. 160 pages, color photographs. £ 25.00.

In this age when 'climbing' conjures up visions of Lycra-clad youth grunting and swearing as they push the limits of human endurance another notch, it is