

Messner and Scott. Likewise, Robbins notes that Croft, in addition to his mastery of climbing has “a character that is head and shoulders above a lot of petulance and nay-saying and faultfinding that even I’m involved in.”

O’Connell does a superb job of introducing each climber in a two or three page bio and his introduction to the book as a whole provides a concise and accurate history of modern climbing. Since the book’s completion Lynn Hill has freed the Nose, and Česen’s ascent of the south face of Lhotse has become highly controversial. Of the many changes since then, none so affected me as the tragic death of Wolfgang Güllich in an auto accident. Güllich, to whom the book is dedicated, seems the freshest voice. One emerges from reading the interview wanting to meet him, then remembering he’s gone, glad to have his words preserved here so eloquently.

DAVID STEVENSON

Mixed Emotions. Greg Child. The Mountaineers, Seattle, 1993. 256 pages. \$14.95 (paper).

Stories off the Wall. John Roskelley. The Mountaineers, Seattle, 1993. Color and black-and-white photographs. 223 pages, \$22.95.

Together these books provide a generous sampling of extreme climbing, principally Himalayan, in the past two decades. Child and Roskelley share a taste for small expeditions to uncharted places. Hard routes on high peaks are their specialty. Roskelley is particularly dismissive of Everest mob scenes and tourists dragged through storms up Denali. Their books dramatize the frontiers of individual climbing style in the last two decades—especially in the Himalaya, where the familiar hazards of weather and altitude are multiplied by technical difficulty.

Child is much more the writer, and *Mixed Emotions* is mixed in content: autobiography, portraits of other climbers, reflections, climbs (a few of which were recounted in different form in Child’s earlier *Thin Air*). I enjoyed the portraits the most; they are the work of a thoughtful journalist, revealing even when tackling such familiar icons as Doug Scott and Don Whillans. Child’s own attitudes emerge unobtrusively but clearly in his description of the Polish high-altitude climber, Voytek Kurtyka. Kurtyka seems heroic not principally for his big-peak achievements, but for his attitude toward them. “The event of an alpine-style ascent has a very deep, ethical reason,” Kurtyka says. Hence his estrangement from his partner Jerzy Kukuczka, who went on to his 14th 8000-meter summit and, soon thereafter, death on Lhotse. Kurtyka has written: “If there is such a thing as spiritual materialism it is displayed in the urge to possess mountains rather than to unravel and accept their mysteries.” Child’s admiration of such views may be inferred from his account of a climb to a high Hindu shrine: “it isn’t what you find at the end but what you learn along the way.”

Surprisingly, the least satisfying of Child's profiles is that of John Roskelley, with whom he attempted Menlungtse in 1990. Roskelley, the cultural primitive misogynist, emerges as "more like a sheep in wolf's clothing than as the predator his reputation has made him out to be." Maybe so, but he would have been more interesting as the wolf. (Child does, however, cite a true Roskelleyism—to the effect that he would rather floss his dog's teeth than attend an AAC dinner.) Roskelley's own volume, *Stories off the Wall*, is also fairly temperate. To be sure, it features the occasional disparagement of women climbers and there are a few patriotic flourishes, but it concentrates on Roskelley's adventures themselves—mostly on the earlier ones, which are not described in his previous books. These are well worth the reading.

Roskelley is no stylist. An average paragraph is three or four undistinguished sentences. Yet on most occasions he achieves a rough immediacy that meets the demands of his exceptional experiences. Here we have a sharp climbing curve from Washington state to Yosemite through Canada and Alaska to the Karakoram and Himalaya. Although Roskelley does not understate his accomplishments, he is never vain. When near the end he remarks that "my percentage of summits to attempts in the Himalaya was unsurpassed," he sounds more factual than boastful. Above all, he shows respect for the beauty and the hazards of the mountain world to which he was so committed for more than twenty years.

