

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.

The 1960s were a landmark decade for American rock climbing, when Yosemite climbers, particularly Royal Robbins, led the way into the future. Looking back, we were incredibly lucky to have such a charismatic, ethically concerned climber like Robbins, a person firm in his convictions who didn't hesitate to speak his mind or set a good example helping positively to influence our developing sport. Clean climbing and the use of nuts, which Robbins began advocating in 1968, represented a tremendous leap forward, changed climbing the world over, and helped preserve our most vital resource: the rock. The "best style" concept of making a continuous ascent of a route without using fixed ropes; modern big-wall climbing technique, using Jümars to follow each pitch and to haul; minimizing the placement of expansion bolts, all these important developments in the history of rock climbing can be traced back to Royal Robbins' creative genius.

Ament describes Robbins' entire climbing career from the early California days at Mount Pacifico, Stony Point and Tahquitz to Yosemite Valley during the Golden Age of the 1960s before he moved on to Colorado and the Desert, the Alps, Great Britain, Alaska, and beyond. Each phase of Robbins' life is covered through 1991, including his family life, business philosophies and acumen, plus his second career of making extreme kayak descents. The recent, hot-tempered debate about bolting is also explored, and frequent quotations from Royal's writings, letters sent to his mother and anecdotes from TM Herbert, Tom Frost and Robbins' wife Liz fill out the story.

The book is a non-stop narrative describing Robbins' unrivalled physical mastery of America's big walls plus his relentless personal search for truth and spirituality, a goal Royal termed "the spiritualism of adventure." One senses that in the end, the spiritual undercurrent of Robbins' climbs and accomplishments became almost as, and perhaps more, important to him than the climbs themselves. Climbing was not only Royal Robbins' way of life, but the vehicle he used to develop himself as a person, and to explore his inner nature. Physical and spiritual challenges have been life long quests for Robbins, and each are examined in detail by Ament.

Of strong spiritual persuasion himself, Pat Ament is well qualified to elucidate upon matters of the heart and soul. There is great human insight and numerous flourishes of literary brilliance in this book; it is the best of Pat's writing that I have read. Other sentences, such as "Life is full of virtual worlds that compel people to create them" stopped me in mid-stride. Pat has always pushed towards the edge with his writing and philosophy (perhaps that's one reason why he and Royal are still good friends after 30 years), but at least he manages to elicit a healthy dose of thoughtful reflection in his readers. Although I stumbled a few times, nearly all of *Spirit Of The Age* makes for insightful, informative and engaging reading.

Spirit Of The Age succeeds in telling us who Royal Robbins is as a person, why his family background led him to achieve as much as he has, and what sort of climbing partner, businessman, husband and father he was in the past and is today. It would have been nice to see even more quotations from others of

Robbins' close friends (there are no modern reminiscences from Chouinard, Pratt, or Kor), but as usual, TM Herbert drops in several memorable lines: "Most of the big breakthroughs came from Royal. I felt that I could keep up with most of the other climbers, but I would never equal Royal. Going up on a wall with him was almost like cheating. If anything went wrong, you'd just give him the lead."

Robbins was a force to be reckoned with, but his actions and motives were frequently misunderstood. "Climbers felt the quiet power of this strong, remote person with a neatly trimmed beard," writes Ament. "He wore sunglasses and seemed to stare out from behind those glasses almost darkly into your soul, as though truth, adventure, and perfection were for him an inward necessity and, to get along with him, the same were going to be required of you." *Spirit Of The Age* does indeed capture Royal Robbins' spirit of greatness, and awes us with his many diverse levels of achievement.

ED WEBSTER

Blind Corners; Adventure on Seven Continents. Geoff Tabin. ICS Books, Merrillville, IN, 1993. 33 color photos, hardcover, 196 pages, \$24.99.

Geoff Tabin's *Blind Corners*, circles around the serious business of alpinism with a whimsical humor. It is what ornithologists call a "rare visitor" and of the same species, and sings with the same irreverence as Tom Patey's *One Man's Mountains*. Like Dr. Patey, Dr. Tabin knows that a collection of light-hearted stories has a better chance of *entertaining* (his stated purpose within the Introduction) than yet another standard climber autobiography.

Mind you, Tabin's *Blind Corners* is a collection rather than an original book. Short and apparently hastily-written vignettes are used as transitions between chapters. The book is occasionally plagued by repetition. And the tone is as disparate as one could expect from the book's wide-ranging sources: *Climbing, Outside, Penthouse, The American Alpine Journal, Trilog, Summit* and *Playboy*.

Tabin's path in *Blind Corners; Adventures on Seven Continents* is to retrace his experiences climbing the highest peak on each continent. Some of these are cryptic. For instance, Denali would have benefited from more than just a single paragraph of Tabin's fun-loving perspectives. Between the big climbs, there are digressions, such as a well-paced chapter on bungee-jumping in Colorado. Tabin doesn't try to milk much conquest out of his sorties atop each of the so-called "Seven Summits." Unlike his predecessor Dick Bass, Tabin takes us on his low budget trips and spends more time sharing social observations than blow-by-blow descriptions of the climbing. In Irian Jaya, he shares a fascinating glimpse of the stone-age Dani people and not only does he dispense with writing about the actual climb of Carstensz Pyramid, but he convinces you that the climb was anticlimactic after culturally connecting with the Dani.

Some readers will recall that Tabin already published the Everest 1981 Kangshung Face story in the *AAJ*. But this chapter in the book contains a lot of previously unpublished nuances that shed the bright light of truth on