



Alpine Warriors

Bernadette McDonald

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From internationally renowned mountain historian Bernadette McDonald comes a highly readable, intense and exciting look at the explosion of Slovenian alpinism in the context of that country's turbulent political history.

After the Second World War a period of relative calm began in Josip Broz Tito's Yugoslavia. During the next thirty years citizens could travel freely if they had the money. Most did not, but alpinists did.

Through elaborate training régimes and state-supported expeditions abroad, Yugoslavian alpinists began making impressive climbs in the Himalaya as early as 1960. By the '70s, they were ascending the 8000ers. These teams were dominated by Slovenian climbers, since their region includes the Julian Alps, a fiercely steep range of limestone peaks that provided the ideal training ground.

After Tito died in 1980, however, the calm ended. Interethnic conflict and economic decline ripped Yugoslavia apart. But Serbian strongman Slobodan Milošević misread the courage and character of several Yugoslavian states, including Slovenia, and by 1991 Slovenia was independent.

The new country continued its support for climbers, and success bred success. By 1995, all of the 8000ers had been climbed by Slovenian teams. And in the next ten years, some of the most dramatic and futuristic climbs were made by these ferocious alpinists. Apart from a few superstars, most of these amazing athletes remain unknown in the West.

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