FOREWORD

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This major revision of Larry Price's book *Mountains and Man* (1981) is both timely and highly appropriate. The intervening three decades encompass a time of remarkable progress in our understanding of mountains from a purely academic point of view. Of even greater importance is that society at large is coming to realize that mountains and mountain people are no longer isolated from the mainstream of world affairs but are vital if we are to achieve an environmentally sustainable future.

The Foreword that I prepared for the 1981 book can yield comparisons between that book and this one and also allows us to emphasize some of the developments that have occurred within mountain geography and in the awareness of *mountains* during the last three decades. I wrote in the opening lines of the original: "This is a most important and timely book. It is destined to become a standard text." My undergraduate mountain geography classes alone sold well over a thousand copies, and I am sure this could be echoed by many faculty colleagues.

Nevertheless, my rereading of that old Foreword, after a lapse of more than a quarter century, prompted a sharp reawakening. The very title that Larry employed (*Mountains and Man*) would be unthinkable today. That may be a superficial assessment, although there are clear underlying implications. Women do account for somewhat more than half of humanity, and a comparable balance is being achieved in their contribution to mountain research, development, and overall adherence to the mountain cause. And we have learned of the overwhelming contribution of mountain women in the struggle for survival in these sometimes severe environments.

There is one particular lesson to be learned. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, world society was being made aware of a portending mountain catastrophe. For example, the early awakening to the relevance of mountains and mountain people by the world at large was prompted

by a news media blitz that the mismanagement of their homeland by the mountain people themselves was pushing the Himalayas to the edge of environmental destruction, not only of the mountains but of the life-support systems of the hundreds of millions living on the plains below. The World Bank had predicted in 1979 that Nepal would be denuded of its forest cover by the year 2000. The United Nations Environment Programme speculated that Himalayan deforestation by 1980 was already compounding seasonal flooding in Bangladesh. The World Resources Institute claimed that "a few million subsistent hill farmers are undermining the life support of several hundred million people in the plains." And the mountain people were the culprits.

The preceding paragraph reflects the remarkable change that has occurred in our attitudes to, and understanding of, mountains and mountain people. The widespread change in understanding exemplified by this single example also provides part of the justification for production of this book.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, under the leadership of the late Professor Carl Troll, the International Geographical Union's (IGU) Commission on High-Altitude Geocology began to flourish. Larry Price was himself an active member of the original small group of geographers committed to high-mountain research. The commission changed its name to *Mountain Geocology* so that it included study of the more inhabitable mountain environments and the people who lived there. It also extended its endeavors well beyond its initial academic arena, however, through the influence of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme—Project 6: *Study of the Impact of Human Activities on Mountain Ecosystems* (1973). The move toward applied mountain research was subsequently accelerated by another leading German geographer, Professor Walther Manshard, as Vice-Rector of the then newly created United

Nations University (UNU), headquartered in Tokyo. There followed the founding of the International Mountain Society and its quarterly journal *Mountain Research and Development*. At that time (1981, coincidental with the publication of Larry's book), a small group of us realized that our efforts should be extended into the development field:

*To strive for a better balance between mountain environment,
development of resources, and the well-being of mountain peoples.*

The quarterly journal, together with UNU/IGU research in the Himalayas and elsewhere, became a prominent force that led to the Mohonk Mountain Conference of 1985. Maurice Strong was invited to serve as honorary chair of the conference, thereby establishing a valuable connection with the future Secretary General of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED 1992). In short, a group of mountain geographers and closely associated anthropologists and foresters set out to examine the validity of the catastrophe paradigm typified by the World Bank doomsday prediction. The Himalayan catastrophe theory was eventually overthrown, and mountain people were identified as part of the solution, decidedly not as the cause of environmental disaster.

As the process of academic and pragmatic mountain research gathered momentum, so institutional allegiances multiplied: IUCN, FAO, UNESCO, UNU, IGU, the East-West Center of the University of Hawaii; and nine different universities in eight countries. The growing debate, for instance, led to the UNU's mountain program being renamed as *Mountain Geoecology and Sustainable Development*, in response to Maurice Strong's request for assistance with the mountain cause in preparation for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio 1992). Chapter 13, for mountains, was duly inserted into AGENDA 21. This, in conjunction with a rapidly enlarging group of institutions and individuals, culminated in the UN declaration of A.D. 2002 as *The International Year of Mountains* (IYM).

An important associated commitment throughout this period was the training of young scholars from developing mountain countries and their incorporation into the field research activities. The UNU/IGU collaboration, extensively assisted by the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), included research and training in western China, the Andes, Tajikistan, Thailand, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, East Africa, and Madagascar. The Mountain Institute was reborn of the Woodlands Mountain Institute in West Virginia and refocused. In Kathmandu, ICIMOD was revitalized. The Mountain Forum was established (1995), leading to worldwide electronic communication amongst all manner of mountain peoples. Following Rio (1992), FAO took on the vital role of nurturing mountain sustainable development activities. Further achievements since IYM 2002 are too many to be incorporated into this Foreword and would go far beyond my remit.

Coincident with these activities, the powerful idea that *mountains are the water towers of the world* became a virtual household saying. It was demonstrated that by *listening to the mountains*, major advances are possible (Rhoades 2007). FAO and the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) (2005) became the only major component of the UN system (excepting our collaborating institutions, UNU and UNESCO) to support the probability that the earlier paradigm of convenience—claiming that poor mountain peoples, through unthinking forest clearance, were causing downstream destruction—was nonsense. These are just a few indications of changes in attitudes and understanding in relation to mountains since *Mountains and Man* was published in 1981.

A recent theme which currently appears to eclipse all others, however, is global warming. It has been recognized during the last 10 years or so that high-altitude and high-latitude environments are experiencing the most pronounced effects of climate change. This reemphasizes the need for accelerated mountain research to ensure an adequate scientific basis for any attempted prognostication, particularly in the highest and more inaccessible regions where time-series data are almost entirely lacking. However, a new claim has arisen, with publicity equal to that which produced the original outcry of Himalayan catastrophe. Gross exaggeration, whether motivated by a felt need to obtain public acclaim or to increase research and consultancy funds, has pervaded much reporting by the news media (and, I am ashamed to say, academic and other research and commentary). This is not to say that future potential impacts of global warming are not serious; they are. And it has been clearly demonstrated that its impacts are especially noticeable in mountain regions. It is highly unlikely, however (to quote one current example), that glacial lake outburst floods will wash away major cities on the Ganges, or that the Himalayas will lose all their snow and glaciers within the next 20 or so years, so that the Ganges and similar great rivers will become seasonal streams with starvation and loss of hundreds of millions of lives. The dangers of this melodrama, aside from the moral implications, should not need emphasis; unfortunately, such is not the case.

By presenting such a timely and far-reaching reassessment of the current mountain *problematique*, the University of California Press has provided a sound base for ensuring that the next generation of students can better understand the processes occurring in the mountains of the world—processes both human and natural, if it is any longer possible to differentiate—and their impact on society as a whole. Of equal importance is the provision of so much new scientific information that our future students are better able to assess for themselves the exaggerations of a disaster-hungry world. I am sure that the coauthors of this book (including Larry himself, of course) have utilized the substantial original contribution to further strengthen the basis for mountain teaching and to

enlarge the prospects for attainment of sustainable mountain development.

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