

Mountain Rescue Doctor: Wilderness Medicine in the Extremes of Nature. CHRISTOPHER VAN TILBURG. NEW YORK: ST. MARTIN'S PRESS, 2007. 304 PAGES. HARDCOVER. \$24.95.

Few titles dramatize with greater flair the nervy, adrenalin-driven world of mountain rescue than Christopher Van Tilburg's new memoir. Packed with detail about the anatomy of these operations, the book runs at a break-neck pace, quickly bringing readers into this world of primary surveys, intubation, and resuscitation, without the hysterics that sometimes accompany such accounts.

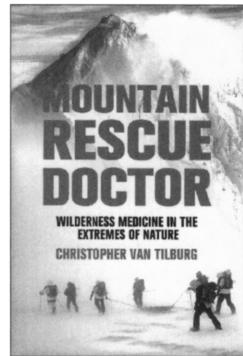
The book opens with a description of treating an injured hiker who had fallen from a trail in the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area. "As Jim lowers me into the abyss, I also have to haul down the stretcher and medical bag, as the brush is too thick and entangled to drop the gear down on a rope. So in addition to keeping myself upright, bushwhacking backward down the hillside, and trying to watch for the upcoming cliff edge, I am dragging the stretcher. Wiry vine maple branches reach out, grab the stretcher, and pull it back up the hill. As I tug, the vine maple fights back and tears my shirt. Finally, I yank the stretcher with all my might. It pops free, slides another ten feet, and nearly bowls me over. The rope goes taut again: Jim's got me."

This tense, active opening leads immediately to background about emergencies, adventure sports, and descriptions of the rugged landscape around Hood River County, Oregon, where the author lives. An emergency room physician and a member of the Crag Rats (the first official volunteer mountain rescue group in the nation), Van Tilburg details his mountain rescue work season by season, describing operations he participated in, such as skiers floundering in tree wells, hikers falling off cliffs, mountain bikers soaring off hillsides, cliff jumpers suffering back fractures.

The account includes detailed information about how mountain rescues are conducted, neatly inserting this information into the narrative so that it feels nothing like a text book or a how-to. Each of these operations requires flexibility, training, judgment, and caring. The reader comes away impressed with the dedication of Van Tilburg and his colleagues, as well as the toll it sometimes exacts on their family and professional lives. The book highlights the tensions of fitting mountain rescue work into the rest of his life, taking time away from his daughters, his wife, his career, and his own outdoor adventures, while giving his life a meaning and purpose that is compelling.

The book's seasonal organization doesn't provide much in the way of narrative direction. You don't feel that the rescues, emergencies, and personal challenges will add up to something greater or will yield deeper insights. Instead, the book seems embedded in the point of view of the author himself, who reacts to these emergencies and doesn't seem to have time to put them into a wider context, because his beeper keeps going off.

The exception to this is the chapter on the most recent Mt. Hood tragedy, in 2006. Van Tilburg participated in the rescue and gives a clear, informative account of its progress, much more analytical and reflective than the overheated hyperbole that appeared in newspapers, magazines, and television. Though he doesn't directly criticize the three men's decision to climb a difficult route on the north side of the mountain with a storm coming in, he makes it clear that their fast and light approach didn't leave much margin for error, especially given the



severity of the storm.

When he returned from the rescue, his daughters, six and eight, bombarded him with questions about it and its aftermath: three men dead, one of them, Kelly James, leaving four children behind. The author answered them simply and directly. "The mountains are not necessarily dangerous," I say to them. "You just have to learn to be careful. You have to respect nature and the mountain."

There is much distilled wisdom in that answer. Moments like this give the book its authenticity and poignancy. You come away impressed with Van Tilburg's knowledge, practicality, sensitivity, and appreciation for the pleasures as well as the dangers of mountaineering, convinced that he's the kind guy you'd want to call if you ran into trouble in the mountains.

NICHOLAS O'CONNELL

Soul of the Heights—50 Years Going to the Mountains. ED COOPER.
GUILFORD, CT: FALCON PRESS, 2007. 224 PAGES. \$39.95.

Ed Cooper's *Soul of the Heights* is a beautiful collection of photographs and stories spanning his 50-year "vision quest" in the mountains. Beside offering a portfolio of magnificent images, it is a work of historical merit, especially of the Pacific Northwest climbing scene that helped shape American mountaineering.

Although Cooper's name is long-familiar to those who read photographic credits in calendars, postcards, and magazines, it is probably a measure of your longevity as a mountaineer if you remember him as a climber, much less as one of the most prolific alpinists of his generation. Herein, however, lies the book's greatest surprise. From the moment he climbed Mt. Rainier at age 16, he recalls, "I realized that mountains would be my *raison d'être*."

Cooper's legacy as a climber, although it lasted scarcely a decade, is noteworthy. Between 1953 and 1963 he may have accomplished more first ascents than anyone but Fred Beckey, with whom he sometimes shared a rope. While still a teenager, he graduated from mass ascents of prominent Northwest volcanoes, led by the Mazamas or the Mountaineers, to climbs up ever-more-difficult routes with smaller groups of friends and new acquaintances—many of whom became pillars of the Cascades climbing community. In the summer of 1955, when he was just 18, he climbed most of the major volcanoes stretching between mounts Baker and Shasta, including a difficult route on Rainier and six ascents of Mt. Hood. Thereafter he kept upping his ante, sometimes solo. The list of his achievements is impressive, including the second ascent of the West Buttress of Denali; new routes in the Bugaboos; the Grand Wall of the Chief near Squamish, British Columbia; the horrifying then-forbidden Willis Wall on Rainier, and finally, his first ascent of the Dihedral Wall on El Capitan, which was only the fifth ascent of the Captain, and the first by a "Valley Outsider."

Cooper's love of photography predated his passion for climbing, beginning in high school. Starting with his very first climb, he carried simple 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ by 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ format cameras, larger than those carried by most, and he returned with striking images of the mountain environments he loved. Although he was slow to publish, these were part of an evolving "master plan" that would shape the rest of his life and forever limit his ability to "get a real job." Over time he augmented his 2 $\frac{1}{4}$

