

Fragile Edge

Maria Coffey

Seattle, WA: The Mountaineers Books, 2000

US \$16.95, 190 pages, softcover

“Joe . . . and all the lost friends—climbing was their dream, and an important part of what made them so vibrant; we survivors have to try to accept that, while coming to terms with the fact that it also took them away too soon.”

It’s something people don’t want to think about, but it is intriguing nonetheless: death in the mountaineering community. Until recently, the concept was shared by only a few: family and friends of, and the mostly women partners of, elite mountaineers and climbers. The well-publicized and recounted Everest tragedy of 1996 brought many of us to tears as we read an account of Rob Hall’s last words to his pregnant wife. Loved ones of these high-risk adventurers face the real fear of death on every expedition, and Maria Coffey tells the story of this tenuous lifestyle through the eyes of those left behind.

“The farewells never got any easier. There was always that wrenching in the gut when he walked away and three months of uncertainty stretched ahead like a tunnel with no light at the end.” In *Fragile Edge*, the author narrates the tale of her life with Joe Tasker, an elite British mountaineer, who perished atop Everest during an attempt at the Northeast ridge in 1982. Through her relationship with Joe, the author at first parties with, then befriends and eventually loves the members of the climbing community, but in an alarmingly brief period of time, many of her friends are lost to the mountains. Her recollections are very raw and personal, with little reservation, as she recounts their love story in the year and a half before Joe’s death. The author then recounts her trip to Everest to memorialize Joe and his companion Peter Boardman, accompanied by Boardman’s wife. It is a moving end to a tragic story and a courageous effort to come to closure with a man she loved.

So intimate is the story that it might appeal to Oprah, and although the book will definitely appeal to mountaineers and their spouses and families, it may well appeal to those interested in relationship stories in general.

Luanne Freer, MD
Bozeman, MT, USA

Wolves: A Wildlife Handbook

Kim Long

Boulder, CO: Johnson Books, 1996

US \$15.95, 179 pages, softcover

If you need to know something about wolves, from their taxonomy to Native American folklore, Kim Long’s book is an excellent resource. This pocket-sized book can be stuffed in a rucksack for hours of fireside entertainment or stored on a reference shelf. Trackers and hikers will find the book useful as a quick reference; the pages include everything from a reproduction of a life-size track to a chapter on how to distinguish a wolf from a coyote. The author writes in an easy-to-read style, and the book is organized with plenty of tables and illustrations. But the book is more than a fact resource; Mr Long devotes several chapters to mythology of the wolf, ancient culture associations with wolves, and the history of wolves in North America—from their proliferation in the late 1800s to their destruction and subsequent reintroduction in the last decade.

Anyone with an interest in learning more about wolves or with plans to travel in wolf country will find Kim Long’s book a valuable resource. It has found a place on my bookshelf.

Luanne Freer, MD, FACEP
Bozeman, MT, USA

Tibetan Border Worlds: A Geohistorical Analysis of Trade and Traders

Wim van Spengen

London: Kegan Paul, 2000

US \$65.00, 307 pages, hardcover

Geographers have the freedom to blend many disciplines—history, sociology, economics, and ethnography—into the study of space and structure. The people of Nyi-Shang, or Manang, as it is more familiarly known, and their travels and trade are the focus of Spengen’s rather brief study. Spengen sets out to understand how these people became such long-distance traders and how they are different from other groups sitting near the border of Tibet.

This useful volume for travelers represents a geographic history of the Nyishangba, or Manangba—a group of people in Nepal often encountered by others on visits to the rest of Asia. Foreigners weren’t allowed to visit their homeland until the gates to Manang were opened literally in 1978. This allowed a circuit of Annapurna to be made by trekkers, which has since become one of the world’s classic mountain routes.