

THE AVALANCHE BOOK

by Betsy Armstrong and Knox Williams.
Fulcrum, Inc., Golden, Colorado, 1986.
Reviewed by Daniel T. Blumstein

In the United States, an estimated 100,000 avalanches fall annually, catching roughly 140 people and killing about 17. If you are buried more than two feet, or for longer than thirty minutes, you have on average, a 50% chance of surviving. So if you go into the backcountry, it would be wise to know something about avalanches in order to avoid becoming a statistic. Betsy Armstrong (associate head of the Colorado Avalanche Information Center) and Knox Williams (head of the Colorado Avalanche Information Center) have written *The Avalanche Book*, a highly readable and extremely interesting introduction to avalanches and safety.

Beginning with a chilling summary of the 1982 Alpine Meadows disaster which killed seven people, Armstrong and Williams define terminology, and outline the where, when, and how avalanches interact with humans. The next chapter discusses the history of avalanches and humans. The discussion has a global perspective, but continually focuses on the U.S., and specifically on Colorado (where the authors are most experienced). Richard Armstrong wrote the third chapter discussing the physics of avalanches. Chapters on weather, route-finding and risk taking, what to do if you (swim!) or a friend (Don't go for help!) are caught in an avalanche, professional avalanche control, the legal system and avalanches, and a history of avalanche studies follow.

Together the authors had previously written *The Snowy Torrents: Avalanche Accidents in the United States 1972-79*, and Williams had compiled *The Snowy Torrents: Avalanche Accidents in the United States: 1967-71*. Their motto, "accidents teach lessons" is a wise one. *The Avalanche Book* is punctuated with numerous case studies in which some people survived while others died.

While reading *The Snowy Torrents* may scare you out of the backcountry, reading *The Avalanche Book* gives you information and suggestions to make winter backcountry travel safer. One of the best pieces of advice about stability evaluation is concisely stated on p. 109. "In the avalanche game, there really are no rules of thumb — which is itself a very good rule to remember... **exceptions kill.**"

The Avalanche Book is clearly written and states complex subjects simply. There are several distracting typographical errors which hopefully will be removed in subsequent printings. I would have liked a more detailed discussion on avalanche transceivers and their use. The emphasis on history and the analysis of previous accidents make this a fine introductory book. It is, however, no substitute for additional reading and actual experience studying snow and weather with more experienced people. Armstrong and Williams realize this and include an excellent bibliography and the names and addresses of numerous avalanche schools.

THE ABC OF AVALANCHE SAFETY

Second Edition.
by Edward R. LaChapelle.
The Mountaineers, Seattle, Washington, 1985.
\$3.85.
Reviewed by Daniel T. Blumstein

Ed LaChapelle knows about mountains and avalanches. The former head of the U.S. Forest Service Avalanche Center in Alta, Utah, an accomplished mountaineer, and the author of one of the first books on avalanche safety, LaChapelle has revised this book into an up-dated second edition.

This concise, small-format, paperback holds considerable information about avalanche terminology, snow physics, stability evaluation, safety rules, and rescues. It should be read and

Avoiding a crack in the snow, such as this one, can keep you out of the path of a deadly avalanche. It's wise to be familiar with avalanche warning signs, thoroughly discussed in the newly revised ABC OF AVALANCHE SAFETY by Ed LaChapelle.

