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The danger is in their

by Kevin Gillese

Mountain climbers. They're the people you see in the photographs — dangling from ropes three thousand feet above nothing, caught in awesome blizzards high on desolate mountain sides, threatened with death at every moment. So, you've read Bonnington's *Annapurna South Face*, seen *The Eiger Sanction*, and read news clips of the Everest expeditions. Mountain climbing is something only raving lunatics bent on self-destruction attempt, right?

That, at least, is the image that has been thrust upon the public. Even in England, where climbing (along with soccer) is the most enjoyed and practised sport of the nation, there is a very deliberate attempt to foster that kind of image. Any climber who does not want to or cannot climb severe or exposed rock faces is called a "rabbit". "Rabbits" are counselled to leave the good rock areas for the "tigers" and further, to lend financial support to "tiger" expeditions going to the Himalayas and the Andes — places where a rabbit could never go to.

Lovely. Socially stratified sport.

So the rabbits go out and push themselves onto

dangerous rock, into dangerous situations. And they drive themselves: "It's not good enough that you climb what you like to climb," they tell themselves, "you have to climb until you're hopelessly scared every time you go out."

Some go on to be tigers, some ignore the pressure and stay contented rabbits, many drop out because they don't enjoy paralyzing themselves with fright just for the sake of recreation. So basically the sport is left to the best — and the best receive plenty of publicity. Which of course, they deserve. The best mountain climbers put themselves through fantastic trials — pushing their bodies to incredible limits in exotic situations. They climb in places where most people can only dream of going.

But that's not the only type of climbing, just as hiking the 2200-mile Pacific Crest Trail is not the only type of hiking. You can climb mountains for enjoyment, pure enjoyment — increasing the element of risk for personal rather than social reasons.

It's just that it's rather hard to begin climbing, because of the equipment required (expensive) and the necessary

technical know to in: acquire).

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