

Some Good Reads

and pace of this extraordinary first novel. The only missing item I would have found convenient to have included in the book was a map, sketch or photo of the Northeast Ridge of Everest, showing the climbing route and camps of the 1924 expedition. However, this is probably not a serious oversight nowadays, since these are readily available on the internet. ■

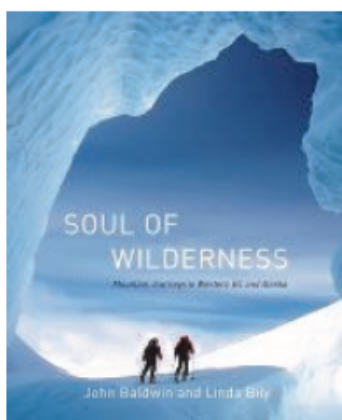
Soul of Wilderness: Mountain Journeys in Western BC and Alaska

By John Baldwin and Linda Bily

Published by Harbour Publishing, 2015

Reviewed by [Ron Dart](#),

ACC - Vancouver Section



There has been an unfortunate yet understandable tendency within Canadian mountaineering literature and photography to front stage the Rockies and subordinate BC's Coastal Mountains to secondary status. There has also been the tendency to valorize rock jocks, first ascents (on ever more difficult and trying routes and pitches) and minimize a more artistic and contemplative yet equally competent approach to

mountaineering. The sheer breakthrough beauty of *Soul of Wilderness* is that "mountain journeys in western BC and Alaska" are front staged and the "soul of the wilderness" rather than a simple literal approach to the mountains is the core of this burnished gold book—truly artists, mountaineers, contemplatives and photographers wed and knitted together in this A+ keeper of a mountaineering classic.

This wordsmith of a text and exquisite photographs evoke and draw the curious and keen reader into both the form and soul of the mountains. John and Linda should be heartily congratulated for a pure diamond of a book that, simply put, has no competitors and would be hard to surpass—it is truly the west coast mountaineering book of 2015 to purchase, read and inwardly and meditatively digest. The expansive photographs, for the most part, cover treks on glaciers, high alpine traverses and fine sloping snowfields. There are a few photographs that span the mountain seasons, but most of the visual delights in *Soul of Wilderness* have been on ski trips in western BC and Alaska.

There are 10 chapters in this must-buy book: 1) Footsteps in the Wilderness, 2) Wilderness at our Doorstep, 3) Where the Ridges Run Wild, 4) Whales and Icefields, 5) Gentle Wilderness, 6) Ski Wild, 7) Thirty Years on Ice, 8) Both Sides of the Stikine, 9) Touch the Wild and 10) Soul of Wilderness. There is often a graphic and, at times, subtle transition from urban to rural to wilderness to a wildness ethos—John and Linda have tracked

the trail well and made it abundantly clear why wilderness and wildness are essential for a sane and centred soul. The soul of the wilderness is, in essence, oxygen for the human soul: without such oxygen, our souls shrink, wither and, eventually, die.

The BC mountaineering community has a rich line and lineage. Dick Culbert took mountaineering to new levels in his creative years. John Clarke told yet a fuller tale. John Baldwin and Linda Bily very much stand on the solid and innovative shoulders of Dick Culbert and John Clarke and *Soul of Wilderness: Mountain Journeys in Western BC and Alaska* amply illustrates why this is the indisputable case. ■

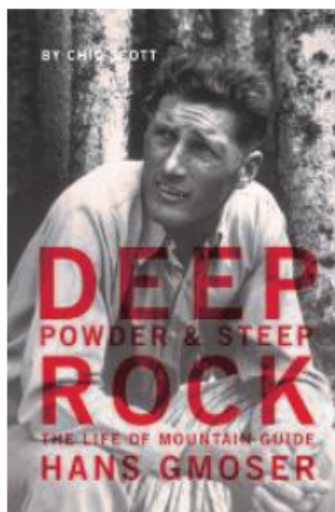
Deep Powder & Steep Rock: The Life of Mountain Guide Hans Gmoser

By Chic Scott

Published by Assiniboine, 2009

Reviewed by [Mike Nash](#),

Caledonia Ramblers



First published in hard cover by Assiniboine Publishing and reviewed by Ron Dart in the Fall/Winter 2009 *Cloudburst*, the new Rocky Mountain Books edition of *Deep Powder & Steep Rock* is a well-crafted and lavishly illustrated book that is a nice read and an essential piece of Canadian mountaineering history. With 346 pages, good end sections, hundreds of black & white photographs, plus 32 colour pages, it is remarkable value at \$25. Biographer and mountaineer, Chic Scott, has done credit to his subject, embedding

Gmoser's story in the historic detail that Scott excels at.

