



AAC Publications

Climbing to Freedom: Climbs, Climbers and the Climbing Life

By Dick Dorworth

Climbing to Freedom: Climbs, Climbers and the Climbing Life. Dick Dorworth. Western Eye Press, 2015. 242 pages. Paperback, \$15.95.

Dick Dorworth's book starts in the year 1972 with the title story, "Climbing to Freedom." He's freshly estranged from his wife and year-old son, living in a 1965 VW, traveling between rocks and mountains in the western United States. Chuck Pratt walks up to his camper and gives Dorworth his first guiding job, a week in the Wind Rivers with Elizabeth. She's in her mid-40s, a mother of two, happily married, and she's hired a guide every summer to climb in a different mountain range. She's a model client—never complains, doesn't fight with the stone, shows an appreciation of the experience.

On a dark night, over a noodle feast, he asks Elizabeth how she got into climbing. Born an Austrian Jew in the late 1920s, at 14 she fled to France and was one of the fortunate few smuggled through the Pyrenees to Spain. A Basque from a small village guided the refugees in a dangerous nonstop journey through ice and snow over two days. Fifteen years later she returned to the Pyrenees, found the Basque guide, and hired him to retrace her journey. They took time to smell the roses and laze in meadows. Each year afterward she climbs for a week or two to be reminded what, exactly, her new life and freedom mean. The story ends with the author thanking Elizabeth for her example of not dwelling on the past, not dreaming of the future, but concentrating on the present moment, the only one that exists.

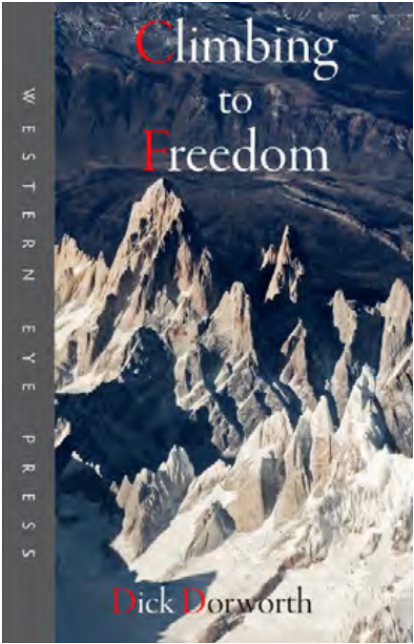
Dorworth writes about what matters. He climbs big rock faces, gets real cold, and has troubles at altitude, but rarely does this book linger on the route or the doldrums of climbing. Often he philosophizes, and there's some preaching too. He has his heroes and he writes them up, but he never gives them a free ride. He has no mercy on himself either.

In his late 60s, Dorworth climbs Gallatin Tower with 84-year-old Fred Beckey. The story screams with respect and admiration for the "King of Dirtbags." Fred keeps asking him if he should go to Mt. Assiniboine or climb Lucky Streaks in Tuolumne. The author tells us: Beckey at 84 is not going to lead 5.10d or a climb of Assiniboine, but also points out that no one else that age is even thinking about it.

This book made me feel at home. I know many of the characters, and he got them right. The stories were easy to read again and again. Dorworth's meditations on skiing, climbing, the country, and the characters are the gospel of us mountain folk.

– James Sweeney

Images



Article Details

Author	James Sweeney
Publication	AAJ
Volume	58
Issue	90
Page	373
Copyright Date	2016
Article Type	Book reviews