

The Boardman Tasker Prize 2013

Adjudication by Chris Harle

As a judge you put your head above the parapet of disagreement and disappointment. There has been indignant disagreement from other readers of mountain literature who cannot believe that we ignored their particular favourite, and as you would expect the judges did not always agree on the relative merits of each book; although as you will hear later we were in complete agreement as to the winning book.

This year twenty-six authors would have been understandably disappointed that their book was not shortlisted. We thank them for their entries and commend their efforts for providing us with such a diverse and interesting reading experience.

You will have noticed on your table a complete list of this year's entries. If you have not already bought and read at least one of these books then shame on you. You can of course redeem yourselves by scanning through this list and buying something that looks intriguing or inspires you.

Of the books that did not make the shortlist I would like to mention a few that particularly caught the judges' attention.

Colliding Continents: A geological exploration of the Himalaya, Karakoram & Tibet by Mike Searle is a monumental book covering thirty years of travel and scientific study. I am sure that there is a particular audience for which this will become a seminal work.

Going Up: Tales Told Along the Road to El Capitan by Joe Fitschen is a highly engaging autobiographical book centring on the Golden Age of Yosemite climbing and would particularly resonate with anyone that has lived through the 1950s and 60s.

Last Hours on Everest: The Gripping Story of Mallory & Irvine's Fatal Ascent by Graham Hoyland is an absorbing summary of the various debates, and a detective story strengthened by his long-time obsession with the mountain and his family connection to T.H. Somervell.

Empire Antarctica: Ice, Silence and Emperor Penguins by Gavin Francis was an unexpected delight and describes fourteen months of hardship, solitude, wonder and beauty at a remote British research station.

The exclusion of any book from a mention does not mean that we did not enjoy reading them, but please make your own mind up.

At the time of selection we felt that any one of the short-listed books was a potential winner. They are all literary works where the mountain environment plays a significant role.

In alphabetical order by author:

Echoes: One Climber's Hard Road to Freedom by Nick Bullock. The fact that it has been favourably compared with Andy Cave's *Learning to Breathe* is compliment enough. Both the prison scenes of his work life and the climbing scenes outside are powerful, gripping and at times X-rated reading. The passion and energy of such an obsessive climbing all-rounder shines through in his writing as we join him on a whirlwind journey around the world of scary ascents. Look at his self-portrait on page 86, on one of his many solo missions to Scotland, and you get the measure of the man. On steep ice he feigns a scared look but you just know that he is loving every minute of it. Read the description of the fall off *Ivory Madonna* on the Cromlech and you will verbally join in the initial 'Arrrrrgh...' followed by the 'whoooohoooo!' of joy and he swings wildly across the rock-face held by a single tenuous skyhook. We can all be grateful that finally he walks away from his restrictive job and has no excuse for writing *Echoes* part two.

Shipton & Tilman: The Great Decade of Himalayan Exploration by Jim Perrin has everything you would expect from such an erudite writer: knowledgeable and well-researched using unpublished source material, but also reassuringly literate, opinionated and argumentative. On this occasion his trademark footnotes add to the narrative, being both enlightening and fascinating. In the author's own words this book explores that 'inspiring friendship, with its lasting legacy' and it remains an endearing tribute to these icons of lightweight, low-impact mountain exploration. Thankfully Shipton and Tilman's reputations remain untarnished, as does Perrin's for his passionate and insightful writing. Like his previous winning entry *The Villain*, you get the sense that this book has been a long time in the writing, but perhaps this is Perrin's magnum opus.

Starry Night by Isabel Suppé describes her own *Touching the Void* story in a book that exudes her multi-cultural background, her vibrant personality and life force, and her determination to return to the

mountains. It is also a nostalgic homage to her grandparents, coffee and blueberry cheesecake. An imaginative, unconventional and sometimes challenging read, yet somehow you are drawn in to every scene with a bombardment of sensual images, sounds and tastes. This German-Argentine's book was first published in Spanish and has now been translated by herself into English so that we too can be inspired by her story of loss and survival in the Bolivian Andes.

Everest: The First Ascent - The Untold Story of Griffith Pugh by Harriet Tuckey is a biography of her father, Griffith Pugh. This book puts the record straight about the level of contribution made by Pugh to the success of Everest in 1953. It is an unflinchingly candid read that challenges the way that both John Hunt and Edmund Hillary underplayed Pugh's vital contribution to diet and fluid intake, the design and testing of equipment, and the acclimatization programme. But if you think that his daughter would say that, then think again because by her own admission she did not get on with her difficult, bad-tempered, philandering father. Beyond Everest the narrative continues to maintain pace and interest through his work on the Silver Hut and Makalu expedition of 1960-61 and with the British Olympic team in 1968. We are indebted to Harriet Tuckey for choosing to finally get to know her father after his death, and introducing us to a flawed yet forgotten hero.

And now the bit that I have been looking forward to:

My job as Chair of Judges has been made relatively easy with the advice and support of both Audrey Salkeld and Shannon O'Donaghue, and even more so because we were able to come to a unanimous decision some weeks ago.

The winning book has been variously described as a tour de force, illuminating, compulsively readable, meticulously researched, riveting, and we agree. I am particularly delighted and somewhat relieved that the winning author is here today.

The winner is

Everest: The First Ascent by Harriet Tuckey