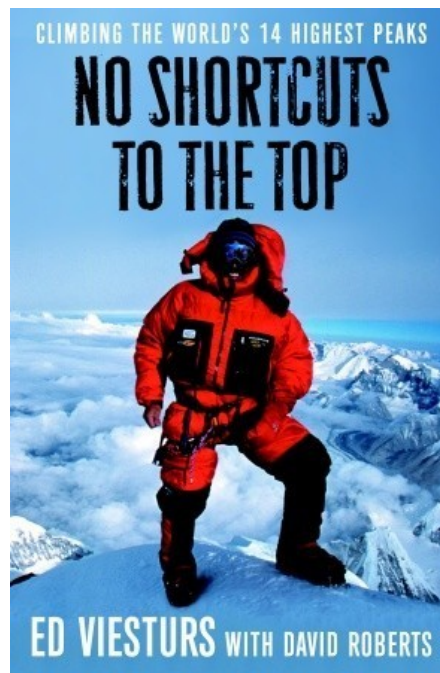




No Shortcuts to the Top: Climbing the World's 14 Highest Peaks

Ed Viesturs , David Roberts

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This gripping and triumphant memoir from the author of *The Mountain* follows a living legend of extreme mountaineering as he makes his assault on history, one 8,000-meter summit at a time.

For eighteen years Ed Viesturs pursued climbing's holy grail: to stand atop the world's fourteen 8,000-meter peaks, without the aid of bottled oxygen. But *No Shortcuts to the Top* is as much about the man who would become the first American to achieve that goal as it is about his stunning quest. As Viesturs recounts the stories of his most harrowing climbs, he reveals a man torn between the flat, safe world he and his loved ones share and the majestic and deadly places where only he can go.

A preternaturally cautious climber who once turned back 300 feet from the top of Everest but who would not shrink from a peak (Annapurna) known to claim the life of one climber for every two who reached its summit, Viesturs lives by an unyielding motto, "Reaching the summit is optional. Getting down is mandatory." It is with this philosophy that he vividly describes fatal errors in judgment made by his fellow climbers as well as a few of his own close calls and gallant rescues. And, for the first time, he details his own pivotal and heroic role in the 1996 Everest disaster made famous in Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air*.

In addition to the raw excitement of Viesturs's odyssey, *No Shortcuts to the Top* is leavened with many funny moments revealing the camaraderie between climbers. It is more than the first full account of one of the staggering accomplishments of our time; it is a portrait of a brave and devoted family man and his beliefs that shaped this most perilous and magnificent pursuit.

No Shortcuts to the Top: Climbing the World's 14 Highest Peaks Details

Date : Published (first published January 1st 2006)

ISBN :

Author : Ed Viesturs , David Roberts

Format : Kindle Edition 368 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Adventure, Sports, Mountaineering, Biography, Travel, Autobiography, Memoir, Climbing

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From Reader Review No Shortcuts to the Top: Climbing the World's 14 Highest Peaks for online ebook

Maria V. Snyder says

I am an armchair adventurer - I love reading these stories about hardship, freezing cold temperatures, dangerous conditions and general misery while I'm wrapped up in a blanket, cozy warm and with a steaming cup of tea nearby (The Deadliest Catch was one of my favorite TV shows). I'm also so very impressed by the author's accomplishment to summit the world's 14 highest peaks - without supplemental oxygen!

This book is not just a blow by blow of his successes and failures on the mountains, but about his life's journey to that point, from being inspired at age 14 to finally reaching his goal at age 46. It's about despite becoming a veterinarian, he was strong enough to walk away because climbing was his true passion - instead of earning a good living working with animals, he spent his time building houses and scrounging for sponsors to pay for his trips to the Himalaya.

One of the best parts was learning what mountaineers do when they're camped on this tiny ledge at 24,000 feet and nature calls, what they wear and eat and how a five pound tent can be the difference between life and death. I've always been curious about that!

For those who enjoyed "Into Thin Air" by Jon Krakauer you'll like this as well. He has a chapter on the 1996 Everest disaster and gives you another perspective on what went wrong.

Here's my favorite passage from the book: "Look, it took me eighteen years to complete a very difficult endeavor. Viewed as a whole, climbing all fourteen 8000ers (referring to peaks that are 8000 meters or higher) would have seemed almost impossible, but I took it one day at a time, one step at a time. I was passionate about what I did, and I never gave up.

"Whatever challenge you have before you can be accomplished in the same fashion--whether it takes a week, two months, or a year. If you look at the challenge as a whole, it may seem insuperable, but if you break it down into tangible steps, it can seem more reasonable, and ultimately achievable."

