

climbs; but I felt disappointment over what the book could have been.

PETER CASTER

Vertical Pleasures: The Secret Life of a Tax Man. Mick Fowler. Cloudcap Press, Seattle, Washington, 1995. \$19.95.

I do not read many climbing books. In fact, I only read the classics. Therefore, when I was given *Vertical Pleasures* and told that it was a finalist for the Boardman-Tasker Award for Mountaineering Literature, I had high expectations. I was not disappointed.

Fowler writes of his most memorable climbing adventures, beginning with his first outings with his father to sandstone outcrops near his home and a trip to the Alps. These climbing excursions were the result of an effort by his father to keep Fowler out of such trouble as exploring the sewage system or biking at night without the use of headlights. Despite his father's efforts, Fowler vowed to ensure that a certain amount of irresponsibility and excitement was injected into his life. Inevitably, his father was left behind.

Fowler further developed his climbing skills on various types and quality of rock in the U.K. and ice in Scotland. He especially seemed to enjoy adventure, climbing chalk cliffs with ice axes, crampons and screws, or sea stacks in which the approach via a rubber dinghy was the crux. Eventually he began to save his Tax Office holidays for trips to foreign peaks, beginning with the first ascent of the South Pillar of Taulliraju.

Fowler writes in a modest, understated style. Little is made of the fact that his first ascents on Taulliraju, Spantik, and Kishtwar are major accomplishments. The book is filled with humor. In one instance, Fowler was being filmed doing a simulated crevasse rescue off a railway cut in hopes of promoting and raising money for Spantik. His partner Victor decked when simulating a fall into a crevasse, so another team member, John, used this opportunity to demonstrate how to jümar with an injured climber (still belayed by Fowler) on one's back. Unfortunately, the weight of Victor on John's back pulled the two over backward and the pain of Fowler's pulling on them caused John to release the jümars, causing John and Victor to collapse in the mud in front of all cameras.

My only criticism of *Vertical Pleasures* is that it might have been stronger if Fowler had described his emotions more often. Also, in a few instances, the stories were not brought to a climactic moment.

Overall, however, *Vertical Pleasures* is an enjoyable read and highly recommended.

KITTY CALHOUN