

point he reflects upon his efforts to meet the old-time mountaineers on their own ground, confessing, “In all honesty, my possessions were disconcertingly light—each easy step forward reminded me that I carried nothing to defend myself against the darkness and the cold.”

The book presents 15 narrative accounts, “the most difficult and notable routes along with the stories of the men who climbed them.” In each case Arnold deftly weaves his own story in with that of his subject. At times the writing is so seamless, the reader is almost charmed into believing that Arnold has dissolved the barrier of years and has joined the climbing ancestors on their historic climbs, “shamelessly eavesdropping on their hundred-year-old conversations.” But more importantly, he treats each climber he writes about with a profound sympathy, which has the effect of shifting the reader’s attention away from the technicalities of mountaineering to the complications of the human heart. Instead of rehashing the all-too-familiar myth of the hero-mountaineer, Arnold leads the reader toward those inexpressible privacies that abound in the souls of those who would climb mountains.

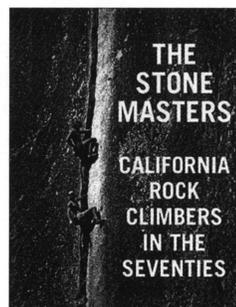
The most poignant character in this regard is the legendary Norman Clyde. Before he gave his heart to the Sierra, Clyde was married to a woman named Winnie Bolster, who died tragically young from tuberculosis only a few years after they married—“before he had the chance to do much more than feel the potential of their future, but apparently she remained with him all his life.” Her spirit, it would seem, was his constant companion, unseen by the others who occasionally climbed with him, yet attending him to the end of his long days. A sad and moving story of love lost, to be sure, but Arnold also sees in Norman Clyde a cautionary tale for any creative spirit. When he wasn’t out and about in the mountains, Clyde was holed up in his cabin, grinding away at his writing, struggling to get into words exactly how the Sierra made him feel. It was a lifelong labor, and he never really found the audience for his work that he hoped for. When he died in 1972 at the age of 87, he left behind reams of unpublished manuscripts. As Arnold sums it up, “To me, the strongest warning against Clyde’s path is the simple fact that Clyde himself, who seems to have been better equipped than anyone to handle solitude and the unrelenting pressure of raw beauty, struggled so hard to find his place in the borderland between the mountains and civilization—and only surrendered to the peaks after exhausting the possibilities in between.”

One comes away from this book with the uncanny sense that rare is the high Sierra peak that is not haunted. As Arnold so eloquently expresses it, “The mountains have a way of propagating human echoes.”

JOHN P. O’GRADY

The Stonemasters: California Rock Climbers In the Seventies.
DEAN FIDELMAN, JOHN LONG, AND OTHERS. T. ADLER BOOKS/
STONEMASTER PRESS, 2009. MANY PHOTOGRAPHS. 196 PAGES.
HARDCOVER. \$60.00.

“We made this book square, like a block of granite,” said Dean Fidelman, the photographer. That’s how much he and John Long, the writer, wanted it to reflect the experience of being a Stonemaster. It’s exciting how well their big volume succeeds, by diving deep into the legend to locate the sparks that set a few high school kids so on fire



they ignited a generation. The story is vivid, thanks to the penetrating writing of their chief spokesman, John Long.

How did it all start? Long “organized a high school rock-climbing club for the sole purpose of enlisting a partner who had access to a car.” The club quickly sank under the weight of teen drunkenness when “a foreign exchange student from Hyderabad [India]—who’d shown such promise on The Blob earlier that day—was found wandering the desert in her panties.” But Long had already hooked up with Rick Accomazzo and “a powder-blue Ford Pinto we drove into the tundra over the next few years.” Step on the gas and wipe that tear away.

Fidelman’s iconic shots are everywhere, opening with John Bachar hanging oh-so-casually off the lip of The Molar for a dedication page. Yet they don’t dominate. Instead, their classiness is deliberately upstaged by snapshots that start out reflecting self-conscious poses from reading too much Herman Buhl, but soon dissolve into the warmth and plain goofiness of hanging out in Josh with your buds.

Likewise, Long is too good to just go big with his own language. The book sweeps together writings from many others who were there as the tribe swelled and became the statement, the identity, of a generation. Right away we get multiple views of climbing Valhalla, their initial entrance exam, from Accomazzo and Mike Graham. Plus rare writing from John Bachar, as he steps it up to the first solo of Butterballs, and sweet Tobin Sorenson going alpine.

The Stonemaster legend has loomed, creating a hunger for this book. It wouldn’t have taken much to satisfy the hunger, but we get filled right up by a rich choir of voices, set off by candid moments on Kodachrome.

