

Preface

The title ‘Himalayan Dreaming’ for this history of Australian mountaineering in the great ranges of Asia reflects a major theme of the book: the emergence of world-class Himalayan mountaineers from the world’s flattest, hottest continent, a land better known for its gentle, time-worn landscapes and its rich heritage of Aboriginal culture.

The history begins with the British expedition to Mt Everest in 1922 and continues through to the magnificent Australian successes in 1990 on four of the world’s highest mountains. The book is not organised in a linear chronological fashion but rather is composed of strands woven together as a large tapestry. The strands are composed of groups of mountaineers who have climbed together for a number of years in the Himalaya, sometimes drawing in sub-strands for attempts on major peaks and at other times splintering to form offshoot groupings. The ebbing and flowing of these strands and their intertwining in the period 1975–90 forms the tightly woven tapestry of Australian Himalayan mountaineering described in this book.

Two major focal points—one in time and the other in space—dominate the tapestry. The first is the year 1975, in which so much of Australian activity in the Himalaya had its start. The second is Mt Everest. Every major Australian Himalayan mountaineer has, at one time or another, been involved in an Everest attempt. Thus, most of the strands are linked at some point to this most magnetic of Himalayan summits.

Although I have tried to be rigorous in my presentation of the facts, much of the material presented in the book is opinion—either my own or that of the climbers I have quoted. In addition, the ways in which I have presented the events and the relative emphases I have placed on them are generally my perceptions. For example, many of the climbs that I organised around an eventual major attempt on Mt Everest were not, in fact, at the time specific training climbs for Everest but were objectives in their own right. For these and other value judgments by organisation and emphasis, I take full responsibility.

Many of the chapters contain excerpts from the climbers themselves—usually tales of a particularly humorous or dramatic nature. They are set out in boxes so as not to interrupt the flow of the story itself, but they do give an immediacy and first-person perspective not often found in a historical work.

I have not attempted to recount every Australian ascent in the Himalaya (although most get at least a mention), but rather have attempted to tell a coherent and interesting story based on the major players and their ascents and attempts. For a more thorough listing of Australian climbing in the Himalaya, including all ascents and all attempts on major peaks during the period covered in this book, please refer to the table prepared by Zac Zaharias, which appears in the appendix of this book. The table was compiled primarily from five such tables that have appeared over the years in *Wild* magazine: nos 40 (Autumn 1991), 55 (Summer 1995), 80 (Autumn 2001), 92 (Autumn 2004) and 100 (Autumn 2006).

Finally, the book presents a glimpse into the lives—the successes, failures, tragedies, motivations, fears, conflicts, humour and compassion—of a most remarkable group of Australians as they push themselves to the ultimate limits of survival in the most spectacular and demanding mountain arena of all: the high Himalaya.

This text is taken from *Himalayan Dreaming: Australian mountaineering in the great ranges of Asia, 1922–1990*, by Will Steffen, published 2017 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.