

# Book Mark

Anna Brown, Senior Consultant



Miss



Maybe



Hit

## Everest: 50 years on top of the world

George Band



Overall rating

This is a wonderful book of photographs, excerpts from diaries and letters, chatty bits of text liberally scattered with exclamation points, and everything to please the armchair climber. Stamped with the approval of the Mount Everest Foundation, the Royal Geographical Society and the Alpine Club, this volume is unlikely to offend anyone – living or dead – as it reflects the 'official version' of events.

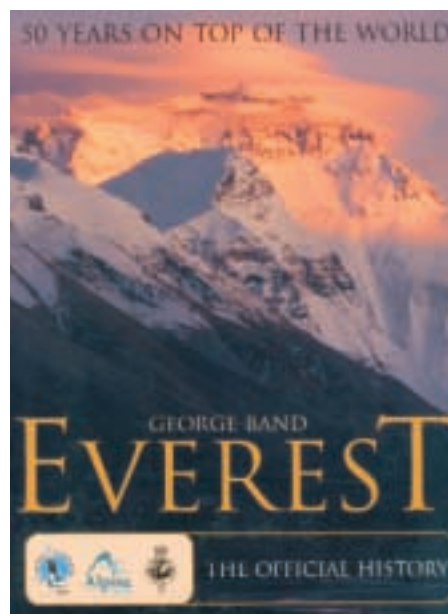
The author is George Band, the youngest member of the successful 1953 expedition (at age 23) and now a friendly, cheerful guide to the mountain's history, who seems equally at home in 1921 and 2001. There are some nice diversions, such as 'The Enchanting Kama Valley', with a forest of 90ft tall juniper trees and a plague of leeches. The Kama Valley featured in Lieutenant Colonel Howard-Bury's 1921 expedition diary ('this valley is so inaccessible that I am glad to think these glorious forests can never be exploited commercially'), and Band himself was so taken with his predecessor's description that he led a trekking party there himself five years ago (not having had time to descend all the way to the river Arun in 1998, he writes 'I must go again').

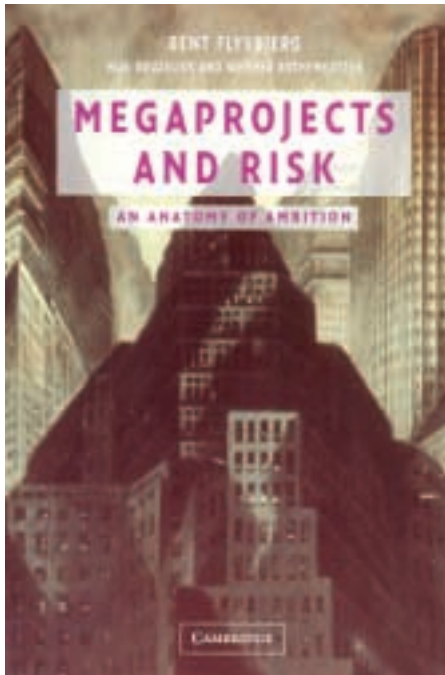
The early years – the 1920's expeditions from Tibet – are lovingly recorded, with watercolours by climbers reproduced next to new and old photographs, and the story of Mallory and Irvine's disappearance on 6 June 1924 is retold in detail, supplemented with photos of Mallory's final note and Odell's famous diary entries. These are the legends which inspired the 1953 party and further generations of climbers.

Despite its title, this book takes 120 pages to get to 1953, 70 pages lingering in that eventful year, and then only 50 pages or so for highlights and anecdotes from the fifty years since. It is a book which focuses on 'conquering' Everest, but tells the story with all appropriate humility.

It is definitely a book about a British Everest: it records the story of the British journey to the roof of the world as if it were the furthest outpost of an imaginary and purely benign empire, where the ritual of afternoon tea is only set aside in the most extreme circumstances, competition with the Swiss (and others) is pursued with a gracious vigour, and the 'amateur' nature of the 1953 team is a point of pride. These are slightly shabby gentleman adventurers clutching tubs of Marmite and cameras they are still learning to use. It is their 'determination to press on no matter how adverse the circumstances' that turns them into heroes. The men from the 1953 expedition (the section entitled 'Women On Top!' is only a few pages from the end of this volume) have lived the rest of their days as heroes – and led lives as interesting as they deserve.

Hardback, 256 pages, Collins, 2003  
(ISBN: 0 00 714748 1)





## Megaprojects and Risk: an anatomy of ambition

*Bent Flyvbjerg, Nils Bruzelius and Werner Rothengatter*



Overall rating

Remember the Dome? Of course. Some say the cost overruns of the Dome and of a number of high-profile Landmark Millennium projects heralded the end of an era for 'big dream'-style capital funding for visitor attractions. At Locum we are particularly close to what happens when the snags of the capital project hang on, sometimes years into an attraction's operational phase (for instance at Glasgow Science Centre, where the Tower should be operational later this summer – about two years too late). Blaming the architects is a common first choice, and project managers come in for some criticism as well, but most of the time the cost of delay or remedy is ultimately absorbed by the funders, and the implications for future / potential projects are dire.

