

# Preface

This book charts the story of land use and change in Australia's highest mountains, the Australian Alps.

In any age, mountains exercise a strong hold on people's interest. My own awareness of them goes back to my mother, an armchair traveller who read and collected climbing and exploring books. She connected me to legendary mountain places: the Eiger and its White Spider, Masherbrum and K2, Dhaulagiri and Kanchenjunga, the Tibetan and Antarctic Plateaus.

I also read accounts by people who explored mountainous places and their cultures: Alexandra David-Neel, Francis Younghusband, Heinrich Harrer, Fosco Maraini, Mildred Cable and Francesca French, Wilfred Thesiger, Andre Migot, John Muir and Henry David Thoreau, George Schaller and Peter Matthiessen.

Of course mountains involve mountaineers, so I followed the exploits of the British climbers Whymper, Mallory, Shipton, Tilman, Bonnington; the French climbers Terray, Lachenal and Rebuffat; and the Americans, Galen Rowell and the Whittakers. The first film I saw was of course *The Conquest of Everest*, in 1954. Much later, in France in 1969, I went to see Maurice Herzog hobble onto a stage to recount his Annapurna adventure.

I knew virtually nothing about Australian mountains then. I lived on the flat dry plains of the Murray–Darling Basin and the nearest 'peaks' were the Warby Ranges (~400 m) to the south and Mount Gwynne (~300 m) to the north in NSW.

Incongruously, we studied *Glaciers and Glaciation* at school: I still have the book of that title. In it we met exotic terms such as *roche moutonnee*, *drumlin*, *col* and *horn*. The text was entirely northern hemisphere-centric, but when we antipodeans asked the obvious question, the teacher vaguely and rather apologetically told us that we didn't really have glaciers or glaciation in Australia, just a few acres around Mount Kosciusko. I had little idea even where that was at the time.

By 1958, my mother's adventurous spirit had taken our family on a hazardous journey from Mount Hotham across the Dargo High Plains to Gippsland: in our aged Vanguard car we uncertainly followed a grassy, sometimes rutted track for 45 km, descending steeply to Dargo. As I became independent, I took up