of the matter, most notably on a voyage in 1977 and 1978 that began in Scotland on a sailboat. Neilson and his comrades sailed to Tierra del Fuego for a climbing interlude, then continued up the coast of Chile to an obscure fiord from which three of them launched out across the Southern Patagonia Icecap to traverse east to the Fitz Roy area. The view from out on the icecap looking east toward the clustered and improbable western aspects of Cerro Torre, Fitz Roy, et al, is one of the great transcendent vistas on this planet.

Neilson's personal stories come from an already bygone era. In 1974, the year of Neilson's first visit, the ice-sheathed spires of Patagonia were still shrouded in an aura of almost mystic impregnability: Cerro Torre had maybe been climbed twice, the west face only first climbed that year. Any endeavor in these storm-swept mountains and icefields was regarded to be an adventure at the ends of the earth. Though Tierra del Fuego and the fiords of Chile may still not be popular destinations, time and familiarity have stolen some of the magic. The busy village of El Chalten that now sits at the road head below Fitz Roy (where 25 years ago there was only a ranger's cabin) notwithstanding, not all change is bad. Neilson's most potentially deadly episode was when he and his friends were arrested by the Argentine army in the bad old days of the military junta for an illegal border crossing out on the icecap.

A good bit of the mountain photography we see from Patagonia comes from climbers standing outside their tent or while on the go. A portion of the photos in this book fall into this category, and they have their own authenticity because of that. But Neilson was in Patagonia with a photographer's eye, and we are treated to photos that are crafted, taken with a photographer's patience and tenacity to find that perfect perspective and moment. Familiar vistas are revisited as well as far more esoteric images of remote fiords, valleys, mountain- and icescapes. Patagonia is not necessarily all harsh and edgy; a soft light can suffuse at times. Neilson has not ignored this, nor the wildlife.

Patagonia is things extreme, near earth's end, where outworldly landscapes are made manifest and primal forces remain unbridled. Some of this Patagonian essence can be experienced vicariously: Neilson's 25,000 words and 61 plates do a superb job of conveying it. However (and I suspect Neilson might agree with this), there is a dimension to Patagonia, more so than any other place I've been, that can only be experienced viscerally. There is nothing like standing out in the middle of the icecap as a big Patagonian storm powers up to full throttle. This you have to go feel for yourself.

MICHAEL BEARZI

Sherman Exposed: Slightly Censored Climbing Stories. John Sherman. Seattle: Mountaineers Books, 1999. 238 pages. $24.95.

Here we have John Sherman's collected articles—30 of them, almost all written during the 1990s and most having first appeared in *Climbing* magazine. The book is organized into four parts: the first is a mock self-interview titled "A Brief History of Vermin." The second part is called "Verm's World," collected articles from the column of the same name that ran in *Climbing* from 1995-'99. These are not organized chronologically but in general categories of "history, ethics, approaches to the sport, and general satire." Part three is organized by Place ("life has been one extended road trip for me"). And part four is "Characters." Sherman has added brief introductions and afterwords to most of the pieces, commenting on their origins, timeliness and the editorial battles fought on their behalf, all of which

make for interesting reading and give readers a behind-the-scenes view of how articles find their way into print, as well as how climbing media shapes the experience of their readers.

In his preface, Sherman proclaims two self-imposed roles. First, by exposing "a new generation of climbers to the values of traditional climbing—sheep, inebriation and lowering after every fall—I hoped to give something back to the sport. Second, by providing lovably vulgar satire, I hoped to get climbers to take themselves less seriously." It would seem appropriate to use these criteria to judge how successful he's been. But the goals themselves pose the exact problems some readers will have with the whole. How many traditional climbers hold to the values of traditional climbing as Sherman sees them? Sheep and inebriation? Come on—it's a joke, folks, lighten up! In fact, that's the other goal: lightening up. It's just that some readers will never find vulgarity "lovable." About those would-be readers, I can only say that they're missing out on a lot of sharp observations about the state of the art, as well as brilliantly drawn portraits of places and people.

In Sherman we see the embodiment of both Royal Robbins and Warren Harding, a pair whose individual values are generally understood to be mutually exclusive. But Sherman somehow takes Harding's *semper farcimas* and combines it with Robins pure, ground-up ethic. I suppose one of the tricks to reading Sherman is to know when he's joking and when he's serious: the answer is usually both a and b.

One of the more rewarding pleasures of reading the pieces as a whole book is that you realize that Sherman very seldom writes about himself. When you read the whole, though you glimpse the "brief autobiographical" content, you realize the amazing range of his actual climbs. His commitment to bouldering has been well-documented in his twin labors of love, *Stone Crusade: A Historical Guide to Bouldering in America* and *Hueco Tanks: A Climbing and Bouldering Guide*, so it's no surprise he's done *The Thimble*, *Ripper Traverse*, and *Midnight Lightning*. But add *Astroman* and the first third (the easy third—he's clear about this) of the north face of the Eiger and throw in a season as a volunteer ranger on Denali, and it all adds up to the climbing life.

