

# With Bare Hands The Story of the Human Spider

Price  
£16.99

By Alain Robert

Published by Maverick House (2008). 316 pages. 16 photos. ISBN 978-1-905379-55-2

I first heard of Alain Robert when climbing in Verdon one summer. He was renowned for soloing some of the big routes here in bare feet! All we could think of was the pain! And how mad was that! We later heard a rumour that he had soloed with his baby in a papoose on his back!!

This was never confirmed, but it was an indication of the bizarre airwave chatter that Robert generated. The fact that his book is mainly about his 'building' exploits and

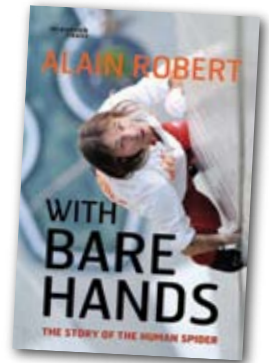
an apparent obsession to get arrested in every country of the world continues this impression of a very unique individual.

The forward is from his surgeon; Robert has had some disastrous falls and rates as disabled to '66% incapacity'. His comment, referring to Robert's physical injuries, that he "remains an enigma" cannot be said to hold true of the man himself now, as this book gives an eloquent and vibrant insight into his psyche.

In it you discover how he was able to make the first

ever free solo of an 8b as a recovery from his second, most damaging, accident and how his climbing life changed course by accident with the first ascent of a 200m building in Chicago for a TV commercial.

The ascent of the biggest and the best man-made structures, the reaction of police, the judiciary, security and even business CEOs, not to mention the media circus it creates around the world, is catalogued to culminate in a sanctioned ascent of the National Bank in Abu Dhabi to



a 100,000 strong crowd.

For someone who has played out his climbing career so openly in the public gaze, there are very few action photos in the book, but the back cover photo perhaps is all that is needed. Read the book and let your mind create the rest of the picture.

Kevin Howett

# Mountain Biking Trail Centres: The Guide

By Tom Fenton

Published by Vertebrate Graphics (2009). Paperback. 216 pages. Full Colour. ISBN 9-781906-148010

Price  
£17.95

There are a lot of old, tired climbers taking up mountain biking, when the knees don't allow long walk-ins anymore! I include myself in that category. But a step away from 'mountain biking' are the numerous 'trail biking' centres that have been developed – a sort of man-made park-boulder facility for bikers. There are some 60+ such centres across the UK now and all in this guide.

On a practical level (at least in Scotland) the guide has to compete with the Pocket Mountains books. They have similar information as well as basic trail maps. The inclusion of some good maps in this guide would have given it a head start on the competition, particularly as the information is now also available in a free visitScotland 'Scottish Mountain Biking Guide'!



There are some good photos (although never of the harder bits?) and the clear 'at a glance' info is good, but the grades of trails I am familiar with across the UK are often as variable as climbing grades (e.g. the Comrie Croft trail).

As the first guide to document all the UK centres in one go it is indispensable.

Kevin Howett

# Jerry Moffatt: Revelations

With Niall Grimes

Published by Vertebrate Graphics (2009). 242 pages. 54 photos. ISBN 9-781906-148119

Price  
£20.00

Everyone familiar with British climbing will know of Moffatt. His achievements, his new routes in England and Wales, his repeats of UK and international cutting-edge climbs and his delving into the new order of climbing competitions through the 1980s and 90s have been well documented in the climbing press and indeed epitomised this era.

Although written in the first person, the book is in effect a biography with Niall Grimes (the Jeremy Clarkson of the climbing world) putting onto the page what Moffatt struggles to do because of his dyslexia: undiagnosed at school and resulting in him being branded a trouble maker – this is a recurring theme amongst recent climbing biographies.

I was itching to read what Moffatt had to say about a time in climbing history I felt I was part of, albeit on the fringe. And in that respect I was not disappointed – many of the scenarios he recounts, the routes he climbed and the characters he describes are familiar and the climbing lifestyle of the 'Thatcher Years' rings true of my own. But Moffatt's globetrotting achievements at the cutting edge are unassailable, and his place as 'best in the world' is put into context. No one could disagree that he was at the forefront of trad development and the sport climbing boom and then did the same for bouldering.

However I was hoping for a little more than just a chronological account of his routes and although there is some introspective soul-searching concerning his single-mindedness to be the best and the effect of the loss of those around him, and there are even a few 'revelations' concerning the style of his early first ascents, I left the book still feeling I have not managed to get into the mind of this driven and gifted climber.

Perhaps that awaits the film spin-off? How about it Alastair Lee?

Kevin Howett

