

Review of “Reaching Beyond” by Denise Evans by John Tait

I really enjoyed this book. It is well written, and carried one along through the fascinating life of a remarkable woman.

Denise Evans was a climber, mountaineer and sailor of considerable distinction. She circumnavigated South America, did a great deal of High Latitude sailing in the Northern Hemisphere, including Spitsbergen, and also climbed in the Alps, the Himalaya, and elsewhere. Denise achieved all this while bringing up three sons (who joined her on some of her adventures), and looking after a disabled husband. She went on to become the first female president of the Alpine Club, amongst many other things.

She was born in France in 1931 to a French father and an English mother (both of whom were distinguished climbers). Moving to first England and then Wales on the outbreak of World War II, she lived most of the rest of her life in North Wales. Here she honed her rock climbing skills and met her husband. And on the way she graduated from Oxford, at a time when only about 14% of students were female. There is much else beside.

Denise Evans was clearly a very special woman, and deserves to be more widely known. The book has a wonderfully understated, matter-of-fact style, whilst being eminently readable and compelling. It is well up to the standards of Tilman.

I can't recommend this book too highly: as good as any book of its kind I have read.

Review of *Reaching Beyond* by Anne Daykin

Climbers' Club November 2024 Newsletter

Reaching Beyond is the story of Denise Evans, a significant female adventurer, first female president of the Alpine Club, and some-one who deserves to be better known.

Denise Evans was of strong mountaineering stock; Daughter of Nea Morin, an early member of the Ladies Alpine Club and the Pinnacle Club, she grew up in Paris, against a backdrop of climbing and the outdoors, playing in the sand under the Fontainebleue boulders on family days out, and learning to ski as a child.

She married Charles Evans, deputy leader of the 1953 Everest Expedition and the 1955 British Kangchenjunga Expedition, and they enjoyed climbing, mountaineering, and sailing together. Heavily involved in the Pinnacle Club, she joined a (women only) Himalayan trip in 1962, in spite of having a young child by then. In the midsixties, with three young children, her husband Charles developed Multiple Sclerosis which soon confined him to a wheelchair.

Undaunted, Denise somehow kept up her active and adventurous lifestyle, but became more involved in sailing, and documents trips around Scotland, the Azores, Greenland, and South America, among other jaunts.

The final autobiographical chapter covers sailing round Iceland in 2002, when Denise was 71 years old, but then follows an Afterword making it plain that she just kept on going, until well into her eighties.

So, what of the book? *Reaching Beyond* is written as an autobiography by Denise Evans, using her extensive diaries which chronicled her many adventures. As diary entries tend to be mundane rather than literary, the writing style is somewhat lumpen with small details that probably felt important at the time. It would be understandable if this book ended up being tedious. It is testament to Denise's full and interesting life that this is not the case; I read from cover to cover and enjoyed it all. Denise died in 2023, aged 92.