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K2 (Adventure Press)



Synopsis

At 28,250 feet, K2 is an enduring testimony to the strength of the human spirit, a mountain where dreams and destiny meet, and sometimes collide. It is considered one of the ultimate challenges for professional high-altitude climbers, a mountain that eschews mere luck and demands both physical and mental fortitude. As of May 2000, only 148 men and 5 women have reached the top. Eighteen of those men and 3 of those women never returned, and for the past five years the weather conditions have been so severe that no one has successfully reached the summit from the Pakistan side. Although it is approximately 800 feet lower than Mount Everest, the established routes on K2 are far more difficult than the standard (Western Cwm/SE Ridge) route on Everest. Temperatures are on average 10 degrees colder, the climate is much more arid, and the weather windows are shorter and less predictable. K2 is also much steeper. Howkins route on the Abruzzi Ridge involves 3,500 vertical meters of climbing in a space of 3 horizontal kilometers, or an average 49-degree slope. Howkins's goal is to climb K2 in alpine style (without established camps, high-altitude porters, or supplemental oxygen). Howkins ambition for the expedition is to do more than "just climb" K2. "We should measure our success not by numbers, but by style," she explains, "It's not what you do, it's how you do it that matters. If you can dream it, you can do it. But don't just do it. Do it with compassion and style." A single mother of a 7 year-old daughter, Howkins believes the rewards of living on the edge outweigh the risks she takes whenever she sets foot on the world's highest peaks. "Sometimes it's very terrifying when I think of not seeing my daughter again. Mountaineering is a life or death situation and I have to be ready for whatever challenge I may face. I take it very seriously. My daughter gives me a desperate kind of strength that helps motivate my training."

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Customer Reviews

For years Heidi Howkins, a young climber, nursed an ambitious dream: to reach the summit of K2--the world's second-tallest and one of its least accessible peaks--without using oxygen. She eventually did, though not without plenty of scary moments and much cause for reflection. Howkins, addressing the reader through stories told to a bemused hitchhiker, reports much more than the sheer achievement of her ascents of K2, notable though they were. Along the way she tells him, and us, of a failed marriage, of the logistical nightmares that accompany any expedition to remote places, of the endless conflicts that can ensue when climbing partners are not carefully vetted. As the lone woman on her K2 climbs, Howkins had more than the usual problems to contend with, though those problems--bad weather, scary bus rides along the Karakoram Highway, the constant presence of death--were hard enough. All of them get an airing in Howkins's book, but for all that, her sense of adventure far outweighs the many downsides. Why take on such a challenge in the first place? A friend warned her about trying to explain, and Howkins toys with a few explanations: the rush gained by conquering fear, denying the fragility of human existence, and "embracing survival with gusto." In the end, though, her best explanation is this: "When you get to the top of K2, there's nowhere left to go. There is a cessation of passion, of the desire to move forever upwards. There is emptiness, and the closure of a circle. You are back where you started. You're at peace."

--Gregory McNamee --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In 1997, Howkins applied for a permit to climb Kanchenjunga, or K2the "savage mountain"the second highest peak in the world at 8,616 meters (or 28,267 feet) and in many ways more difficult than Everest. "It is the ultimate goal for many climbers, and reaching the summit is akin to winning the Olympic gold," writes Howkins, the first American woman to reach the base of K2's summit peak. The first three-quarters of this fascinating but uneven book trace Howkins's journey from planning to final descent. Howkins's photographic recall of events, places and details of what climbers endure yields statements like "glove fuzz and sheer exhaustion and carbon monoxide poisoning from cooking inside a tent are not the main obstacles to eating.... the higher you go, the more your appetite diminishes." Unlike some swooning climber-authors, Howkins doesn't romanticize her struggles. ("I once heard someone define Himalayan climbing as the `art of suffering.' I understand the suffering part, but I'm not sure I fully grasp the artistic challenge.") But

her book is flawed by the structural conceit of telling her tale to a hitchhiker. The strength of her story (including an increasingly psychotic husband-climbing partner) is better served when she simply tells it, sans hitchhiker, in the last quarter of the book, which recounts an unsuccessful attempt up K2 in 2000. However, this very personal account of the climbing experience, including the rampant sexism that pervades the climbing community, is an important addition to the ever-growing genre. 16 pages of photos not seen by PW. (May)Forecast: To coincide with the release of this book about adventure from a woman's point of view, CNBC will air a National Geographic Explorer special entitled Surviving K2, followed by coverage by the networks. Meanwhile, the author will drum up sales in a cross-country tour with stops in Boston, Seattle, New York, Denver, Berkeley, Boulder and Portland, Ore. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