Remember the Chunnel? It was an even greater opportunity for media excoriation of the public sector's pitiful inability to get from Point A to Point B without overspending by 80% on a £2.6 billion budget (on the basis of calculation in 1985 currency). Transport infrastructure is where the big boys of megaprojects play, where the biggest risks and rewards are. That is the focus of this volume, although occasional excursions are made to other types of megaproject: dams, Opera Houses and so on. It is worth making explicit that this subject matters to us for three reasons: because these projects have significant effects on flows of tourists, because they often quite literally pave the way for the smaller capital projects that go with 'destination development', and because they suffer the same problems (on a larger scale) as more familiar capital projects.

Combining the rigour of an academic thesis with the directness of a more journalistic approach, this slim study hits home. The problem it identifies is the systematic avoidance of a realistic discussion of risk in project planning.

Most appraisals of megaprojects assume, or pretend to assume, that infrastructure policies and projects exist in a predictable Newtonian world of cause and effect where things go according to plan. In reality, the world of megaproject preparation and implementation is a highly risky one where things happen only with a certain probability and rarely turn out as originally intended.

Sound familiar to anyone who has been through the process of redeveloping a heritage building?

There is a solution, say the authors, and it is all about acknowledging, quantifying, managing and distributing risk. One of the key points made here is that the consultants whose cost estimates and traffic forecasts form the basis of multi-billion pound decision-making are never held accountable for their blunders and misrepresentations. I would add to this observation a number of reasons why consultants' forecasts can be so very very wrong. Too often, underqualified teams are called upon to make projections at too early stages (too quickly, with too little market research), and then pressurised to give the client's (or the government's) desired answer. Their initial leaps of faith are compounded when forecasts are not revisited in light of changing circumstances over the years which elapse between early feasibility work and construction. In what seems a desperately false economy, capital project bid teams often save pennies on consulting support early on, opening up gaping holes full of financial risk for their successors down the line.

Paperback, 207 pages, Cambridge University Press, 2003  
(ISBN: 0 521 00946 4)

# Web Sight

John Nurick, Senior Consultant

## New Beijing Great Olympics

<http://www.beijing-2008.org/eolympic/eindex.shtml>



Overall rating

Anyone can build a simple website – if you can't, take Groucho Marx's advice and find a five-year-old child – but creating and maintaining the web presence of a large international project is a different matter entirely. The official site for the Beijing Olympics shows some of the challenges for those involved.

One is to capture the right domain names. The first address I tried was [www.beijing-olympic.org](http://www.beijing-olympic.org) – which turned out to be a front for a firm of "credit advisors". Internet registries showed that [beijing-olympics.org](http://beijing-olympics.org), [beijing-olympics.com](http://beijing-olympics.com) and [beijing-olympics.info](http://beijing-olympics.info) don't belong to Beijing either. And it took me five minutes to register [www.beijing-olympics.tv](http://www.beijing-olympics.tv) to Locum Destination Consulting.

The official home page is at the unintuitive [www.beijing-2008.org](http://www.beijing-2008.org). You can also get there from [www.bocog.org](http://www.bocog.org) (the acronym of the Beijing Organising Committee) or [www.beijing.olympic.org](http://www.beijing.olympic.org), which is in the IOC's own [olympic.org](http://olympic.org) domain.

Multiple languages present another challenge. The home page has links to separate Chinese, French and English sites (French and English are the official languages of the IOC). The three language sites share a look and feel – a simple design with news down the middle and links to other topics either side. Their structure is similar but not identical, and their content is significantly different.

For instance, on 5 June, the lead story on the French site was about the competition to choose an Olympic song, with a picture of the press conference where it was announced on 8 April. The Chinese and English sites led with the meeting between President Hu Jintao and Jacques Rogge of the IOC in Lausanne on 3 June, with a really exciting picture of them shaking hands.

But it's not that the French site lags behind the others.

There are news stories in the French section that don't appear in the English one, and vice versa. Even when the same story is covered in both languages, the two versions can be very different. (For a quite different approach to multilingual sites, see [www.trigeminal.com](http://www.trigeminal.com), which uses exactly the same structure and interface in up to 24 languages.)

Navigating through the site is a pleasure: there is little time-wasting



fancy stuff, and the designers made intelligent choices about when to display material in the current window and when to open a new one. A search facility would be welcome, but isn't necessary because the pages are visible to search engines such as Altavista and Google.

As for the content, it was rather dry and discouraging: press releases and official documents, a page to report corrupt officials, another to report violation of intellectual property, and back numbers of the Beijing 2008 newsletter. One of the press releases (in French but not in English) announced the indefinite postponement of the official launch of the Beijing games logo and of this summer's Olympic cultural festival. It didn't say that the reason was the SARS virus. But what else would one expect when the Chinese Communist Party meets the International Olympic Committee?

Still, it's early days. The Beijing Olympic Action Plan promises to 'adhere to the principles of openness, fairness, efficiency and honesty' – and how this web site develops over the next five years will be a key indicator of whether this is being achieved.