

CHALLENGING MOUNTAIN NATURE: RISK, MOTIVE, & LIFESTYLE IN THREE HOBBYIST SPORTS

By Robert A. Stebbins



Robert A. Stebbins, Ph.D., FRSC, is a research sociologist of some 40 years experience in the field of work and leisure, and, in his free time, a mountain scrambler, cross-country skier, and snowshoer. *Challenging Mountain Nature* combines his professional and leisure interests in an extensive examination of the rarely studied questions of how and why committed hobbyists in mountaineering, kayaking, and snowboarding meet notable challenges posed by nature in the Canadian Rockies. Here he applies a perspective to help us understand why some people become so passionate about such sports and how they arrange their lives so as to consistently pursue them.

Common belief has it that people go in for such activities expressly because they endanger life and limb of the participant, even at the individual's high level of competence to execute them. Nevertheless, this study reveals that, with rare exceptions, extreme sports are not at all risky in any major way; hobbyists in these fields are not, as a rule, suicidal. Nature-challenge activity involves surmounting barriers posed by the natural environment for deep fulfillment, and offers an exhilarating peak experience. Thus, this is not the language of risk, but rather it is the language of psychological flow.

This book examines climber, kayaker, and snowboarder involvement in their core activities, as well as their preparation for them, the ways they relate them to noninvolved friends and relatives, and how they mold their own participation in them around personal and occupational obligations and other serious and casual leisure interests. The study also included extensive participant observation of low-medium- and high-challenge participants in action (to the extent possible and safe for the researcher) as well as related activities.

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