Book Reviews

Ghosts of Everest

Jochen Hemmleb, Larry A. Johnson, and Eric R.

Simonson (as told to William E. Northdurft)

Seattle, WA: The Mountaineers Books, 1999

US \$29.95, 207 pages, hardcover

June 8, 1924, may not be a date that most people associate with any significant historical achievement. Nor do most associate George Leigh Mallory or Andrew Cournyn Irvine with Mount Everest in the same way that Edmund Hillary or Tenzing Norgay are linked to this mountain, the latter two reaching the summit of Everest on May 29, 1953. However, the question remains: Did George Mallory and Andrew Irvine first reach the summit of Everest?

After 75 years of speculation, one of the great mysteries in the annals of exploration comes to a head. On that fateful day in 1924, photographer, geologist, and fellow climber Noel Odell caught a glimpse of the men 600 feet below the summit at 12:50 PM, “still going strong” above a rock outcrop called the Second Step. Soon afterward, a storm blew over Odell, and he saw nothing more. Mallory and Irvine never returned.

On May 1, 1999, in a clandestine effort to find the remains of the climb, the 1999 Mallory and Irvine Research Expedition found something that would forever change climbing history. Conrad Anker, one of the expedition’s climbers, came across the body of none other than George Mallory, remarkably intact. The letters and effects found on Mallory, in addition to oxygen bottles and an ice axe found earlier, give a rough idea as to the fate of Mallory and Irvine. Unfortunately, the 1999 expedition was unable to find the camera that Mallory borrowed that could demonstrate whether or not the 1924 expedition reached the summit.

Odell was the sole eyewitness to Mallory and Irvine’s summit bid, and much of the subsequent conjecture about their fate has rested on precisely where Odell saw them. The 1999 expedition did not stop after finding Mallory; rather, they attempted to verify what Odell saw from his vantage point, and even retraced the possible route taken to the summit. Anker and his summit partner, Dave Hahn, shed more light on the possibility of Mallory and Irvine’s fate, based on their climbing experience and the climbing standards and equipment known to exist in 1924. Anker himself attempted to free climb the Second Step to determine if it could have been overcome in 1924.

Jochen Hemmleb, one of the authors who has exten-

sively studied Everest history, nicely compiles some of the facts with the disparate bits of data gathered during the past 75 years, including those of the current expedition. The authors compare and contrast both expeditions to give the reader insight on how organized expeditions have changed over the years. After a good introduction, the book continues in a somewhat jumbled fashion, becoming initially difficult to follow, yet the authors are able to pull the mystery and the end of the book toward a good finale. They also do a fairly good job of giving the reader insight into the personalities of the climbers on both expeditions, although it is weighted more toward the 1999 expedition (no doubt understandable, considering that record keeping was not as detailed 75 years ago). Although one cannot assert that these 2 men peaked on Everest 33 years before Hillary and Norgay, one does certainly appreciate the nature of their daring endeavor, considering the limited clothing and protection climbers had in the 1920s.

Overall, the text is well written and researched, with many references. The historical insight into those times is captivating, and quotes from the 1924 climbers and organizers add to the story’s personality. The photographs also augment the flow of the text. Although some argue that the authors may have sensationalized Mallory and Irvine, the treatment is not entirely unfair when one considers the ways these early pioneers attempted to push the standards of the day. I heartily recommend this book to anyone interested in climbing, high altitude, or expedition medicine, or to anyone who likes a good mystery.

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High Life: A History of High-Altitude Physiology and Medicine

John B. West

New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998

US \$99.95, 493 pages, hardcover

Our understanding of the effects of hypoxia on the human body continues to grow. Fueled by curious minds inspired to observe, investigate, and record this body of expanding knowledge, a path has been worn. It is this historic trail that *High Life: A History of High-Altitude Physiology and Medicine* documents.

