

## Reference Books

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Editor

*Berkshire Encyclopedia of Extreme Sports*. Ed. by Douglas Booth and Holly Thorpe. Great Barrington, Mass.: Berkshire, 2007. 404p. alkaline \$125 (ISBN 978-0-9770159-5-5).

As noted by editors Douglas Booth and Holly Thorpe, extreme sports are about more than risk taking, rule breaking, or having fun. Extreme sports “are also a major cultural, commercial, and media phenomenon” (ix) of increasing global interest. Booth and Thorpe, both professors in the Department of Sport and Leisure Studies at the University of Waikato, New Zealand, and avid surfers and snowboarders, provide the first serious survey of extreme sports. An outgrowth of the *Berkshire Encyclopedia of World Sport* (2005), *Berkshire Encyclopedia of Extreme Sports* offers multifaceted coverage of its topic, reporting on the sports and athletes on the surface of extreme sports (including such practical information as the “Rules of Mountain Bike Racing”), and also delving into underlying concepts and issues, such as history, philosophy, psychology and sociology. For example, the volume contains a lengthy essay on the *Agon Motif*, tracing the concept of competitive struggle from its origins in ancient Greece to its role in contemporary education.

Comprising 114 signed, alphabetically arranged entries by sports experts, the encyclopedia covers fifty types of extreme sports, provides biographies of thirty notable athletes, profiles nine sporting venues, and discusses many relevant social issues. The sports covered range from the less extreme (“Ballooning” and “Scuba Diving”) to the very extreme (“Extreme Ironing” and “Ultimate Fighting”). The entries are comprehensive, as exemplified by the entry for BASE jumping, which includes sections on technical issues, history, community, legal issues, jumping locations and events, and the future direction of the sport. The biographies are brief and less comprehensive, introducing and highlighting the achievements of extreme sports athletes, many of whom are likely unknown to the average reader, although most would recognize daredevil Evel Kneivel and snow/skate boarder Shaun White. Among the venues discussed, the ESPN-produced X Games receives substantial coverage for its role in bringing extreme sports to the attention of a large mainstream audience. The volume also provides essays on several intriguing social issues. Among these are essays on “Whiteness and Extreme Sports” (most extreme athletes are white) and “Initiation/Hazing” (includes a photograph of a man participating in the common initiation ritual of “shotgunning” a beer). Sidebars are used throughout to highlight related concepts, such as extreme tourism, and to point out statistics, such as avalanche fatalities. Entries conclude with sometimes-lengthy lists of references for further reading that also include works cited within the entries. Some entries also have cross-references.

The volume includes several finding aids: a detailed and useful index, an alphabetical list of entries, and a less useful “Reader’s Guide,” which would have served as a topical index if page numbers had been included. The editors state that the design of their book “reflects the unpredictability and daring” (xii) of their subject, but their design for the most part is tame, with black-and-white photographs appearing throughout. The use of mirrored page numbers on odd numbered pages comes off as more unsettling than extreme.

Like a telecast of an extreme sporting event, the encyclopedia opens with a disclaimer warning that without proper training the activities described within can be dangerous. The disclaimer is warranted, as the *Berkshire Encyclopedia of Extreme Sports* is likely to appeal as much to prospective extreme sport athletes as it will to students and scholars. Characterizing the complex, multivariate experience of extreme sports, this work is a welcome addition to the reference literature, bringing together comprehensive information about a new and developing genre of sports and speaking to the needs and interests of a wide range of readers. This title is recommended for high school, public, and academic libraries, especially for those with significant sports collections.—Kenneth Burhanna, Head, Instructional Services, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio

*British Film Noir Guide*. By Michael F. Keaney. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2008. 269p. alkaline \$55 (ISBN 978-0-7864-3805-1).

It is well-known that the term *film noir* originated with French critics who used it to describe certain Hollywood films of the 1940s and early 1950s—films that are characterized stylistically by dark tones and night scenes and thematically by ambivalent protagonists and a sense of fatalism. The so-called film noir bible, Alain Silver’s and Elizabeth Ward’s *Film Noir: An Encyclopedic Reference to the American Style* (Overlook, 1979) claims that film noir is “an indigenous American form” and that it is a “unique example of a wholly American film style” (1). Since that book’s publication in 1979, other critics have argued for a more expansive noir canon that includes many European influences (in particular, gothic horror and German Expressionism) that are important precursors to the “classic” film noir style. Michael Keaney, author of *Film Noir Guide: 745 Films of the Classic Era, 1940–1959* (McFarland, 2003), agrees that film noir is not exclusively a product of the U.S. film industry and his work adds to the growing literature in support of this claim. Audiences familiar with the quintessential noir films such as *Out of the Past* or *The Maltese Falcon* might be surprised at Keaney’s inclusion of such a film as the lush Technicolor production of *Black Narcissus* (which was given a rating of 4½ stars out of 5), but if two of the primary characteristics of the film noir genre are the cynical, pessimistic hero and the femme fatale, then the entry is certainly justified.

Included in this work are 369 British films produced between 1937 and 1964. The guide is arranged in alphabetical order by the original British title, and each entry includes the