of his recovery as soon as he had learned to speak again. Keep in mind he had his brain literally knocked halfway out of his head and then stuffed back in. Now, talking in a tape recorder as soon as one regains their power of speech is not an ordinary thing one might think of doing. But Pritchard is obviously no ordinary guy.

What we are left with is the perfect postmodern account of a man trying to literally rethink himself and understand what his thoughts once were. Then comes the haunting question of how to interpret it all. So what exactly is the "self"? Who is Paul Pritchard? Before the accident, we have a fanatically gifted climber and writer; during recovery, an individual fighting for his life and against despair, disappointment and depression; after the accident, a non-climber and brilliant writer.

In the end, Pritchard states, "I have seen things with new eyes since my accident, especially the relative importance of climbing. I once thought I would rather die than do without."

Have you ever wondered what you would do without? I know I have.

So why did Pritchard push himself so hard? Why do some climbers tempt fate over and over again, barely escape, then turn right around and hurl themselves back into the maelstrom?

Much has been made of totems in anthropology. They are the embodiments of spirits, gods and power. Cliffs, towers and mountains are the climber's totems of power. Friedrich Neitzsche wrote in *Will to Power*, "Thus a man climbs on dangerous paths in the highest mountains so as to mock his fears and trembling knees." This mocking, this "oppression" of our fears is a "tyranny of the soul" whereupon the prudent, the timid, the cautious part of all of our souls is demonized. Why? So that we may idolize and worship, in the highest form of vanity, our false courage as gods.

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Hesiod's *Theogony* and Plato's "Symposium," there are retellings of an ancient Greek myth. The story is always the same: the Titans—half men, half gods—attempt to storm the heavens, located fittingly on Mount Olympus. Such hubris invited the wrath of all the gods. Pritchard's story is a cautionary one. We should be careful when we tread upon high places. We are not gods, and we tempt their patience.

DAVID HALE

A Life on the Edge: Memoirs of Everest and Beyond. Jim Whittaker. Seattle: Mountaineers Books. 24 color photos, 50 black-and-white photos. 272 pages. $24.95.

The superb description by Jon Krakauer of the tragedy on Mt. Everest has increased the audience for mountaineering literature from a limited group of cognoscenti to the general public who frequent airport book shops. Many of the books that have recently been written to attract this audience have included far too much material best left in personal diaries or in the offices of psychiatrists.

Happily, this autobiography by Jim Whittaker, the first American to reach the summit of Everest, is an exception. The addict of storm and tragedy who wishes to read about death-defying actions in perilous circumstances will find relatively little to satisfy in *A Life on the Edge*. Instead, the book provides a view of a life well led by a mountaineer who has always stretched his own boundaries, has used fame wisely, has always been willing to take risks to advance good causes and has never lost his reverence for nature.

Jim Whittaker achieved national fame when he reached the summit of Everest with Nawang Gombu in 1963. His fame is memorialized through his life-sized statue in the Mt. Rainier Visitor's Center. In an era when $65,000 will provide almost anyone with an excellent

chance for the summit and reasonable odds of a round trip on expeditions directed by able Sherpas and professional guides, it is difficult to remember how challenging this summit was in 1963. Moreover, while the attention of the public has always been focused upon "Big Jim," the imagination of climbers was immediately captured by the first ascent of the West Ridge of Everest by Unsoeld and Hornbein and their heroic bivouac above 28,000 feet. It has consequently seemed puzzling to climbers that so much attention has been focused upon the first American to summit when other climbers produced the most gripping story and enduring achievement of this expedition. That being said, readers will finish this book with an appreciation of how large and extraordinary a life Whittaker has led. Similar to Sir Edmund Hillary, Whittaker has used his fame and the opportunities it has provided to him for many altruistic and admirable purposes.

The early chapters describe Whittaker's life before it was transformed by Everest. Of particular interest are his descriptions of his career as a Rainier guide and his role in directing the early growth of REI. This mountain "jock" proved to be an unusually able and interesting businessman, transforming REI from a one-employee organization to a large and thriving business. The chapters also describe the most harrowing of Whittaker's mountain experiences, the expedition that he and his brother Louis took to Denali with Pete Schoening and John Day. By ignoring all prudence in acclimatization, they established a speed record to the summit. This was followed by an accident in which the entire climbing party tumbled 500 feet down the slope below Denali Pass. Their evacuation required several days of massive rescue efforts in which two people died and an altitude record for evacuation by helicopter was established. The honesty of the writing in this section will appeal to all readers.

