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The Art of Shralpinism: Lessons From the Mountains

By Jeremy Jones

THE ART OF SHRALPINISM: LESSONS FROM THE MOUNTAINS. By Jeremy Jones (Mountaineers Books, 2022). Paperback, 288 pages, \$29.95.

The Art of Shralpinism is about doing what you love in the mountains, doing it as safely as possible, and how to continue doing it. “Shralpinism,” by the way, is shredding plus alpinism. In Jones’ case the shredding is accomplished on a snowboard, or more precisely, a splitboard. The alpinism part has to do with how Jones puts himself in position to shred: After a fairly long history of chairlift and heli-assisted ascents, his preferred method is self-powered.

Jones began his snowboarding career competing in the mountains of his native northeastern U.S., riding 250 days a year; he turned professional at 16. His older brothers Tom and Steve founded the media company Teton Gravity Research. At 19, Jones heard the call from his brothers: “Sell everything, bring Clif Bars and a sleeping bag, and get up to Alaska—we have a spot in our tent on Thompson Pass.” Many of us have been similarly, if not so dramatically, called to the mountain life.

Before reading this, all I knew of Jones was that he snowboarded lines I would be scared to climb. What I didn’t know: He founded Protect Our Winters (POW), which is probably the most influential climate-advocacy organization in the outdoor world. He also founded Jones Snowboards, and he was, among many other accolades, the 11-time “Big Mountain Rider of the Year” (Snowboard magazine) and a National Geographic Adventurer of the Year.

The Art of Shralpinism is described as a “how to” book, and it is divided into three main sections: “Wisdom,” “Science,” and “Art.” The text proper is embellished with many anecdotes and mini trip reports, usually in service of some lesson. Sidebars abound, with quotes from snow sports/climbing luminaries, and the book is liberally and literally illustrated with Jones’ pen and ink drawings, which are mostly decorative and do little to distinguish themselves from one another.

Jones loves a list. His first is “What I Believe: A Life Manifesto,” an 11-point affair ending with, “I believe you’re born into a society that likes to keep everyone on the same path, and there’s very little encouragement to get off that path and forge a new one.” Not much teeth to it, but yeah, inarguable. A better list follows: “Live to Ride Another Day.” This one has sharper teeth: “Don’t take an agenda into the mountains. Ride what the mountains give you and don’t force it. The mountains dictate what’s rideable, and it changes every day.” Or, number ten: “Just say no.... If it doesn’t feel right—for any reason—at any time—don’t go.”

I’m not a snowboarder, and as a backcountry skier I’m self-confined to the equivalent of an intermediate groomer at a resort. Thus, Jones’ advice on sluff management, selecting a clean outrun, or “cornice tunneling to create an entrance on a slope guarded by cornices” is pretty much lost on me. (Though the advice given on the efficacy of digging snow pits made a lot of sense to me.) So why do I like this book so much?

Ultimately, this is a book about managing risk, our most important work in the mountains. Jones has thought about this as much as anyone. Preparing for this review, I watched Jones shred a spine in a

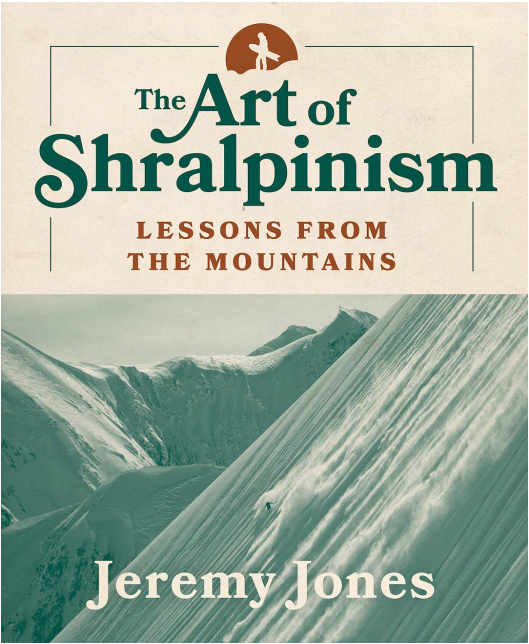
TGR film. My wife walked by and observed, “Well, he’s an idiot.” I may have thought so before reading the book, but Jones is no idiot—far from it. Once, before attempting a descent, he remarks, offhandedly, “I watched this face for ten days [before trusting that it was safe].”

Jones begins the book with a quote from Robert Pirsig’s *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. My first impression was to judge this connection a reach. But I’m happy to say these books belong on the same shelf. And you’ll learn a lot more from Jones about how to live safely in the mountains than you will from Pirsig about how to tune your Ducati 900SS.

Remember, my dudes: “Don’t sluff your exit.”

— David Stevenson

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