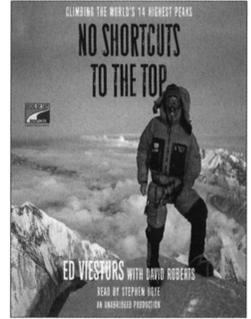


To the Ends of the Earth is a collection of powerful photographs from beautiful places. If you're looking for a treasury of crisp images, and some understanding of the hand that holds the camera, well this is the book for you.

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 Maudit 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.

Take a chapter from Ed if you ever need to explain the risk/safety equation of mountaineering to a critic. But don't forget the underpinning lesson: this sport is dangerous and only an individual can assess his or her own vulnerability in life-threatening situations.

Pete Athans once told me "you can't believe your own press releases." That's clear here, and Viesturs clearly is a man who knows what the headlines are, how many are true, and what the real story is. This is a humble, honest book by one of the world's greatest mountaineers—the best thing is he just happens to be a real person, too.

CAMERON M. BURNS

World Climbing: Images from the Edge. Simon Carter. BLACKHEATH, NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA: ONSIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY AND PUBLISHING. 2005. 192 PAGES; 230 COLOR PHOTOS. \$40.00.

What makes a climbing photo a stunner is not necessarily the climber. Rather, the texture and color of the rock can make for images that transcend the conventional shot. Simon Carter has done a superb job portraying such textures in this lavish coffee-table book of climbing photographs. For example, take a look at the bizarre formations of seaside Thailand. Or the marvelous conglomerates of Riglos, in Spain. Or the sheen emanating from the slate quarries of Wales. Or the gray and gold limestone of the Verdon. Such images make one want to rush to such places on the next flight, to climb or simply to gaze upon such fascinating geology.

Had this book been published thirty years ago we would have been astonished at the lush colors, the pristine reproductions, and, of course, the dramatic climbing. Nowadays, sad to say, the glossies that arrive every month or two are full of almost identical images. I think most of us who look at this book will say: I've seen these before. This, of course, is not Carter's fault. It's simply to say that there's not much new in climbing photography. It appears to have hit a dead end (perhaps it's the same with surfing, skiing, and skydiving?).

We see overhangs surmounted by the obligatory topless men with Popeye muscles. We see 17 photos of the photographer's lithe girlfriend (but why not?). We see some world-renowned climbers: Lynn Hill, Chris Sharma, Leo Houlding, and Alex Huber. We see obviously staged shots, many dozens of them, though Carter claims, "I do not ask climbers...to adopt a particular pose." We see the familiar shots taken from rappel, looking down, and slightly off to the side. Perhaps I am jaded. A youth just beginning to climb will be mesmerized by these images; this would be a dream gift for such a person.

Carter has certainly traveled the world in his quest for photos. Australia is represented by the Grampians, Mount Arapiles, the Blue Mountains, and Tasmania (where the photos of Lynn Hill and Nancy Feagin on the fearsome Totem Pole are among the best of the book). Canada is under-represented, as is New Zealand. Croatia, Spain, France, Thailand, and the UK, among other countries, are featured. The United States is allotted 35 pages (about the same number given to Australia), highlighting Yosemite, the desert spires and cracks, Red Rocks, and the Bishop boulders. It's a bit odd that only three states are represented. You would think Carter might have visited the Tetons, Eldorado, the Gunks, the fabulous gorges of the Southeast, or