Whittaker then went to Everest, where his life was transformed by fame, which also ensured that his future actions would be subjected to skeptical scrutiny. Following the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, Whittaker was asked to guide the president's brother Bobby on the first ascent of Mt. Kennedy. This expedition resulted in a lifetime friendship with Bobby, his family and the Kennedy clan. Some of the most fascinating passages in the book describe the friendship and their shared idealism. Whittaker directed Bobby's primary campaign in Oregon and Washington. Bobby's assassination devastated Whittaker and the American body politic but did not destroy Whittaker's enduring optimism and confidence, which permeate every page in this book.

Together with his second wife, Diane, Whittaker then led two ambitious expeditions to K2, at that time unclimbed by Americans. On the first expedition, it soon became clear that the ambitious route was beyond the team's grasp. A combination of bad weather and difficulties with Balti porters destroyed their self-confidence before they really came to grips with the mountain. Whittaker returned to K2 in 1978, but the Pakistanis requested that he not begin the climb before the start of the monsoon.

The best of climbers' personalities often emerges in heroic circumstances; the worst almost inevitably becomes visible during weeks of weather-imposed inactivity. The text provides a compelling description of his personal frustration in leading a group of able, ambitious, but not entirely altruistic individuals during 70-odd days of monsoon storms. Happily, a last-minute break in weather after porters had been summoned to evacuate Base Camp made it possible for the expedition to succeed in the end.

While the retreat from the mountain had gripping moments, Whittaker emerged as a victor who brought all members of his two expeditions home safely. Shortly after returning from K2, Whittaker left REI to start his own business. While his K2 comrades were often difficult, his business partner proved to be wickedly treacherous. Whittaker's faith in the comparative

stranger led to his personal bankruptcy.

Somehow, Whittaker's confidence and idealism survived the trauma. While rebuilding his financial security, he assembled a joint Soviet-Chinese-American expedition with the simple goal of putting representatives of each nation on the summit of Mt. Everest together. Whittaker clearly felt that success could inspire world leaders to eliminate the scourge of war. The text provides a fascinating description of the difficulties he encountered both before and during the expedition in making the dream a reality, relying upon climbers who came from very different cultures. In the end, leadership experience on K2 served Whittaker well and he achieved an amazing goal.

Whittaker is now in the midst of a voyage around the world with Diane and his second family, a voyage that seems likely to be equally rich in adventure.

Whittaker emerges from the pages of this book as a heroic, but also very human figure. The peaks and valleys in his life are much larger than those most of us will experience. His heroism lies not in his successes on Everest and K2, but in his perseverance, optimism and enduring love of nature despite betrayal, tragedy and other severe personal challenges.

Whittaker clearly wrote this book with the objective of educating as well as entertaining us. As usual, he has succeeded admirably.

LOU REICHARDT

Ghosts of Everest: The Search for Mallory & Irvine. Jochen Hemmleb, Larry A. Johnson, Eric R. Simonson, as told to William E. Nothdurft. Seattle: Mountaineers Books, 1999. 80 color photos. 208 pages. $29.95.

It was on George Leigh-Mallory's third expedition to Mt. Everest in 1924 that he and Andrew Irvine disappeared several hundred vertical feet from the summit. Over the years, this vaulted the two to legendary status, with speculation that they, and not Hillary and Tenzing nearly 30 years later, were the first to climb to the top of the world. One of the great unsolved mysteries of 20th century exploration, it would take until nearly the end of it before the most chillingly compelling evidence in this intriguing enigma would be discovered by the 1999 Mallory and Irvine Research Expedition.

Ghosts of Everest: The Search for Mallory & Irvine impressively tells the tale of this ambitious team effort led by veteran mountaineer Eric Simonson, and it is a must-read for aficionados of the subject and anyone else who would be riveted by a recounting of the courage of the 1924 expedition and the high drama of the 1999 team in searching for its two most famous members.

Seattle writer Bill Nothdurft, through expedition members Jochen Hemmleb, Larry Johnson and Eric Simonson, has crafted a powerful story, neatly combining the adventure of both expeditions until their two destinies converged with the discovery of Mallory's remains. The result provides a sharp contrast of the two eras and an invaluable appreciation of how success in the costliest human endeavors stands nobly on the shoulders of those who tried first.

Although Nothdurft's text effortlessly reads like good fiction, it is artfully woven with sepia-toned images from the pioneer Everesters and the more brightly spun Fuji and Kodachrome photography of the 1999 team. And utterly compelling are the images of the artifacts recovered from George Mallory's body. While not the Shroud of Turin, their collective impact comes close, and one has the sense in viewing them of the mythical Mallory made tangibly, warmly mortal. We see a broken, Everyman's wristwatch, the embroidered initials