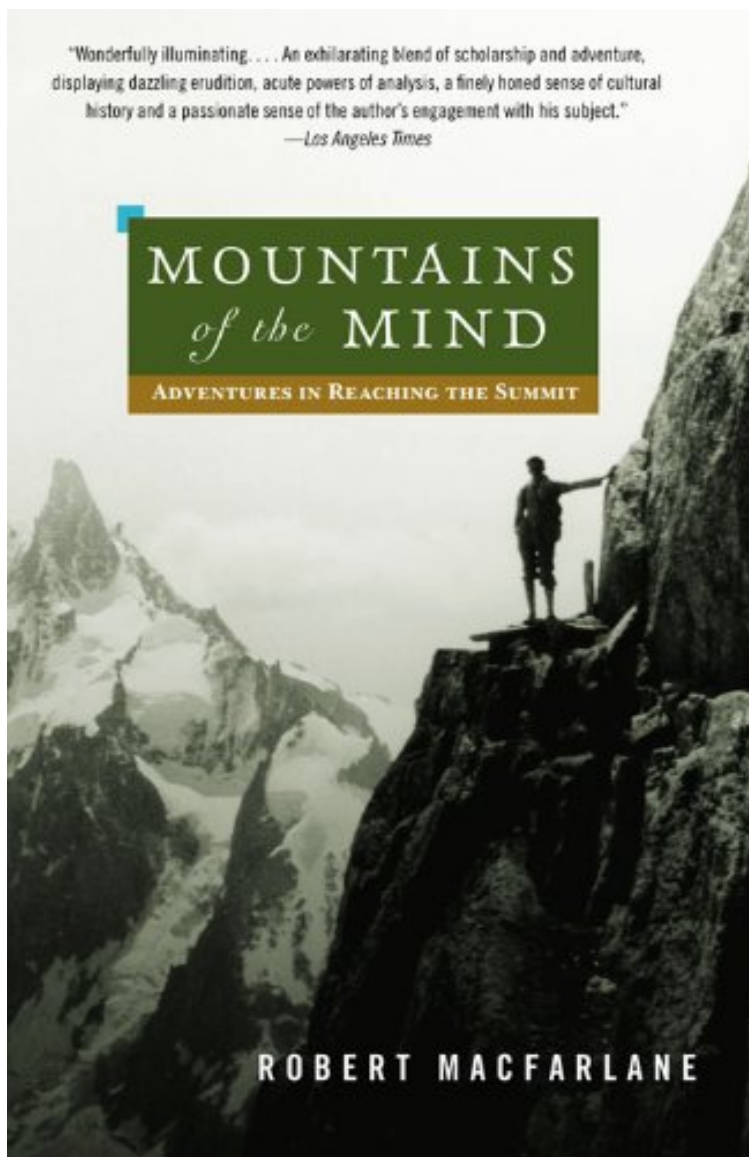


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# Mountains of the Mind: Adventures in Reaching the Summit



*Par Robert Macfarlane*  
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**Par Robert Macfarlane : Mountains of the Mind: Adventures in Reaching the Summit** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Mountains of the Mind: Adventures in Reaching the Summit:

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**Description :** Description du produitThree centuries ago, mountains were considered forbidding and forbiddenthe abodes of dragons and other ill-tempered grotesque beasts. But with the growing recognition that the Earths surface had not been created once and for all but was slowly evolving, mountains came to be seen as the unexplored text of the Earths storya terrain that scientists, adventurers, naturalists, and, finally, travelers began to explore. In Mountains of the Mind, Robert Macfarlane blends cultural history, meditation, and memoir to show how early geologists helped transform our perceptions of the wild, chaotic landscapes; how the allure of height increasingly drew fearless climbers, culminating in the romantic figure of George Mallory, the passionate Englishman who died on Mount Everest in 1924; and how the elemental beauty of

snow and ice coalesced into an aesthetic of the sublime. Mountains of the Mind is at once an enthralling work of history, an intimate account of Macfarlane's own experiences, and a beautifully written meditation on how memory, landscape, imagination, and the landscape of mountains are joined together in our minds and under our feet.

Combining accounts of legendary mountain ascents with vivid descriptions of his own forays into wild, high landscapes, Robert MacFarlane reveals how the mystery of the world's highest places has come to grip the Western imagination and perennially draws legions of adventurers up the most perilous slopes. His story begins three centuries ago, when mountains were feared as the forbidding abodes of dragons and other mysterious beasts. In the mid-1700s the attentions of both science and poetry sparked a passion for mountains; Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Lord Byron extolled the sublime experiences to be had on high; and by 1924 the death on Mt Everest of an Englishman named George Mallory came to symbolize the heroic ideals of his day. Macfarlane also reflects on fear, risk, and the shattering beauty of ice and snow, the competition and contemplation of the climb, and the strange alternate reality of high altitude, magically enveloping us in the allure of mountains at every level. Robert Macfarlane's Mountains of the Mind is the most interesting of the crop of books published to mark the 50th anniversary of the first successful ascent of Everest. Macfarlane is both a mountaineer and a scholar. Consequently we get more than just a chronicle of climbs. He interweaves accounts of his own adventurous ascents with those of pioneers such as George Mallory, and in with an erudite discussion of how mountains became such a preoccupation for the modern western imagination. The book is organised around a series of features of mountaineering--glaciers, summits, unknown ranges--and each chapter explores the scientific, artistic and cultural discoveries and fashions that accompanied exploration. The contributions of assorted geologists, romantic poets, landscape artists, entrepreneurs, gallant amateurs and military cartographers are described with perceptive clarity. The book climaxes with an account of Mallory's fateful ascent on Everest in 1924, one of the most famous instances of an obsessive pursuit. Macfarlane is well-placed to describe it since it is one he shares.

MacFarlane's own stories of perilous treks and assaults in the Alps, the Cairngorms and the Tian Shan mountains between China and Kazakhstan are compelling. Readers who enjoyed Francis Spufford's masterly *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination* will enjoy *Mountains of the Mind*. This is a slighter volume than Spufford's and it loses in depth what it gains in range, but for an insight into the moody, male world of mountaineering past and present it is invaluable. --Miles Taylor From Publishers Weekly

Mountains haven't always been viewed as magnificent tests of bravery or even as scenic vacation spots--only in the last few centuries have Westerners found them worthy of attention. As British writer Macfarlane (the London of Books; the Times Literary Supplement) points out, "until well into the 1700s, travelers who had to cross the Alpine passes often chose to be blindfolded," sparing themselves the terrors of the view. His point throughout this strangely compelling volume is that our attitudes toward mountains are very much a cultural product, a rich mix of theological, geological, artistic and social forces. With the development of geological science in the early 1800s, mountains, once viewed as "giant souvenirs of humanity's sinfulness," came to be seen as part of the earth's historical record. Recognized as "the great stone book" of history, mountains opened a window into "deep time," a glimpse of eternity. The thrill of vertigo, the infatuation with the unknown, the Social Darwinist challenge of the survival of the fittest, the march of British imperialism, even advances in cartography--all shaped the social imagination of mountains. As Western adventurers were increasingly lured from the Swiss Alps to the Himalayas, Macfarlane closes his study with the ill-fated Mallory expeditions to Everest, so mythic they almost defy analysis. The book itself is rather like some idiosyncratic, hand-drawn map of terra incognita. But for romantic, mountain-struck readers, Macfarlane's rich thoughts may make snow clouds clear, revealing new peaks and new wonders. Bw illus. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.