Duane recognizes that the core of an adventure may not, when you finally get there, be an event worth writing about. Read, for instance, a chapter on doing the Washington Column, where the most memorable action is his partner's tale about wandering stoned for days in the desert eating only pot brownies, which is told as the pair are fumbling down a complicated descent.

Quite fittingly, after two aborted attempts on the Nose, the book ends with the loss of Kyla (an inevitability) and the author more or less where he began, at loose ends: not much wiser but ready to skew the next piece of absurdity to float into view.

JOHN THACKRAY

The Undiscovered Country. Phil Bartlett. The Ernest Press, Holyhead, Wales. 183 pages, 62 black-and-white photographs. £15.95.

"Theoretical studies of mountaineering have generally received bad press," Bartlett writes. His own book, however, will prove no exception. In part, the reason for this widespread antipathy to theory is hinted at in John Salathé's *cri de coeur,* "Vi can't we chust climb?" And Bartlett himself repeatedly stresses that the climbing, the doing, the intense physical and mental involvement in the natural arena, is the key thing. So why do we need this book, which consists almost completely of airy speculations on just what it is that makes climbing special? Bartlett's answer is:

> Mountaineering goes against the grain of so much of life that preserving it demands more than *laissez-faire.* We know that there is something valuable about it which is vulnerable and under threat—from progress, from normality, from something—in a way which most sports and pastimes are not, and to have any hope of countering the threats we must surely analyze the game, even if the only result is to show us how much must remain a mystery.

If a great deal remains a mystery, as Bartlett suggests, one wonders if there is enough left to counter his alleged threats.

One of the threats Bartlett specifically mentions is improvement in equipment. He mentions that some of the earlier English climbers disapproved of bottled oxygen in the Himalaya and takes a glancing shot at sport climbing as an outgrowth of modern rock equipment. The only other equipment issue he offers in support is a reference to Reinhold Messner's vehement dislike of bolts in mountaineering. The judgment is Messner's (and we are not told if Bartlett agrees or to what extent), but the proffered rationale is apparently Bartlett's. He claims that proposed limits on equipment derive from ". . . a wish to preserve the infinite. Without the infinite there can be no tension between logical opposites and without the tension there can be no inner satisfaction."

And it is just here, I think, and in many similar passages, that the worm feasts in Bartlett's apple. He is much given to turns of phrase which might be read as having a kind of superficial profundity. But one can also wonder what they really mean. And if that puzzle is solved, then there is the matter of whether or not his pronouncements are actually true. Is it really that obvious that the tension, say, between being and not being, or climbing and not climbing, requires "the infinite," or that it is this kind of tension which gives inner satisfaction? One might have thought that it was more a tensing of the muscles and a stretching of the mind. Another example: "Not succeeding, which to us is failure, can only seem wonderful with a change in outlook. That can happen if one escapes the tyranny of passing time for a moment and feels instead that eternity is not in passing time but at right angles to it." Or perhaps only a half bubble off of plumb.

Without doubt, this style, this raising of the flag to infinity and eternity and other grand old absolutes, will appeal to some in the climbing community, which is anything but homogeneous. Indeed, Bartlett can be seen as the latest voice of the Romantic tradition. His philosopher-guides seem to be Nietzsche and Hegel as well as the more mystical Gurdjieff. For poetic inspiration he turns to Blake, Byron, Coleridge and Wordsworth. And the climbers he refers to most frequently are the Victorians or post-Victorians: Mallory, Shipton, Tilman, Geoffrey Winthrop Young, and Sir Francis Younghusband. These climbers have had their say about freedom, intensity, the authentic (and on occasion the mystical) experience that climbing can provide.

I too find such concepts helpful to understanding the attraction of climbing, but I do not find much in their writings or in Bartlett that is genuinely illuminating. Nor would any climber, I suspect, who takes a more steely-eyed view of the human condition. But this is not ultimately a matter of cynicism, skepticism, or misanthropy. In taking the grave metaphysical high road, Bartlett generally overlooks the delight, the sheer fun of climbing, not to mention its more silly and ridiculous moments, surely as effective a relief from the "normal" world which Bartlett eschews as the more serious or even grim encounters he recommends.

If Bartlett were merely offering a collection of personal reflections arising quite naturally out of his own experiences, it would be easier to take. But he wants a lot more. The book's subtitle, "The Reason We Climb," suggests an explanation of motives. What we ultimately get, however, is an attempt at a definitive and exhaustive (and exhausting) set of justifications. And then to give himself added authority, Bartlett indulges in the not-quite-royal "we," presumably referring to all climbers, cragsmen, hill walkers, etc., etc. But since we find it difficult to identify with the sentiments Bartlett expresses, we are royally put off by his rhetoric. If justifications for climbing are indeed desired, "because it is there" will have to suffice for now.

JOE FITSCHEN