It’s the start of an era of red two-inch swamis, worn like a pirate’s sash over painter’s pants, long hair, an insouciant stance. They might have been tempted to tighten that circle as more aspirants clamored. Instead, the Stonemasters did a remarkable thing. They threw open the gates and became a generation that wouldn’t quit until it had run itself out on enduring icons like Astroman, the Nose-in-a-Day, and the Bachar-Yerian.

“Dime edges,” we often say, when in truth most of them were larger coin. Long wryly acknowledges “centavo” size as they build early skill bouldering on Mt. Rubidoux before tackling the “holdless” slabs of Suicide Rock, where the drill stances were “round as a wine grape and smoother, too.”

The Stonemasters were the last great trad climbers, pulling the rope after a fall and trying from the ground or the last no-hands stance to send it straight through.

Steve Roper’s slim volume, *Camp 4*, gestated 30 years before committing to history the Golden Age of Valley climbing. He got it so right, reflecting by turns the serious and farcical, all with painstaking accuracy. A hard act to follow. All the more interesting then that we waited out the same delay in documenting this next great era, one that couldn’t really be contained by the walls of The Gulch. Hardly a tombstone, this volume cracks open with the invitation to make your own mischief and keep it real.

I keep returning to Long’s piece that opens the book, “A Short History of the Stonemasters.” Like a solo on the sax, it has evolved over the years since it was first published with subtle twists and big surprises. By the time I encountered them in the Valley, the Stonemasters were already a movement at flood stage and had recruited the best of the Bay Area boys, like Dale Bard and Werner Braun, Ron Kauk and John “Yabo” Yablonski, not to mention sweeping in their King-of-the-Valley predecessor, Jim Bridwell.

The brilliance in this volume calls out its dark side, which surfaced with a couple of bod-

ies shattered by long falls, the early death of Tobin Sorenson, and a sick obsessiveness oozing out of Yabo that even the strong medicine of climbing itself could not hold in check forever. Lynn Hill digs into the story of sparring with Yabo as no 18-year-old girl should have to, yet so many do. Emotional blackmail forces her hand, and in the heat of the moment they end up practically soloing a line that is lost forever. But its acid-etched tale could be the strongest piece in a very strong book.

The Stonemasters scatters a lot of gripping writing among grainy snapshots and epic landscapes. It also innovatively uses a lot of short snippets culled fresh from tossed-off posts on SuperTopo.

Okay, so I'm kind of smitten by the Stonemaster legend. It is truly a thrill to trace their roots, exposed as never before in this excellent book.

DOUG ROBINSON

The Last Of His Kind; The Life and Adventures of Bradford Washburn, America's Boldest Mountaineer. DAVID ROBERTS. WILLIAM MORROW, 2009. 352 PAGES. HARDCOVER. \$25.99.

I never understood Bradford Washburn.

Or rather, I never understood his place in the climbing pantheon. I always thought of Washburn as a remarkable photographer who happened to climb a dozen (or so) prominent peaks; a genius mapmaker who happened to climb a dozen (or so) prominent peaks; a great writer, a careful naturalist, a serious scientist, a devout museum guy—who happened to climb a dozen (or so) prominent peaks. Even a wingnut who battled other wingnuts about the activities of the ultimate wingnut, Dr. Frederick Cook.

As biographer Roberts makes clear, Washburn certainly was a climber. He was, in fact, just a big kid who carried on doing everything we all do as youngsters (exploring, climbing, taking pictures, and writing about our experiences) for much of his adult life.

Today we're used to 12-year-olds training in gyms and becoming 5.12 climbers by their early teens. That's not how it used to be, especially in the climbing-naive 1920s and '30s. For precocity, though, Washburn's life was a surprising exception.

His writing career started as an eight-year old, in 1918, when he was living with his family in New York. He penned a piece about fishing on the docks along the Hudson and East rivers that was published in *The Churchman* in 1919. An interest in geography was in full tilt by the time he was in fifth grade, and by 14, if not earlier, he was drawing maps and plotting routes around New Hampshire's Squam Lake, where his family had a cabin. He also had a thirst for knowledge about the natural world, and as a young student wrote school papers on subjects as esoteric as ferns.

He was introduced to climbing at age 11, finding that the higher he went, the less hay fever bothered him. He shortly thereafter climbed Mt. Washington, and in the summer of 1926 he spent a month climbing difficult technical routes in the Alps, as well a few of the highest peaks, with a guide. Roberts observes: "In one month, at sixteen, Brad had amassed an alpine experience that could be matched by no more than a score of American climbers of any age."

