

Salkeld and Breashears, while not on last year's expedition, both have a long-standing involvement with Everest in general and Mallory in particular. Salkeld is an eminent mountaineering historian and winner of last year's AAC literary award, while Breashears has on various occasions climbed and guided the mountain and filmed the IMAX Everest movie (not to mention highly acclaimed documentaries on Tibet). Rather than focusing on the current rediscovery and forensic analysis, Breashears and Salkeld emphasize the far more interesting and significant circumstances of the three British expeditions of the early 1920s. The adventure and camaraderie that marked these expeditions is apparent in the abundant selection of striking photographs supplemented by judiciously researched background material. The images alone, of early Himalayan mountaineering and the undisturbed Tibetan civilization through which these expeditions approached, make this book a great addition to the coffee table, while the text provides substantial insight into the attitudes held by Mallory and a variety of his contemporaries toward their dream of climbing the virgin Chomolungma.

The tone of the book is set in a dignified forward by Mallory's son, John. He puts the tragic cost of his father's boldness in perspective, which reminds us of the more recent deaths of Alison Hargreaves, Rob Hall and Alex Lowe and the consequences for their families.

Consideration of the mysterious final day is deliberate and reserved. I'm sure the authors would have liked no less than anyone else to be able to conceive of a way that Mallory and Irvine could have summited without attributing to them a reckless "glory or death" attitude. Going on to the top when the consequence is certain death is no more praiseworthy on an unclimbed Everest than it is today, and the authors do not demean Mallory and Irvine by suggesting such a scenario. (Breashears is only too aware of the numerous ways a summit attempt could have ended early and turned tragic.) Regarding the famous step on the ridge, which Odell last saw the climbers ascend through a break in the clouds, Odell later pointed to what we now call the First Step on a Brad Washburn photo. Conrad Anker, whose own first-person account, *Lost Explorer*, demonstrates the same realistic and sensitive understanding of his fellow climbers that Breashears brings to *Last Climb*, recognized that the Chinese ladder provided significant psychological protection for his ascent of the Second Step, even if he hadn't stepped on it when it blocked a resting hold. (Breashears also understands that the off-width technique involved is a specialty of Anker's; while holding the highest regard for Mallory's ability, he also understands it was still not the equal of Conrad's "on a bad day.") Guided by Carl Sagan's dictum, "Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence," the authors resisted the increased sales potential of the summit fantasy, and instead produced an infinitely more worthy record of historic adventure turned tragic only by accident. (It is also worth noting that Breashears turned down offers for photos of the bodies of friends Hall and Fisher, the kind of situation others have been less reticent to exploit.)

In the conclusion of *Last Climb*, the authors quote Mallory's friend Howard Somervell who prophetically "saw their deaths as 'a clarion call to a materialistic age.'" Fortunately, their own book lives up to the better impulses that guided—and still guides—the true adventurers.

BOB PALAIS

Life and Death on Mt. Everest: Sherpas and Himalayan Mountaineering. Sherry B. Ortner. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999. 396 pages. \$26.95.

Life and Death on Mt. Everest by Sherry Ortner is a fascinating exploration of the complex and changing relationship between international mountaineers ("sahibs") and the Sherpas

who have helped them make their climbs—and suffered the greatest number of climbing deaths in the Himalaya. The book traces the history of this relationship, showing how both Western and Sherpa attitudes toward climbing and each other have evolved over time.

Ortner points out that the sahibs began with a paternalistic, colonial attitude toward the Sherpas, whom they viewed as children to be taken care of and disciplined. Over time, as Western culture changed and mountaineering reflected egalitarian and countercultural influences, sahibs came to view Sherpas as friends and equals. This change is highlighted in the fact that starting in the 1970s, Sherpas stopped calling sahibs “sahibs” and began addressing them by their first names.

In the beginning of Himalayan mountaineering, climbing Sherpas came from the lower economic and social classes of Sherpa society—those who were disenfranchised, needed money and would carry loads, something that “big” people with status looked down on as demeaning work. Today, however, climbing Sherpas and those in the trekking industry have become the social and economic leaders of Khumbu, the Sherpa homeland near Everest.

Ortner focuses on changes in Sherpa culture and society during the period of Himalayan mountaineering and how the Sherpas have handled the advent of powerful outside influences. In a chapter titled “Monks,” she presents an interesting parallel between the effects of the introduction of Western values by sahibs on the one hand and the introduction of monastic Buddhism by tulkus or incarnate lamas on the other hand. Before this period, Sherpas had relatively little to do with Westerners, and their religious life was dominated by village temples with married priests and the shamanistic healing practices of spirit mediums.

Ortner argues that the Sherpas and their culture have been much more resilient than many outside observers think. Rather than passively react to outside pressures, Sherpas have taken an active role in molding these influences to their own purposes. Ortner recounts a number of contemporary stories that contradict a widespread impression that the Sherpas have lost their old, selfless values and become materialistic money-grubbers.