Beginning with the first known description of the del-

eterious effects of high altitude from Greek and Roman literature, the author clearly and meticulously outlines the key developments in a chronological progression. Out of necessity, the book encompasses the work of early pioneers of respiratory physiology, as well as the compelling controversies of that period, including oxygen transfer by the lung and blood, and the oxygen secretion debate. *High Life* then expands in detail to describe the main events of the last 150 years, from early sojourns by balloonists and expeditionary climbers on Mt Everest, to more recent elaborate field and chamber studies.

West has ambitiously and masterfully accumulated a vast amount of material in a single volume. For those with an ongoing interest in the medicine and physiology of high altitude, *High Life* will serve well to occupy reading sessions. This book is not meant to be read cover to cover; it serves much better as an orderly and comprehensive archive recording the exploration and discovery in high-altitude physiology in which to immerse oneself during short forays. It is an enjoyable literary journey and an invaluable resource to those inclined to pursue their own in-depth understanding of hypobaric hypoxia.

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Canoeing Safety and Rescue: A Handbook of Safety and Rescue Procedures for Lake and River Canoeists

Doug McKown

Calgary, Alberta: Rocky Mountain Books, 1996
US \$9.95, Can \$12.95, 128 pages, softcover

When I started looking for a canoe this summer for my family, I had no idea how complex the sport had become. There are whitewater, quiet water, hunting, competition, and inflatable canoes and even canoe-kayak hybrids. Moreover, materials are wildly diverse, high-tech, and hydrodynamic. It is fitting, then, that *Canoeing Safety and Rescue: A Handbook of Safety and Rescue Procedures for Lake and River Canoeists*, is singularly devoted to this sport (an Olympic sport at that). Although some of the information overlaps with kayak and raft safety, most of this book is specific to canoes.

The book begins with a few introductory chapters on topics such as equipment and basic techniques. To my liking, author Doug McKown discusses low-budget alternatives. For example, he demonstrates crafting a baler from a 1-gallon plastic jug and drybag alternatives from garbage bags, the latter a technique I have tried myself

with mixed results. It covers wetsuits and paddling shoes, but because it was last revised in 1996, it does not include some of the more recent designs in aquatic attire or footwear. The bulk of the book covers essential rescue skills, such as utilizing a throw rope, dealing with capsizing, and getting boats unstuck from swift water, rocks, and the like.

The text is clear, straightforward, and relatively short. It is supplemented with lots of graphics. Numerous well-chosen photographs highlight important points and techniques. Informative line drawings show technical rigging maneuvers. Two rescue flow charts sum up the entire book. All aspects are thoroughly covered, including such rarely used but important techniques as cardiopulmonary resuscitation from a canoe and a canoe litter. In short, this book is an excellent book for all canoeists.

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Telemedicine: Practicing in the Information Age

Steven F. Viegas and Kim Dunn, editors

New York, NY: Lippincott-Raven Publishers, 1998
US \$55, 383 pages, softcover

This is an ambitious book that explores the broad and complex field of telemedicine. Telemedicine is an application of modern communication technology, primarily videoconferencing, which purports to cost-effectively bring specialty medical knowledge and care to remote areas. These settings might include rural areas, the aerospace environment, the military battlefield environment, penal institutions, and, ultimately one might suppose, the wilderness.

The range of topics covered is broad, including chapters on the legal and ethical aspects of telemedicine, equipment selection and evaluation (both medical and networking), telerobotics in surgery, clinical laboratory and pharmacy support, provider education, cost accounting, program evaluation, and quality improvement. Many of the chapters were written by specialist physicians who describe various considerations for practicing their specialty via telemedicine.

Much of the book describes the University of Texas Medical Branch's (UTMB's) telemedicine program to bring care to inmates in far-flung prisons. Unfortunately, the focus on UTMB's system does limit the applicability of the book. (The subtitle might have more appropriately been "Implementation of the UTMB System" rather than the more enticing and general "Practicing in the Information Age.") The authors did tackle a very com-