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SURVIVAL IS NOT ASSURED: THE LIFE OF CLIMBER JIM DONINI

By Geoff Powter

Survival Is Not Assured: The Life of Climber Jim Donini

By Geoff Powter (Mountaineers Books)

Hats off to Geoff Powter and Jim Donini for teaming up to tell Donini's life story in *Survival Is Not Assured*. The story is beautifully written and captivating, as it not only describes many of Donini's legendary climbs but also takes the reader into the depths of his personal life.

Powter gives the reader insights into Jim's formative years—before climbing—that even Donini's close friends may not have known. Donini's time as a Green Beret cultivated his drive to complete a mission with trust and dedication to his comrades. In his foreword for the book, Michael Kennedy describes Donini as “a person who values friendship above all else.”

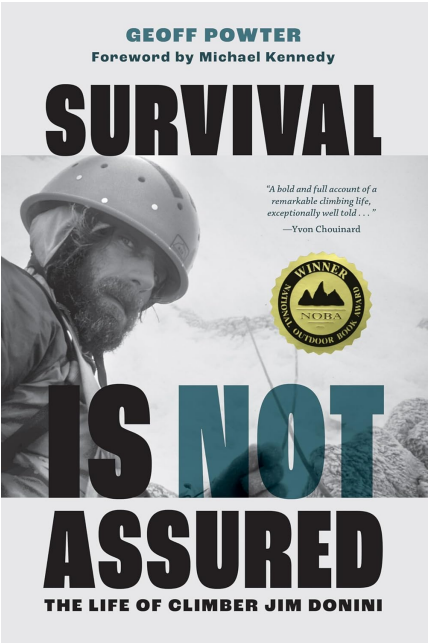
Powter powerfully and vividly recounts the story of Donini's attempt on the north ridge of Latok I in Pakistan in 1978, as part of the famous team that included Kennedy, George Lowe, and Jeff Lowe. They climbed alpine style up into the edge of survivability, abandoning the climb just pitches from the summit because of Jeff Lowe's illness. Powter also recounts the near-fatal accident and complicated, high-risk rescue of Malcolm Daly as he and Donini attempted an unclimbed route on Thunder Mountain in the Alaska Range. Daly would survive but lose his leg as a result.

These stories are interlaced with chapters about Donini's personal life in which the reader learns more about Jim's heart-wrenching losses within his family. *Survival Is Not Assured* takes on a deeper meaning as Powter deftly weaves the threads of Donini's accomplishments with his failures; the book is not merely an account of three decades of serious climbing, because it also captures the bond of partnerships, family, and friendships in and out of the mountains. Powter takes us to the Alaska Range with Donini and Jack Tackle in a way that paints the relationship of these alpinists as chosen family in a majestic temple, where life can be felt in pure and simple terms.

For all the mountains have given to Donini, he has given back to the climbing community through his work with the American Alpine Club and other organizations. In Donini's words, “Our lives are short, and we need to live in the present and be all that we can be to the ones we care about; we also need to celebrate the love and beauty that those no longer here were able to give us.” This book is a gift, and my only complaint is the pages turned too fast.

—Kirsten Kremer

Images



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