K-2, One Woman's Quest for the Summit reveals a very reflective, contemplative woman who is unimpressed by her own brilliance. (MIT invited - not merely accepted - her to do a Ph.D. Program in math and philosophy.) Heidi Howkins is not limited by her own intellect or the vanity that can come from being bright. She looks beyond it all pushing herself in more gritty ways. Instead of pursuing the intellectual lofty world of philosophy she chooses the physical and mental challenges of the brutal world of mountains. Yet, throughout the book, you feel she is comfortable in both worlds and will, no doubt, go on to write some worthwhile treatise in philosophy someday. Heidi Howkins is one of the most down to earth people you could possibly meet. Nothing about her signals that she has jumped out of planes, is brilliant in mathematics and climbs mountains. When asked why she climbs mountains, she mockingly shrugs, "with a name like Heidi, what do you expect?" Heidi said one day someone told her, "reach for the moon and you may land on Everest." She has reached Everest but K-2 holds greater challenges: it is a harder climb, it is steeper, more rugged. That's probably what draws her to it, to overcome the fear and challenge of such an obstacle. One finds throughout this book that overcoming is what Heidi Howkins is all about. This book is a rare glimpse of life in mountaineering. It is rare because we see the inside fighting, the jealousy, and the petty arguments amongst mountaineers. The actual mountain proves less strenuous than the world of small mindedness and prejudice. We see some of the climbers' courage contrasted with others whose show out and out cowardice. On one expedition to Everest we see a whole group fail to stand up to the bullies in their midsts. The bullies are bullies not because they are afraid of the climb, but rather they are naturally cruel, stupid and mean. Not that this is a whiny book. Far from it, nothing is cliché or obvious. You never know where this journey is leading but

it pulls you along maintaining a relentless intensity. Howkins' greatest challenge may have been endeavoring to climb K-2 with an untrustworthy husband as their marriage disintegrates and her husband's mind does the same. He becomes ever more troubled, angry and homicidal. We never know exactly why Heidi married such a man apart from a shared love of mountain climbing. Though he is a major feature of this book, he seems to be insufficiently fleshed out. This may be due to the fact that he is the father of her child whom she may wish to protect. But if this is the only insufficiency of the book, it is a small one. For one so gifted one hopes Howkins will be cut free from all encumbrances that could possibly hold her down. This first book is beautifully written, sheer poetry in parts without any of the prosaic observations of majestic and mighty heights. Howkins notes that "when you get to the top of K-2 there's nowhere left to go". She has yet to conquer that summit, when she does, I hope she goes on to some other summit, physical or intellectual and writes about it. I hope we will not have heard the last from Heidi Howkins

I haven't finished this book yet, but after reading some of the other reviews, I figured I would share my two cents. I haven't read many other mountaineering books, but I am an avid reader, as well as an English teacher. And this is a great book. Sometimes when reading it, I think Howkins must have had a ghost writer crafting this text - because how someone can be such an incredible athlete and well-spoken writer is beyond me. I think many people do not like it because it is not a linear construction of events. Howkins sets this text up as a frame story -- it is a story within a story. She is providing the reader the information of her journeys through a dialogue with a hitchhiker whom she picked up on her travels one night. What Howkins may lack in clear and linear information of her K2 expedition is completely supplanted with the personal experience of the climbing conveyed in this text. She is not just giving details -- she is explaining beyond straightforward facts an essence of what has drawn her to this lifestyle. Again, I haven't finished the book, but it is one of those books I wish didn't end. I am completely enjoying it.

K2: A Women's Quest for the Summit The approach to which Heidi Howkins told us her story was both atypical and captivating. By obtaining a permit, permitting Howkins to attempt the deadly slopes of K2, her first attempt in 1998 was an unmitigated failure. However, Howkins became one of the first women to attempt this perilous peak. On her second attempt in 2000, she was determined to once again mount the summit of K2 but this time without the aid of porters or supplemental oxygen (an accomplishment made by very few mountaineers). Although Howkins knew the risks of her exigent goal of the summit, not even her long experience of climbing could prepare her for such

events that occurred high on K2. This book contains multiple photographs of K2 that show what a physical and personal feat it would be to climb to the summit of this mountain successfully. While on this expedition Howkins explores through her emotions as a single mother, a confused climber, and the subject of her last husband Zee's abuse. As she searches for her true passion for climbing she uses her inner strength that is given to her by her daughter to attempt K2, hoping to accomplish her task. When I first decided to read this book, by reading the title I assumed it would be about the struggles of climbing and techniques used to reach the summit of the mountain. Although Heidi explains some of her expeditions the book really explains her personal life and how she uses climbing as an escape to her chaotic emotions. My impression of K2 is it has a confusing plot line. As Heidi explains her expeditions on other mountains in the Middle East to a hitchhiker that she picked up, she gets into her expedition on K2 and all the events that occurred without finishing her stories about her expeditions that she was explaining before. This book is both very interesting and emotional. In *Inherit the Wind*, the young lady Rachel also had emotional problems like Heidi. Heidi's emotions were between her abusive husband Zee and her new lover that had become her climbing partner, where Rachel had emotional problems between her father and her current lover Bertrum Cates. The social value of this book is the information that is told by Heidi how to deal with her fearful emotions. Teenagers and older adults could connect with Heidi and they can compare their emotions and insights to Heidi's. This book is well written in great detail; however the organization of this book where Heidi talks about her previous expeditions confuses and quickly loses the reader. I would suggest this book to teens or adult readers because of the high vocabulary level and because of the harsh events that occur high up on this treacherous mountain.

Very deceptive title. Heidi set out on a half hearted "expedition" and failed to summit. Understanding that summiting K2 often doesn't happen she used a deceptive title. Essentially it is the story of a spoiled rich girl who slummed with a guy from a lower social caste, had a kid, dumped the kid on her parents while chasing dreams of mountaineering glory. Don't waste your time or money on this dull read.

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