

was becoming connected to a world that filled me with dread." These difficulties are what transformed him into the *Rock Athlete*.

For the filming of *Rock Athlete*, a movie watched by millions on BBC, Fawcett walked away with a new pair of EBs and the paltry sum of 80 pounds. His life as the star of the landmark documentary was not an easy one. He put himself in dangerous positions not just for himself but for his livelihood. He felt at odds with his role. More than that was the shy man's ego in the public view. While climbing Lord of the Flies for the film, Fawcett uttered, "C'mon arms, do your stuff." The phrase was heard at pubs across the world, and climbers emulated Fawcett with their talk of "crozzly pockets" and other Fawcett-speak. "I felt deeply self-conscious at the best of times, and found generating media interest embarrassing," he writes about his film life. Fawcett's life in the public eye seemed more out of necessity than desire. "I felt confident in my own ability, but putting myself on a pedestal made me uncomfortable. I had too thin a skin for the flak it drew." Fawcett loved the climbing, though, and the experiences. It wasn't about the job or the fame but about the experiences and the friends.

The absurdity of his climbing life, of traveling across the globe to meet fellow climbers, comes out in his dry wit. At Camp VI on the Nose, John Long and Fawcett dangled their feet off the ledge. The pair climbed the route in a speedy day and a half, stopping to rest for the night on the ledge, where they stuffed themselves with hard-boiled eggs. In a wild attempt to stave off dehydration, Long added salt to their water. "A lot of salt," Fawcett emphasizes. Early in his climbing life, young friends of Fawcett's rappelled off the ends of their ropes. The first broke his legs. The second broke his wrists. The pair struggled to a nearby farm, where the fellow with the broken wrists knocked on the door with his head. With subtle humor Fawcett describes the climbing life and takes a bit of the edge off the danger and stress of his lifestyle.

Fawcett's life on the rocks was a remarkable one. Later he shifted toward running. "When you've been very good at something, when it's been the purpose of your whole existence, it feels odd carrying it on at a lower standard." Fawcett's move toward running was a way to fight off depression, to numb his mind. After his daughter's mother left him, running became the only time when he could forget his pain. Ultimately, both climbing and running provided a deeper fulfillment in his life. "But through it all I needed that sense of space and freedom to be myself, and that's as true now as it was then," he reflects. Fawcett's autobiography depicts a man in constant search of space and freedom. As much as he finds them, he continues to search for more. His constant search made him a great climber and, more than that, a great man.

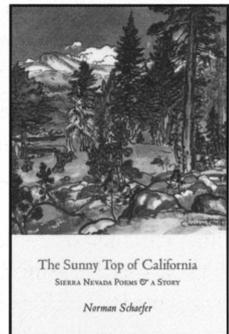
JAMES LUCAS

***The Sunny Top of California: Sierra Nevada Poems and a Story.* Norman Schaefer. La Alameda Press, 2010. 120 pages. Paperback. \$14.00.**

*A poem is like a Chinese fortune cookie: surprise and insight,  
wrapped inside a small mystery.*

*The joyous hardship of climbing a peak  
For a clear far view*

Climbing poems are so rare—odd, even—that it helps, it's reassuring, when a poet like Norman Schaefer has chalk under his fingernails and real gobies from firing V4s. You



gain some trust when his shoulders are sore from dropping his pack at timberline: this guy speaks our language. The edge of each line may be ragged, but its knot is tight:

*Blue lakes with golden trout,  
Meadows and all their flowers,  
Granite that won't break  
When you pull down hard.*

A century and a half is all that white guys have been tromping the Sierra. Mountaineers who write down words about it are just a blink to the melting glaciers. The Paiutes before us spoke only in footpath and sweat lodge, and before them there's nothing but mute, powerful scratchings, storied into soft volcanic rock near the Happy Boulders. Puzzled, we retreat to our own time of words, brief as Schaefer's "paper-thin silver crescent" rising barely before dawn.

Within our span here, already Jack Kerouac and Gary Snyder climbing Matterhorn Peak together in the fifties—that's a third of the way back to our white kin's 49er dawn in the Sierra. Yet I can't shake their influence (happy not to, really), and I notice that Schaefer can't either. Thanks to the Beats we sound more like T'ang Dynasty Zen Lunatics dancing over ragged cliffs than we do like Paiutes or even the crag rats in our own lineage like John Muir:

*I lift a cup of tea to the alpenglow  
and clear autumn morning,  
alone, happy,  
thirty miles from a road.*

That's "shack simple" in the words of the Beat poet Lew Welch. To catch its mood, where the simplest things become poignant, it helps to be emptied of action-figure busyness and filled instead with a receptive stillness, as you are after climbing, after exhausting yourself on terrain. Poems are quick hits, a distilled essence. You'd think they would get more popular in a distractible, sound-bite age. But no, nowadays poets mostly talk to other poets:

*Awareness blossoms everywhere  
This lake knows I'm here.  
I thought I heard a voice on Diamond Mesa:  
"Forget yourself and you're free."*

Tune in, I urge you. It will be illuminating. A slim volume in the pack, poetry is Light & Fast. Best of all, take these poems back to from where they came. Read them up high, in the alpine zone. Sure to produce shouts of joy.

DOUG ROBINSON

**Unexpected: Thirty Years Of Patagonia Catalog Photography.** Jane Sievert and Jennifer Ridgeway, eds. Patagonia Books, 2010. 213 pages. Hardcover. \$49.00.

The photographs collected here are beautiful and inspiring.