

To the Ends of the Earth: Adventures of an Expedition Photographer. GORDON WILTSIE. NEW YORK: W.W. NORTON, 2006. HARDBACK. 224 PAGES. \$35.00.

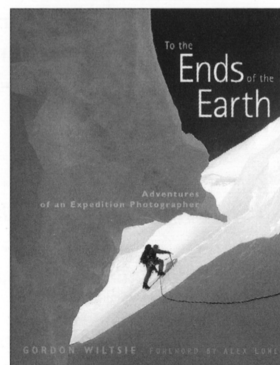
Gordon Wiltsie's *To the Ends of the Earth* is a merry carnival of destinations, a shiny ride that spins readers through the globe's far-flung mountains. Wiltsie's book will please you as a glittering photographic tour, though it may disappoint as a sustained narrative. Gordon Wiltsie's career from Bishop climber to *National Geographic* regular makes him a perfect writer for a book like this, and WW Norton Publishing has come through with first-rate reproductions. This book offers insight into both sides of the camera—the places in front of the lens, and the man behind it.

To the Ends of the Earth opens with a biographical chapter called "Getting Started" which details Wiltsie's early Bishop climbing days, and his formative acquaintance with mountain legends Galen Rowell and Doug Robinson. Not surprisingly, Wiltsie's photo career started with shots of climbing trips, and progressed to what he defines as "Expedition Photography." That means a "complicated exploratory endeavor that may be very expensive, involves years of planning, and involves risks far beyond what most people would consider acceptable." And those endeavors and that risk fill the rest of the book's nine chapters.

First and foremost, this is a book of cool photos. Wiltsie's chapters take us to the Arctic, to Baffin, to Nepal, to the Antarctic, to Mongolia and Peru and Chile and Nepal. It's a wild ride. And beyond the photos, Wiltsie's ambition is to "step out of the shadows" and be recognized as "a full-fledged team member" on these hard expeditions. Every climber and wannabe Shipton will love the photos; whether Wiltsie deserves varsity status as an explorer and climber each reader can decide. One thing I know, it's very hard to climb peaks and also get good photos. So full credit to anyone who can do either. If it's only a rare talent like Galen Rowell who can do both at the highest level, then all the more reason to appreciate the clear colors and careful framing in Wiltsie's photography.

If the volume has a shortcoming it lies in the narrative, which is presented, in staccato bursts of information. I suppose the point really is the photographs, but I do like the writing best where it sustains a point of view and develops instead of describes characters and situations. Unfortunately, much of the book reads like *National Geographic* captions stitched together—informational but superficial.

On the plus side, Wiltsie emphasizes that photography is much more than a mirror to the physical world. Photography is a series of choices that shapes, frames, and even manipulates that world. Therein lies the art, and therein lies a particular power for the modern photographer. You see, on this threatened planet people need a reason to care about places and creatures beyond their own lawns. Wiltsie's lens and doughty explorations make him one bridge between ourselves and these other places and other beings. I'm reminded of John Muir and the Preservationist ideal of getting people into the wild so they can see for themselves, and then become caring wilderness defenders, too. In Wiltsie's case this guiding hand is extended through his photography. That environmental desideratum is made real with the presence of great spirits like Alex Lowe who appears throughout the volume to remind us that climbing's joy is connected to the places and the people that host it.



To the Ends of the Earth is a collection of powerful photographs from beautiful places. If you're looking for a treasury of crisp images, and some understanding of the hand that holds the camera, well this is the book for you.

JEFF MCCARTHY

No Shortcuts to the Top: Climbing the World's Highest 14 Peaks.
ED VIESTURS AND DAVID ROBERTS. NEW YORK: BROADWAY
BOOKS, 2006. 368 PAGES. \$23.95.

The old adage about bold climbers and old climbers is hackneyed jargon to most of us, but in Ed Viesturs' fascinating account of his quest to climb the fourteen 8,000ers (without bottled oxygen), few sayings have rarely been as apropos. Himalayan climbing legends typically seem to get away with seemingly impossible feats on a diet of sheer balls and superhuman willpower—at least from the public's vantage. *No Shortcuts to the Top* undermines that notion by describing how one extremely careful mountaineer managed to climb all fourteen peaks, but did so within his own, very healthy, margins of safety.

The story begins with a truly hairy account of Viesturs' 1992 ascent of K2, and describes a heroic effort by Viesturs and Fischer to rescue the late Chantal Mauduit and Thor Keiser from high on the mountain. His subsequent climb to the top with Fischer and Charley Mace introduces the reader to Viesturs' notion of "acceptable risk"—a theme that is repeated, quite appropriately, throughout the rest of the book.

From there, the story jumps back and gets real, so to speak, and describes Viesturs' upbringing in the Midwest and his subsequent collegiate life, as well as the on-again off-again life of a guy trying to fit a professional career into the climbing life (eventually climbing wins). As a Rainier guide, "acceptable risk" became a theme in Viesturs' life, as did his adage "getting down is mandatory."

Through the 1990s, as Viesturs juggles work and climbing more and more 8,000ers, the tale becomes, honestly, more and more frightening as super-safe Ed watches the many accidents, illnesses, mistakes, and deaths that are, literally, waiting around every corner.

At one point he even lists a handful of his early '90s climbing partners and friends, commenting, sadly, that they'd all since died.

The final section of the book includes a white-knuckle series of attempts on Annapurna, from the north, from the east, from the north again. While Viesturs' own obsession with the mountain is quite a story, he weaves it together with the haunting Annapurna-obsession story of the late Jean-Christophe LaFaille, one of his partners on the east ridge.

One of the best parts of *No Shortcuts* deals with a story about an article on Viesturs written for *Men's Journal*, and the author of that piece, who was, apparently, something of a statistician. Viesturs describes the writer's theory of risk on high mountains ("...[he] had counted up all the members of all the expeditions that had gone to 8,000-meter peaks and divided them by the number of deaths on those expeditions..."), and then goes on to explain that so safety conscious was Viesturs' own approach to mountaineering—one nurtured by years as a Rainier guide—that the numbers simply didn't apply.