He's right - I've used that same persistence for my writing career - when I sit down to write, I don't think "I'm going to write a novel." That would scare the adverbs out of me! No, I think, I'm going to write 1000 words - that's my goal and if I get more done then I'm happy.

Lori says

While I found reading about all the mountain expeditions interesting, I had a problem connecting with the author. I think he reminded the reader too many times about how great he was at making decisions, what an incredible athlete he was, how attractive he was to the ladies. . . He very well may be all of these things, and he has accomplished incredible feats, but I found his propensity to brag exhausting at times. I think a friend of mine who also enjoys mountaineering books warned me away from this one, but I didn't realize this was the same book until now.

Dannie says

The stories jumped all over the place, both in chronology and in length. And although the message is about getting down the mountain safely, the theme isn't interesting enough to play through the whole book. The author isn't arrogant, but he does appear to be self-centered, which seems to be pretty common for serious mountaineers or elite athletes.

Cory verner says

It's impossible not to respect Ed Viesturs accomplishments. That does not mean you need to love his writing. I found the book interesting, primarily because I am passionate about climbing mountains myself. There is a lot of back story here that, although interesting and possibly even necessary for a book like this, is a bit tiresome. I would have preferred to have had the climbs described in more detail. I'm not sure that would have pleased other, though. You can't win with a book like this.

I will say I'm glad I read it.

Tarik Adnan says

Ed Viesturs is probably the best American high altitude climbers in the history of Himalayan climbing. His climbing stories taught me so much about risk management and climbing safely! I think his advice is practical for not only climbing but also for any risk management situation in life.

But the quote that I will take with me as long as I climb is 'Getting to the top is optional. Getting down is mandatory.'

Judd says

I got the opportunity to climb with Ed Viesturs on Rainier in July 2010. It was by accident and only for half an hour. I didn't know who he was at the time, but as he welcomed me onto his rope halfway up Cathedral Gap, I was struck by his charisma and positivity as I struggled with the thin air and the fat kid spilling his last two meals on the rocks behind me. As we climbed, he continually called out encouragements to the middle-aged man just behind on the rope. I didn't know who he was, but I recognized him as someone special on the mountain.

After returning to Utah, I looked him up and found this book. I am now stunned that I was lucky enough to climb with someone this great - and a bit disappointed I didn't get his autograph while I ate pizza at the next table after the climb...

Without a doubt one of the best books about determination and the love for mountaineering. An honest recounting of a decade long journey to climb all 8000 meter mountains without supplement oxygen.

Vanessa says

BookRiot 2018 Read Harder Challenge #6: A book about nature

I read the reviews, so I know there is a whole cult of people, myself included, who can't get enough of mountain climbing books ever since they read *Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mount Everest Disaster*. Hey! Here's another one.

Actually, if you've read Krakauer's book, Ed Viesturs' name should be familiar to you. He was at Everest in 1996 making the IMAX film (called, surprisingly, *Everest*) with David Breashears, and participated in the rescue effort after the killer storm that killed eight people. So, the guy is a hero.

He's also one of the few people in the world who has climbed all 14 8000 meter peaks (that works out to 26,000 feet and some change, basically all of the mountains in the Death Zone and all located either in the Himalayas or the Karakoram.) And he climbed them all without supplemental oxygen.

You should know this also serves as Viesturs' memoir, so while there are plenty of mountain-climbing stories, there are also stories about his life. Some of that is still interesting: Viesturs' infatuation with climbing began when he read Maurice Herzog's account of being the first team to successfully summit Annapurna (called, surprisingly, Annapurna), he completed veterinary school and then barely worked as a vet at all because it got in the way of his climbing obsession, he was friends and had climbed with both Rob Hall and Scott Fischer (who both died on Everest in '96.) He also has a chapter about the Everest story, including his opinion on what happened. If you've read and liked *Into Thin Air*, I'd say this part in particular is a must-read.

But he also does talk some about his wife and kids. Which, I don't begrudge the guy his happiness; I'm not a complete dick. It's just that I bought a ticket for a mountain-climbing ride, and that's what I wanted to take. I might have skimmed some of the family parts.

I did want to add that a few reviewers thought Viesturs was conceited or seemed full of himself. I didn't find that to be true at all. He's just very confident and a ridiculous over-achiever, so I think those attributes are getting misread. It's kind of a shame, because he seems like a nice guy who would be genuinely surprised and a little hurt to hear that (He's been a public figure for years though, he's probably used to it.)

