Running with the Kenyans: Discovering the Secrets of the Fastest People on Earth

Adharanand Finn
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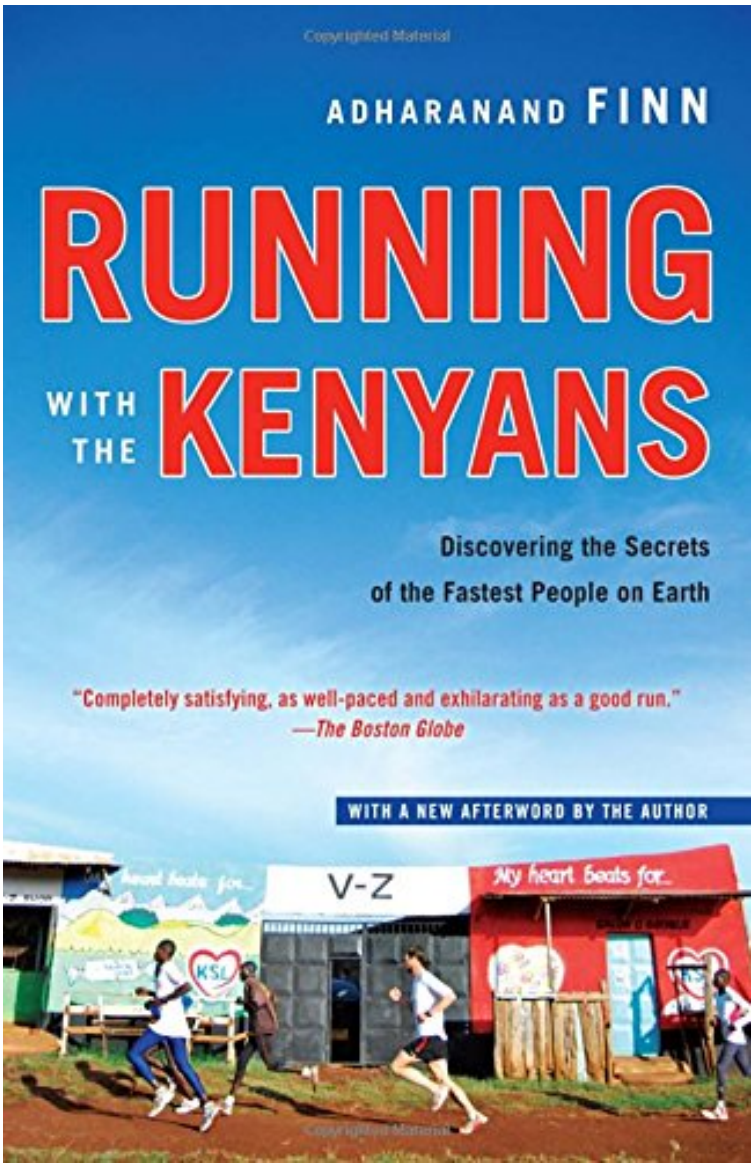

#118906 in Books Adharanand Finn 2013-04-09 2013-04-09Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 7.95 x .81 x 5.14l, .50 #File Name: 0345528808304 pagesRunning with the Kenyans Discovering the Secrets of the Fastest People on Earth | File size: 35.Mb

Adharanand Finn : Running with the Kenyans: Discovering the Secrets of the Fastest People on Earth before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Running with the Kenyans: Discovering the Secrets of the Fastest People on Earth:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Not your average running book. Better!By C. EverhartFantastic 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.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Putting it togetherBy Leon WorthThis 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?0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great, Natural Running ReadBy Steven StamAdharanand Finns 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 dont think that running is ridiculous (Finn 45). In Iten, Kenya, the town he relocates to, people do not run for fitnessthey are not dog walkers, they have to work too hard just to stay alivehere 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.Finns marathon rests at the texts 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: [...]

Completely satisfying, as well-paced and exhilarating as a good run.The Boston Globe Whether running is your recreation or your religion, Adharanand Finns 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. Finns 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 Kenyaa 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 runningand 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, Finns 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

