

The Inevitable Sport: An Analysis of the Eighteenth Century Origins of Mountaineering in Europe

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Sport historians are intrigued by the origin and evolution of specific sports - a problem which may become quite perplexing if we ask why certain sports came into existence. The problem is particularly interesting if we consider the sport of mountaineering. Why did men, and women, suddenly begin to climb mountains for pleasure in the early part of the 19th Century? This occurrence is particularly dramatic when we consider that, prior to the 19th Century, mountains had typically been perceived as rather horrifying places.

The purpose of this paper was to propose that the coincidence of a number of social, philosophical, artistic, and scientific movements during the 18th Century led to the sport of mountaineering. The argument will be presented that, the combination of these various interacting movements, which continued into the 19th Century, provided an environment and a force by which the occurrence of the sport of mountaineering was almost inevitable.
