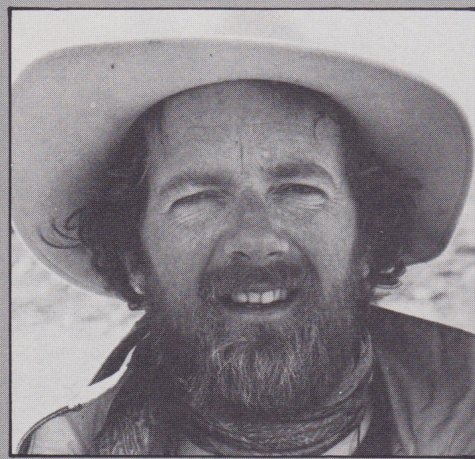


# OBITUARIES



## Joe Tasker (1948-82)

The news, heard over a car radio, came to me at the end of a stunning June day in Pembrokeshire, sea level traversing, beachcombing, sunbathing, with a reasonable climb to finish. The sort of day, I remember thinking, when climbing in Britain is so good you wonder why you ever go anywhere else. Then the numbing shock of the announcement — 'Joe Tasker and Pete Boardman missing on Everest.' Within an hour 'missing' became 'presumed dead'; an hour later 'dead'. Disjointed memories flitted through my mind; of Joe's hilarious and protracted parties in Derbyshire; of the crazy and disorganized trip to the Trento Film Festival with Joe and Pete, and more recently the Kongur Expedition last year, when with Chris Bonington and Al Rouse, Pete and Joe had returned, long overdue from the summit. Michael Ward and I had spent anxious days at Advance Base, scrutinising the mountain for signs of life. I remembered our relief and near tears as four specks eventually appeared high on the ridge above us. But this time they had not returned.

Since Pete moved to Switzerland I had come to know Joe well, and in the last 18 months we had worked together on the Kongur film and the preparations for Joe to film on Everest.

His achievements are so well known as to need only a brief summary — a long partnership in the Alps with Dick Renshaw that included most of the major north faces, culminating in the first British ascent of the 1938 route of the Eiger in winter. This ascent in particular brought them both out of a seemingly deliberate low-key obscurity and into the limelight of the climbing media. Then followed the innovative Alpine-Style ascent of the south-east ridge of Dunagiri again with Dick. 1976 saw the outstanding ascent with Pete Boardman of the west wall of Changabang, two expeditions to K2, the first ascent, without oxygen of the north ridge of Kanchenjunga, Everest in winter, Kongur and finally the attempt on the east-north-east ridge of Everest this year. Joe wanted to climb Everest more than anyone else I know. It is of little comfort to know that he died within sight of achieving his ambition, and it is the kind of vague thought I know Joe would not have accepted. He was nothing if not realistic. A passage in his book *Everest the Cruel Way* is enlightening.

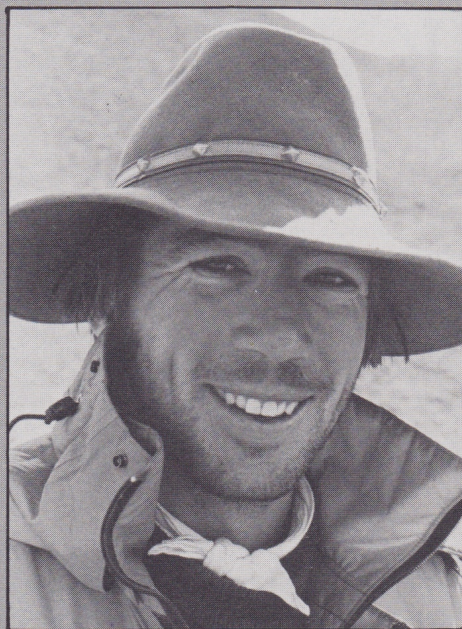
... For many years whilst I trained to be a Catholic priest, I lived in a dream world, planning for the holidays when I could really live, escaping mentally from the strait-jacket of a rigid time-table, strict rules and enforced behaviour. Having left that regime I had an antipathy towards any tendency to live in fantasy worlds, preferring to think only about

what I knew I could do, and not to live in hope, only to be disappointed or to find that the reality did not live up to my dreams.'

