

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 Kwanade 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.

The recognition one receives from such climbs is limited to a relatively small group of climbers. It's quiet climbs like *Kloberdanz*, and especially *Perilous Journey*, that formed the character and made the man.

There are deaths depicted in this book, but there is no sense of Breashears taking advantage of this for the sake of his story. Instead, his attitude toward death is utterly respectful and heartbreakingly rendered, even when he happens to disagree with the decision-making processes that led to those deaths.

Death is not the only risk a climber takes; one also risks being alone. Breashears writes about his marriage—a marriage basically sacrificed on the altar of climbing and ambition—and seems to realize its dissolution was in essence his fault. Though that aspect of his life is not center stage as subject of the book, when he needs to talk to someone after the debacle on Everest, he realizes he's forfeited the right to call his wife, and that calling his mother would only worry her unnecessarily. If Breashears is harsh, he casts an equally harsh eye upon himself.

Like a lot of climbers, Breashears did not take to formal schooling but sought out an education in the mountains on his own terms. Numerous times we see Breashears the student absorbing his material: on an early Himalaya trip, he writes, "my eye was being educated to the light," or, regarding a mentor, "he was teaching me about removing myself from the story." Like all good students, Breashears sought out the best teachers, a pedigree line that includes Pat Ament, Tom Frost, Greg Lowe and Kurt Diemberger. In the acknowledgments that follow the book, he thanks many for the "collaborative effort" that went into *High Exposure*, especially Jeff Long, who helped structure the book. Breashears has learned from the best, and this learning is evident in the story of his life.

One can not, and should not, remove oneself from the story of one's own life. Yet there's a way of telling a story, and Breashears accomplishes it here, of writing a book about oneself that somehow doesn't come across as egocentric. Perhaps this sense of humility comes from repeated trips to the greatest of mountains, perhaps as a result of repeatedly witnessing the loss of friends and strangers. Perhaps it is only the rhetorical trick of good writing. However Breashears accomplishes it, the book works incredibly well. Don't give this one a miss if you're tired of Everest. Read it, in fact, because you're tired of the other Everest portrayals. This one, and its writer, stand apart.

DAVID STEVENSON

Summit: Vittorio Sella, Mountaineer and Photographer, The Years 1879-1909. Essays by Ansel Adams, David Brower, Greg Child, Paul Kalmes and Wendy Watson. Newark, NJ: Aperture, 1999. 125 duotone photographs. 129 pages. \$50.00.

Vittorio Sella's eye, heart and mind danced in the mountains. Scion of a wealthy, cultivated and politically influential Italian family, Sella participated in many of the most important mountaineering expeditions of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He developed his considerable skills as climber and photographer in the Alps, but his most extraordinary projects brought him farther afield. Sella took part in Douglas Freshfield's fabled 1899 circuit of the Kangchenjunga massif; the epic first ascent, with the Duke of Abruzzi, of Alaska's Mt. Saint Elias in 1897; first ascents in the Ruwenzori's Mountains of the Moon; and an audacious 1909 probe into the Karakoram that reached 24,500 feet on Chogolisa.