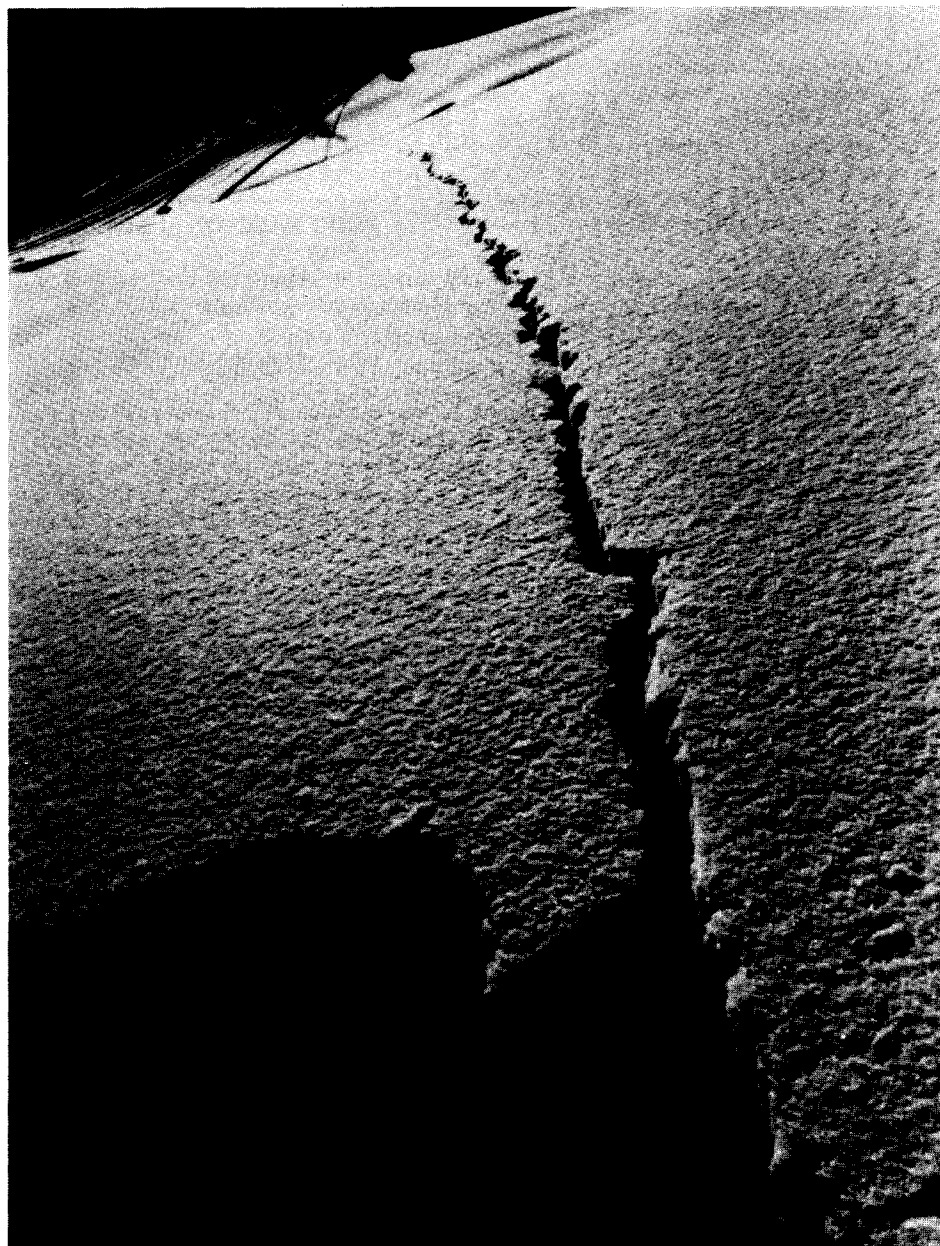
Photo courtesy of Mike Kennedy.

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then re-read each year before the snow begins to fall. While the book is filled with many rules of thumb, LaChapelle cautions that "the fuzzier the answers, the wider the safety margin that must be allowed in practical decision."

LaChapelle stresses constant evaluation while travelling in and around avalanche terrain. He discusses snow pit analysis and other ways to estimate snow stability that can be performed by

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anyone while in the backcountry. He ignores a detailed discussion on weather forecasting (see the U.S. Forest Service's *Avalanche Handbook* for an excellent discussion on mountain meteorology) and I think, he stresses the use of probing and other secondary rescue techniques a bit too much. But this discussion on avalanche transceivers is very good.

The book ends with several case histories which illustrate the necessity of avalanche forecasting as an ongoing process while one is in the backcountry. The size, price, and content of this book make it an excellent addition to a mountaineering library and should probably be read, understood, and then carried when venturing into avalanche terrain.

THE CLIMBERS GUIDE TO NORTH AMERICA — East Coast Rock Climbs by John Harlin III. Published by Chockstone Press, 1986. 397 pages with numerous black and white photographs, maps, line drawings and sketches. \$22.00.

Reviewed by Richard DuMais

East Coast Rock Climbs is the third volume in the *Climbers Guide to North America* series published by Chockstone Press. It is similar in format, size, and presentation to the two preceding volumes. As a group, these books present extensive coverage of most of the rock climbing areas of the country and are a very worthwhile source of reference.

As in preceding volumes, the amount of information contained in this book is substantial and represents an impressive amount of research and work by the author. Not only does Harlin describe the major areas of climbing in the eastern United States, but also previously lesser known areas there, and in eastern Canada are brought to prominence by his coverage.

The introductory section has much valuable information on matters such as travel, ratings, bibliographical information, general climbing and climbing considerations, and climbing history. Following this there are fifteen chapters, arranged geographically from south to north, each dealing with a different climbing area. Each area has coverage of its unique features, data pertinent to travel, camping, climbing, services and history. However much of this latter segment is a rehash of material covered in the main historical segment. A final chapter then provides a brief synopsis of another sixteen minor rock outcrops.

