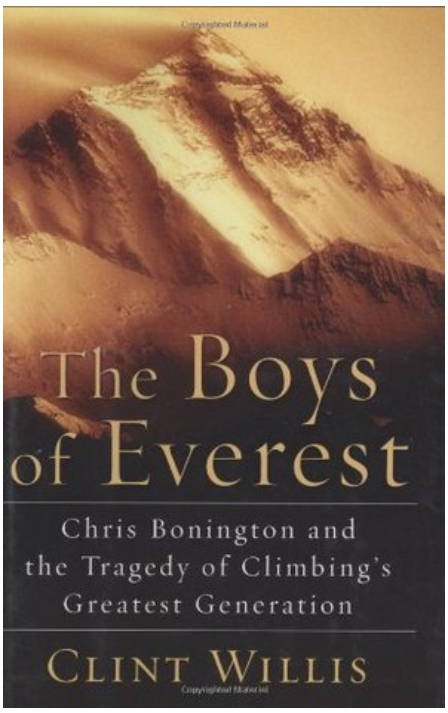

The Boys of Everest: Chris Bonington and the Tragedy of Climbing's Greatest Generation

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The Boys of Everest: Chris Bonington and the Tragedy of Climbing's Greatest Generation Clint Willis *The Boys of Everest* tells the story of a band of climbers who reinvented mountaineering during the three decades after Everest's first ascent. It is a story of tremendous courage, astonishing achievement and heart-breaking loss. Their leader was the boyish, fanatically driven Chris Bonington. His inner circle — which came to be know as Bonington's Boys — included a dozen who became climbing's greatest generation.

Bonington's Boys gave birth to a new brand of climbing. They took increasingly terrible risks on now-legendary expeditions to the world's most fearsome peaks. And they paid an enormous price for their achievements. Most of Bonington's Boys died in the mountains, leaving behind the hardest question of all: Was it worth it?

The Boys of Everest, based on interviews with surviving climbers and other individuals, as well as five decades of journals, expedition accounts, and letters, provides the closest thing to an answer that we'll ever have. It offers riveting descriptions of what Bonington's Boys found in the mountains, as well as an understanding of what they lost there.

The Boys of Everest: Chris Bonington and the Tragedy of Climbing's Greatest Generation Details

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From Reader Review The Boys of Everest: Chris Bonington and the Tragedy of Climbing's Greatest Generation for online ebook

Judy says

After Everest was conquered in 1953, it seemed like there was nothing left to accomplish in the climbing world. However, a ever-changing group of young British climbers pressed even greater limits by climbing more difficult mountains and taking impossible routes on mountains already summitted on easier trails. A few of the climbers lived to old age, but according to this book most of them died on an 8,000 meter peak somewhere on the other side of the world.

I have read and enjoyed many other books about the world's greatest mountain climbers. While the subject matter was fascinating, I felt like this book could have been so much better than it was. The focus on so many climbers made none of them seem very significant, and I had an impossible time keeping them straight, especially in this audio version. There were also details of dozens of climbs, again making it hard for me to distinguish one from another. More than most audio books, I had a hard time keeping my focus on what I was listening to. However, the thing that bugged me the most was the omniscient narration. The author could see into the thoughts of every one of the climbers, and this became especially annoying as he described their innermost hopes and dreams and their deepest sorrows as they died. I would have preferred a more scholarly approach more clearly based on interviews and the climbers' own writing. This had the definite feel of an "unauthorized biography."

Kelly says

This was is an excellent read. I would highly recommend it to anyone with an interest in the history of mountaineering

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Peter L says

The Boys of Everest is about Mount Climbing after Mt Everest is climbed.

Book relates & defines 2 ways to climb & the struggles of each. Big English expeditions with lots of porters vs only a few climbers on a shoe string budget. But no matter the method there is still much danger.

Matt says

I recently returned from mountaineering school in the Cascades. I went in the hope of familiarizing myself with the techniques and skills to be a competent follower of a guided trip up some larger mountains, such as Rainier, Aconagua, or Denali. The mountains inspired me to know the history of mountaineering. Amazon recommended "The Boys of Everest."

