

Himalaya: Personal Stories of Grandeur, Challenge, and Hope

Edited by Richard C. Blum, Erica Stone, and Boughton Coburn.

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Reviewed by Lawrence S. Hamilton

Mountains, as the highest and most majestic features of landscapes, inspire us, and evoke feelings of reverence and awe. The Himalaya in particular excel in this respect, with even photos stirring those who have never experienced them personally. To those who have wandered, trekked or climbed in the area known to many as “Roof of the World”, this beautifully-crafted book will come as a welcome fireside friend who restores memories of magical time spent in the Himalaya. This book of narratives by well-known personalities, with photographs by acclaimed photographers, is not only a celebration of these mountains and their peoples, but it is a challenge to all of us for the future wellbeing of the mountain range, its resources and its cultures.

The Foreword is a simple plea for peace in the Himalaya and conservation of its treasures of natural resources and peoples, by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The Preface is by Former US President Jimmy Carter, based on a trek which he and Rosalynn Carter took in 1985 to Kala Pattar’s summit at 5,500 meters. Richard Blum, Chairman of the American Himalayan Foundation, led the 1981 Everest East Face Expedition, and speaks of his long association with the mountains in the Introduction. The volume is then divided into its three main components: Grandeur, Challenge, and Hope, consisting respectively of 9, 13 and 15 illustrated essays or stories.

The myriad voices heard herein are those of Nepali doctors, mountaineers, Sherpa porters, wildlife scientists, Buddhist monks, Tibetan refugees, authors, diplomats, and politicians. Forty voices all told. Several names are well-known in the mountain community; for example: Sir Edmund Hillary, George Schaller, Rodney Jackson, Norbu Tenzing, Dechen Tsering, Hemanta Mishra, Maurice Herzog, Brot Coburn, Apa Sherpa. These are all voices of heroes, who endure isolation and hardship with courage, whether it be summiting a difficult mountain, providing orthopedic surgery to young Nepalis, studying snow leopard or Tibetan wild ass, or restoring sacred temples in Bhutan.

The splendid photographs also have eloquent tongues that depict grandeur, mystery, reverence, joy and sorrow. The many pictures of everyday life in the five countries of the Himalaya are especially noteworthy and evocative; and the close-ups of the faces move one to awe at diverse human beauty. Fifty photographers contributed.

As Jon Krakauer states: “Visiting that place, and these people, you immediately realize that you have been given an astonishing gift. And having received something so valuable, how could anyone not feel the urge to give something back?” The proceeds from the sale of this book are dedicated to projects of the American Himalayan Foundation. AHF provides education, health care, and cultural and environmental conservation in the Himalayan Region. www.himalayan-foundation.org.

Note to readers

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