



PETER WESSEL ZAPFFE

Stetind

BY PETER WESSEL ZAPFFE

It becomes the burning question, whether the true friends of Nature are doing the right thing by sharing their discoveries. They are jeopardizing those idyllic spots of peace and rehabilitation, which they next time may find occupied by unworthy ones, brought in their masses by comfortable transport means, guided by their own naively philanthropic views. Cornices of waste are left on the ground after them, and in the air hermetic music is competing with the nature lovers' own noises. Hail to the innocent pleasures of the people, whom we all belong to, and no borders should be drawn between human beings. It is in the wilderness that the line must be drawn; there we must begin to build a wall of silence around those values in nature

that die when they are taken by force, and that unfold their deepest wonders only in the hour of silent contemplation. But even more dangerous are the hyenas weighing profit—the ones lulling with lyrical tongues and calculating with cold, greedy eyes. Any living creature falling into their claws will be crucified in effigy on their screaming posters, distorted with the standardized exaltation of their brochures. They tear life out of their silent victims and sell the corpses in parts. Protect us, Heaven, from the fury of such projects.

But Mt. Stetind in Tysfjord is, in a geographical sense, no longer a new find. It has already travelled around the Earth on the tongues of many peoples, in images and songs. Silent wanderers from far away came

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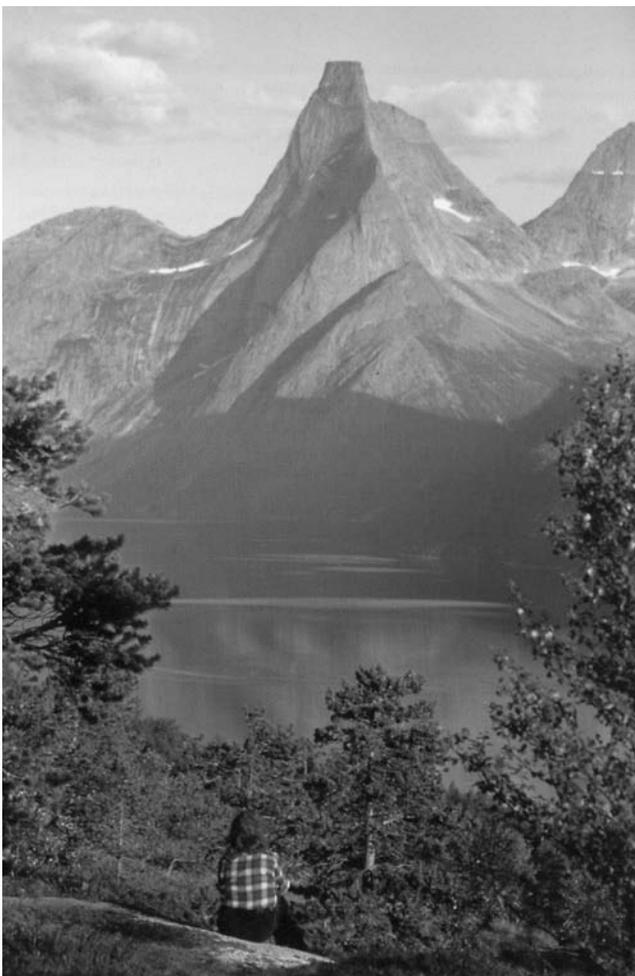
to contemplate under Stetind, a tower soaring skyward. I was among those who felt the calling. Norwegians had crossed the threshold of the Holy and showed the believers the way from the courtyard to the heart of the temple, where the consecration takes place. It became my dream to light a campfire at the foot of Stetind, ever since I read Ferdinand Schjeldrup's passionate testimony many years ago. I was facing many obstacles, but eventually the dream became reality.

Poets say that dreams die when they come true. Yet my Stetind dream did not die when it merged with reality. My dream was neither to be humiliated, nor to be cropped or bent and trapped inside a miserable cell; this time my dream was to materialize full of life and in

all its splendor straight into its earthly manifestation, in a fourteen hundred meter high fairy tale castle of silver grey granite.

