



Mountaineering Tourism

Author: Maher, Patrick

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Mountaineering Tourism

Edited by Ghazali Musa, James Higham, and Anna Thompson-Carr.
Abingdon, United Kingdom:
Routledge, 2015. xxvi + 358 pp.
Hardcover. US\$ 145.00. ISBN 978-1-138-78237-2.

As with most niche areas of tourism, within mountain and mountaineering tourism there exist a few early research works, then a long hiatus, and then a resurgence of scholarship. Key early works would include the ones by Godde et al (2000) or Beedie and Hudson (2003), both of which are now 10–15 years old. In the intervening years, there has been a general growth in publicity for mountain regions and the study of mountains beyond tourism. These developments have included the International Year of Mountains 2002, when some of the early tourism research projects arose, and the growth in mountain-related conferences, such as Perth I, II, and III in Scotland (www.perth.uhi.ac.uk/mountainstudies), Thinking Mountains in Canada (<http://www.mountains.ualberta.ca>), and the upcoming Sustainable Summits in New Zealand (<http://sustainable-summits.com>). These events are supported by a number of centers and institutes. Placing mountain studies in front of a global audience will also soon include a massive open online course (MOOC) (<https://uofa.ualberta.ca/courses/mountains-101>).

This is the context in which *Mountaineering Tourism* has come to exist. Musa, Higham, and Thompson-Carr are well-recognized tourism scholars, and they have assembled a team of 30 additional authors to provide comprehensive coverage of the topic. The text is a compilation of 17 chapters and 9 case studies, edited around a structure as theorized by Weed and Bull (2004). Thus, the editors present mountaineering

tourism as an interplay among activity, people, and place. This tripartite segmentation shapes the rest of the text, and a number of full chapters and additional case studies are presented under each heading. The interplay, where the book uses the terminology “mountaineering tourism,” which one might see as just an activity, versus “mountain tourism”—a title that might focus more on place as a destination—is further confused by the title of another recent book (Richins and Hull 2016). Even within the various chapters, some authors refer to mountain recreation or mountain trekking, while others discuss only high-altitude mountaineering, further confusing the language of the landscape.

Part I focuses on “Activity” (chapters 2–6 and case studies 1–3). Chapters 2 and 3 set the scene in terms of geography and history. While both are interesting reads, neither provides a comprehensive overview: Chapter 2 provides a descriptive treatment of mountain trekking (versus mountaineering), and, although chapter 3 does provide a brief global history, this is through a decidedly Anglo-European lens. Following these chapters, the editors provide 2 case studies. Again, while interesting to read, they seem out of place. Case study 1 showcases mountain recreation in New Zealand, and, although it has a historical focus, it seems dated and includes no references since the mid-1990s. Case study 2 shares the geographical diversity of mountain tourism with experiences from Taiwan. Chapters 4–6 explore the concepts of wilderness and mountaineering experience, guided mountaineering, and the place of alpine clubs. Each starts with a specific national context (New Zealand or Canada) and then attempts to branch out from there. Chapter 6 is an enjoyable read, perhaps because it follows how alpine club culture is developed using the published word. Case study 3 reveals the narrative of business owners

engaged with guiding in New Zealand’s Southern Alps.

Part II shifts the focus to “People” (chapters 7–11 and case studies 4 and 5). Chapter 7 reveals the tremendous level of commitment necessary to climb. It draws from a broader study of narrative construction of self among a population of New Zealand mountaineers. Chapter 8 discusses the typical gendered landscape of mountaineering narratives and mountaineering media, providing an excellent highlight of where gender fits in the discussion of culture, guiding, mountaineer development, and such. The most refreshing aspect of this chapter is its simple honesty—asking the reader to appreciate the challenges versus shying away from them. In chapter 9, we are treated to an interesting historical and theoretical treatise on mountaineering motivations and satisfaction, followed by a case study on mountaineering flow experience. Neither of these pieces offers much empirical grounding, and, as a reader, I would have appreciated more direct examination; research that focused on specific motivational questions, such as why do mountaineers attempt the Seven Summits? or satisfaction-based questions, such as: what has completing all the Munros (Scottish mountains above 3000 feet) provided to future aspirations? Chapter 10 provides additional theoretical perspective, touching on the author’s own experience in Bolivia, while chapter 11 is populated by stories and personalities in Peru. With case study 5 sharing responsible behavior of climbers in Borneo, the end of Part 2 offers greater global coverage; however, it all seems thrown together. There are large portions of theory connected with varying examples of practice. Overall, there is a lack of flow because the chapters and case studies are not coherently introduced or concluded.

Part III is about “Place” (chapters 12–16 and case studies 6–9) and begins with the type of chapter I was expecting throughout. Chapter 12

offers a focused examination of one issue: the environmental impacts of mountaineering. Table 12.1 exposes a thorough meta-analysis of studies from around the world, which then leads to discussion under a very clear umbrella for mountaineering and “related activities.” Case study 6 immediately follows and seems out of place. Although interesting, it is a short statement on the manner in which mountaineering may need to adapt to climate change. It feels as though it simply throws a critical topic of our time on top of mountaineering. Case study 7 would have been a more appropriate addition to chapter 12, as it shares a specific environmental impact of mountaineering in a specific context. The flow of chapters 13 and 14 into case studies 8 and 9 provides such structure. Chapter 13 gives a clear introduction to risk and commodification in the Mount Everest region of Nepal, followed up with a case study on Sherpa culture and climbing ethics. Chapter 14 provides a personal narrative on the ethical use of mountain guides in Africa, followed up with a case study on the working conditions of porters on Kilimanjaro. Chapter 15, like chapter 12, is a very nice overarching perspective on mountaineering with global scope

and covers the broad topic of health and safety issues. Chapter 16 offers a loose conclusion to this part of the book largely because its topic is management, and the practice and limitations of such often encapsulate a link to place.

The concluding chapter provides a well-thought-out summary of the chapters and case studies presented in the book. The editors reiterate the variety of challenges facing mountaineering as a form of adventure tourism and offer a critical eye toward adaptation, entrepreneurial innovation, and informed management as necessities for the future. This book is not an end point but rather a stone in the path toward better understanding tourism in the many mountainous regions of our planet.

Overall, this book aims to provide a “critical treatment of the possibilities and pitfalls of mountaineering tourism” (p xxvi). I would suggest that it succeeds. However, one should not see this book as all-encompassing. Like most edited texts, it lacks a coherent thread, and could use some additional introductions and conclusions within each of the 3 parts. It does provide a valuable resource for anyone seeking a glimpse into some of

mountaineering’s history, geography, guided experiences, alpine clubs, relationships to the environment and local communities, risk, ethics, and safety. This book reopens the door toward a scholarship of mountaineering tourism as the study of mountains reaches higher altitude. Yet, as with other niche tourism areas, it is not alone (see Richins and Hull 2016).

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AUTHOR

Patrick Maher

pat_maher@cbru.ca

Department of Community Studies, Sport and Physical Activity Leadership, Cape Breton University, Sydney, Nova Scotia B1P 6L2, Canada

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