This is more worthy grist for your mountain-climbing book obsession. I might pick up his other books on K2 and/or Annapurna. Those peaks, Annapurna in particular, are considerably more statistically dangerous to climb than Everest, and therefore much more fascinating.

Koeoaddi says

4.5

Engaging book by an amazing climber. Interesting to read his even and respectful account of the 1996 disaster as well as his other mountain experiences. One half point deducted for when I briefly ran out of bottled oxygen at Camp 3, reading about the minutiae of his corporate sponsorships. Otherwise a riveting book.

Amar Pai says

Ed Viesturs is kind of a dweeb, but I have to admit he's a workhorse superman. One foot in front of the other, repeat, repeat, repeat. He said at the top of some summits you have to take 15 breaths for every step. Damn

Becky says

While I absolutely respect Ed Viesturs not just for his accomplishments in mountaineering but also for his efforts to maximize safety, to rescue stranded climbers, to help scientists understand HACE and HAPE, and for his many MANY donations to wonderful charities... this book was just sort of ho-hum. His compartmentalization on mountains, while necessary, does not necessarily make for great narration in a story. Not that I want to capitalize on the heartache and terror he has seen, but it all felt so distant in the narration, and it left it a bit dry. I think Ed would be a very engaging speaker, but this book left me wanting more. Also, the first half jumped around quite a bit in its story telling, it was very jarring and off putting. I grew bored quickly with the repetitive simple sentence structure, and it became increasingly hard for me to pick the book up and continue reading.

Now, this book is still a great read for those interested in mountaineering. There is a lot of good philosophy and tactics for mountaineering in here, but I just wouldn't expect to be riveted like you can be reading *Into Thin Air*.

Petra X says

[Rant follows. Noting to do with the book. One wonders if these are readers or are just on here to be Librarians and be on the Top Librarians lists by doing lots of easy things and don't actually read books. I am thinking of ~~an awful bloody lot~~ a couple of librarians. Despite all evidence to the contrary they are the same ones (some of th

Agnese says

The life of a mountaineer and his pursuit of the fourteen 8000ers. A very engaging book that succeeds in depicting the passion, determination, and emotional waves that animate Viesturs and lead him repeatedly to the top of the world and from there with the same intensity back home. The last chapter is an unnecessary reiteration of the meaning of mountaineering, in which the author feels the need to explain - maybe first of all to himself - the significance of a life spent in the accomplishment of extreme enterprises, which may look like the selfish choice of an ambitious individual. But being true to oneself whatever it takes, honest and generous as Viesturs appears from this account, is a meaningful way of life. I also feel that the references to his private life at the end of the book are superfluous: they are too few to depict it properly and they sound forced, as if the author thought it necessary to give a tribute to his family. The anecdotes about his family that are scattered in the book are enough to give an idea of the strong bonds and mutual understanding within his family: no need for any explanations.

David says

Fast-paced account of the mountaineering exploits of the author, particularly his feat of reaching the summits of all 14 of the world's mountains exceeding 8,000 meters in height. Describes his relatively conservative approach to managing the risks, which led him to turn back just short of several summits due to bad weather, avalanche-risk conditions of the snow, etc. on several occasions. Annapurna in particular thwarted him several times before he finally got to the summit.

good to get his take (was there with the crew making the Imax film "Everest") on the 1996 Everest disaster chronicled in "Into Thin Air". also enjoyed the details of his training, gear, effects of altitude on physiology, etc. Very interesting discussion of his family life, incl. the strain on his wife of being left alone for months at a time, often with poor communications availability, with little kids, while he was undertaking life-threatening challenges.

The stuff about securing sponsorships and later giving motivational talks was less engaging, but I guess that's a matter of taste. At least he didn't devote the bulk of the book to "how my climbing experiences apply to business success" or what have you.

In 2006 he ran the new york marathon at the invite of the New York Road Runners -- had always run as part of his mountaineering training, but never competed in road races. He finished in 3:15, a very respectable time for anyone, let alone someone who doesn't race regularly. I'm sure, given his overall endurance and fitness, he could improve that time considerably with a longer period of training focused just on running, but what I particularly found striking in this story was his conclusion "I can't say that I would run another one. The NYC marathon was fun, it was interesting, and it was a unique new challenge for me, but it was very time-consuming to train for."

I guess "time-consuming" is sort of a subjective perception -- somehow I've managed to train for marathons without leaving my family for several months to go to the other side of the world, but whatever.....

