

Roger Frison-Roche and Sylvain Jouty, *A History of Mountain Climbing*. translated from the French by Deke Dusinberre, Flammarion, Paris and New York, 1996. Bibliog., illus., index. pp. 336. \$120.

This translation is an expanded version of Frison-Roche's *Les Montagnes de la Terre* (1964). Two new chapters, one in the first section on the Alps, 'Endgame?' (1964 to the present), and one in the second section on other mountain ranges, 'The Development of Himalayan Mountaineering' (post-1953), as well as potted biographies of 50 great mountaineers, a chronology, and a bibliography have been contributed by Jouty. The work is lavishly illustrated with at least 300 photographs and reproductions of paintings, two-thirds in colour. For those of us not up to ever tackling Lhotse south face or other breathtakingly difficult ascents, words come second to the stunning photography on display here.

One of the striking features of this book is the prominence of French achievements. 'This is not a matter of boasting or denigrating the feats of others but one of emphasis and proportion. The first part of the book, on the Alps, is a chronological narrative, while the second part, dealing with other mountain ranges, is thematic, the implication seeming to be that development takes place in the Alps, which is then dispersed to the rest of the Globe. While this is suggestive of a link between the meaning of mountaineering and constructions of national identity, it does little to enlighten the general reader as to climbing as a social activity.

The Alps get very detailed attention. The treatment of transitions is the art of narrative, and while Frison-Roche does tend to deal with the problem of periodisation by announcing the terminal date of a period well in advance, at the appropriate point and again later, to remind us that we are into a new period — rather like some bustling tour guide — the factors given for the key changes in climbing activity are of two kinds: technical and political.

Each author gives an example of change imparted by technical advances, both imported from outside the western Alps. Frison-Roche describes the changes wrought by the adoption of the piton, carabiner, and boots from the eastern Alps after World War I. Jouty describes the impact of the bolt and other big wall techniques from the United States in the 1960s. These technical developments, though dealt with rather perfunctorily, are the first indication that mountaineering does not conform to the notion of a single alpine line of descent that is then dispersed. The description of the American dominance of the big walls like the Drus west face at Chamonix (climbed by Gary Hemmings and Royal Robbins in 1962), as 'cross-influence' (p. 145) is an attempt to grapple with the complexities.

Frison-Roche gives three examples of change imparted by political factors: the growth of Italian climbing after the acquisition of the South Tyrol; and the rise of Italian and German climbing under the influence of fascist youth movements, apparently in competition with each other; the grounding French youth gained in the *Jeunesse et Montagne* during the German occupation when they were confined to their home departments, which results in a surge in French activity in the immediate post-War period. Taken together these two sets of factors indicate that in Europe the meaning of mountaineering underwent change due to internal and external pressures, although our authors do not put it in those terms.

The thematic treatment of other (non-alpine) mountains in part two leaves the narrative thread of part one intact, the rest of the world being an adjunct to the Alps. Nonplussed at the prominence given to the French contribution to Himalayan climbing. I reread Sir John Hunt's *The Ascent of Everest* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1953), only to find in the historical background section no mention of French expeditions whatsoever! Probably an appreciation of Himalayan climbing as a whole is an overdue corrective to a focus on the conquest of the world's tallest peak, although on both sides I have the suspicion that national prestige has been the mould into which the efforts of climbers have been poured, at considerable loss of the humanity of the climbers themselves.

Although assaults on Everest had traditionally been made from the Tibetan side, Hunt rendered a foreshortened narrative by beginning at 1950, when Nepal was opened and Tibet was closed, which was a whole new ball game. And while Hunt acknowledges the efforts of the 1952 Swiss team in making it to within 1000 feet of the summit, Frison-Roche

makes it clear that after the unsuccessful British attempt of 1951, the Swiss were inveigled into going a year early, they having been allocated 1953 on the rota by the Nepalese Government (with France allocated 1954). Lack of suitable oxygen equipment defeated the British in 1951 and the Swiss in both the spring and autumn of 1952, but the British used 1952 to get it right, storming to success in 1953. Frison-Roche is not interested in how this was affected as Everest had been earmarked for the British by the British ever since Himalayan climbing began. Of course, if there was any justice in the world the British, whose experience on snow, ice, and rock was gained in the western Alps, would have come second to the French if not the Swiss. Nevertheless, previous Himalayan experience (Hunt, Evans, Bourdillon) and New Zealand snow and ice experience (Hillary and Lowe) proved a viable combination. Frison-Roche's alpine genealogy of mountaineering hardly accommodates a figures like Sir Edmund Hillary or Norgay Tenzing — yet they climbed Everest first!

