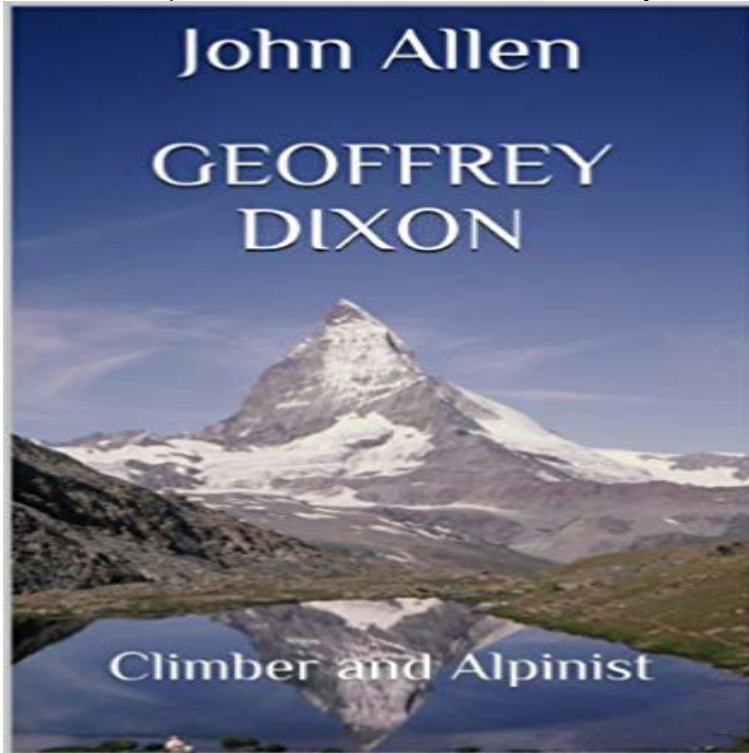


Geoffrey Dixon: Climber and Alpinist



Geoffrey Ferris Dixon (1912 -2004) was no ordinary Headmaster. As an enthusiastic and accomplished rock climber and mountaineer in his own right from the 1930s through to the 1950s, on his appointment to King George V Grammar School, Southport, Lancashire in 1949, he was given a free hand by the Governors and parents to introduce rock climbing to senior boys. At the time this was innovative in state schools. He was a tough leader in the Outward Bound mould who led us on hill-walking, climbing and caving expeditions during week-ends and week-long holidays. In the austerity years after WW2 and before the establishment of outdoor pursuits centres of the 1960s and 1970s leading to the risk-averse society of the late 20th century, Geoffrey was pioneering education in the outdoor environment, as well as that of the classroom and sports field there were no professional outdoor instructors in the early 1950s. This was the time of the Ascent of Everest in 1953, and the pioneer rock climbing and mountaineering by the likes of Joe Brown and Don Whillans between 1949 and 1960. Geoffrey master-minded our extended expeditions such as the Welsh Threes over 14 peaks above 3,000ft in Snowdonia, rock climbing in North Wales and the Lake District, and even exploratory caving in north Yorkshire. We were keen to learn and ready to stretch ourselves. This publication includes anecdotes by contemporary ex-KGV boys about the excitement of rock climbing and caving, activities probably unique in UK state schools at the time. The sixth formers record here outdoor activities in a period apparently barren of what later became core instruction at outdoor pursuits centres. However, it is Geoffreys own writings, not previously published, that make this biography so special. His own adventurous and daring expeditions, with equally determined and accomplished friends, were

deeply personal and momentous for him. His restrained writing style underscores the continuous uncertainties of Alpine climbing in small groups, but the effect on the reader conjures their enthusiasm, energy and commitment, but also betrays their fears and near hopelessness when the odds seemed stacked against them. Eventually Geoffrey did what no responsible Headmaster would be able to do in the late 20th or early 21st century. In the 1950s he took some of us older boys and ex-KGV boys on mountaineering expeditions in the Alps, where the seriousness of the climbs and the awe-inspiring nature of the whole landscape impacted on us for life. I was one of the lucky ones at age 17 in 1956. I sent letters home and thus recorded the inside story, as revealed here. This was true adventure with never any accidents, but plenty of exciting moments, ever to be remembered. Mountains became my inspiration. I have been active in climbing and mountaineering throughout my life. As Geoffrey had been born on 30 October 1912, it seemed entirely appropriate that this biography was completed in October 2012, exactly 100 years after his birthday.

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