"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

the gritstone classic, *Master's Edge*. I've never climbed grit, and it's been years since I roped up on anything both hard and run-out, but I read and re-read this piece that opens the Rock & Ice anthology for its humor and voice. Most articles of the *R&I* collection follow suit, offering particular climbs and climbers in concert, telling in the first person a history made from a particularly personal narrative, sharing with other selections in the volume what editor Dougald MacDonald calls "unique characters and originality."

Climbing magazine's collection offers a different sort of truth, a survey of characters, often investigation rather than introspection, more journalism than personal essay. Greg Child's opening article sets the tone, and "The Big Easy: Everest the Weird Way" presents less of Child's own travail than a motley band of who's, how's, and why's. *30 Years of Climbing* features a daypack's worth of investigative articles, the backbone of journalism, whether the puzzle at hand is Alison Hargreaves' alpine career, the life of Heinrich Harrer, the 1996 Everest tragedy or Herzog's account of Annapurna. While *Climbing*'s collection includes plenty of emphasis on the personal and the individual ascent, it finds its favored truth in research, in exploration, rather than (as is the case with the stories in the *Rock & Ice* anthology) truth made in exposition.

Which is not to say that these books are in the end all that different. The names remain the same, as Jim Bridwell, Greg Child, Jeff Long, John Long and Alison Osius appear in both venues; unfortunately, both also feature the typical polemic-epic from Marc (or Mark, now that he's back in the U.S.) Twight. In addition, all but four of *Climbing*'s 38 articles are from the 1990s, most from the past four years. Similarly, only four of *Rock & Ice*'s 25 are from the 1980s—though to be fair, the latter magazine only began in 1984 and was much shorter in its early years. In both cases, the "best" writing seems to be the most recent. In the alternative, the editors considered the datedness of earlier writing too much of a hard sell. Either way, the reader of these books sadly is left without a broader historical spectrum of writing about climbing.

Perhaps more important than their history is the present and future purpose these books serve—a critical purpose that perhaps can't be filled anywhere else, not in the magazines themselves or in the cragside conversations that might (or might not) be the origins of the adventures that the stories document and the magazines publish. These anthologies are neither beginnings nor endings but intersections, common places for readers, for climbers from rads to trads, from V9 no-name boulderers to big-time mountaineers to weekend warriors, all of whom, if they were to meet at the local coffee joint, might have little or nothing to say to one another. These two anthologies remind us that we are a "we," bound not even by ropes (for those who would emulate Bachar or Gill or Messner) but by a common passion for testing one's self against a little patch of nothing, be it in Chamonix or Central Park.

That sense of "we," of unity across the sub-specialties of our sport, is a sense of sameness that climbers, given current access problems ranging from closed cliffs to bans on wilderness fixed protection to skyrocketing peak and rescue fees, definitely need. There is strength in numbers, and when climbers recognize their plurality rather than their differences, they can more effectively act on access issues that, if unaddressed, will make climbing itself a thing only of history rather than the future. By joining tales of bouldering with mountain adventures, sportclimbing roadtrips alongside Tibetan treks, these two books hail the broadest bandwidth of climbers imaginable.

If you can buy only one of them, go with 30 *Years of Climbing* instead of *The Best of Rock & Ice*; for a buck extra, you get at least 100 more pages, a glossier cover photo and a hard binding. But better yet, read three issues of the mags at the climbing shop counter instead of

purchasing them, and buy both books. They may lack the photos and up-to-date information of the magazines, but their stories are more lasting, their histories more telling than the hot send of the moment.

PETER CASTER

High Exposure: An Enduring Passion for Everest and Other Unforgiving Places. David Breashears. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999. 16 color photos. 309 pages. $26.00.

It would be a great injustice for *High Exposure* to be regarded in any potential reader's mind as the work of just another climber trying to cash in on the big E while the market is hot. Breashears' claim on Everest (actually, he would have it the other way around) is both long-standing and intimate: four times to the summit in eight expeditions over 16 years (1981-97). Along the way, Breashears had a quiet role, either as firsthand observer, participant or leader, of every sensational Everest story of the last 15 years. But in *High Exposure*, Breashears just tells us what he's done. It's an impressive accounting.

Most of us know Breashears as the cameraman and director of the Everest IMAX film. (Or maybe we don't, as he's mostly behind the camera and the scenes.) And most people know that the IMAX team was on the mountain in the spring of 1996 at the same time as the teams decimated by storm. It's even common knowledge that the IMAX team members were generous in their assistance to climbers in trouble (though this, too, is a bit understated in the film). In *High Exposure*, though, we get the more thorough story. Why was Breashears' team going down when the others were going up? The reason: not mere dumb luck or some sort of mystical intuition, but because of an intuition earned by hard-won experience.

Breashears' opinions on the tragedies may come off as strong, but they never seem personal. In fact, he raises questions about people for whom he clearly has deep affection. Doubtless, some readers will disagree with his views, but they would do well to remember his opinions weren't formed while sitting on the couch. He's writing about a world he knows better than almost any reader—better, for that matter, than most on the mountain at the time.

It's hard for the average movieviewer to imagine the supreme effort that went into the making of the Everest IMAX film. The problem is that the film is so beautiful and the climbers so graceful that it's possible to walk away from it thinking that it was easily made. Here, Breashears tells us of the difficulties involved—not merely the brute physical effort of hauling the equipment, but the technical intricacies of operating the equipment at altitude as well as the aesthetic problems of the art maker. In a world that requires most climbers' full attention to simply put one foot in front of the other, Breashears ticks off a 15-item camera checklist that ends with "take a good picture with story value."

Breashears was also part of Tom Holzel's 1980 trip, the first expedition to search for Mallory. In addition, he was one of the first to "guide" Everest, leading Dick Bass to the summit in 1985. What struck me in this description was Breashears' obvious sense of respect for Bass—not a hint of leader/client arrogance or condescension. So, yes, Everest takes up a certain proportion of the book, a certain proportion of Breashears' life, but these excursions are the rewards of a long and, to me, more interesting mountain life.

The trip to Kwangde with Jeff Lowe is the climb Breashears rates as his finest mountaineering achievement. This is clearly the judgment first and foremost of a climber, not someone seeking the public eye. Likewise, the early rock climb upon which Breashears first made his reputation was *Kloberdanz*, a relatively obscure route in a relatively obscure place.