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, Finns 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 DealerEqual 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 satisfactionand none of the ancillary painof 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, Finns 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 RunningAbout the AuthorAdharanand Finn is a journalist at The Guardian and a freelance writer, contributing regular features for The Guardian, The Independent, and Runners World (U.K.).Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.OneRunning in the Northamptonshire County Championships, 1988Were running across long, wavy grass, racing for the first corner. Im right at the front, being pushed on by the charge of legs all around me, the quick breathing of my schoolmates. We run under the goalposts and swing down close beside the stone wall along the far edge of the field. Its quieter now. I look around. One other boy is just behind me, but the others have all dropped back. Up ahead I can see the fluttering tape marking the next corner. I run on, the cold air in my lungs, the tall poplar trees shivering above my head.We go out of the school grounds, along a gravel path that is normally out of bounds. My feet crunch along, the only sound. An old man pushing a bicycle stands to one side as I go by. I follow the tape, back down a steep slope on to the playing fields, back to the finish. I get there long before anyone else and stand waiting in the cold as the other runners come in, collapsing one after the other across the line. I watch them, rolling on their backs, kneeling on the ground, their faces red. I feel strangely elated. Its the first PE class in my new school and weve all been sent out on a cross-country run. Ive never tried running farther than the length of a football field before, so Im surprised by how easy I find it.Hes not even breathing hard, the teacher says, holding me up as an example to the others. He tells me to put my hands under my armpits to keep them warm as the other children continue to trail in.N MA few years later, at age twelve, I break the 800 meters school record on sports day, despite a few of the other boys attempting to bundle me over at the start in an effort to help their friend win. Five minutes later, I run the 1,500 meters and win that, too. When we get home, my dad, sensing some potential talent, suggests that I join the local running club and looks up the number in the telephone directory. I hear him talking to someone on the phone, asking directions. From that point on, a course is set: I am to be a runner.It all begins rather inauspiciously one night a few weeks later. I put on my shorts and tracksuit and walk across the bridge to the shopping mall next to our suburban housing estate in Northampton, England, a town of 200,000 people sixty-five miles north of London. The precinct is half deserted, save for a few late shoppers coming out of the giant Tesco supermarket. I head down the escalator to the car park, and then

across the road to the unmarked dirt track where the Northampton Phoenix running club meets. Its a cold night and all the runners are crammed into a small doorway in the side of a huge redbrick wall. Inside, the corridor walls are painted bloodred and covered in lewd graffiti. Down the hall are the changing rooms, where men can be heard laughing loudly above the fizz of the showers. I give my name to a lady sitting at a small table.Rather than head out onto the track, as I had imagined, Im taken back across the road with a group of children my age, to the shopping malls delivery area, a stretch of covered road with shuttered loading bays all along one side. The road itself is thick with discharged oil. A man in tights and a yellow running jacket gets us to run from one side of the road to the other, touching the curb each time. Between each sprint he makes us do exercises such as push-ups or jumping jacks. I begin thinking, as I lie back on the cold, hard concrete ready to do some sit-ups, that Ive come to the wrong place. This isnt running. I had imagined groups of lithe athletes hurtling around a track. My dad must have gotten confused and called the wrong club.N MIm so convinced this isnt the running club that I dont return for another year. When I do, they ask me if Id like to train in the tunnelwhich I take to mean the shopping mall loading baysor head out for a long run. I opt for the long run and am directed over to a group of about forty people. This is more like it. As we set off along the gravel pathways that wind around the council estates of east Northampton, I feel for the first time the sensation of running in the middle of a group of people. The easy flow of our legs moving below us, the trees, houses, lakes floating by, the people stepping aside, letting us go. Although most of the other runners are older and constantly making jokes, as I drift quietly along, I feel a vague sense of belonging.I spend the next six years or so as a committed member of the club, running track or cross-country races most weekends, and training at least twice a week. Much of my formative years I spend out pounding the roads. Even when I grow my hair long and start playing the guitar in a band, I keep on training. The other runners nickname me Bono. One night, when Im about eighteen, I pass a bunch of my school friends coming back from the pub. We are going at full pace in the last mile of a long run. My school friends stare at me open mouthed as I charge by, one shouting, incredulously: What are you doing? as I disappear into the distance.N MI first become aware of Kenyan runners sometime in the mid-1980s, around the time I join the running club. They seem to emerge suddenly in large numbers into a running world dominated, in my eyes, by Britains Steve Cram and the Moroccan Said Aouita. Im a big fan of both of these great rivals. Cram, with his high-stepping, majestic style; and the smaller Aouita, with his grimacing face and rocking shoulders, who is brilliant at every distancefrom the short, fast 800 meters right up to the 10,000 meters.But by the 1988 Olympics in Seoul, it is all Kenyans, winning every mens middle-distance and long-distance track gold medal except one. What impresses me most about them is the way they run. The conventional wisdom is that the most efficient method, particularly in the longer distances, is to run at an even pace, and most races are run that way. The Kenyans, however, take a more maverick approach. They are always surging ahead, only to slow down suddenly, or sprinting off at a crazy pace right from the start. I love the way it befuddles the TV commentators, who are constantly predicting that a Kenyan athlete is going too fast, only to then see him go suddenly even faster.I remember watching the 1993 world championship 5,000 meters final on a warm mid-August evening in our living room in Northampton. My mum keeps coming in and out, suggesting I go and sit outside in the garden. Its a lovely evening, but Im glued to the TV. The television cameras are focused on the prerace favorite, the Olympic champion from Morocco, Khalid Skah, and also on a young Ethiopian named Haile Gebrselassie, who won both the 5,000 meters and the 10,000 meters at the world junior championships the year before. The athletes stand side by side at the start line, looking back into the camera. They smile nervously when their names are announced, and give the odd directionless wave.The race sets off at a blistering pace, with a succession of African athletes streaking ahead one after the other at the front. Skah, who has taken on and beaten the Kenyans many times before, tracks their every move, always sitting on the shoulder of the leader. Britains only runner in the race, Rob Denmark, soon finds himself trailing far behind.With seven laps still to go, the BBC television commentator Brendan Foster is feeling the strain just watching. Its a vicious race out there, he says. Right on queue, a young Kenyan, Ismael Kirui, surges to the front and, within a lap, opens up a huge gap of more than 150 feet on everyone else. Its a suicidal move, Foster declares. Hes only eighteen and has no real international experience. I think hes got a little carried away. I sit riveted, screaming at the TV as the coverage cuts away to the javelin for a few moments. When it switches back, Kirui is still leading. Lap after lap, Skah and a group of three Ethiopians track him, but they arent getting any closer. The camera zooms in on Kiruis eyes, staring ahead, wild like a hunted animal as he keeps piling on the pace. This is one savage race, says Foster.Kirui is still clear as the bell sounds for the last lap. Down the back straight he sprints for his life, but the three Ethiopians are flying now, closing the gap. With just over 100 meters left, Kirui glances over his shoulder and sees the figure of Gebrselassie closing in on him. For a brief second everything seems to stop. This is the moment, the kill is about to happen. Startled, frantic, Kirui turns back toward the front and urges his exhausted body on again, his tired legs somehow sprinting away down the finishing straight. He crosses the line less than half a second ahead of Gebrselassie, but he has done it. He has won. Battered and bewildered, he sets off on his lap of honor, the Kenyan flag, once again, held aloft in triumph.That evening I head down to the track for a training session with my running club. I try to run like Kirui, staring straight ahead, going as fast as I can right from the start. Its one of the best training sessions I ever have. Usually, if you run too hard at the beginning, you worry about how youll feel later. You can feel it in your body, the anticipation of the pain to come. Usually it makes you slow down. Its called pacing yourself. But

