

Everest Mountain Guide: The remarkable story of a Kiwi mountaineer

By Guy Cotter, Pottton & Burton, October 2023, hardcover, 260 pages, \$49.99. Reviewed by Peter Laurenson, New Zealand Alpine Club.

The title of Guy Cotter's new book, *Everest Mountain Guide: The remarkable story of a Kiwi mountaineer*, is no exaggeration. It makes sense though, with Cotter's pedigree, explained all too briefly in Chapter One, 'It's calling me'.

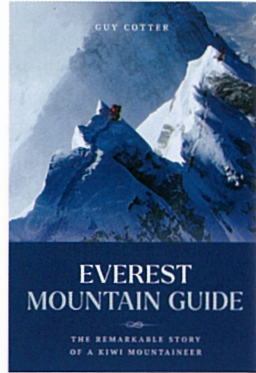
His parents took their kids into the hills from when Cotter was five years old. By 11 he'd climbed Mt Rolleston with his father Ed and younger brother Anton. 'From the age of 12, I'd often catch a train on Friday nights after school into the mountains inland from Christchurch and wander the hills and climb peaks in the Arthur's Pass region until Sunday evening [...] Most of the time I wasn't sure my parents were even aware I was gone.' At 15, Cotter was invited by a young Rob Hall to join him on a 240-kilometre alpine traverse from Arthur's Pass to Mt Cook. At 17 he made his first of many ascents of Aoraki Mt Cook, and the following year he headed overseas in search of greater challenges.

Cotter's relentless progression to become one of the most capable and accomplished mountaineers on earth unfolds from that foundation. In his twenties he trained through the International Federation of Mountain Guides to be a qualified guide. At 29 he was a mountaineering instructor for the New Zealand Army Adventurous Training Centre. 'At some point I recognised that, if I continued on this path where I was climbing progressively harder and more dangerous routes, I may push myself too far and become another gloomy mountaineering statistic.' His training enabled him to morph from climbing randomly on intuition to a

process of considered judgement, something that would set his future guiding on Mt Everest apart from many of the other guiding companies that began appearing in the 1990s.

If *Everest Mountain Guide* is Cotter's memoir, then it is a selective one, because Chapters Two to Sixteen focus almost entirely on his life on and around Mt Everest, guiding and running the guiding company Adventure Consultants (AC). I would have been very happy to read plenty more about his early mountaineering as well as more recent exploits on mountains beyond Everest (he has climbed six of the world's other 8,000 metre peaks and completed the 'seven summits' challenge). That said, his coverage of his Everest years could hardly be more fascinating, especially as it is a highly informed and open account from the heart of the Everest guiding fraternity.

Cotter was there from the beginning when Rob Hall and Gary Ball established AC in 1991. By 1992 he was a novice guide for AC, reaching the summit that year for his first of what would become five times by 2018, when attempting the 'Triple Crown'. As the chapters unfold, all the most notable events on Everest since 1992 are recounted: the deaths of clients and guides; the tragic death in 1996 of Rob Hall near the South Summit, which led to Cotter buying AC and leading it from that point; the implications of the explosion of guided climbs on the mountain; the devastating avalanches in 2014 and 2015 that culminated in a shift in the mindset of the local Sherpa guides, porters and support staff; Cotter's almost successful attempt to be first to achieve the triple crown of Nuptse, Lhotse and Everest in one season; and the arrival of Covid-19. There is no point in



me expanding any further on these events. You should read Cotter's words, a uniquely informed and thoughtful account from a man who has grown to love and respect the Khumbu environment and the local Sherpas and other Nepalese mountain people he employs and works with.

I felt at times that Cotter's account is understated, but there are glimpses of a wry humour and sense of fun. From a small tent on the South Col with mountaineering legend Ed Viesturs: '[...] "I'll film you." When he said "rolling", I leapt out of the tent, stark naked except for my boots [...] and ran around the col in a circle, yahooping loudly as I circumnavigated back to our tent door and threw myself in [...] Oh, and by the footage Ed took, it wasn't that warm a day!'

Everest Mountain Guide builds a picture of a complete, dedicated and considerate professional. Occasionally he shares more personal opinions: 'Ed [Viesturs] and I started talking about how people like to make claims about being first this, first that, and how Everest was a perfect springboard for many wannabe heroes.'

I found the final chapter, '2020–2023. On reflection', the most revealing of Cotter: 'During my tenure as a guide on Mt Everest, the world has changed and while I always thought mountaineering and Everest were immune from the wanton idiosyncrasies of everyday human foibles, it eventually arrived at the mountain.'

On his most recent ascent of Everest in 2018: 'A woman was being filmed by her Sherpa as she climbed. I requested that they let us past but the pair made it very difficult [...] It was a behaviour I couldn't understand. What pleasure would you get from holding someone back from going at their pace? I could imagine the film footage, with a commentary that she was 'leading' all other climbers to the summit. Frustrated at the arrogance of their blocking tactics I gave them a barrage as I went past.'

Everest Mountain Guide: The remarkable story of a Kiwi mountaineer is a typically high-quality publication from Pottton & Burton and features a small selection of impressive images that help to clarify some of the text. For anyone interested in Himalayan mountaineering, guided climbing, or simply taking on a huge challenge, this is a must-read. Cotter sums it up nicely: 'If we stay the course, the future may align with our plans and expectations, but it may not, and that defines the adventure of life.'

Tongariro National Park: An artist's field guide

By Desmond Bovey, Pottton & Burton, November 2023, softcover, 200 pages, \$39.99. Reviewed by Pip Lynch, New Zealand Alpine Club.

Kiwi-born Desmond Bovey's book arose from a personal project of reconnection on his return to Aotearoa after time spent overseas, and grew into a combined sketchbook and nature tour guide of central North Island landscapes. It combines a personal travel narrative with a sumptuous collection of nature illustrations, nature notes and social history. The effect is a satisfying immersion in the landscape of Tongariro National Park.

Five main chapters cover three landscape types – forests, open country and water – and two over-arching themes of landscapes and species. In my initial flick through, the sub-title of Chapter Five, 'Who lives here? Whose guests are we?' caught my eye. The questions form a recurring theme throughout the book as Bovey entices readers to linger longer and look closer at the natural environment of Tongariro National Park. He invites us to bring an artist's eye to our park visit, and his illustrations whet the appetite for the sensory feast that will be our reward.

Bovey's book is as refreshing in its content as it is visually beautiful. As a nature guide, the book provides information on Tongariro National Park's particular ecology and history. However, unlike many excellent guides – Alan Mark's 2012 *Above*