It was five o'clock on a glowing white morning in July when we set the plough of our curiosity into the darkening surface of the fjord. There was crushing silence in the boat as we sailed around the last headland and our eyes could no longer find escape. They were turned in one direction by an unknown force and were held there until it hurt to look.

Giant—majesty—horn of Hell—the words fall short in our minds to adequately describe the shock of the first confrontation. From the cairn in the sunlit clouds to the



Summer photo of Stetind.

PHOTO: PETER WESSEL ZAPFFE, FROM THE BOOK *ARVEN OG GLEDEN*



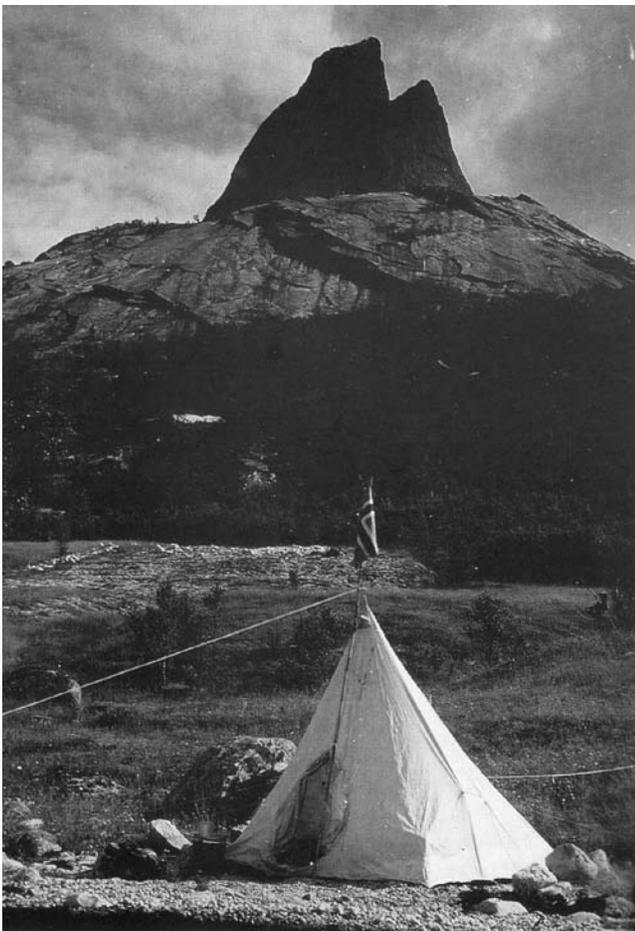
Drawing of Stetind, made by Peter Wessel Zapffe.

PHOTO: PRIVATE COLLECTION

cairn in the deep there stretched one smooth sheer cliff three thousand meters high, only interrupted where the fjord lines gathered in sublime harmony.

Not much was said while the ice cold water was biting our bare legs as we unloaded our baggage from the bottom of the boat onto the white, sun dried shell beach. We were in a hurry, because water was threatening us both from below and above. The fjords fill their lungs and exhale violently, the sky changes fast from joy to grief. Experienced hands were building up the camp—our home for one week on an alien beach, while the first raindrops started drumming on the last luggage case on its way into Ole Andersen's boat-house.

I wake up in my sleeping bag and know that today is the day. It is warm and comfortable in here; the



Tent camp under Stetind.