I'd heard of Mallory and Hilary, of course, but never of Chris Bonington and his "boys" (including Hamish

McInnes, Don Whillans, Ian Clough, Joe Tasker, Peter Boardman, Doug Scott, etc.) Apparently, according to Clint Willis, they revolutionized climbing. I don't know how, because the book doesn't give a great deal of context. What it does, mainly, is give a step by step account of seemingly every climb these guys did, from the Bonatti Pillar and the Eiger's North Face to K2 and Everest.

Willis gives the briefest of biographical sketches (and even briefer skethces of the women left behind), then jumps into the expeditions and the minutiae of some of the world's most famous climbs. At first, the detail is thrilling. You are there, turn by turn and step by step as the climbers cross glaciers, lay anchors, and tap in pitons. You get a sense of the sheer output of energy needed to get to the top. After 500 pages, though, it just gets repetitive. One excruciatingly difficult climb blurs into another.

Throughout the climb, Willis intersperses the thoughts of his characters at certain points along the trek. The detail of the thoughts is almost novelistic, and you think, geez, these guys either left behind great memoirs, letters and diaries, or Willis scored some sweet interviews. Then, however, Willis starts relating the thoughts of dead men: what one climber felt as he fell off a cliff; what another sensed as he was buried by an avalanche. No one could know what these men felt in their last moments. They died alone and left no remembrances or witnesses. It is clear that Willis is either inferring from some other source, or making stuff up; however, he never goes to the trouble of telling the reader: "hey, I'm speculating." This is questionably ethical and calls everything else into question. The most glaring example of this is a reconstruction of Joe Tasker's and Peter Boardman's deaths near the Three Pinnacles of Everest's Northeast Ridge. Willis recounts the episode factually, as though he'd interviewed God and God told him the entire sad tale. Willis writes that Tasker gave up, Boardman tried to help him, then gave up too. The fact is, no one knows what happened to these two men. Tasker's body was never found.

When I go to the mountains, everything else slips away. You are reduced to the primitive, fundamental aspects of life. You expend a great deal of energy melting snow for water; cooking food; staying dry; staying warm; keeping hydrated and covered. From dawn till dusk, you are moving with purpose, because there are always things to be done, and everything takes longer at altitude. You don't think of your life back home: the lost loves, your finances, your job, politics, sports. These things are pushed away. Indeed, you can't think of these things, because if you lose focus for even a moment, you can kick a bad step and find yourself sliding down a glacier. This is why I go to the mountains. Hilary put it best: "It is not the mountains we conquer, but ourselves."

Willis spends a lot of time trying to explain why his characters went to the mountains over and over, leaving behind their wives and girlfriends, often leaving their friends on the mountains. It's an honorable attempt, but his rationales are too ephemeral and abstract and fall short of Hilary's assessment. Indeed, an epigram at the start of the book concisely states what Willis takes 500 pages to do: "Men who go to mountains are half in love with themselves, and half in love with oblivion."

The book could've used a lot more explanations of climbing tools and techniques. To fully enjoy it, you either need to do further reading or have a secondary source at hand. Willis never really explains what he means by pitons, prusik knots, running belays, and the like. I knew most of what he was talking about from my own limited experience, but I definitely could've used a little expansion on the foundations of my knowledge.

This story is a litany of dubious triumph and real tragedy. If you've never been to a mountain top, or had that desire, you won't understand what made these men go, even as they die one by one in the pursuit. Reading this book won't solve that riddle. However, if you can understand what drives these men, before you even crack the cover, then you will be treated to a strong retelling of some famous climbs (excepting, of course,

Willis's recounting of their deaths, which can only be based on assumption and speculation).