that night I dont care. I want to unshackle myself and run free like a Kenyan.N MThe night I spend hurtling wide-eyed around the track after watching Ismael Kirui turns out to be one of the last sessions I ever have with my running club. Just over a month later I pack my belongings into my parents car and drive up to Liverpool to begin college. Although I join the college running team, my focus on training is soon lost amid the whirlwind of university life. Like most teenage students, Im unleashed into a new world in which anything seems possible. Running seems to belong in a previous life, although I never completely let go of it.The extent to which my training peters out becomes clear by the time the British University cross-country championships come around the following March. The night before the race, I take off on a spontaneous road trip to Wales with three friends, clambering onto the team bus the next morning ready for little else other than sleep. Its a miracle I make it at all.A hundred miles away, in the small northern town of Durham, its a cold, blustery day. I lace up my spikes and go through the familiar routine of jogging and stretching, but once the race starts, my legs, sucked down by the thick mud, give up without a fight. I jog around, unable to rouse myself to run any faster. I finish in 280th position. My good friend and rival from my running days in Northampton, Ciaran Maguire, comes second. Just a few years earlier we battled neck and neck all the way in the county cross-country championships, until he edged past me on the line to win. And now here we are separated by almost three hundred people. I see him after the race. All you need is to give yourself one good year of training, he says consolingly. I nod, but deep down I know it is not going to happen.Over the years, Ive met others like me: former runners who still, every now and then, dig out their old sneakers and start lapping the local park in the vague hope of remembering what it felt like. We sign up to a local 10K or half marathon, determined to get back in shape. But somethinglife, an injury, a lack of dedicationalways gets in the way, and we stop training. But the embers refuse to die, and we refuse to chuck our moldy old sneakers away. We know we might need them again, that the urge to run will return.After I have children, it becomes even harder to find the time to train, that is, until I manage to land a freelance job writing race reports for Runners World magazine. Although it doesnt pay much, it makes the running feel less self-indulgent. It isnt just me doing something for myself in an effort to revive some lost childhood fervor. It is now work.With regular assignments from Runners World, I start training more frequently over the next few years, although with young children its still hard to get out more than twice a week. I descend the stairs from my office to find Marietta with little Ossian hanging off her hip, struggling to get lunch ready, as my two daughters Lila and Uma are screeching at each other and tussling over a book. The yard is overgrown, the trash needs to be taken out, and the phone is ringing. Its not easy to say, Im just popping out for a long run. See you in an hour or so. So even though I start racing regularly, my times barely improve. I run my first half marathon when Im twenty-nine, in 1 hour 30 minutes. Seven years later Ive run three more in exactly the same time.I keep telling myself that one day I will train hard and run really fast. Im not sure what that would mean exactlyan under-three-hour marathon, perhaps? But the years are slipping away. Every time an athlete over thirty-five wins a big race on television, I tell myself that there is still hope. It isnt that I want to achieve any specific goal; I just dont want to look back one day and regret that I never gave myself a decent chance to see what I could do.