Many think of Hans Gmoser as the 'father of heliskiing,' but as *Deep Powder & Steep Rock* makes clear, he was much more than that, with significant climbs and hard expeditions to his credit. In 1958, he guided the third ascent of Mount Alberta; in 1959 he led the second ascent of the East Ridge of Mount Logan involving hundreds of kilometres of self-propelled access, staged from the Alaska Highway; and in 1963 he led a near-deadly first ascent of Denali's Wickersham Wall, described in the book as "probably the highest snow and ice wall in the world." Gmoser pushed hard, with dissensions not uncommon in the hard-core groups that he led, but he usually patched things up by the end of each trip and invariably enjoyed good loyalty from most of his associates.

Trailblazers and entrepreneurs like Gmoser seldom get things done without some controversy, and one area where he was criticized by some mountaineers was his contribution to the

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FMCBC grant funds have been used to upgrade trails, install bridges, improve huts, purchase tools and run community events. Learn about our recent grant funded projects on **page 11** of this issue.

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commercialization of the backcountry. He justifies it, as in his reply to Fred Beckey on pages 275-277, but not always convincingly. He appears conflicted within himself, and in hindsight he might have thought twice before opening the heliski Pandora's Box, but having done so he pressed on to do it as well as he could. Gmoser was in the right place at the right time with his interest in mountain ski touring converging with the advent of jet helicopters, and we are perhaps fortunate that it was he and not others who pioneered heliskiing and helihiking in British Columbia.

A founding member of the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides, Gmoser is described on the book's cover as "the most influential mountaineer in Canada in the last fifty years," just as his hero and fellow Austrian Conrad Kain had been in the first half of the 20th Century. Just 20 years after he arrived in Canada as a penniless immigrant from post-war Austria, Gmoser guided then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau on a climb of Bugaboo Spire. Despite Gmoser's conservative political views, he and Trudeau respected each other and appeared to get on well. Later, in his heliski business, he hosted prominent clients from around the world, including European royalty. He received many honours later in his life, including the Order of Canada.

I enjoyed a beer with Gmoser 25 years ago after a focus group meeting in Richmond at the end of the BC government's Commercial Backcountry Recreation Policy process where I was representing the FMCBC. Gmoser didn't join us until after lunch as he had been heliskiing on the other side of the province during the morning. I remember his commanding presence in the meeting room, and his friendly and unassuming manner in the pub afterwards—traits that come through in the book.

The book has an unusual format in that instead of many chapters it is divided into five sections, each covering a major phase of Gmoser's life: *Hard Years in Austria*; *A Mountain Guide in Canada*; *The Great Communicator*; *Heli-skiing Takes Off*; and *Elder Statesman*. As a communicator, Gmoser made many feature-length dramatic films of backcountry skiing and expeditionary climbs for more than a decade. He toured and personally narrated these films all over North America at events that, for many, were the social highlight of the year, much as the "Best of Banff" tour is today.

A quote from a Gmoser article in the 1961 Canadian Alpine Journal should resonate for anyone who has skied the deep powder in BC's backcountry: "A man should have wings to carry him where his dreams go but sometimes a pair of skis makes a good substitute." A fitting epitaph. ■

52 Best Day Trips from Vancouver [4th Edition]

By Jack Christie

Published by Greystone Books, 2015

Reviewed by Dave Wharton,
Valley Outdoor Association



That this is the 4th edition of this popular book testifies to its ongoing relevance in a world increasingly dominated by online guides. While this book may have, at times, little to offer for those who have called Greater Vancouver home for a good part of their lives or for those who are committed to particular outdoor pursuits with no interest in expanding their horizons, this book will have considerable appeal to many other user groups.

This book will be particularly valuable to those who are new to the area and who are looking for a general guide to what the region has to offer for the non-motorized outdoor recreational user. This guide will also have value for any looking to become involved in outdoor recreation, but not yet sure which