Roskelley sees himself as a cautious professional; his greatest scorn is for the amateur, the reckless romantic, the unprepared. For all his reputation as a rebel and an individualist, his emphasis is on teamwork and choosing the right partner. His book is littered with victims—sometimes of bad luck, but more often of a failure to appreciate the dangers that come with the fiercest of the high peaks.

His narrative begins with a cautionary account of the first winter ascent of the east face of Idaho's Chimney Rock—a brutal enough achievement, but modest by his later standards. He recklessly embarks on a slippery, 50-foot unprotectable flake: "I either reached the top or the name Roskelley would go down in Webster's meaning 'stupid stunt.'" He is finally saved not by the seat but by the crotch of his pants. He reached a turning point by scaring himself into cautiousness: "Our climb of the east face of Idaho's Chimney Rock is why I'm alive today."

By contrast, risk is pure gold to the relatively obscure Jim Beyer, subject of one of Greg Child's sharpest profiles. He is Roskelley's opposite: eschewing partners of any kind. His amazing and little-publicized solo career has taken him to Yosemite, through the Utah desert, to the Karakoram. His route descriptions exemplify his style: "extensive hooking and bashies with a crux pitch of thin, rotten expanding rock, looking at the big death fall" (*AAJ*, 1990). But even Beyer finally frightens himself, if only much later in his career than Roskelley; the profile ends with a renunciation of solo climbing.

Both books are published by The Mountaineers, whose book series grows richer every year. From the point of view of production, Roskelley's is the

greater bargain: the extra \$8.00 brings hard covers, better paper, and excellent photographs. Child's gorgeous cover shot of the Everest area above a cloud from Menlungtse makes us wish for more inside. But as far as content is concerned, you can't go wrong with either book. Each is a vivid part of the mountaineering history of the last two decades.

STEVEN JERVIS

Spirit Of The Age, The Biography Of America's Most Distinguished Rock Climber, Royal Robbins. Pat Ament. Adventure's Meaning Press, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1992. 301 pages, 219 black & white photographs, many by Tom Frost. \$24.95.

There was not much climbing that Royal Robbins did *not* do. Throughout the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, Robbins helped create and define modern rock climbing with his hard free routes, big walls, alpine climbs, and solo ascents—with most of his climbs usually involving some sort of first as an intrinsic part of the experience. His legendary accomplishments speak for themselves: the first 5.9 climbed in America, the first Grade VI big-wall climb up the northwest face of Half Dome, the first ascents of the Salathé Wall on El Capitan and the American Direct on the Dru, and the first solo of a Grade VI, the Muir Wall, also on El Capitan. Given his forceful, creative personality, Royal Robbins was one of American rock-climbing's principal founders, and not infrequently, its spiritual advisor and "step into the ring" arbitrator.

In one of the most important climbing books of the decade, Colorado climber and author Pat Ament has written a superbly evocative and lasting biography of this most influential figure. *Spirit Of The Age* could not be a more apt title, as Royal Robbins was at the focal point of so many controversies and developments during his active years. The text is supplemented by over 200 extraordinary black-and-white photographs, many of which were taken by Robbins' longtime Yosemite partner, Tom Frost. Add a selection of cartoons from the sharp-witted pen of Sheridan Anderson, and this historic book is a photographic and literary feast which balances well with Royal Robbins' own remarkable career.

Tom Frost's unrivalled photographs have long needed just such a permanent display. Well reproduced, often full-page in size, they have retained all their original black-and-white splendor. The early photographs taken on The Nose, Salathé Wall, and North America Wall on El Capitan are absolute classics of rock-climbing photography, and just happen to illustrate many of Robbins & Company's finest moments. We can be glad to have these visual memories preserved for our admiration and for posterity; many of the images in the book have never been seen before. Not only are there action photographs, there are also a large number of revealing portraits, of Royal and Liz Robbins, John Salathé, Yvon Chouinard, Chuck Pratt, and many others.