

*The High Sierra: Wilderness of Light.* Photography by Claude Fiddler. Foreword by David Brower. Introduction by Steve Roper. Chronicle Books, San Francisco. Hardcover, 132 pages, color and black and white photography. \$25.00.

*The High Sierra: Wilderness of Light* is a glossy coffee table book featuring large format (4"x5") images from climber/photographer Claude Fiddler. Anyone who spent time clawing up Yosemite's polished granite walls during the 1970s and early 1980s will recall Fiddler, a valley icon who spent his summers putting up routes in the Meadows. I remember him for his filthy climbing pants and his worn-out running shoes bound with duct tape. But more importantly, I remember him as a man totally involved and passionate about mountains. He was love over money and lived the moment. His 1000-watt smile told you he was in the right place at the right time. *The High Sierra* reflects 14 years of that unyielding passion. It is a work of art; and, given all the miles of rough scrambling and pre-dawn starts necessary to capture the elusive light, it is also a work of love.

Fiddler's images, all cropped to horizontal format, are razor-sharp with ultra-fine detail. Many were exposed during fleeting, magic moments of unusual light: sunrise, sunset, sudden breaks in changing weather where clouds and mountain tops turn colors rich and pure. There is a lot of air in these images: huge detailed skies and their reflections on water. Perhaps this is how Fiddler's climbing background translates to his art: the attraction of exposure, the face or ridge where the world drops away and the climber embraces air; all that nothing, all that empty space becomes life and provides energy. My favorite of Fiddler's images offer skies washed with subtle pastel hues. I can feel the dawn chill and hear the distant call of a Clark's nut-cracker. I can also feel the heavy backpack loaded with camera, tripod, lens, film, light meter... oh, the knees.

Not all the credit belongs to Fiddler. Steve Roper has written a simple, yet thoroughly researched survey of the early Sierra explorers. And art director Sarah Bolles deserves an award for the book's gallery-like presentation: no art crosses the book's gutter and the photos breathe easily within generous borders.

The bad news? I think there's very little. Only one photo didn't ring true: the colors on page 85 bring to mind the title "Bad Acid on Mount Fujichrome." High Sierra zealots will point out the striking similarities between *High Sierra* and a Sierra Club-Ballantine book published in 1967, *Gentle Wilderness: The Sierra Nevada*, which featured photography by Richard Kauffman, foreword by David Brower, and text culled from the

writing of John Muir. But Fiddler's *High Sierra* is very different. There are no signs of human existence; no distant tents, no people, no visible trails even. This is the timeless Sierra. Another example of Fiddler's unique vision is seen in his "Precipice Lake," a subject made famous in the Ansel Adams image, "Frozen Lake and Cliffs, 1932." Although the framing is nearly identical, Adams saw the full tonal scale in black and white, while Fiddler is drawn into ethereal emerald hues on submerged granite boulders.

Forgive the blasphemy of mentioning any photographer in the same sentence as Ansel Adams — I just wanted to point out that *The High Sierra* is a new look at a very familiar subject, and Fiddler does an excellent job at sharing his love for these gentle mountains.

MICHAEL GRABER

*Defying Gravity: High Adventure on Yosemite's Walls.* Gary Arce. Wilderness Press, Berkeley, California, 1995. Softcover, 194 pages. \$24.95.

*Defying Gravity* is a history of Yosemite rock climbing that provides easy reading and an adequate, if often-seen, selection of photographs. The author states in his preface that the book reflects his bias and is not intended to be a complete history. Instead, Arce claims, it is intended to be "a general outline of rock climbing in Yosemite." As such, it succeeds.

As *Defying Gravity* progresses, the reader gets a good idea of climbing in the Valley through the 1970s. The book quickly covers the climbs and tries to bring out the personalities of the climbers involved. Arce comes very close to bringing out the motivations of the main players such as Robbins and Harding. And yet, while we learn what people did and how they were viewed by others, we don't get a feeling for the climbers themselves, as we might if we had climbed with them. Take Harding, for instance: The less you know about him on a personal level, the easier it is to follow the lead of other writers. This Arce does, saying that Harding didn't care. But Harding does care and always has. This sort of complexity is almost impossible to describe second-hand, especially in an overview like this.

*Defying Gravity* does do a fair job of handling the many ethical debates of the various times throughout the Valley's history, such as *The Wall of the Early Morning Light* or Ray Jardine's chipping holds on *The Nose*. This may be the book's greatest strength. Though a contemporary climber, Arce has no first-hand experience of the sixties and could not, no matter how hard he tried, acquire the perspective of those who were there at the time. So while Arce may have missed many of the personal details, he was also not wrapped up in the often-petty and personal squabbles of the climbers. This is defi-