



## AAC Publications

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### **A Youth Wasted Climbing**

By David Chaundy-Smart

**A Youth Wasted Climbing. David Chaundy-Smart. Rocky Mountain Books (Canada), 2015. 247 pages. Paperback, \$20.**

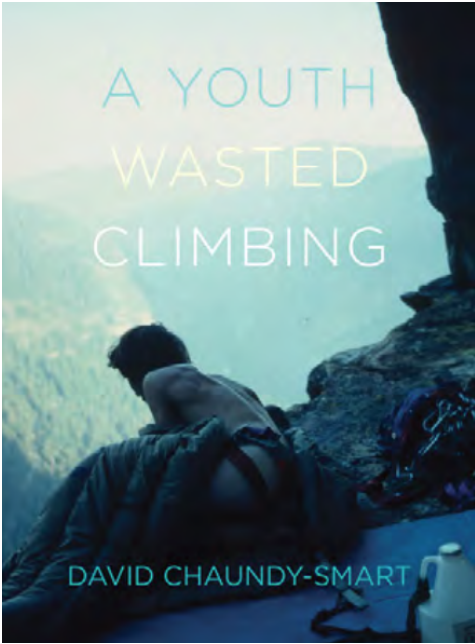
In 1972 a boy stared out the back window of his parents' car, straining for a last glimpse of his family's sold-off farm before it vanished in a cloud of late-summer dust. To David Chaundy-Smart and his brother, Reg, the recollection of a nearby limestone escarpment fringed with trees and moss turned into an emblem of a lost paradise, the beginnings of a deep attachment to place. By the time they were young men, climbing had become a means to recapture some of that initial wonder, to find an inner wild on cliffs just beyond the edges of Toronto suburbs. As Chic Scott later wrote in his history of Canadian mountaineering, *Pushing the Limits* (2000), David represented "one of the first Ontario climbers who considered the local crags to be an end in themselves and not just training for bigger routes elsewhere."

David Chaundy-Smart went on to become the founding editor of the Canadian climbing magazine *Gripped*, to publish five guidebooks, and to complete hundreds of first ascents. But his memoir, *A Youth Wasted Climbing*, is not a typical climbing autobiography preoccupied with the progression to ever-harder routes. Instead, it's something both quieter and more ambitious: an examination of what it means to climb and live, as Chaundy-Smart puts it, "by the authority of...[the] imagination." Scene by scene, his prose captures impressions of intense beauty and awe concentrated into small moments: how the afterimage of an adventure on a brushy, shale cliff can linger in a schoolchild's mind; how even short ascents can seem to offer access to some hidden, luminous existence; the ways that fantasies and realities elide each other; the layers of stories from books and magazines that form a youthful alpine mythology; the split longings for stone lines and human love; the passage of light through a canopy of leaves and across a face; the persistent belief that there's always "something wonderful that's just a little more climbing away."

In the now-classic 1990 book *Flow*, the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi quoted a climber and a poet: "The mystique of rock climbing is climbing; you get to the top of a rock glad it's over but really wish it could go on forever.... The act of writing justifies poetry. Climbing is the same: recognizing that you are a flow. The purpose of the flow is to keep on flowing, not looking for a peak or utopia but staying in the flow." Reading Chaundy-Smart's memoir, you get the sense that this writer is, indeed, as deeply immersed in the rhythm of creating sentences as he is in movement over stone. The result is a book that unfolds a series of unexpected wonders, like glowing vistas along a forest path. During an age when not only the climbing world but also much of mainstream society has become engrossed with quantifiable data, technology, and profit, *A Youth Wasted Climbing* makes a strong, implicit argument for the recovery of lost arts of unfettered daydreaming and backyard wandering—a reawakening to the wildness and mystery of both the extraordinary and the ordinary world.

– Katie Ives

Images



## Article Details

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