

multiple interpretations.” As a result, *Missing in the Minarets* becomes a tale of two men, Pete Starr and Norman Clyde, which focuses attention on the philosophical question, What is the nature of a mountaineer?

Pete Starr loved the mountains. He was, on the one hand, “outgoing, the sociable son of a prominent family, a joiner in college and career. On the other, at least in the wild, he preferred the companionship of the landscape itself.” He was a man who one time, not having a pencil, signed his name in a mountain register in his own blood. And then there is Norman Clyde, one of the great “characters” in North American mountaineering history, who likewise valued his solitude. For most of his life he was not known to have a regular job and spent his days wandering and climbing in the Range of Light, achieving by far more first ascents than anybody else on record. Even this achievement pales in comparison to his devotion to just being in the mountains. Both these men ought to be compared to the most famous of all Sierra mountaineers, John Muir, who, in writing about his own solitary and dangerous adventures on Mt. Ritter, captured something of the spirit of all those old-time Sierra climbers: “But we little know until tried how much of the uncontrollable there is in us, urging across glaciers and torrents, and up dangerous heights, let the judgment forbid as it may.”

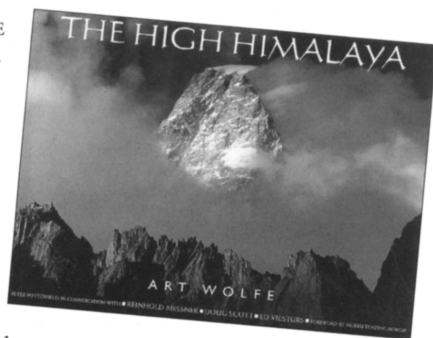
The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus observed that character is destiny. The exquisitely produced *Missing in the Minarets* demonstrates that, for some characters, destiny lay in the mountains and that this destiny often comes at a dear price. Alsop concludes his book with these admonitory words: “Peter Starr proved how dangerous was the climb; readers definitely should not repeat the act.” Wise words. You, however, will likely want to repeat the act of reading this deeply satisfying book.

JOHN P. O’GRADY

The High Himalaya. ART WOLFE. SEATTLE: THE MOUNTAINEERS BOOKS, 2001. 160 PAGES, 140 PHOTOGRAPHS, HARDCOVER. \$49.95.

Few contemporary nature photographers are as prolific or talented as Seattle-based Art Wolfe, who spends nine months a year traveling to remote corners of the world in search of stunning images. In just three decades he has produced 45 books and it was only a matter of time before he focused on the Himalaya—perhaps the planet’s most magnificent landscape.

Given the impressive number of Himalayan books that have already been published, he faced some very hard acts to follow. As I first flipped through the pages of *High Himalaya*, however, I was pleased to see many signature images that immediately set him apart. I especially liked his strong visual theme of tightly-cropped details, patterns, and textures, a peek at things that is uniquely his own. Some are as intimate as a spray of tiny flowers in the Rongbuk Valley, the ripples in a folded rock, or the snowy slats of a bridge across the Hunza River. Others are grander, ranging from star tracks behind towering mountains to huge fluted snow faces, or hazy ridges receding towards the plains of India. Within these frames he shows us the world as he alone can see it.



In many images Wolfe also demonstrates his mastery of light, shadow and color—as well as the patience to wait until they are perfect. I loved the alpenglow he captured on Masherbrum, Mitre Peak, and many others, and wanted to step right into the “God rays” he saw pouring between the Trango Towers. Also notable were juxtapositions of light and shadow that bring huge depth to some of his images on the Pamir Plateau and one winning shot of Gasherbrum. He knows how to make the most of a swirl of color, or the momentary kiss of warmth into an otherwise frigid environment.

Viewing this book with eyes that have seen more Himalayan pictures than I can remember, I was impressed. It’s inspirational to watch how he plays with the light and frames his pictures to maximize curves, jagged edges, repeating shapes, and other compositional elements that make them “Art” (pun intended), not just snapshots. Still, I wish that Wolfe had edited even more tightly toward this distinctive vision.

As with most photography books, *High Himalaya* includes a few pictures that seem to stray from the mix and these puzzled me. There’s a yak staring stupidly at the camera in boring mid-day light and a few scenes of various mountains that any trekker might have shot. As well, there are scenes of mountains such as Machhapuchhare or the Trango Towers that break no distinctly new visual ground. But maybe these serve a purpose. By reminding the viewer of the ordinary, they make us appreciate his stronger images all the more.

