



Freedom Climbers: The Golden Age of Polish Climbing (Legends and Lore)

Bernadette McDonald

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"One of the most important mountaineering books to be written for many years." —Boardman-Tasker Prize

See this book trailer for *Freedom Climbers* made by RMB Books, its publisher in Canada, where the cover is slightly different from the Mountaineers Books U.S. edition

* Behind the Iron Curtain, Cold War mountaineers found freedom on the world's highest peaks—and paid an awful price to achieve it

* Winner of the Boardman-Tasker Prize, Banff Grand Prize, and American Alpine Club Literary Award

Freedom Climbers tells the story of Poland's truly remarkable mountaineers who dominated Himalayan climbing during the period between the end of World War II and the start of the new millennium. The emphasis here is on their "golden age" in the 1980s and 1990s when, despite the economic and social baggage of their struggling country, Polish climbers were the first to tackle the world's highest mountains during winter, including the first winter ascents on seven of the world's fourteen 8000-meter peaks: Everest, Manaslu, Dhaulagiri, Cho Oyu, Kanchenjunga, Annapurna, and Lhotse. Such successes, however, came at a serious cost: 80 percent of Poland's finest high-altitude climbers died on the high mountains during the same period they were pursuing these first ascents.

Award-winning writer Bernadette McDonald addresses the social, political, and cultural context of this golden age, and the hardships of life under Soviet rule. Polish climbers, she argues, were so tough because

their lives at home were so tough—they lost family members to World War II and its aftermath and were so much more poverty-stricken than their Western counterparts that they made much of their own climbing gear. While *Freedom Climbers* tells the larger story of an era, McDonald shares charismatic personal narratives such as that of Wanda Rutkiewicz, expected to be the first woman to climb all 8000-meter peaks until she disappeared on Kanchenjunga in 1992; Jerzy Kukuczka, who died in a fall while attempting the south face of Lhotse; and numerous other renowned climbers including Voytek Kurtyka, Artur Hajzer, Andrej Zawaka, and Krzysztof Wielicki.

This is a fascinating window into a different world, far-removed from modernity yet connected by the strange allure of the mountain landscape, and a story of inspiring passion against all odds.



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