



# Wild Country: The Man Who Made Friends

*Mark Vallance*

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## **Wild Country: The Man Who Made Friends** Mark Vallance

In early 1978, an extraordinary new invention for rock climbers was featured on the BBC television science show Tomorrow's World. It was called the 'Friend', and it not only made the sport safer, it helped push the limits of the possible. The company that made them was called Wild Country, the brainchild of Mark Vallance. Within six months, Vallance was selling Friends in sixteen countries. Wild Country would go on to develop much of the gear that transformed climbing in the 1980s. Mark Vallance's influence on the outdoor world extends far beyond the company he founded. He owned and opened the influential retailer Outside in the Peak District and was part of the team that built The Foundry, Sheffield's premier climbing wall - the first modern climbing gym in Britain. He worked for the Peak District National Park and served on its board. He even found time to climb eight-thousand-metre peaks and the Nose on El Capitan. Diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in his mid fifties and robbed of his plans for retirement, Vallance found a new sense of purpose as a reforming president of the British Mountaineering Council. In Wild Country, Vallance traces his story, from childhood influences like Robin Hodgkin and Sir Jack Longland, to two years in Antarctica, where he was base commander of the UK's largest and most southerly scientific station at Halley Bay, before his fateful meeting with Ray Jardine, the man who invented Friends, in Yosemite. Trenchant, provocative and challenging, Wild Country is a remarkable personal story and a fresh perspective on the role of the outdoors in British life and the development of climbing in its most revolutionary phase.

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