A particularly interesting chapter goes into the complex attitudes that Sherpas have toward death, particularly deaths on Himalayan expeditions. Ortner shows that Western notions that Sherpas are fatalistic and accept death easily are simplistic and misleading. Climbing deaths in particular can have a profound impact. This I know firsthand. Annulu, a well-known Sherpa who put in the route to the South Col so that Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary could make the first ascent of Everest, was killed in a climbing accident. When I visited his family afterward, people avoided talking about what had happened, and I could see how much his death had affected his wife and sons.

Ortner is a well-known anthropologist who knows the Sherpas well and received a prestigious MacArthur Award for her research on their religion and society. Accordingly, she has written the book from an anthropological perspective. She attempts to combine two approaches that have dominated recent scholarship in anthropology. One sees culture as primarily the creation of meaning, exemplified in the work of Clifford Geertz; the others sees it as the product of political and economic forces, as highlighted in Edward Said’s critiques of Orientalism. Ortner also makes use of a distinction between “high” and “low” religion popular in anthropological circles. Her expertise lies in the extensive fieldwork she has done on “low” or village Buddhism. She is less knowledgeable about “high” or monastic Buddhism and its subtle systems of thought and meditative practice.

For her study of sahibs and their climbing culture and history, Ortner has drawn on extensive reading of mountaineering literature. She hasn’t climbed herself and readily admits that she looks a bit askance on the sport and the risks it entails, both for sahibs and Sherpas:

"The mountaineering sahibs seemed in many ways more alien to me than the Sherpas. In the end I think I 'got it.' I have not entirely lost my critical sense about the senseless [this word appears with a slash through it in the book] risking of lives, and I could not imagine doing it myself." (pp. 8-9)

A strong feature of the book that commends it to climbers and many other readers is the range of perspectives it provides. In few other places will you find such a well-balanced and rich mix of points of view. Ortner does an excellent job of presenting sahib views of Sherpas, Sherpa views of sahibs and sahib and Sherpa views of themselves and the life and death they have shared on the highest mountain in the world.

EDWIN BERNBAUM

30 Years of Climbing Magazine. Climbing Magazine. Carbondale, CO: Primedia, 1999. 337 pages. \$18.95.

The Best of Rock & Ice: An Anthology. Dougald MacDonald, Editor. Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1999. 200 pages, black-and-white photographs. \$17.95.

Whether it's end-of-the-millennium angst or anniversary efforts to account for their existence, *Climbing* and *Rock & Ice* magazines have each released an anthology of what they consider the best writing of their respective 30- and 15-year histories. The notion of "best of" in climbing literature invokes many possible responses, from rabid reading to dismissal, appreciation for a forgotten gem to outrage at the absence of a favorite. Tallying tastes in this way tells more about the reader than the book, and when I first flipped through the pages, I skimmed through the essays that spoke to my preferences: clipping bolts on steep stone and a longing to be back on Yosemite's walls. In *30 Years of Climbing*, this meant Matt Samet's "How to Climb 5.14," a sardonic how-to of just that; Dave Pegg's "What's Your Problem," an indictment of the low standard of U.S. sportclimbing; John Long's "Wall Rats," his chronicle of Yosemite big wall climbers of the 1970s; and Tyler Stableford's "The Wild Bunch," a look at the Valley's search and rescue team. In *The Best of Rock & Ice*, my first look was to Will Gadd's "Verve," an interview with sport pioneer Christian Griffith; Cameron Burns' "Bad Boy," an ironic take on sport climbing's seamier side of one-upmanship and chipping; and Jeff Long's story, "Revenge," a fictional recount of innocence lost on the first pitches of the *Salathé*.

But these aren't the articles I necessarily turn to again and again, and this returning marks a difference between the anthologies and the magazines from which the stories emerge. As John Hart pointed out in his 1999 *Ascent* article "The Climbing Magazines: Read, Skim, or Ignore?," it's common practice to scan the current issues for topics of interest and then set them aside. For some readers it's "Hot Flashes" or "Cliff Notes," for others the photos in "High Exposure" or "The Gallery," equipment reviews or mountaineering epics. Many climbers keep a collection of issues on a shelf, but we have to be pretty bored or looking for a particular mini-guide to pull one from that stack and leaf through it. Not so with the books, which have a more singular formality, a coffee table quality with their glossy covers, a sense of seriousness in their lack of pictures and advertisements. "Best of" and "30 Years" sound lasting, enduring in a way that the flavor of the month, whether climber or route, never could.

So it's certain stories that stand out, stories that become history in their telling, narratives of climbing that engage a reader even if they have little in common with that reader's own climbing—like Martin Atkinson's "Over the Edge," in which he recounts his third ascent of