But this is not to suggest that Joe, beneath a wry and at times cynical view of life, was merely some sort of unfeeling climbing machine, driving himself coldly up ever harder and higher mountains. His upbringing in a large close-knit family in the North East, and his training for the priesthood, gave him a devastating honesty and lack of regard for any form of pretentiousness. This was combined with a massive determination to overcome the practical problems of organising his life, whether on mountains, in business, writing books and more recently making films. He had the rare knack of seeing and understanding problems, and once deciding on the best solution, carrying it out with the minimum of fuss and maximum efficiency. At times this could appear ruthless to us more wayward mortals. Joe was aware of this and intensely conscious of other peoples feelings and pride, perhaps hiding his own under a mask of apparent indifference. This was most in evidence in his tortuous relationship with Pete, which to the outsider seemed nothing so much as an old married couple, eternally nagging and nit-picking. Joe had profound respect for Pete's ability as a climber and a writer. He paid him and his other close friends the compliment of being as critical with them as he was with himself.

He has left us at least with something to look forward to — a second book dealing with his early climbs and expeditions up to his second K2 trip, and also the film he shot on Everest. On Kongur he displayed a quite incredible perseverance in filming right to the summit, a film that was finished just before his death. These will, if nothing else, become reminders of the man and the mountaineer we will miss so much.

Jim Curran



## Pete Boardman (1950-82)

Had Peter been writing this he would have thought of something original but the phrase is particularly apt to describe his life and achievements. Perhaps it would have amused him for he was a great romantic.

Peter David Boardman was born on 25th December, 1950 (a fact no doubt unconnected with his extraordinary talents) into a close-knit family in Bramhall, Cheshire. The strongest influence in his early life was his mother who fostered Peter's love of literature and in later years was supportive of his writing. He attended

Stockport Grammar School and was active in the Scouts. He went on to Nottingham University and graduated with second class honours in English. This despite an active climbing career which culminated in his Presidency of the University climbing club and his first expedition. A Dip.Ed. in English and *Outdoor Pursuits* from Bangor University completed his formal education and led to a job at Glenmore Lodge. Subsequently he was appointed National Officer of the BMC and remained there until 1978 when he was offered the directorship of the International School of Mountaineering at Leysin.

To all these things, as well as to his climbing, Peter brought with him considerable dedication and commitment. This attitude was supplemented by a keen interest in people and his environment and he was an outstanding diplomat. It was typical of Peter that whilst studying at Bangor he started to learn Welsh. Whilst instructing he obtained his Guides Certificate. One of his greatest strengths at the BMC was in building bridges between various groups and it was largely due to his efforts that the Association of British Mountain Guides finally secured recognition and obtained membership of the Union Internationale des Guides de Montagne. It was a long process, only completed in 1978, by which time Peter had been elected President of the ABMG.

His speed and confidence in the Alps was formidable: he reached the summit of the Grand Capucin by 1.30 pm from a bivouac on Col Midi. An inner steel was forged during severe storms on the Gervasutti Pillar and the Drus, though this was often masked by a vague, almost soft exterior. He preferred to leave practical tasks to others and at that time it was advantageous to pack his sack for him to secure an early start. Fresh from the Matterhorn north face in 1971 we attempted the north east spur of the Droites in bad conditions and were benighted without a bivouac site. I sat on a rock and Peter sat on me as snow fell steadily through the night. A long and difficult retreat ensued during which we joined forces with another team who had been independently following us on the climb: Dick Renshaw and Joe Tasker. In all he climbed scores of Alpine routes including five first British ascents.