Zinta says

I was handed this book by a colleague, saying, "Hey, you're Latvian, too, aren't you?" Indeed, I am, and if perhaps my first spark of interest in this book came from that - Ed Viesturs' father, Elmars Viesturs, came to the U.S. very much by the same route as my own parents, refugees from the Soviet occupation of Latvia - then it soon enough veered far more to his achievements in mountainclimbing. I'd heard of Viesturs before. I'd seen a few film clips of his remarkable feat in summiting the world's 14 highest mountains over a span of 18 years. If his Latvian name caught my attention (my own father's name is Viestarts, a variation of the same, and the name is, in fact, rooted fittingly in folklore based on a Latvian warrior), it was his life and how he lived it that sustained my attention.

Yes, his life and how he lived it, because the story of Ed Viesturs is not just about climbing mountains. It is very much about HOW he climbs those mountains, and not only how he climbs them, but also how he descends. Viesturs continually reminds his readers that his secret to his mountainclimbing success - "Reaching the summit is optional. Getting down is mandatory." - is to never allow ego to get in the way of reaching the summit, to keep passion for one's pursuit aligned equally with sound sense, and that even the most desired outcome for a personal dream must sometimes be put on hold, perhaps numerous times, when the wisdom of experience-honed instinct dictates: this is not your time.

Viesturs tells his story (with the help of writer, David Roberts) from its logical beginning. The boy reads a book. It is a book about a mountaineer who is doing battle with one of the most difficult, if not quite the highest, mountains: Annapurna. Although his childhood unfolds in the flattest parts of the Midwest, his imagination soars with his reading. (Do books still so inspire our youth? one has to wonder ...) To climb all of the fourteen 8,000-meter peaks in the world (8,000 meters above sea level) becomes his life's pursuit.

Dreams are often not practical. Viesturs realizes he must pursue also some more practical career, and so he earns a degree in veterinary science. Alongside the practical, however, he never stops pushing the dream. He eventually ends up abandoning the "sensible" career, subsists on a meager salary as a climbing guide, takes on odd jobs to allow for the needed time off to travel across the world and climb. We can already see the needed fiber and hardy character of the man in these early climbing days, in how he approaches his goal with just the right mix of sensible and dream-crazy. He has the discipline to train, he has the persistence to continue when others fall away, he has the character to not give in to numerous rejections or obstacles that would close the door on so many others. He has what it takes to be a winner in whatever arena.

This is a gripping adventure story. It even has its element of mature romance, as Viesturs eventually meets his wife, Paula, who is his source of support and encouragement, his best friend, his companion dreamer. There is also history alongside his accomplishments to give the reader perspective. Many die. Very many. What Viesturs accomplishes only five others can claim to have done. And while Mount Everest is the mountain most know, it is not at all the most dangerous. Viesturs' story nears grand conclusion as he ends where he begins, with his last climb, the same mountain that inspired him as a boy: Annapurna. As the circle closes, the reader, too, feels a deep satisfaction.

If we ever wonder, as Viesturs does at one point, if living such a life makes sense, he ties it up nicely as he talks about how he was able to become a professional mountaineer, financed by sponsors. He has a debate with a reporter about the statistics he faces, life or death. While the reporter uses the metaphor of Russian roulette, Viesturs argues that his odds actually improve with each summit, even as his experience accumulates. What he does, he says in his speaking tours, can be an approach well transposed to any pursuit in life. Know when and how to chase your dream; know when to turn back; know what should be sacrificed along the way and what should never be left behind; know when to trust your instincts; know how to celebrate an accomplishment without letting it get overmuch to your head; know how not to give up on what truly matters; know how to go home again and appreciate the source of your strength.

Indeed, there are no shortcuts to the top. And that, perhaps, in this time of instant gratification, of superficial and short-lived pleasures, of quick and easy fixes that somehow never last, of climbing on the backs of others to reach a higher level, is the best part of this grand adventure story. Viesturs never forgets his values. He never loses a solid sense of personal integrity. He never loses sight of his motivation. He does what he does because he wishes to know what his personal best can be. And yet, when he summits, he never quite forgets he is not alone. Family at home, fellow climbers, the ghosts of climbers that didn't make it ... the reader realizes by end of this story that mountain peaks were not his only, or even his greatest accomplishments. This is much more about the journey than the destination, and it is a journey taken with a rare kind of wisdom and integrity.

To learn more about Ed Viesturs and his summits and current journeys to explore the effects of global warming at the earth's poles, I encourage a long visit to his stunning Web site at <http://www.edviesturs.com/>

Anne says

The first two-thirds was really good, then it got a little slow.