PHOTO: FROM THE BOOK *ET LIV PÅ MANGE VIS: EN ANTOLOGI OM PETER WESSEL ZAPFFE*

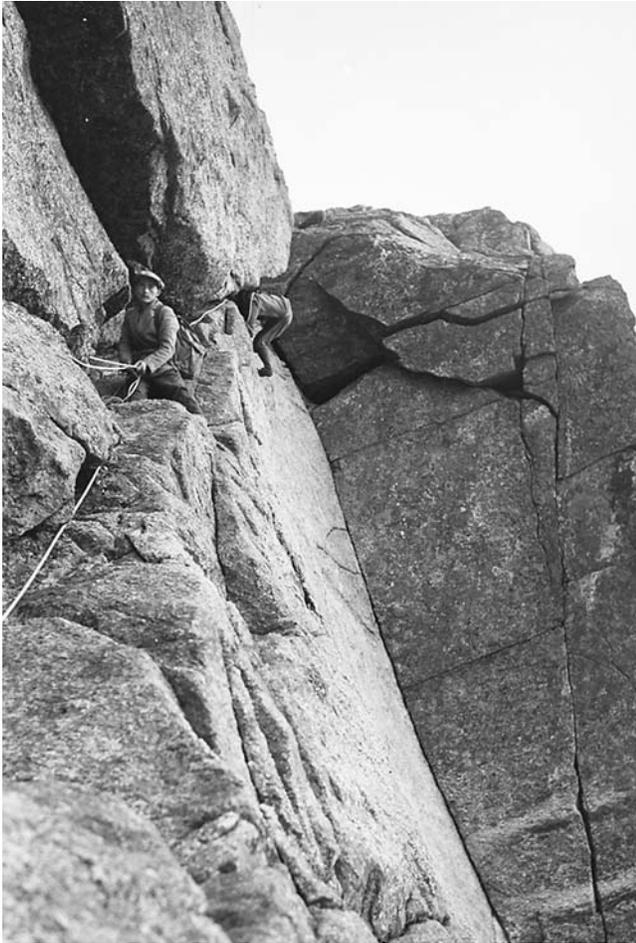
world around me is set up according to my will. It makes me feel calm and safe. I lie and feel that I hate this damned mountain, because it has power over my mind. This stupid injustice on the top of five billion tons of granite. What do you want from me, who has travelled countless miles to get here from a more joyful place just to exhaust myself on your endless slopes and hang there like a culprit facing his end? You, mystically terrible, you, Sphinx above all fog! I hate you, because you have shattered me and shaken me to the core and will not give me peace of heart before I have you under my iron heel. Are you then a woman, igniting painful Eros in our chests? No, you are the Eternal Masculine, a colossal sculpture of solemn, supreme, virile power!

It is better not to think about it any longer. The rain has stopped and I can already hear rambling kettles from Dekke's tent. We are taking off! It is time for thoughts inside a snug sleeping bag to give way to the deeds of the day.

The company has split into two groups. I am going with Dekke and Simon Andersen Storelv over the ridge from the Southeast, the only known access point until now. Arne Naess and Else Hertzberg will be seeking new routes on the southern face. Our team looks somewhat ordinary, whereas these two meagre eagles of the abyss are loaded with ropes, bolts, karabiners, hammers, shoes and food packages and underneath it all garments of unknown fabrics and cuts, enough to make the perception of an uninitiated observer shatter. Their mission is not an extraordinary one, which becomes obvious after a slightest sullen glance up the sky-high, armor smooth mountain face, on which they will crochet their way upward with their odd ironmongery.

Worlds of scree and slopes of naked rock are now separating us from our friends in the transcendental league. Lumps of clay as we are, forced adherents of the alpine immanence, we choose the route where hand and foot find support in the good old sense of the word. But from Hall's Height we hear distant, fading hammer strokes from the opposite mountain face,—tiny bell chimes in the whizzing space. And with a six-

barrel Zeiss we detect two colorful grains out on the edge of the plunging stonewall, hung up on hooks like martyrs between the sheer cliffs. Wonderfully and terribly skilled people! And what about the autocracy of man? Are we going to be driven away by curly, bright haired usurpers from our last refuge, our humble foot-steps up on the mountainside?



Climbing on Stetind, 1936.

We shout—but the wind catches the weak human sound in its cheerful game, tumbling hither and thither and tosses it away in some unknown crevice, where it shrivels into a sigh and eventually dies.

