



The Ogre: Biography of a Mountain and the Dramatic Story of the First Ascent

By Doug Scott

THE OGRE: BIOGRAPHY OF A MOUNTAIN AND THE DRAMATIC STORY OF THE FIRST ASCENT.
Doug Scott. Vertebrate Publishing, 2017. Hardcover, 192 pages, \$26.72.

The Ogre's first ascent by a six-member British expedition in 1977 might have been "just another" significant summit in the amazing climbing career of Doug Scott—that is, Doug Scott, CBE. (Readers will find that his other "career" was rugby.) But fate, and perhaps hubris, had other plans. Just below the summit, at the end of a rappel that required much traversing, and in a moment of inattention, Scott's foot slipped. The ensuing pendulum into a wall shattered both of his tibiae. What followed is a lesson seemingly forgotten in our modern world: how to act when splattered with the foul aftermath of our mistakes, and with self-rescue as the only option.

What would each of us have done in such a situation? What would our partners have done? Doug and his three partners seemingly followed their only option and continued their descent, setting up rappels or following their previously fixed ropes. Scott writes that traversing was much more painful than simply rappelling vertically, which seems immediately obvious and painful upon reflection. However, the most difficult and painful crawling was along the final five kilometers of glacial terrain to base camp, where a cadre of hired porters could assist. Here, the story could use more metaphor or simile, allowing readers to better imagine the pain of crawling so far, with or without bilateral tibial fractures!

Throughout the book, Scott takes readers to many places and to many ideas, among them an exploration of British schemes for empire. Scott also refers to a "Pax Britannia" that arose from the Crown's imperial expansions into central Asia and justifies those expansions as countering Russian goals in the "Great Game" between the two powers. Perhaps we should expect such an attitude from a man who was honored by his country for his significant contributions to British alpinism. But of course, this review is intended for the alpine journal of a nation that is sometimes seen as expansionist, propagating a "Pax Americana."

In the chapter "Scottish Contribution to Empire," we find the following: "The British empire since the Battle of Waterloo (1815) and the American Civil War (1865) had expanded by 100,000 square miles every year." This is more than trivia: Scott's attention to Britain's Empire helps the reader understand the attention that alpine-oriented Brits gave to certain sweeps of geography, and the relative ease of obtaining official permission to explore.

The book has some sloppiness: misspellings, typos, and forced wording. But these are rare and some may be idiomatic. And certainly, an index would be useful to most readers. Surprisingly, the end pages list of "Further Reading" doesn't include Mo Antoine's account in the *Alpine Journal* (1978) or Chris Bonington's in the *AAJ* (1978). Both are engaging reads, and Antoine's, predictably, is humorous and nonchalant.

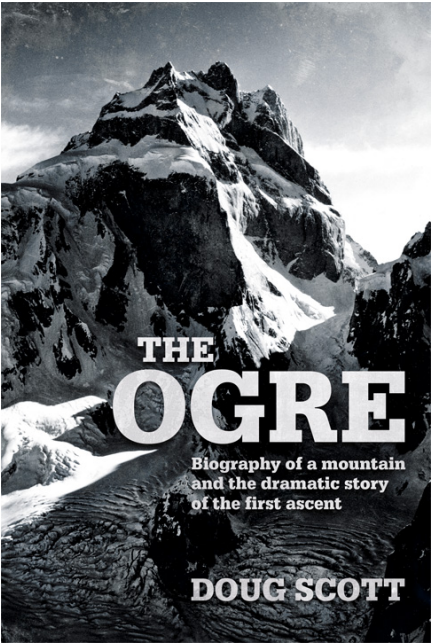
"The Climbers" (Chapter 6) is worth its weight in the coin of the realm, and the bond between the author and the other climbers is clear and poignant. A reader will feel the trust and respect that Scott has for all members of the loose team of acquaintances. They were not an expedition, but several small teams, each engaging a major alpine objective in its own way and perhaps by its own route, and

still looking out for the others. Readers will be prompted to ponder times when they've been reduced to a speck in a vast alpine environment, and their mate or mates are their only solace if an accident occurs. When we've been reduced to a "crawl," or perhaps further, whom else do we have?

– Carl Tobin

Editor's Note: This article was edited from its original version to remove references to knighthood for Scott. He received the Commander of the British Empire (CBE) honor but was not knighted.

Images



Article Details

Author	Carl Tobin
Publication	AAJ
Volume	60
Issue	92
Page	360
Copyright Date	2018
Article Type	Book reviews