

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.

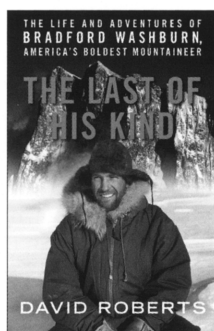
Or rather, I never understood his place in the climbing pantheon. I always thought of Washburn as a remarkable photographer who happened to climb a dozen (or so) prominent peaks; a genius mapmaker who happened to climb a dozen (or so) prominent peaks; a great writer, a careful naturalist, a serious scientist, 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-naïve 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."



By the time he was 17, after a second season in the Alps, he had written his first book—*Among the Alps with Brad Washburn* (published by Putnam). By the time he was a Harvard freshman, he had a professional lecture agent. In Washburn's teens, Charles Lindbergh's Atlantic flight stirred an interest in aviation (Washburn learned to fly at 24). In his early 20s, he was courted by *National Geographic* and other publications.

The die had been cast.

Exploring, climbing, writing, flying, and an insatiable curiosity about unknown places were to make this life remarkable in many ways. And while he originally looked to the Himalayas, by the time he was partway through his undergraduate education, Washburn had figured out the final, crucial element to his career, a vast area where he could do all of the above with the style of a born Olympian: Alaska and northwestern Canada.

The deeds he performed there, we know well: Mt. Crillon in 1934, Lucania in 1937, mts. Marcus Baker and Sanford in 1938, Mt. Bertha in 1940, Mt. Hayes in 1941, Mt. Deception in 1944, Mt. Silverthrone in 1945, McGonagall Mountain in 1947, Denali's West Buttress and Kahiltna Dome in 1951, and Mt. Dickey in 1955, to name the most prominent. Roberts tells the stories of these climbs—and his subsequent years as a father, mapmaker, Everest height-adjuster, and museum director—richly, in detail, and expertly placed within their historical context.

But *The Last of His Kind* has its uncomfortable moments for even sporadic readers of mountain literature. Roberts spends considerable time covering climbing history that has been repeated dozens of times (the history of the 8,000-meter peaks, for example). The ascent of Lucania gets its own chapter. There are lengthy descriptions of other climbers' careers (e.g., Terris Moore) that, though related to Washburn's trajectory, seem superfluous. At times I felt like I was rereading James Ramsey Ullman's *High Conquest*.

While Roberts does a terrific job of assembling Washburn's personal story, what's covered at times seems unbalanced (Brad's broken engagement to an Eleanor Kelsie covered most of eight pages). The epilogue hints as to why.

Roberts knew Washburn, and he is not just his biographer, but was a friend, student, and, as he calls himself, protégé of the great man. As a mountaineering publisher friend recently pointed out, "It must have been incredibly difficult for David to write that book. Even if Washburn wasn't there, he must have felt Brad looking over his shoulder."

This sense is the source of the epilogue's awkwardness. It describes the Washburn-Roberts relationship and is part memoir, part celebration, and part justification as to why Roberts was the man to write this book (even though several other Washburn biographies exist). Thirty-one pages long, it leaves the reader with the impression that Roberts feels he's the heir apparent to Washburn, which, though plausible enough, gives the reader pause after 300 pages of expert, if occasionally bumpy, storytelling.

Quibbles aside, *The Last of His Kind* is a great read and offers the details necessary to fully understand Washburn—who he was, how he was raised, what motivated him, how he achieved so much in so many fields, and how he sat at this great intersection of the things he loved as a boy. And how he put them to use to ultimately join the pantheon.

CAMERON M. BURNS