Frison-Roche undercuts the British grab for the limelight by dealing with all Himalayan ascents up to 1953 in one chapter and the conquest of Everest in another. There are fourteen Himalayan peaks higher than 8000 metres and a league table of their conquest would read as follows: Austria, three; France, Britain, Switzerland, two each; Italy, Germany, Japan, United States, China, one each. The chapter on these peaks ('Slaying the Giants') warrants close textual scrutiny. The first to be slain was Annapurna (8091m), by the French on 3 June 1950, in a magnificent assault led by Maurice Herzog and which resulted in tragic loss of life. This French achievement sets the tone for the description of the other ascents.

How are the remaining thirteen peaks other than Everest, which encapsulate the Himalayan bigger picture, dealt with? Seven of them get a subheading and a substantial amount of text, five get merely a paragraph, and one gets no mention at all. Or, in terms of the climbers' nationality, France with two first ascents gets five-and-a-half pages, while Switzerland with just as many gets a mere two-and-a-half pages. Probably the most hard done by are the Austrians, their three ascents meriting a mere one-and-a-half pages, while the US with one ascent gets a short paragraph, which is more than can be said for the Chinese first ascent of Shisha Pangma. In addition there is a long description (one page) of the French ascent of Jannu (Kumbhakama), and description of the British and French ascents of the Mustagh Tower (a half-page) (both Jannu and Mustagh are

below 8000 metres). Looking at the larger photographs accompanying the text, we find a similar tendency. Double page, Lhotse seen from Makalu (by French party) (pp. 224-5); full page, French base camp at Makalu (p. 208, facing chapter opening); Rongbuk Glacier, Everest north face (p. 213); French team on Jannu (p. 234, facing chapter close). Textually and pictorially the chapter is bookended by the French triumphs of Annapurna and Jannu.

One consequence of the thematic approach of part two, with its middle two chapters focussed on the Himalayas, is the fragmentation and thus downgrading of the achievements made by climbers in other parts of the world. This is particularly noticeable in the treatment of South America and Antarctica. The 8800 km of the Andes is discussed in both the first and fourth chapters of part two. Climbing in the central Andes is covered well, and this has much to do with the very well known climbers who went there and whose exploits could hardly be ignored: Erwin Schneider in the 1930s (Nevado Champara), Tom de Booy, Egeler, and Lionel Terray in 1951 (Huanstan), Jongen, Georges Kogan, Raymond Leininger, and Maurice Lenoir in 1951 (Alpamayo), Claude Kogan, Bernard Pierre, Fred Ayres, George Bell, Graham Matthews, and David Michael in 1952 (Salcantay).

The Patagonian Cordillera receives attention because of two great feats, the first ascent of Mount Fitz Roy by Terray and Guido Magnone in 1952 and the first ascent of the south face of Aconcagua in terrible storm conditions in 1954 by Lucien Berardini, Edmond Denis, Adrien Dagory, Pierre Lesueur, Robert Paragot, and Guy Poulet. While he says that from then on 'the eyes of mountaineers have turned above all to Patagonia, where extraordinary towers of granite stand to attention above the ice' (p. 181), Frison-Roche says no more of Patagonia. Jouty takes up the theme in his chapter on post-1953 mountaineering, saying that Patagonia is 'one of the main destinations of cutting-edge climbing' (p. 284). Yet Jouty devotes only two-and-a-quarter pages of text to this region, which with Frison-Roche's page or so, amounts to less space than that devoted to some individual Himalayan peaks, and far short of the 150 pages devoted to the Alps. The South American cone deserves much more extensive treatment for two reasons. Firstly, just as lighter more rapid ascents have become the norm in the Himalayas (and Herzog's ascent of Annapurna was the precursor), the sheer remoteness of Patagonia make this the only realistic method of approach. While this puts it financially in

reach of private teams, they are faced with technically very difficult rock and ice, and extreme weather conditions, which because of the latitude and narrowness of the landmass (rather like New Zealand) can undergo violent and rapid change. Secondly, the simple genealogy of mountaineering seems to have been completely unravelled in South America. This time it is not a matter of reinterpreting New Zealand as an analogue canton or Norgay Tenzing as an analogue alpine guide (which is a kind of environmental determinism in disguise), but of assaying an explanation in terms of political, social, and economic factors that have both changed and broadened the scope and meaning of mountain climbing.