The portraits of places and people are the strongest pieces in the book. I took equal satisfaction in reading about places I know well, like Deadman's on the east side of the Sierra where I've bouldered dozens of times, or the gripping, committing, disintegrating, muddy towers of southern Utah's sandstone, where I've never climbed at all. In the case of Deadman's, I recognized the place perfectly, but felt I was seeing it anew through the eyes of someone who pays closer attention than I often do. In the case of the Fisher Towers, I was reading about a kind of climbing utterly foreign to me and utterly terrifying, and I had no doubt it was being accurately portrayed.

I doubt it's an accident that the portraits of people is titled "Characters," because his subjects possess it in aces. One key ingredient to character is that none of the characters ever seemed to particularly seek out the public eye. I think his two-part tribute to Robbie Slater, lost descending K2 in 1995, is as good as writing about friendship, partners and loss gets. Period.

I appreciated the previously unpublished pieces and their commentaries as much as the pieces already published. If anything, the writing that's being newly presented to the public is a little less censored, a little more personal, targeting Everest baggers, hold chippers and film makers, all of whom should understand that a little criticism goes with the territory.

If you're of the opinion that Sherman is a raving lunatic, he'd probably be the last to argue with you. In fact, you'd do well to remember that he's the one who very self-consciously gave you that impression in the first place. Don't let the hyperbolic style fool you—this is one very smart guy. And don't miss the one-paragraph history of climbing since about 1970 that ends

with the sentence "Climbing is now decidedly mainstream, as proven by the media's insistence on calling it 'extreme.'"

At this late point in the review, I feel obligated to confess that I have a juvenile sense of humor and that I enjoy a glass (or more) of beer. I'm also male, of roughly the same generation as Sherman and am a traditional climber (a bad one, though). While I'm being confessional, I should add that I never saw a bolt I didn't clip; further, I admit with much regret that this year I may "climb" more days indoors than out. I suppose I'm saying that, when I'm reading, Sherman is preaching to the converted. I doubt that he will win many converts, but like all the devout, I believe that even if I don't need Sherman to remind me that "climbing" indoors isn't climbing, others do.

DAVID STEVENSON

Close Calls: Climbing Mishaps and Near-Death Experiences. John Long. Helena, MT: Falcon Publishing, 1999. 182 pages. $12.95.

John Long is a Yosemite hardman from the 1970s and the author or editor of some 17 books on rock climbing. In *Rock Jocks, Wall Rats, & Hang Dogs*, his account of his early career in and around the Valley, he recounts free-soloing 2,000 feet of 5.10 routes in a day at Joshua Tree—and nearly dying capping the day off with a 5.11. Evidently, he has grown more circumspect with age. His latest book, *Close Calls*, is devoted to safety.

In Close Calls, Mr. Long applies the droll style he has honed over the years to the accident-and-analysis format of *Accidents in North American Mountaineering*. He can get away with taking a comic approach to such a serious subject because, despite their carelessness and recklessness, the anti-heroes of these dramas all survived (miraculously, in many cases) to tell their tales. Collectively, they constitute a madcap Accidental Survivals in North American Mountaineering. Each story is followed by some pointed commentary, sensible advice and a cartoon by Tami Knight that vividly captures either the state of mindlessness of the perpetrator or the dire consequences of the deed. The locations range from Yosemite to local crags and rock gyms, the climbers from world-class to beginner. The names have been changed to protect the negligent, and the stories embellished with amusing details unabashedly supplied by the author.

The morals of most of these fables are timeless verities that every climber knows, but which many occasionally neglect: fasten your harness; rope up; set protection at regular intervals; bring water; don't climb drunk; don't test anchors with swan dives; watch out for rockfall; be careful with knives when dangling from ropes; be wary of gasoline stoves in nylon tents and romantic entanglements; don't climb with strange felons; don't drop your gear; don't rappel from rotten slings or off the end of the rope.

Other mistakes are more subtle, and yield more advanced lessons: don't belay directly beneath the climber; set anchors to withstand lateral pulls; anticipate both rope drag and stretch; plot the trajectories of both your own and others' likely pendulums; if you must climb drunk, don't puke on your rockshoes; keep in mind that real handholds may break and that gym holds may spin; the speed of long rappels increases as the rope runs out, lowering the tension on the braking device; and, given the extreme difficulty of have sex with harnesses on, the deed is best accomplished on hanging bivouacs by tying off one ankle apiece with a hangman's noose.