



AAC Publications

WINTER 8000: CLIMBING THE WORLD'S HIGHEST MOUNTAINS IN THE COLDEST SEASON

By Bernadette McDonald

WINTER 8000: CLIMBING THE WORLD'S HIGHEST MOUNTAINS IN THE COLDEST SEASON.
Bernadette McDonald. Mountaineers Books, 2020. Paperback, 272 pages, \$21.95.

When a team of 10 Nepalese mountaineers reached the summit of K2 in the waning hours of January 16, 2021, the achievement marked not only a singular feat of endurance and teamwork, but also the closing of a frontier: All the world's principle peaks above 8,000 meters have now been climbed in winter. While it took only 14 years, from 1950 to 1964, for all the 8,000-meter monsters to be climbed for the first time, their winter conquest required 41 more years.

In her latest book, Canadian author Bernadette McDonald delivers a succinct and timely history of this period. Succinct because the author made the deft choice to structure her story with each chapter focusing on a different mountain. Checking in at tidy 272 pages, her narrative drops the reader directly into the fray on the flanks of each peak, delivering 14 epic climbs for the price of one. And timely because the book was released in 2020, some months before the K2 ascent made headlines around the world.

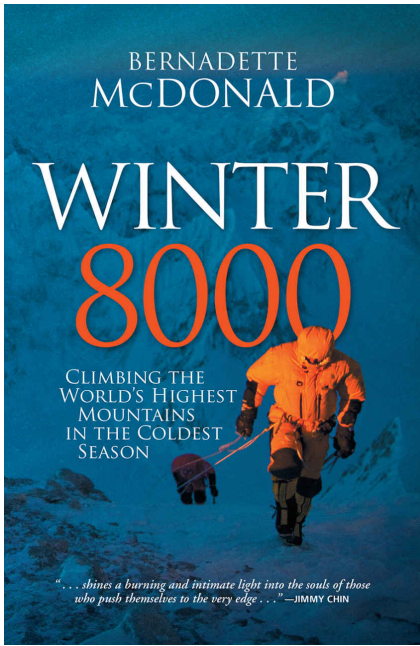
At the heart of the story are the Ice Warriors, a legendary band of Polish mountaineers who embraced "the art of suffering" and successfully summited seven of the 8,000ers, including Everest, in a span of only eight years during the 1980s. Having written extensively about the rich Polish mountaineering tradition (McDonald's *Freedom Climbers: The Golden Age of Polish Climbing* was published in 2011), she is clearly on comfortable terrain, introducing the reader to the key players with ease and adroitly explaining nuances between different cliques that came together behind the Iron Curtain in cities like Zakopane and Katowice.

For many armchair mountaineers, the names are familiar yet their true characters remain only dim outlines. McDonald does a genuine service sketching in their substance here—and the integrity of her work is most visible in the cracks in the legends she exposes. For instance: Did Andrzej Zawada knowingly allow the Polish media to falsely report the first winter ascent of Broad Peak, when those in base camp knew Maciej Berbeka had only reached its rocky foresummit? Was Jerzy Kukuczka so caught up in his race with Messner that he coldly exploited the efforts of his teammates on Dhaulagiri, Cho Oyu, and Kangchenjunga?

As the narrative shifts into the new century, the players broaden into an international crowd, and the sense of collective action embodied by the Poles gives way to a Western sense of individualism. In these latter chapters, McDonald does a good job dissecting complicated intra-team dynamics, particularly those that unfolded on Nanga Parbat and Gasherbrum I, with tragic repercussions. I particularly enjoyed getting to know Elisabeth Revol, Marianne Chapuisat, and Tamara Styś, a trio of gritty alpinistas whose contributions may well have been overlooked by less attentive writers.

McDonald is already hard at work revising her book to include the recent ascent of K2, an achievement that will make a fitting finale to this indispensable work. While the Golden Age of Himalayan climbing ended more than a half century ago, I suspect the Frozen Age of high-altitude climbing is here to stay.

Images



Article Details

Author	Freddie Wilkinson
Publication	AAJ
Volume	63
Issue	95
Page	208
Copyright Date	2021
Article Type	Book reviews