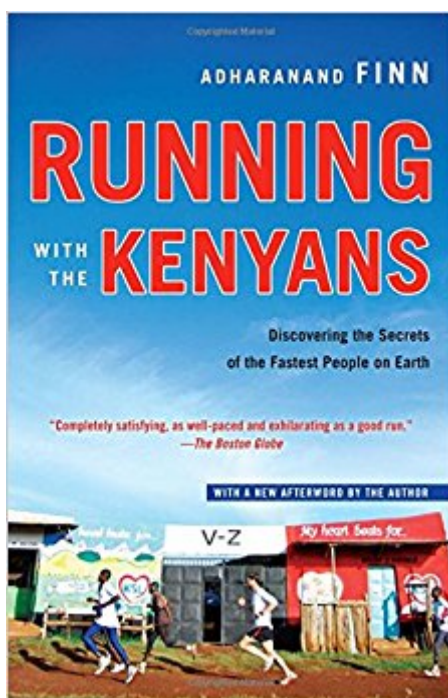


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Running With The Kenyans: Discovering The Secrets Of The Fastest People On Earth



Synopsis

“Completely satisfying, as well-paced and exhilarating as a good run.” —*The Boston Globe* — “Whether running is your recreation or your religion, Adharanand Finn’s incredible journey to the elite training camps of Kenya will captivate and inspire you, as he ventures to uncover the secrets of the fastest people on earth. Finn’s mesmerizing quest combines a fresh look at barefoot running, practical advice on the sport, and the fulfillment of a lifelong dream: to run with his heroes.” —Uprooting his family of five, Finn traveled to a small, chaotic town in the Rift Valley province of Kenya—a mecca for long-distance runners, thanks to its high altitude, endless paths, and some of the top training schools in the world. There Finn would run side by side with Olympic champions, young hopefuls, and barefoot schoolchildren, and meet a cast of unforgettable characters. Amid the daily challenges of training and of raising a family abroad, Finn would learn invaluable lessons about running—and about life. — With a new Afterword by the author — “Not everyone gets to heaven in their lifetime. Adharanand Finn tried to run there, and succeeded. Running with the Kenyans is a great read.” —*Bernd Heinrich*, author of *Why We Run* — “Part scientific study, travel memoir, and tale of self-discovery, Finn’s journey makes for a smart and entertaining read.” —*Publishers Weekly* — “A hymn to the spirit, to the heartbreaking beauty of tenacity, to the joy of movement.” —*The Plain Dealer*

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Customer Reviews

Advance praise for *Running with the Kenyans* — “Completely satisfying, as well-paced

and exhilarating as a good run. •The Boston Globe •“Not everyone gets to heaven in their lifetime. Adharanand Finn tried to run there, and succeeded. Running with the Kenyans is a great read. •Bernd Heinrich, author of *Why We Run* •“Part scientific study, travel memoir, and tale of self-discovery, Finn’s journey makes for a smart and entertaining read. •Publishers Weekly •“A hymn to the spirit, to the heartbreaking beauty of tenacity, to the joy of movement. •The Plain Dealer •“Equal parts cultural examination, cult-of-running treatise, and poignant memoir, *Running with the Kenyans* thrives on a variety of levels. Like the skilled distance runner he is, Finn paces this book marvelously and then saves the best for the final kick. This book packs all the pleasure and satisfaction and none of the ancillary pain of a long training run. •L. Jon Wertheim, senior editor, *Sports Illustrated*, and co-author of the New York Times bestseller *Scorecasting* •“Not everyone gets to heaven in their lifetime. Finn tried to run there, and succeeded. Running with the Kenyans is a great read. •Bernd Heinrich, author of *Why We Run* •“If you want to know the secrets of Kenyan runners, and have a rollicking adventure along the way, join Finn in his fascinating tale of what it is to go stride for stride with the fastest people on Earth. •Neal Bascomb, author of *The Perfect Mile* •“An extremely good book . . . If *Born to Run* taught us what to wear (or not to wear) when running, Finn’s fascinating *Running with the Kenyans* teaches us how to run. . . . In the tradition of the best sports writing, Finn embedded himself fully in his subject and reveals, for the first time, just how close we are to the holy grail of the sub-two-hour marathon. •Robin Harvie, author of *The Lure of Long Distances* •“A beautiful and inspiring must-have for every runner, *Running with the Kenyans* is far more than an inspirational story, but a guide toward running, humility, and life, from the amazing people of Kenya. •Michael Sandler, author of *Barefoot Running*

Adharanand Finn is a journalist at *The Guardian* and a freelance writer, contributing regular features for *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, and *Runner’s World* (U.K.).

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 regiment using Kenyan tradition! This book is a fantastic read because it's a story about the authors 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 border 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. Works Cited Finn, 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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