

BOOK REVIEWS

By Pete Lucas for the Fell and Rock Climbing Club

If like me, you have a bus pass, grey hair and regard a friend as someone you climb with rather than a sophisticated camming device, then this book is for you. In 1976 Peter Benson joined the Rucksack Club and over the years contributed articles to the club's journal on a regular basis. These are not stories of hard climbs and daring do, though he does have one or two narrow escapes, but of adventures with friends and partners on mountains and moors and at home and abroad over a period of 70 years. As he says in his introduction, mountaineering activities are neither dull nor boring and these adjectives certainly can't be applied to this delightful book. Written in a style which is both very readable and amusing, nearly every story makes use of a variety of colloquial words and expressions, so much so that the author includes a glossary at the end of the book.

The range of tales can at best be described as an eclectic mixture. For example, an ascent of Great Gully on Craig Yr Ysfa in the winter of 1954/55 in Tricounis with long axes, ex-WD carabiners and woolly balaclavas; no crampons, crash helmets or curved picks. Another chapter of a trip to the Dolomites in the late 50's, recounts an early attempt on the Brandler/Hasse on the Cima Grande involving 1600 feet of rope and the rear seat from a van! A hilarious account of a descent from Dinas Cromlech in the dark with a 60 pound rucksack reminded me of the Bricklayer's Story by the late Gerard Hoffnung. Interspersed between the climbing and mountaineering stories are tales of peat bashing over the Marsden-Edale, a solo 1000 km cycle trip along the River Elbe from Cuxhaven to Prague and stories of lively encounters with a variety of continental mountaineers. Have I got any complaints? Yes the book could have been longer.

Copies of 'Rucksacks at Dawn!!' are available from Delfryn Publications (www.delfrynpublications.co.uk). Price £9.00 (£7.50 plus £1.50 p&p).

By Jill Croskell for The Pinnacle Club

As the title suggests, this is more a series of anecdotes than a continuous narrative and details some of the adventures, experiences and musings of the author from his early climbing life. The stories certainly have an old school feel to them with references to Tricouni nails, hawser-laid rope and peg hammers, with much of the humour being derived from these recollections from a bygone age. There are some genuinely entertaining pieces such as the description of a descent from Dinas Cromlech in the dark and some more orthodox contributions simply telling the tale of a successful trek or climb but all are delivered in a light-hearted, informal style with the voice of the author a strong linguistic presence. There is a distinctly laddish element in much of the book with tales of the boys getting 'all slickered up' and 'guzzlin' the old ale' and even a description of the author's 'rightroyal scuffle' with his friend, Harold, occasioned by a breakdown in communication and a missed meeting in Mallaig.

The style is colloquial and conversational with many Lancashire idioms and slang terms employed to create a sense of place and time and in keeping with the original purpose of the stories which was to entertain readers of the Rucksack Club Journal. There is considerable variety of topic, however, with anecdotes ranging from search and rescue in the Scottish Highlands to a bike trip to the Czech Republic as well as the usual tales of near disaster on both rock and snow. Pinnacle Club members will read with interest the references to PC member, Sally Keir, who emerges from the text as a very competent and adventurous climber who is a foil to her more disorganised and slightly outrageous husband.

The book is now in the Cwm Dyli library collection but can be purchased for £7.50 (postage free) from Cathy Woodhead via her website at www.delfrynpublishings.co.uk

Jill Croskell