

Mountaineering Tourism

Reviewed by Philip M. Mullins

Musa, G., Higham, J., & Thomson-Carr, A. (2015). *Mountaineering Tourism*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

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Musa, Higham, and Thompson-Carr have edited a volume intended to provide “a critical treatment of the possibilities and pitfalls of mountaineering tourism” (p. xxii). The book contains 17 chapters and nine case studies divided into three sections. The book’s structure follows Weed and Bull’s (2004) conceptualization of sports tourism as interplay of activity, people, and place. In the opening chapter, the editors explain clearly the purpose, basic concepts, and structure of the book. That the book takes on a theoretical approach is highly commendable; doing so provides a structure through which the reader can gain more insight from the volume as a whole, and more clearly see connections among diverse papers. The approach, however, also raises problems and possibilities that the editors no doubt had to contend with, and which arose in my reading. The editors acknowledge the potentially uneasy fit of a sports tourism approach, and they make a good case for using it. I believe it can function well.

The editors explain the concepts of activity, people, and place (p. 9), but the framework would facilitate greater insight, I think, if these conceptions responded more to a paradigm of mobilities and globalization. Globalization, according to Urry (2000), has exposed as untenable the notion of the natural world and society as separate. As I have stated elsewhere, “this context challenges outdoor adventure — traditionally practiced and theorized around distinctions between nature and civilization — to rethink and reframe its socio-environmental role” (Mullins, 2014a, p. 131).

While the editors employ the notion of place as “space that is infused with meanings” (p. 9), alternative conceptualizations that give primacy to place, rather than space, challenge the dominant Western worldview of nature and society as separate, and could position mountaineering tourists as participating socio-ecologically in making, remaking, and challenging places and their various contested meanings within a globalized world of mobility (McCarthy, 2002; Mullins, 2014a, 2014b). McCarthy’s (2002) insight regarding mountaineering and place is worth revisiting:

Climbers’ stories are evidence that people can experience the world as place instead of space, and that while certain

mountaineering literature emphasizes egotism and reinforces the subject/object divide, another current of mountaineering literature documents transcending a narrow, egocentric, conception of individuality, and replacing it — if only fleetingly — with a recognition of interconnection between human being and natural setting. (McCarthy, 2002, p. 181)

And so the book as a whole would benefit from clearer conceptualization and identification of the social and biophysical interrelations of persons and places that occur through and are potentially fundamental to meaningful experiences of mountaineering tourism as an activity (Mullins, 2014a, 2014b). I have elsewhere used a hermeneutic phenomenological circle to highlight these interrelations (Mullins, 2015). Nevertheless, readers should approach the book sections as overlapping and evocative of a larger whole, rather than discrete descriptive units.

Having read the work front to back, I will provide some thoughts on what readers might anticipate in the book sections, where readers might look for additional material, and how the editors might make a good thing even better for future editions. It is easier to be the observer/critic than the climber/author, and so I offer my review and suggestions humbly with respect for those who wrote and assembled this volume.

The group of 33 contributing authors (including the editors, who wrote the first and last chapters) is well-balanced in terms of international representation and between men (19) and women (14) — an important consideration for an activity that is historically masculine and tied to imperialism, and for a book intending to provide critique. The volume does have a Kiwi flavour, but clearly and purposefully presents an international context.

On activity, Part One comprises five chapters and three case studies. It opens with Lew and Han’s sweeping overview of the world’s mountain trekking destinations — a nice reminder that mountaineering tourism, as an activity, is not all about advanced technique, high altitude, and high risk. The chapter also touches on physical geography, history, and motivations of mountain trekking. Beedie admirably establishes a history of mountaineering tourism