Back to work! We gather on the western side of Hall's Height and look at the peak. Either the Pan, or the Earth Spirit, or the Devil himself has tightened a two hundred meter clothesline from the block we are

standing on over to the Eastern face of the great peak, where freshly smoothed thousand meter high cliffs are broken off in the middle and hung up to dry. Three tiny clothes pegs sitting astride and slowly wriggling over to the other side, holding on to the edge and riding the swinging span.

Ride on! Away with the clothesline, bring in the timber! A death stallion on its hind legs with a reeking mane is the animal that carries us across the void. We jab him with sharpened spurs and speed up as the air streams clash behind us.

Finally we are on the other side and we pat him in gratitude, step off and proceed on foot. The ridge is spacious and broad here, we sit down to rest on a pile of gravel, eat lots of food, drink lots of juice and lie down on our backs, legs splayed and smoking a pipe—while our eyes are wandering through the sky. We still have a few hundred meters left to the top, but why rush? It is good to be here and the day is still young and the night belongs to us. We are absolutely cool and calm on the outside and quite deep inside our bodies and souls. But what is in our innermost being?—They say that there is a cliff up there that one cannot by-pass, a slab that has to be crossed hanging by your arms—a climb that people, who have done it, somehow never stop talking about—well, come what may, let's not cross that bridge until we come to it; we are not in a hurry.

A gust of strong wind wakes us from our doze and Simon catches a boot on its way into the abyss. The wind blows stronger, it plays the comb on the scraggy ridge and the monstrous organ pipes of the Northern face are gurgling. We shiver with cold, put our rubber boots on quickly and prepare our ropes. Dekke is given the honorable task of leading us through the crucial ten meters that stretch between uncertainty and triumph.

We are soon standing on the narrow ledge that stretches between the safety on one side and the void itself on the other. This is the credo, *quia absurdum* moment. Tiptoeing on the uttermost point of the ledge, the first man stretches himself through the abyss to reach for the slab. Then he proceeds hanging by his

arms while his body and legs are hanging like a dead weight. He disappears around the corner and now I am the one standing in the last bend of the ledge feeling small. Am I dreaming? Is this a part of a human earthly path? Could this possibly be a mountain,—this hardened shape, this avalanche of yellow-gray rock that plunges from the ridge down into the forest with ghostlike speed in a one thousand meter sweep?—At least I have to treat it so, as if it was, and signal the one up there and get myself out. It is a landscape out of this world, yet these whims of the cosmic forces are turned into a path under my clasping hands. During these nameless seconds I sense how the wide stream of my destiny flows into nothing in this passage of six or eight embittering fingertip grips.

We sit by the cairn and let our eyes wander. From the mirage lands of Lofotveggen in the West to the cold glacier glow in the East. There is a reek coming from the abyss and a drift coming from the sky, as the storm and the fog are being crushed against the rocks and ravines. Vision and sound merge into a saga about the eternal sovereignty of the minerals. Life forms are frothing around the foot of the mountain just like the mist that forms, changes and disappears in the sky. Not only has Stetind seen Ages of Man from its height, it witnessed the Ages of the Earth. It stands like a pillar in the stream of time, and cleaves the striding glacier like a plough. But the glacier disappeared and the warmth came, and brontosaurus started grunting under the palms.



Mount Stetind, 1936.

And Stetind became drowsy from the steam and pulled a blanket of haze over its head and dozed for a while. Now, the old Anders Nilsen is padding here in cowberry heather.

And yet in autumn, as The Great Stranger comes to reap his harvest and his eyes go wandering along the sullen mountain faces, that is when a single stone might loosen and fall off.

The weather is rough as we are gnawing our way through the fjord in Simon's ramshackled vessel. Squalls are hunting under the heavy stratus as the rain and the salty waves hit our necks. Then the clouds burst, and he is standing before us once again, the titan, wreathed in lightning, casting water, shining like emery polished iron. Thunder belches around him, but it does not affect him, nothing affects him, as he sits enthroned in his Olympic indifference over the hectic course of life—an anvil for the gods to hammer on.



Climbing Stetind.