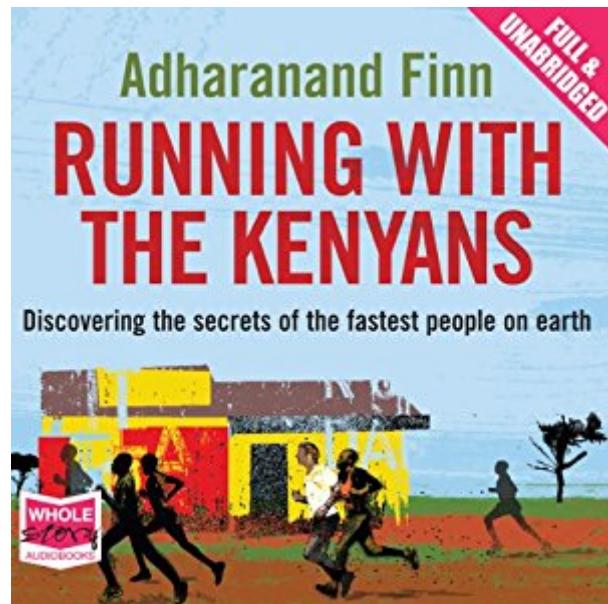


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Running With The Kenyans



Synopsis

After years of watching Kenyan athletes win the world's biggest races, Adharanand Finn set out to discover just what it was that made them so fast - and to see if he could keep up. Packing up his life he moved from Devon to Iten, in Kenya, to eat with, interview, sleep beside and - most importantly - run with, some of the greatest runners in the world. In the distance rests his dream, to join the best of the Kenyan athletes in an epic first marathon across the Kenyan plains.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Fantastic book, easy read. More than 50% of my life I've been a runner. I'm a white Caucasian male who is trying to always get better and I look up to East Africans in the sport of running because, quite frankly, they're the best. I'm always curious to know what kind of training they do differently, or what kind of food helps them. Obviously I'm aware that genetics plays a large role and no ONE THING will make me into a superstar outside of more training. But, I like learning about new cultures and seeing how I can implement changes into my running regimen using Kenyan tradition! This book is a fantastic read because it's a story about the author's journey to Kenya to uncover secrets about Kenyan success. What you find is that there are like 10+ "secrets" that, when all put together, lead to Kenyan success. Not ONE thing like going barefoot, being at altitude, etc.

This is a journalist's account of contemporary running culture in Kenya. And so it is in the unmistakable, or I might say inevitable, style of a reporter. It's readable - I've often read books in a less agreeable style. A lot of it is anecdotal journalistic free association rather than analytical

observation. Yet, in spite of a pretty good effort I think he still misses or at least underappreciates some aspects of what he experiences, although the observations are appreciated. And it certainly does take more determination than I would likely gather to uproot a small family, leave a job and move to Kenya to study the runners there. Would that there could be a similar book about the Tarahumara, which is doubtful. What he comes away with is a series of factors that logically seem to lead to the Kalenjin Kenyans' domination of distance running worldwide today. It's just that somehow you come away with the feeling that something is missing, that it doesn't all really quite add up. The running barefoot as children, training at high altitude, diet, and the motivation to get out of poverty -- are all significant...yet you don't come away with the feeling that all the pieces are there, or maybe they just don't fit together into a coherent whole. One point in particular he fails to mention: with the debate over whether distance running causes heart scarring or not, it would be especially interesting to hear if the Kenyans have experienced this problem or not. I've never heard of one of their runners having any such thing. I think that something not fully acknowledged is that Westerners have become so distanced from nature they have no comprehension of life in a tribal culture. For those who look, there are certain common features of any true tribal society. They all start with the assumption that nothing is given. You must work hard, very hard, for survival. So you see the brutal training given to young Apache runners, described in my book, the vision quests and sun dances of north American plains tribes, the pueblo kiva initiation ceremonies, and the Kalenjin circumcision ceremony. You had indeed better be focused if you aim to survive such ordeals. And once a young person survives such an initiation they are much less fearful or reluctant to give everything to any endeavor. For example, after the Masai kill a lion with a short sword in order to become a warrior, do you think they would be too concerned about competing in a race?

Adharanand Finn's *Running With The Kenyans* stands as part personal odyssey, part Kenyan running exploration. On the surface Finn sets out with two primary goals in mind: first, he wants to find himself as runner, person, and writer, and second he wants to tap the Kenyan well in an effort to figure out what makes the country so dominant in distance running. In order to achieve both goals, Finn uproots his family, complete with small children and moves to Kenya to train for a marathon. With these two central themes, at times the book can inspire, at others it can meander along lacking direction as he searches for to find the answer to questions that boarder on rhetorical. As a runner, Finn is not world class, at least at the texts start, and regardless of his end stage fitness, he will never be elite. That said, he wants to live the dream, to run free as he calls it, *to live among people who don't think that running is ridiculous* (Finn 45). In

Iten, Kenya, the town he relocates to, people do not run for fitness—“they are not dog walkers, they have to work too hard just to stay alive”—here people run to be athletes, to seek a way out and to find a future. In Iten, a hotbed of Kenyan running, the home to the famous Brother Colm who started it all, people run because to run, they have a chance. Thus their training comes with “the hunger to succeed” (237). Finn explores this world, stumbling into record holders both current past at nearly every step. As he works toward his personal running goal, running his first marathon, he befriends locals, attends races, and visits training camps. Finn creates a running team with the goal of not only completing, but also promoting a few dreamers. Along his journey, he casually shows up to a morning run, one conducted at 5:30 am, to find the current Marathon World Record holder, Wilson Kipsang, giving directions for a fartlek workout. Success and greatness is so abound, that when Finn attempts to contact Kipsang, a 2:03 marathoner, he phones the wrong Kipsang, only this one has a 2:05 personal best. The running greatness becomes his focus, and much of the text tries to find the secret, one in the end has a complex and convoluted answer, a response deeply rooted and spread across the culture of the area. Finn’s marathon rests at the text’s culmination, standing as the final event beyond the afterword. While this path is interesting, the nuts and bolts rests in the sections highlighted above. Finn wants to know why we run. Why do people punish themselves? At times he follows the lead of Born to Run for he himself had converted to forefoot style to avert injury and mimic barefoot Kenyans, and he longs to know what running means. Throughout the narrative journey, he digs, ponders, and tries to find the answer: “Perhaps it is to fulfill this primal urge that runners and joggers get up every morning and pound the streets in cities all over the world” (195). He went to Kenya to become primal, and as an avid runner I can claim that his journey stokes the internal fires of those constantly searching for the same facts. Favorite line: “Twenty-six miles; forty-two kilometers. But they are just numbers. One step at a time. One breath at a time” (xiv). Works CitedFinn, Adharanand. *Running with the Kenyans: Passion, Adventure, and the Secrets of the Fastest People on Earth*. New York: Ballantine, 2012. Check here for other reviews: [...]

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