

The Accidental Adventurer: Memoirs of the First Woman to Climb Mt. McKinley. BARBARA WASHBURN. KENMORE, WASHINGTON: EPICENTER PRESS, 2001. 192 PAGES, PAPERBACK. \$19.95.

Rising from the tundra of Alaska to over 20,000 feet in height, the Arctic summit of Denali remains a worthy objective to mountaineers today. So much more so to Barbara Polk Washburn who in 1947 became the first woman to reach the highest point in North America. In *The Accidental Adventurer* she writes:

"The view all around was truly the way I imagined heaven to be when I was a little girl.... The wind was gusting to thirty miles an hour and the temperature was twenty degrees below zero.... Before me lay 100,000 square miles of Alaska. Snow covered mountains and terrain stretched to the horizon in a view that left me breathless... There were no windows, no buffers between my body and the cold... I kept telling myself I must keep my head clear and be prepared for the difficulty of the descent. I had to get home to Massachusetts and our three young children."

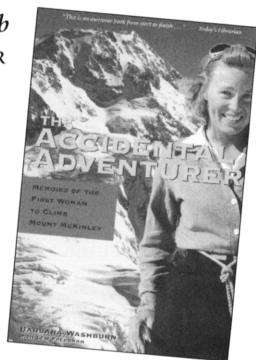
Washburn's previous expeditions to Alaska included the first ascents of Mt. Bertha on her honeymoon and the first ascent of Mt. Hayes. In this engaging memoir, Barbara Washburn modestly states she came along on numerous expeditions to Alaska and around the world to support her husband, the world-renowned explorer Bradford Washburn.

The Accidental Adventurer demonstrates Washburn's own imagination, strength and courage beginning in her teen years. We follow her education at Smith College and in Europe just before World War II, her romance with the handsome young explorer Bradford Washburn and her adventures as mother, wife, teacher, surveyor, mountaineer, and world traveler. We especially admire her steely determination to keep going to achieve her objectives in the face of all obstacles; and her continuing to set an example and raise team morale during the most harrowing circumstances.

In the decades following her ascent of Denali, she helped her husband create maps of the Grand Canyon and do the first aerial mapping of Mt. Everest, went on a photographic safari in Kenya, and made repeated trips to China and Nepal.

In *The Accidental Adventurer* we gain an appreciation for the stamina and verve of this early role model for women climbers. In an era where a woman's place was in the home, she climbed beyond the limitations of gender. Barbara Washburn has led a full and interesting life. Thanks to her and to Lew Freedman of the *Anchorage Daily News* for retelling the stories of her adventures and providing an inspiration for us all.

ARLENE BLUM



IN BRIEF

DENALI: DECEPTION, DEFEAT AND TRIUMPH (Seattle: The Mountaineers Books, 2001; hard-bound, \$38) collects the works of Frederick Cook, Belmont Browne, and Hudson Stuck—"the stories of the fake, the almost, and the actual first ascent"—together in one volume.