ForeWord Reviews

Above All: Mount Whitney and California's Highest Peaks
Steve Roper
David Stark Wilson, photographer
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After naturalist John Muir ascended the tallest mountain in the continental United States, he wrote, “Well-seasoned limbs will enjoy the climb of 9,000 feet required by this direct route. But soft, succulent people should go the mule way.”

Muir had climbed California’s Mount Whitney on its more difficult eastern face. He’s one of several mountaineers whose adventures among the Sierra Nevada’s fifteen Fourteeners—those mountains measuring 14,000 feet and above—are recounted here by Roper, a climber himself who has written several books about these mountains since the early 1960s. His first person narrative of the early hearty souls who conquered Whitney and three other peaks is tucked between Wilson’s exhilarating photographs.

Wilson, a photographer for almost thirty years, is also a native of the area who climbed the mountains in his younger years and only recently returned to the pastime, “when I found a rope in my pack and a willing partner in my son.” The majority of the sixty-five photos are spread across two large pages, and Wilson captures many striking views at sunrise after hiking out and spending the night. In several of the shots following the text on Whitney, the snow-sprinkled brown, rocky terrain seems almost otherworldly. In another picture, switchback trails are visible, resembling tiny ant paths. A distant mountain is reflected in a clear mirror lake in a photo dated June 17, 2007. In one black and white photograph a solo climber stands aloft on a peak’s highest point. White Mount Peak, home to the nearly 5,000-year-old Bristlecone pines, is described as being easy to ascend, “if one is acclimatized and can handle a round-trip hike of fifteen miles in such a super-bright, skin-sizzling landscape.”

While all the photos are breathtaking in their scope, two of the best appear at the end of the section on Mount Shasta. Both plates 58 and 59 depict views which seem to go on forever. A map showing the mountains referenced and a glossary of terms associated with mountain climbing might have been useful for armchair travelers.

Those who enjoy history (especially of this specific region) and nature’s beauty will find this book both informative and a feast for the eyes.

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