For example, in 1985 a South African team led by Paul Fatti made the first ascent of the east face of the Paine central peak in Patagonia. While South Africa has a long tradition of bushwalking and rock climbing with clubs and journals dating back to the late nineteenth century, it has no truly alpine peaks. Nevertheless, it seems that some South African climbers were practising alpine bivouac techniques in the late 1930s (D P Liebenberg, 'High altitude winter camps in the Drakensberg', *Annual of the Mountain Club of South Africa*, no. 43, 1940, pp. 19-22), and that in the post-War years trips to places like Kilimanjaro and the Alps have been on the itinerary of good South African climbers. There was a similar, if much later development in Australia. The Melbourne University Mountaineering Club (MUMC) was founded in 1944, but only took steps to establish a winter hut, at Mount Feathertop, after three tragic expeditions to New Zealand, each with multiple fatalities, in 1955, 1958, and 1965. In the 1960s MUMC members attempted to gain snow and ice experience by participating in Australian antarctic expeditions. Also in the 1960s, standards of rock climbing in Australia and South Africa were greatly improved by the influx of enthusiastic British climbers, such as Martyn White and Tony Barley (South Africa) and John Ewbank and Brydon Allen (Australia). While some climbers are seriously underdone in some departments, this can be overcome by ingenuity, sweat, and the expenditure of copious amounts of money. Climbers from these countries can be found taking on both the Himalayas and Patagonia as a result.

The achievements of climbers from Japan, Poland, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic are testimony to the diverse backgrounds that make up successful Himalayan and Patagonian climbers. It is probably within this context that an explanation of the emergence of women climbers of

the first rank can in part be found. The factors that go to make up the emergence of the hybridised mountain climber from non-alpine countries — long term breaks at university, the income and lifestyle afforded by the professions, use of the most technically advanced equipment, and modern air travel — also go a long way to explaining the equalisation of the sexes in Europe, the United States, and elsewhere. It is incidentally on the matter of women alpine guides that Frison-Roche's reliance on his alpine genealogy has let him down. He writes: 'The first woman guide was Gwen Moffat from Britain, back in 1953' with Martine Rolland the first woman to become a guide on the continent in 1983 (p. 162). In fact the first woman guide was a New Zealander: 'Betsy Blunden, the first woman guide at the Hermitage 1928-31, had to act as a hostess in an evening dress after dinner, a role she was not at ease with. During the day, as a guide, some men were not happy when she led them up mountains.' (Graham Langton, 'A History of Mountain Climbing in New Zealand to 1953', University of Canterbury, PhD thesis, 1996, p. 267.)

On the matter of Antarctica the book's structure has resulted in its disintegration as a subject of discussion. Dick Bass, a US climber, scaled the Vinson Massif (4897m) in 1985, but who was the first to do so and when? Mug Stumps, an Alaskan, we are told, found a solo route up the west face of Mount Tyree (2500m) but we are not told when. And we are informed that Ulvetanna (2931m) in Queen Maud Land, Norwegian Territory, was scaled in 1993 (p. 279), but we are not told by whom. Antarctica, we are told, 'is the least well explored continent from a mountaineering standpoint' — this book doesn't do much to enlighten us as to what has been achieved there.

While I am not competent to comment on the translation, the text is free of typographical errors, a rare sight, and there are very few infelicities: 'has now become classic' and 'entreprises' (p. 161); 'the temperatures turn very and it was this cold that partly undid the second Swiss expedition to Everest' (p. 215); 'an avalanche overtook them, spun them around and — miraculously — spit them back out' (p. 217). There are some minor discrepancies between different renderings of the same information: the first ascent of Aconcagua is given as 1897 and 1898 (pp. 176, 319); Margherita Peak in the Ruwenzori mountains *is* given a height of 5118m and 5119m (pp. 191, 192); the dates for the first ascents of two of the Himalayan 8000m plus peaks are given incorrectly on p. 214, with Lhotse given a date of 18 May 1955 instead of 18 May 1956 (see p. 229), while

Manaslu is given a date of 11 May 1956 (when a second pair from the Japanese team reached the summit) instead of 9 May 1956 (see p. 229). The picture captions are error free and the quality of reproduction is excellent — the chalk on Lynn Hill's hands as she makes the first free ascent of the Nose on El Capitan, Yosemite, in 1993, is clearly visible (p. 165).

Jouty has achieved a difficult task of filling in the story of the last 30 odd years without muffling Frison-Roche's distinctive authorial voice ('1936, the year Andre Ledoux and I founded the first private school of mountaineering in Chamonix', p. 94; 'in 1935, I had to trek for seventeen days (seven of them on camel) to reach the Hoggar', p. 130). At the same time Jouty has asserted his own views, acknowledging something that is quite foreign to Frison-Roche's outlook: the breakdown, particularly since the mid-1970s, of the distinction between mountaineering and rock climbing, with difficult and sustained rock routes being put up at great altitudes. Overall, the book is both an fascinating overview of mountain climbing and a treasure trove of illustrations.

Andrew Honey
School of History
University of New South Wales