Anna Adolfsson says

This could've used a whole lot of editing.
The adventures are all grand, but Willis adds imaginary details to spice it up, with the result of me constantly going "Wtf Willis. This is to stretch it way to far."
In the last 200pages, one climb blends with all the previous ones. I found it boring to a ridiculous extent.
Adding to this, the non-male characters are shallow and unexplored.
Etc etc.
Will never read anything by Willis again.

Karen says

I liked this book because it gave me more detail on the technical aspects of climbing than most mountaineering tales do. On the other hand, it was odd that the author put thoughts and actions into the heads of dead men, trying to imagine, I guess, what they were thinking and feeling when they died climbing. Of course, we'd all like to know, but it takes it a bit far to actually imagine those thoughts and write them into the story as if they're part of the (non-fiction, supposedly) narrative.

Also, I have to admit I lost track every now and then of what mountain was being climbed ... was it Everest? K2? Annapurna? Dunagiri? Another? They were all climbed in this book, some more than once. I did especially enjoy the sections about climbs in the Alps ... those are rarely written about these days. The technical climbing is evidently quite difficult there, but because the altitude is less than the Himalayas, they are less written about in the past few decades. Less glory for the climbers, I guess.

Anyhow, if anyone is reading this review and can suggest other good mountain climbing tales, let me know. I've read a lot of them, but am always looking for more.

Ross Leblanc says

This author is a douchebag. Let's focus on his picture in the back of the book: Wisping long hair with flashes of professorial gray just north of a shit-eating grin. A smart crew-neck sweater and pair of jeans just so you know he's casual-cool. And to top it off he's sitting, almost seductively, on a pile of logs so we all know he's an outdoorsman. Who chopped that wood Clint? I would've respected him more if he had been winking. It's clear to me he really wants to wink. And his name is Clint. Strike 8.

I don't trust him. He writes in too much detail of things which happened 20/30/40 years ago. There is no way he could know the exact sentiments or foot-placement on a non-event of a climb that happened in 1956. It became incredibly difficult to believe the rest of the book and it became more and more ridiculous.

I agree with what everyone else criticises this book for: he writes the thoughts of people just before they die.

For example:

"His grief packs his mouth and his throat and freezes his face and neck. He struggles for breath, for coherence. He made a mistake and he is ready to forgive it, but there is no apparent need. He's grateful for that but he is distracted. He is swimming in a blue, blue light - it reminds him of something - and the snow keeps falling; the flakes touch the ocean and vanish." -Willis' description of what Mick Burke thought before he died alone at the top of Everest.

Good fiction but Clint has written a non-fiction book so the writing is disingenuous at best and I'd argue that it's disrespectful.

Furthermore I feel the book is entirely negative. It has an entirely negative vibe. Clint, motivated but hesitant to take on an endeavour idolizing those who have accomplished much more than he ever has on a mountain, sat pen in hand and forcefully decided to portray that each climber has the same love-hate relationship with climbing that leans more towards the 'hate' side(see what I did there? I "Clinted"). Perhaps, but hate won't drive you 28,000+ feet up a mountain. There is beauty in the struggle that Clint misses.

Not a fan of Clint.

Clint(just like saying it).

Elmarcel says

Mostly in the context of how you would want to read climbing books, and the other available literature.

There is a lot of "train of thought" and "imagery" in this book. Which is weird, as the author was not present, and doesn't have this info from the actual climbers. He is a climber, luckily, so it isn't all made up. The only problem is that his descriptions are hilariously bad, to the point of becoming comical. I wish I had it on hand to make some comments. It's a painful, painful read. Read any other climbing book, plz.

The only reason I got anywhere with this book was because I was confined to the lavatory, and it was the only one I had.

Eric_W says

As someone who has never, will never, and wants never, to climb even a hill without a path and ice cream shop every mile, I remain somewhat perplexed by those who feel they must endure freezing cold, ridiculous food, tea all the time (if you’re British), and the constant risk of death. But these psychotics are great fun to read about. I’ve read several mountaineering accounts, and not just for the feats of climbing, but the internal and external personality conflicts, as well.