On the Matterhorn we conceived the idea of the Nottingham University Hindu Kush Expedition. Travelling light we made 12 new ascents of which two stand out. The north face of Koh-i-Khaaik was to be a training climb for Koh-i-Mondi, the main target of the expedition, but it provided the hardest climbing either of us had ever experienced and took three times as long as we planned. With retreat cut off, no food and insufficient equipment, we succeeded due only to a combination of luck and Peter's skills. The subsequent ascent of Mondri proved classic despite injury to Peter high up which later led to him crawling down the glacier to await rescue in a more hospitable environment.

A number of short trips followed — to Alaska, the Caucasus and to the Polish High Tatras in Winter — before Peter was invited to join the 1975 Everest South West face expedition. He was the youngest member of the team but his strength and commitment to the team effort won him a place in the second summit party. The disappearance of Mick Burke overshadowed Peter's triumph but his descent to Camp 6 from the south summit with Pertemba was an outstanding piece of mountaineering. He later referred to the trip as 'one of the last great imperial experiences' but it left him curiously dissatisfied.

The following year he went to Changabang with Joe Tasker. Their ascent of the west face remains perhaps the hardest technical climb yet

achieved in the Himalaya. It purified Peter's soul and enabled him to regain the perspective lost on Everest. Peter's literary powers had already been tested in a number of magazine articles, production of the Hindu Kush expedition report and in contributing a chapter to 'Everest the Hard Way'. They reached maturity with his first book 'The Shining Mountain' which won him a literary prize. His insight and perception of himself and his companion and their relationship with each other and the mountain provide qualities rarely matched in mountaineering literature.

Changabang proved to be the first step on a ladder of new fulfilment. Peter met Hilary Collins and they went to East Africa together, climbing Kilimanjaro and two routes on Mount Kenya including the Diamond Couloir. At ISM he found new inspiration in guiding others among the mountains. Hilary was now living nearby and they planned to visit New Guinea. They made two new major ascents and their relationship deepened. Successes on Kanchenjunga, Gauri Sankar and Kongur were mixed with disaster and disappointments on K2. Peter's mountaineering triumphs were often haunted by tragedy but his marriage to Hilary brought happiness and growth.

And so to the final tragedy. The disappearance of Peter and Joe Tasker high on the east north east ridge of Everest has been well documented elsewhere. The circumstances made it inevitable that the incident would be compared with the disappearance of Mallory and Irving. Less well known is the fascination which Everest and the northern approach in particular had held for Peter for many years. It was after all the ultimate romance for a British climber.

Shortly before he left for Everest Peter had completed the text of his second book. 'Sacred Summits' must now be his memorial, but for other reasons as well it is a very special book. There is no doubt that Peter could have succumbed to commercial temptation and produced a book after any of his recent expeditions. His climbing reputation and the success of 'The Shining Mountain' would have ensured good sales. Instead he remained true to his own standards and ideals and to the mountains themselves. Peter's approach was that of the lover not the rapist. The book was nearly three years in the writing and was based on the 12 most eventful months of his life: those when he visited New Guinea, climbed Kanchenjunga, became engaged to Hilary, ascended Gauri Sankar and mourned his father's death. In course of time it will take its place in the forefront of mountaineering literature. It contains a highly readable account of his climbs but is much more than that: it is an intensely personal story and the reader will learn more about Peter from his own writings than I can hope to communicate. The title and the poem with which the book is prefaced contain a clue to Peter's relationship with the mountains.

Peter Boardman was without doubt one of the greatest mountaineers this country has produced. At the age of 31 he died, as he had lived, moving boldly and confidently towards new horizons. Shortly before he died Peter wrote the words which Hilary has chosen for his epitaph:

*'Strangely enough it is not all hard here, on the brink of our adventure. Now I have no need to wander, to read edifying or instructive books, I need only that ridge — the tunnel to go through before a new, evermore dazzling daylight.'*

Perhaps the greatest tribute to Peter is his unique ability to form friendships: the number of people in many lands who will treasure his memory and say with pride — 'He was my friend'.

Martin Wragg