Adventures of a Reckless Amateur

Sverre Aarseth

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# Preface

The more active stage of my life started almost precisely at age 40 which is typically opposite to the great majority when physical exertion is concerned. Up to that time I had been heavily involved in the non-physical challenge posed by correspondence chess by *letter* as well as being absorbed in scientific research, particularly the development of complicated N-body codes. Although I had been used to skiing and roaming in nature from an early age, my simple life in the countryside did not give much chance for acquiring technical outdoor skills. However, spending my childhood on an idyllic small island (pop 50) provided many opportunities for *adventures*. Based on ignorance of the dangers involved, it seemed natural to invite excitement and adopt a *reckless* attitude. My approach to expeditions also favoured an independent style as an *amateur*, hence the title of this personal volume.

As a dynamical astronomer by profession and even having worked in the subject of planetary formation, I am acutely aware of inhabiting an actual planet. From this point of view, the step to explore planet Earth was a logical one, including both its wonderful wildlife and raw nature itself. In this quest, the diversity of our planet was sampled by visiting all the seven continents. To have had this opportunity has been a privilege.

I had close calls near the beginning and end of my mountaineering career and these events could so easily have terminated my existence. Hence the ability to pen the following chapters is largely down to luck which, after many escapades, is now taken for granted. Along the way, I was influenced by many interactions which shaped my world line. The variety of unusual experiences gives me an opportunity to present a permanent record for others to share. The whole draft was written during two summer months while living undisturbed in the self-built family cabin at beautiful Lake Reinunga in the Norwegian mountains. This backdrop provided ideal conditions for the task of recording the true story based on a number of expedition notebooks and reports.

Each chapter is presented in strict sequential order and is devoted to a particular trip, either as part of a group or alone. A number of the shorter climbs listed in Table 1 are not discussed in the text and are therefore summarized in the Appendix for completeness. In addition, there were other safaris to East Africa relating to mountain gorillas and rhinos who are especially close to my heart. Hopefully, the contents of this eBook is not controversial or contentious and I take full responsibility for all factual statements.

These short chapters are written in the hope of inspiring others to experience real nature in its many forms as a counter to the prevailing trends of engaging in virtual reality. In this shrinking world, it is increasingly difficult to get away from stressful activities where instant communication is given high priority and consumes an increasing fraction of our time. We are evolving in a direction where being alone must be avoided as much as possible. Yet, the journey called life takes on added meaning when we confront our insignificant existence with the uncorrupted natural world.

In acknowledgement I thank Amanda Smith for creating the useful map sketches as well as the cover and my long-suffering wife, Patricia, for a careful reading of the draft.

*Cambridge, July 2014*

*Sverre Aarseth*

# Contents

Preface

1. Kilimanjaro 1976 1

2. Erciyes 1977 8

3. Atlas Mountains 1977 13

4. Sabalan 1978 16

5. Mt Blanc 1979 23

6. Chimborazo, Cotopaxi, Galapagos 1980 27

7. Nun 1981 36

8. McKinley 1982 44

9. Huayna Potosi & Ancohuma 1983 51

10. Aconcagua 1984 60

11. Tibet 1984 68

12. Changtse (Everest North) 1984 74

13. Luangwa Valley 1985 79

14. Okavango 1985 89

15. Easter Island 1987 100

16. Torres del Paine & Ushuaia 1987 105

17. Antartica 1988 110

18. Ranthambore 1990 116

19. New Zealand & Australia 1990 122

20. Ojos del Salado 1991 130

21. Greenland 1992 139

22. Orizaba 1993 148

23. Atacama 1993 153

24. Pissis 1994 159

25. Hardangervidda 1997 172

26. Namibia & Botswana 1998 178

27. Llullaillaco 1998 183

28. Franklin River & Western Arthurs 2000 189

29. Tupungato & Mercedario 2003 196

30. Aragat & Ararat 2004 203

31. Kanha & Kaziranga 2005 216

32. Atacama 2007 222

33. Antofalla 2008 231

34. Sumatra 2011 238

Appendix 245

Table1 252

Table2 255