

used his limited gear—six ice screws, ten short slings, two long runners, three Prusik cords, a belay device, and two cams—to self-rescue by aid climbing 80 feet of overhanging glacier ice. When he reached the surface, he shouted to Camp Sherman for help. Rescuers walked him back to Camp Sherman, where he was taken off the mountain by helicopter. The whole incident, from fall to rescue, took less than seven hours.

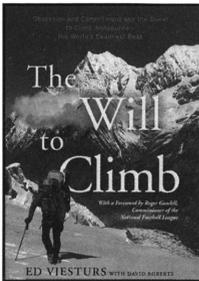
The final 50 pages cover the 19 years since the accident—the heartbreaking details of Price’s memorial service, the logistics of Davidson’s recovery, and, of course, his reflections. His survivor’s guilt manifests in all the expected ways: fear, anxiety, doubt, sadness. He entertains the what-ifs and whys, often alone and late at night. (Strangely, though, the question that seems most natural—“Why didn’t Price self-arrest?”—is only briefly discussed.) Ultimately Davidson finds solace in later climbs—notably on Cho Oyu and in Nepal—and in aspects of Tibetan Buddhism. Each of his climbs since the accident, he suggests, is “a microcosm of that repeating cycle of resilience: engage, persevere, rally.”

While the final 50 pages of *The Ledge* are earnest, they’re relatively predictable. But that’s what’s interesting: the strength of this book isn’t in poetic reflection. It’s in looking over Davidson’s shoulder as he’s figuring out how to get out of a crevasse. We hear him speak to his father, his wife, to God. We watch him struggle on overhanging ice with ripped muscles after hearing his friend’s last breaths. We hear him think about inspirational stories, like Joe Simpson’s *Touching the Void*, and wonder if he can pull off a similar feat. And as we witness his interior monologue during the struggle, it’s impossible for readers not to wonder, “What would I have done?”

The book jacket advertises “...a heart-stopping adventure story, a heartfelt memoir of friendship, and a stirring meditation on fleeting morality and immutable nature.” I disagree: I read *The Ledge* as the kind of unvarnished first-person account you’d get from a climbing partner over a beer in a dark corner of a bar. It’s the kind of grossly detailed story climbers crave in a private, voyeuristic kind of way: What was that like, exactly? And therein lies the terrifying poignancy of *The Ledge*: this accident didn’t happen on a new route in the Himalaya or on a wind-loaded slab in the Alaska Range. It happened to two average dudes on a well-traveled glacier on a popular mountain; one of those men died and the other had to figure out how to survive. Davidson’s matter-of-fact everyman perspective is terrifying—because the same thing could happen to any of us.

CHARLOTTE AUSTIN

***The Will to Climb: Obsession and Commitment and the Quest to Climb Annapurna—the World’s Deadliest Peak.* Ed Viesturs and David Roberts. Crown: 2011. 304 pages. Hardcover. \$26.00.**



*The Will to Climb* sat in my book pile for a long time. The title turned me off, the cover announced that Roger Goodell, the Commissioner of the National Football League, wrote the Foreword, and I didn’t understand why Ed Viesturs needed tried-and-true climbing writer David Roberts to help with the book. But I reminded myself of the old adage “You can’t judge a book by the cover” and cracked open the pages.

The authors set the story up quickly. In April of 2000 Viesturs is hiking in to climb Annapurna, the tenth highest mountain in the world. He has climbed 10 of the 14 8,000ers without supplemental oxygen. No

American has accomplished this feat. Viesturs' wife is pregnant with their second child.

Viesturs does not climb Annapurna on this first attempt. The mountain is in horrible condition, the team retreats, and the book shifts to the history of Annapurna climbing. The story cooks through here; my palms sweat as I read about Maurice Herzog and his partner Louis Lachenal becoming the first to climb Annapurna but losing fingers and toes during their "successful" ascent. Herzog is elated, while Lachenal feels no fulfillment; instead he feels robbed of his legendary skill and grace. Here Roberts and Viesturs question the lasting rewards of mountaineering, indeed of any passionate enterprise. They repeat Maurice Herzog's famous line, "There are other Annapurnas in the lives of men."

Viesturs was 16 when he first read Herzog's *Annapurna*. He still considers this account his most important influence as a mountaineer. When he was 17, Viesturs read Chris Bonington's *Annapurna South Face*. That book further boosts his ambition to climb. The authors use Bonington's book to repeat the story of the massive English South Face Expedition, and again I breezed through the pages.

Then comes another book, *Annapurna: A Woman's Place*. In 1978 American Arlene Blum assembled 10 women to attempt the north face. The team put two women on top, while two others died trying. Viesturs and Roberts aren't inspired by Blum's tale, telling us that Blum herself didn't climb above 22,000 feet, the team used male Sherpas (who broke trail), and the summiters used supplemental oxygen for nearly the entire ascent. Viesturs tells us that he prefers to keep his thoughts about the expedition to himself.

Viesturs and Roberts also examine a host of other books by Annapurna climbers, including those by Erhard Loretan, Reinhold Messner, Jerzy Kukuczka, and Anatoli Boukreev—all books that influenced Viesturs.

Though the authors tell us up front that *The Will to Climb* is structured around obsession and commitment—and fulfillment and emptiness, triumph and failure—as revealed in the deeds of Annapurna's bravest antagonists, by the time I finished I felt I knew little about Viesturs himself except that he has some thoughts he'd rather keep private. I wondered where he got the money for all these climbs and, despite his claims to the contrary, I wasn't convinced that he wasn't in a race to become the first American to climb all the 8,000ers. When Ed Viesturs finally stands on the summit of Annapurna, his final 8,000-meter peak and exclaims, "Oh my God! It's not just my fourteenth, it's Annapurna," I'm not there. I wondered why Viesturs didn't write his own book.

JIM SWEENEY

***The Valley Climbers, Yosemite's Vertical Revolution.* John Long, editor. Stonemaster Press, 2011. 99 photographs, most in color. 168 pages. Hardcover. \$54.95.**

A coffee-table book with photos from improbable places, *The Valley Climbers* is organized around three Fs: fast, free, and first. If one can climb a big route all free, that's great. If one can climb it really fast, that's also marvelous. And, of course, to tick a first free or a first one-day ascent should get you drinks in the Mountain Room.

Four of the pieces describe solo ascents: Hans Florine linking El Cap and Half Dome, Alex Honnold ropeless on Half Dome, Dean Potter on the Rostrum with a mini-parachute on his back, and Cedar