A more serious critique of *High Himalaya*, however, is the book’s inclusion of a text that bears little connection to the images. Aside from Wolfe’s own camera notes about each picture—which are fun to read and provide interesting background (as well as the book’s only personal story line)—the rest of the words are interviews and short descriptions of the accomplishments of famed mountaineers Reinhold Messner, Ed Viesturs, and Doug Scott, all written by Peter Potterfield. Together with a nicely articulated and very personal introduction by Norbu Tenzing Norgay (Tenzing’s son), these echo a common theme that the real rewards of Himalayan mountaineering are encounters with the natural environments and cultures through which alpinists pass in search of their summits. Here, each climber suggests the need to reach out and learn something from local people, and then to give something back.

This is a noble and important message, but it doesn’t really fit the pictures. It also leads Wolfe into dangerous ground, inviting comparison not just with landscape photographers—with whom he can hold his own—but also with such brilliant Himalayan cultural photographers as Eric Valli, Roland and Sabrina Michaud or Steve McCurry—with whom he does not. In a few cases he delivers. His best people shots are of Kazakh horsemen galloping together in clouds of dust as they jostle one another for possession of a headless goat. He stopped and really waited to catch them at their best. I also liked the patterns he captured in the exotic yellow hats of Buddhist monks in Kathmandu, the splash of color on the back of a Balti child carrying flowering weeds in Askole, or the rich warm light on the faces of Uygur children in western China.

Over a broader span of pages, however, I was disappointed. The book includes too many listless, unengaged portraits of people staring at the lens, whether they be wrinkled Nepali grandmothers, Hindu “naga babas,” gangs of giggling kids, or sultry teenagers sucked closer by a telephoto. It looks as if Wolfe was rushing through his encounters with many of these subjects en route to something more important. Only occasionally does his cultural photography share the same power and attention to detail as his pictures of nature and the mountains—which he, himself, admits to be his forte and greatest love. With a few exceptions, I wish he’d stuck with what he does best.

What really sets a book apart is passion. You can't look at Galen Rowell's *My Tibet*, Eric Valli's *Caravans*, or Steve McCurry's *Monsoon* without feeling a visceral sense of how much they love their subjects. There is no doubt that Wolfe also brims with this for both the art of photography and the wider natural world. In the best pages of *High Himalaya*, that shines clearly through the ink. But as I look more carefully at this somewhat disjointed book, I feel that in Wolfe's exuberance to create powerful mountain images, he hasn't slowed down enough to let the more ethereal Himalaya root deeply in his soul.

GORDON WILTSIE

***Enduring Patagonia.* GREGORY CROUCH. NEW YORK: RANDOM HOUSE. 224 PAGES, HARDCOVER. \$24.95.**

Wind, cold wind, rain, snow, waiting, and more wind. These elements define the desolate peaks of Patagonia, mountains of modest altitude, but mountains with subjective dangers always lurking ominously in the background.

Greg Crouch, no stranger to the climbing world, has made his bones as a legitimate climber, and with the release of his new book, *Enduring Patagonia*, he establishes himself as a serious adventure writer. Crouch uses an excellent vocabulary to skillfully paint colorful pictures of this remote, wild area and its people; you can almost feel the golden granite of Fitzroy and Cerro Torre, topped with fragile and perilous rime rising through the clouds. For those with challenged imaginations, 16 pages of beautiful color photos make up for any lack of visualization. Chapter three, "The Nature of Alpinism," masterfully explains the creation of the unique and violent weather of Patagonia, as geographic and meteorological factors collide in an ocean of ice and water.

Crouch's life revolves around climbing. When he is not climbing, he tackles any type of work that will quickly return him to his love/hate affair with Patagonia. Climbing is a visible projection of his philosophy and how it guides his life. It is not about heroics or conquering mountains, but about the fatigue, pain and misery that is endured to achieve not necessarily victory but closure. One quote, "the most remarkable statements of character are often played out in losing efforts and doomed causes," reveals his feeling that often a greater personal victory is found in returning from failure to prevail. Although he pushes the envelope, he has a good sense of his own mortality and knows when to back off and regroup. One contradictory trait that pops up from time to time is his rather blasé approach to supply logistics, starting many climbs with insufficient food, a meager selection of hardware, and once with the wrong size ice boots; to his credit he overcomes these shortages by personal toughness and ingenuity.

The setting of this book is climbing in Patagonia, but the writing rises above the genre of the standard climbing tale. Crouch probes his inner feelings while reminiscing about his personal pantheon of legendary climbers and the human qualities he respects. One begins to feel the inner peace he finds as each climbing goal is achieved. A good ascent can be a summit well won under a blue sky, or it can be the fight of an over-matched boxer, whose victory is the courage to step into the ring and struggle on as long as possible. By a careful mixture of metaphor and simile he lures the reader closer and closer to that scary place that all climbers

