



IN BRIEF

Michael Kerrigan

★★★★★ Superlative ★★★★ Super ★★★ So-so
★★ Substandard ★ Shoddy

THE SUMMITS OF
MODERN MAN

BY PETER H HANSEN
(Harvard, £25.95) ★★★★★
A VICTORY for civilised man over wild nature, a triumph of the individual will, Petrarch's ascent of Mont Ventoux in 1336 has often been regarded as the start of the Renaissance. Only since the 19th century, though. Before that, Hansen explains, no self-evident link was seen between mountain-climbing and modernity. In this wide-ranging and subtle cultural history of climbing, Peter H Hansen explores our evolving relationship with the rocky heights. At the centre of this (beautifully presented) study is the paradox that mountaineering, the ultimate team pursuit, has been mythologised as an individualistic contest.

THE ATTACKING OCEAN

BY BRIAN FAGAN
(Bloomsbury, £20) ★★★★★
ABOUT 7,500 years ago, the last surviving summit of the Dogger Hills disappeared below the waterline. Its human inhabitants had long since left: nomadic hunter-gatherers, they'd scarcely have noticed as, over generations, they moved

up to higher ground. Now, of course, the Dogger Bank lies 50ft beneath the North Sea. Sea-levels have fluctuated wildly over the lifespan of the human species: currently, it's 700ft higher than it was during the last glaciation. Through prehistory, that hardly mattered: for the last 7,000 years or so, however, we've been leading settled lives, and stand to lose much more. As Fagan – an eminent archaeologist – shows, this isn't just a story of catastrophe: our struggles with the sea have helped shape make us who we are.

STEAMING TO VICTORY

BY MICHAEL WILLIAMS
(Profile, £25) ★★★★★
THE Flying Scotsman, the Mallard, the Brighton Belle ... the 1930s represented the Golden Age of the British train, but it was all derailed by the outbreak of war. Even so, says Michael Williams, the railways were the pulsing arteries of wartime Britain: moving troops and munitions; shifting coal, steel and food; carrying commuters and mail; bringing families together. Keeping it all going was dirty, dangerous and unrelenting work, Michael Williams reveals in a book that's by turns stirring, awe-inspiring and simply quirky.