One wonders in books like this just how much of the internal thinking reported can be relied upon. One Amazon reviewer who claims to be a moderately successful climber himself (I certainly can be no judge)

echoes my concern. “...shows to be invented material on thoughts and motivations of the people about whom he writes. I am suspicious of this practice and it may well be that it says more about our Clint than it does about our Chris.” *

In the aftermath of Tony’s death, one of women at the base camp notes she had begun to “fear people who didn’t know any easier way to be happy.” That certainly sums up one attitude toward these overgrown children. Willis doesn’t call them “boys” lightly.

Climbing techniques were changing and Chris Bonington, a constant in Willis’ book and known as a more than competent climber and organizer, soon realized that the techniques of mountaineering had changed. The practice of large groups with multiple base camps, lots of supplies, many sherpas, fixed ropes to ease passage between base camps, was losing favor to smaller, lighter attacks on summits, more in the tradition of Alpine climbers.

The larger question is whether the author gets it “right” when he discusses motivations and the ethos of climbing. I suspect he does, but have no way of knowing. Nevertheless, this book is intriguing and riveting, a real page-turner.

Audiobook ably read by James Adams

*Ref: http://www.amazon.com/review/R293TC13...

Wayne says

I had to quit this book. It became incredibly boring. A play by play of every step of a climb. It became repetitive and I could guess what the author was about to describe. Worst part was author describing the final moments and thoughts of climbers before their death as if they were facts. Unacceptable!

James says

At best this is a "non fiction novel"

too much is fantasy made up by the author

Stephanie says

This book took forever to read because it never develops the characters -- who are real people -- to the point where you can actually distinguish them apart from each other and care about them. Essentially, the book details several climbs, in which someone feels spurned for not being invited, tension rises among the climbers while on the climb, and then at least one person dies. It's challenging to grasp the passage of time between climbs and they all start blending into one. The accounts are based on interviews the author conducted of surviving climbers, research at Britain's climbing clubs, and in some cases, the climbers contemporaneous journals. The weirdest parts about the book are when it describes several of the climbers

last moments and depicts their thoughts. Huh? It's as though the author couldn't figure out whether to write non-fiction, memoir, or fiction. I think any one of the expeditions would have been enough for a book, but this was too disjointed to really enjoy, and it's not because I read it only while I was on airplanes this spring.

Nigel says

I've been reading climbing books for many years now and found that they can be rather variable. Books on Everest will tend to crop up quite often as Everest is perceived as the big challenged (kind of ignoring the many mountains that are actually harder in many ways).

While this is called the "Boys of Everest" and does focus to a substantial degree on the highest mountain it really is a book about a climbing generation - Bonington's boys. This is not a clearly defined group of people but those who tended to climb together quite often and were arguably the best UK climbers of a generation. I found that this perspective and from someone outside the group but with real climbing knowledge, worked well for me looking at different expeditions and mountains over maybe 25/30 years. In particular this book covers a real change in approach to climbing moving from large supported expeditions into far small alpine style summit attempts.

The stories are movingly told at times, the dead, the dying and the survivors all have their parts to play. As I've often found being a successful climber may well not make you a real team player and some of the characters do seem quite flawed as other books have suggested. If I have any complaint it would be that I think the author ran out of steam in the last 25% or thereabouts of the book. The level of detail diminished and became rather brief. However I'd recommend it to anyone with an interest in this field of human endeavour - interesting insights.

Laura says

Interesting subject. Very comprehensive and detailed on the efforts of these adventurers. However, I was frustrated by the author's constant need to wax poetic on the thoughts of dying men. The presumption and creepiness of these lengthy monologues was off-putting as was the nasty swallowing sound the narrator kept making.

Tyler says

My dad gave me this book last year for christmas (it was just as much for him as it was for me), he loved it and I hated it. This follows a revolutionary group of climbers along many trips of some of their best climbs and what happens to them along the years. If you are looking to read a climbing book that is not about everest or k2 this is a very good book. The Eiger in Switzerland plays and important role as well as others, but I can't say that I really enjoyed the book, although others have.
