

Book Reviews

EDITED BY JOHN THACKRAY

Mount McKinley: The Conquest of Denali. Bradford Washburn and David Roberts. Preface by Ansel Adams. Photographs mostly by Bradford Washburn (more than 120 illustrations, including 77 photographs in duotone, 41 in full color). Text by Bradford Washburn and David Roberts. Relief map by Dee Molenaar. Index and Bibliography. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, 1991. Printed and bound in Japan. Price \$60.

Mount McKinley is the American mountain book of the year, possibly the century. Its black-and-white and color photographs are the cream of the many pictures of Mount McKinley taken by Bradford Washburn in over half a century. They are largely full page (12x10¼ inches with no border), and sometimes spread across both pages. They show America's greatest mountain from every side, clarifying the difficulties thwarting explorers who tried to reach it from the coast, and showing in great detail routes on the mountain made by climbers in recent decades. The late Ansel Adams, writing about Brad Washburn in his preface, remarked, "It is astounding to realize what tremendous physical risks he took to get these shots—many, for instance, were taken from unpressurized airplanes or helicopters often at temperatures far below zero, with the door removed and Brad tethered to the opposite side of the cabin."

Though the book is large and heavy, great beauty and much information lie between its covers. Washburn and Roberts both write well. The text, beginning with the experiences of the early explorers, concludes with the situation today, when even a thousand may try to climb the peak in a given year. Each new route is described, including David Roberts' modest tale of how he and six other college students climbed the long-thought-impossible Wickersham Wall in 1963. Dee Molenaar's maps are helpful in understanding the complicated geography of the McKinley area, but the extraordinary feature at the end of the book is the nearly 14-page bibliography, with about half a thousand references to books and articles about McKinley, including first ascents on neighboring Huntington, Hunter and Foraker.

Washburn's foreword states, "This book has been nearly a lifetime in the making;" yet his fascination with the world's greatest northern mountain remains undiminished, for he declares, "Just being in its presence is still as exciting to me as it was the first time I saw it." That excitement is in no way limited to the mountain's climbing opportunities, for many of the photographs have great artistic beauty, especially when he focuses on patterns of crevasses, wind-swept snow slopes or details of sheer rock walls.

Washburn had read books by Belmore Browne and Hudson Stuck before his

first expedition to Alaska in 1930, and by the time Gilbert Grosvenor, head of the National Geographic Society, in 1936 asked him to suggest future northern exploration objectives, he had already led five expeditions to Alaska and the Yukon Territory. One, for the National Geographic Society in 1935, spent a winter in the St. Elias Mountains travelling by dog team and mapping that then virgin area of sub-Arctic Canada. In January, 1936, Washburn suggested to Grosvenor flights to photograph then little known Mount McKinley. So that summer he made a highly successful photographic survey for the N.G.S. at a cost of slightly less than \$1000! That began his love of McKinley.

In early 1942 when the Quartermaster General's Office and the Army Air Force were seeking a place to test cold-weather clothing and equipment that spring, Brad strongly recommended Mount McKinley, and this became the region where the Alaskan Test Expedition in May, 1942 tried out 30 prototype items for mountain and winter warfare. Representing the Army Air Force on this expedition, Brad was very active, leading the first rope up Karstens Ridge, and along with others, all of whom wore different test clothing and footwear, making the third ascent of Mount McKinley.

After the war he climbed McKinley by the Muldrow route again, this time to film for RKO and to help make cosmic-ray studies. Barbara, his wife, who was with him, became the first woman to climb McKinley. Their team constantly used igloos instead of tents. Though they spent 90 days on the mountain and climbed the north summit as well, he was not finished. Four years later he persuaded Terris Moore to use his plane on skis to land him and other climbers on the Kahiltna Glacier. From there they made a new route up the West Buttress. Since then, this flight-assisted route has become the favorite way to climb the mountain. In fact, in 1991, in a single season, nearly 600 climbers reached the summit, most of them on this route.

Washburn did not climb to the summit again, but year after year he took new aerial photographs, many while making his outstanding map of Mount McKinley. Regularly publishing superb pictures of the mountain in the *American Alpine Journal* and elsewhere, he kept pointing out new route prospects. These pictures and articles more than anything else have led to the tremendous national and international interest in climbing our highest mountain. Some of the world's most famous climbers have been attracted by them, men such as Riccardo Cassin, whose party made the first ascent of a difficult route up the middle of the South Face, now known as the Cassin Ridge. Famous mountaineers who have climbed McKinley or its surrounding peaks, tempted by Washburn's prodding, include Lionel Terray, Reinhold Messner, Dougal Haston, Doug Scott, and the famous Japanese, Naomi Uemura, who lost his life while descending from the south summit after a successful winter solo climb. By now McKinley has been climbed solo winter and summer. It has even been climbed by the West Buttress route up and back in one day, but none of these extreme achievements take away from the challenges of the early climbs or the majesty of a mountain that at times endangers everybody on its slopes. More than fifty have already died there. Despite this book's subtitle, McKinley will never be

permanently “conquered.” Instead it will accede to human ambitions when it wishes or crush them violently when it does not.

This book is sure to be a cherished item in mountain libraries far, far into the future.

ROBERT H. BATES

Surviving Denali: A Study of Accidents on Mount McKinley 1903-1990.

Jonathan Waterman, with an Introduction and chapter on Mountain Medicine by Peter H. Hackett, M.D. Second Edition, Revised. American Alpine Club Press, New York, 1991. 67 pages of black-and-white pictures, plus appendices and short bibliography. Soft cover.

Surviving Denali should be required reading for people climbing Mount McKinley. The first edition was published in 1983 and this edition brings it up to date. Accidents on the mountain are still common and the death toll continues to rise. This does not mean that climbing Mount McKinley should be discouraged, but that before climbers commit themselves, they should know what can happen. The book describes a series of accidents, most of which could have been avoided.

Chapters discuss high altitude, pulmonary and cerebral edema, frostbite, climbing falls, crevasse falls, avalanches, unusual accidents, preparations for Denali, and the use of drugs at high altitude. There are summaries of each type of accident.

Nobody is better prepared to write about the danger of climbing McKinley than Jonathan Waterman, who from 1976 to 1987 has been closely involved with the mountain as climber, ranger, guide and rescuer. He has risked his life to help others on various occasions, and knows well the highest northern mountain in the world and McKinley's unique conditions and dangers.

ROBERT H. BATES

The Endless Knot: K2, Mountain of Dreams and Destiny. Kurt Diemberger.

Translated by Audrey Salkeld. Grafton Books, London, 1991. 308 pages, profusely illustrated; diagrams and tables, necrology and bibliography. \$32.

This is not so much a mountaineering book as a love story. A story of the love between a man and a woman and their passion for mountains. A soliloquy rather than a narrative, a story of death and disaster with few heroes.

At 60, Kurt Diemberger is a grand veteran of climbs around the world. Mountains are not the main part of his life—they are, he writes, “what we are living for”. Since his youth he has been devoted to mountains as climber, photographer, writer and lecturer. Julie Tullis became his acolyte and partner and her memory permeates this entire book. She was 47 when she died. Both were happily married—she in Britain, he in Italy—and both had children.