

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

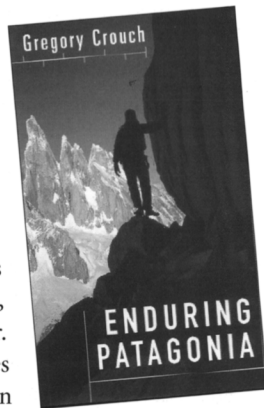
Enduring Patagonia. GREGORY CROUCH. NEW YORK: RANDOM HOUSE. 224 PAGES, HARDCOVER. \$24.95.

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



have visited at one point or another, a mixture of fear, isolation, and doubt that can only be overcome by advancing or accepting the reality of a debilitating retreat. As you read on you feel the fear that gnaws at Crouch and his teammates as they endlessly wait for a break in the weather, a fear he equates to a soldier waiting for D Day. You feel the base camp blues. The terror of sitting out a storm in a tent perched precariously on a lofty ledge, not knowing what is going on in the dark outside, conscious only of the wind tearing at your tent, seeking to hurl you from the side of the mountain. To Crouch, climbing with honor and skill is life itself.

Crouch is rightfully obsessed by the winds of Patagonia, indeed scarcely a page passes without some reference to the wind and anyone coming to this place suffers some degree of anemomania (wind madness). His military training at West Point and Army Ranger School characterize his approach to all obstacles and has well prepared him for the physical and psychological challenges faced in his seven trips to the wilds of Patagonia. Each barrier or crux becomes a frontal assault ending either in victory or retreat, but never defeat. Retreats are resolved as battles to be fought again. It is no accident that on several occasions he uses the word crucible to describe the peaks and valleys, a crucible where the values he so respects are forged.

Climbers and adventure readers will enjoy this book. The technical descriptions are straightforward and detailed enough for the climber, and his thoughtful inclusion of a climbing glossary gives the casual reader a better feel for the climbing sequences.

Thankfully Crouch has avoided the current fad to overuse trendy terminology to the point of rendering most articles incomprehensible to all except the youngest and most hip readers. One thing is made very clear; success in the mountains of Patagonia cannot be bought by well-financed climbing dilettantes. These mountains make themselves accessible only through old school dedication and a long apprenticeship in the alpine trade.

Climbers should read this book, not to learn about climbing, but perhaps to learn more about themselves. Non-climbers should read it to better understand the strange lot that does climb.

JOHN BRAGG

***Below Another Sky: A Mountain Adventure in Search of a Lost Father.* RICK RIDGEWAY. NEW YORK: OWL BOOKS, 2000. 306 PAGES, PAPERBACK. \$15.00.**

The book begins in 1980, with the young Rick Ridgeway writing about his surviving an avalanche that killed a close friend: "I need to get this down while it's still fresh." Yet he wisely waited before expanding upon that lead. Twenty years later, *Below Another Sky* was published in New York, where editors cast a wary eye at writers under 40. The conventional wisdom among these publishers is that young writers lack the life experience to perform the so-called "act of literature."

Below Another Sky could not have been written with such lucidity immediately after the avalanche. It is no accident, however, that the best-selling climbing disasters rush cathartically to press from hospital rooms and funerals: Whymper spinning the Matterhorn fall, Herzog agonizing over his Annapurna frostbite, Simpson embellishing his crevasse abandonment, or Krakauer recreating the Everest tragedy. Until Ridgeway's book, there