East Coast Rock Climbs should go a long way to dispel the attitude that the only good climbing in the eastern part of North America is in the Shawangunks. The most appealing sections of the book are those dealing with the southern areas. Indeed one of the strong points of *East Coast Rock Climbs* is its coverage of these previously less-known crags. Conversely, it is in the presentation of the traditionally more significant crags, especially the Gunks, that the book is weakest. Harlin's attempt to depict the Shawangunk climbs by topo-style drawings is a dismal failure. They are generally far too vague and it is immediately apparent that the complex nature of the Shawangunk cliffs do not lend themselves to this type of descriptive presentation.

The overall visual presentation created by *East Coast Rock Climbs* is a good one. It is profusely illustrated and the mix of scenic and action photos nicely complements the many standard descriptive views of faces and routes. The result is that they convey a good feel for the overall nature of the climbing depicted. Furthermore, the use of continuous dotted lines to show the routes is good, and a definite improvement on the random usage of various symbols in the preceding volume of this series. While a significant number of the pictures are excellent, the quality, both in selection and reproduction is rather uneven. This has resulted in many of the pictures being blurry or uninteresting, detracting from their ultimate impact.

As in the other two volumes of the series, a considerable number of line drawings by Adele Hammond have been sprinkled throughout the book. I felt that these constitute one of the book's highlights, being invariably excellent. They create a playful tone, and their subtle touch adds immensely to the attractiveness of the book.

In summary, despite any minor shortcomings, the book is well done and very worthwhile. By itself, and as a part of the whole series, this constitutes a major contribution to the information on the American climbing scene. It will serve as a most handy reference for visitors as well as eastern climbers looking for new vistas.

FIRST RAINS OF AUTUMN

by Aubrey Diem

Published by Aljon Print-Craft Limited, Kitchener, Ontario, Canada 1985, 115 pages.

Reviewed by Sally Moser

One thought furthest from most mountaineers' minds is that of using their outdoor skills to destroy other people or things. Yet in certain parts of Europe during World War II, the defensive manipulation of mountain hazards kept small pockets of the resistance alive and operational. One of the enclaves naturally formed by surrounding massifs is the Valle d'Aosta, situated in northwestern Italy. *First Rains of Autumn* provides the reader with a brief glimpse of the wartime struggles that occurred in this small mountain area.

The first rain precipitates an American flyer who bails out over the Po Valley after a bombing mission. Smuggled into a remote mountain inn to recuperate from his injuries, his long winter stay results in an affair with the beautiful innkeeper. While they are sharing body heat, the resistance movement rages in the frigid confines of the Alps. In one memorable sequence, a group of night raiders is chased up a pass by Nazis after destroying an iron ore cable car which fed the steel works. Breaking trail for themselves and their pursuers through several feet of snow is compounded by the Nazis shooting at them. This nightmare is suddenly terminated when three strategically tossed grenades launch a propitious avalanche which buries the pursuers.

Written in a narrative style and based on true incidents, Aubrey Diem's first novel weaves a fictional thread through historical events. Maps and photos enable the reader to locate the action.

The strength of the book is its description and chronicle of the wartime milieu, which evolved out of Diem's research for his master's thesis. He is obviously more comfortable writing the action scenes than the bedroom dialogue. The characters remain rather flat and are not fully developed. The dialogue is used as a vehicle for information more than to expand their personalities. However, this may make the point that they, like everyone during war, are merely pawns of greater forces and their aspirations matter little.

First Rains of Autumn has all the elements of a great adventure movie — romance, intrigue, chase scenes, mountain scenery and, as a bonus, historical significance. In these days of tension and aggression in various parts of the world, the reader would do well to be thankful that the major decision of the day is which mountain to climb and not which military installation to bomb.

"HARD MUSIC FOR HARD CLIMBERS" THE NEW VULGARIANS

Reviewed by Jeff Smoot



Just when you thought it was safe to go back to the crags... The "New Vulgarians" have pulled off a first, a 12-song, 30-minute recording of music in the finest garage band tradition, music "devoted entirely to the pastime and way of life we all know so well..." Well, sort of.

The recording, titled "Hard Music for Hard Climbers" comes across not so much as a fine collection of original songs about climbing, but as a revolt against climbing as a mainstream American activity. According to band member and spokesperson Jim MacLean, the songs are intended to "educate our fellow climbers about the despicable dangers that are threatening our sport." And what are these dangers? Hangdogging? Rappel-bolting? Not even close. According to the New Vulgarians, crass commercialism and athletic respectability — not to mention John Bachar and Ron Kauk being on T.V. — are to blame for what's happening to climbing. "With this tape," promises MacLean, "climbers everywhere will be inspired to even greater depths of profanity and degradation, enough to ensure that we will never have to endure a climbing Super Bowl, corporate sponsorship or public acceptance." To this end, there are three rather gratu-