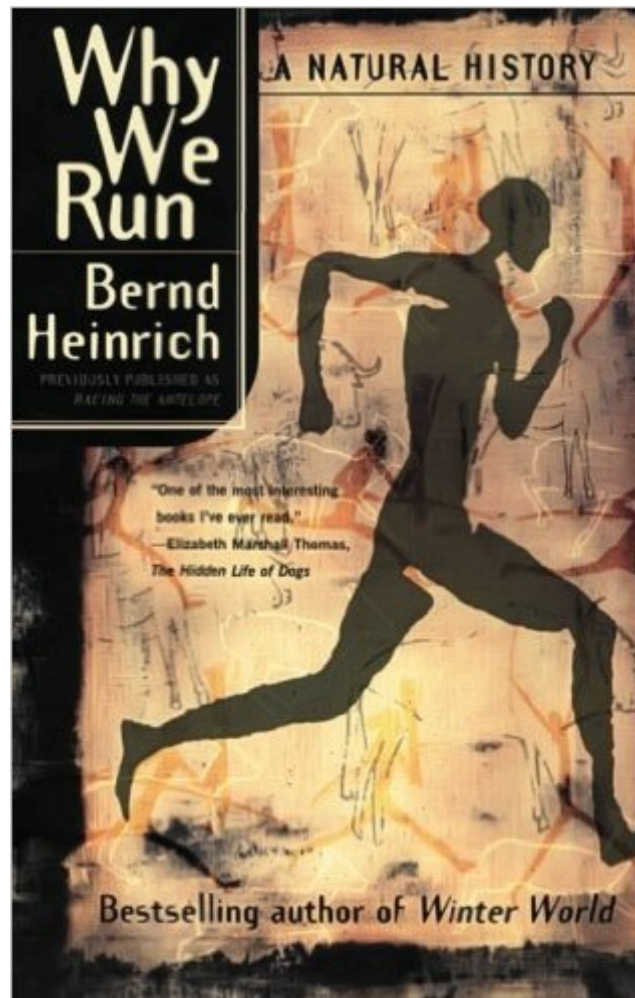


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Why We Run: A Natural History



Synopsis

In *Why We Run*, biologist, award-winning nature writer, and ultramarathoner Bernd Heinrich explores a new perspective on human evolution by examining the phenomenon of ultraendurance and makes surprising discoveries about the physical, spiritual -- and primal -- drive to win. At once lyrical and scientific, *Why We Run* shows Heinrich's signature blend of biology, anthropology, psychology, and philosophy, infused with his passion to discover how and why we can achieve superhuman abilities.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Heinrich is a biologist and world class ultramarathon runner. This book is a combination of random biological vignettes, autobiography, and inspirational story of Heinrich's training for and racing a major 100 kilometer race in which he basically broke the world record for that distance. Of course, there are only a few hyper-dedicated individuals that compete at that distance, but nevertheless Heinrich's accomplishments are astounding. WHY WE RUN has all sorts of biological discussions that remind me of the worst of Stephen J. Gould's pieces. Unfortunately the biological passages for the most are incoherent although tantalizing. For example, and there are many like this: "Eating is controlled by psychological drives, which in turn are influenced by blood chemistry. Just thinking about a hamburger can change your blood chemistry." But wait a minute, the blood chemistry was supposed to influence the thinking (i.e. psychological drives?). Much of the writing and thinking is mushy like this. The strong points of the book are that despite the self-indulgent and poorly

connected and developed thinking, Heinrich is a passionate and engaging person and this comes across in his writing. He has also led an interesting and bizarre life. To me the book is most valuable as an inspirational story. His inspirational attitude is deeper than the "if you just believe and try hard enough you can do it" variety. Heinrich has a kind of hard-knuckled, gritty attitude toward life (and at the same time a love of nature and animals--although he is also an avid and skilled hunter). He manages to communicate a holistic view of human nature and biology that I found encouraging and inspiring, and at the same time realistic. As a 20 mile a week runner nearing 60, I found the book helpful to my puny efforts.

"Why We Run A Natural History" By: Bernd Heinrich (Author) This is not a new book it is simply a new titled version of Bernd Heinrich's book "Racing The Antelope" so if you have already bought the older version or read it don't rush out to buy this new titled edition. The beginning of this book is Bernd's autobiography about his childhood in Germany, and in the Maine woods. In this section he writes about his undefeated cross-country career and his college running career at UMO (University of Maine at Orono). Despite his very unique and almost bizarre childhood, he seems very human and easy to relate to from in two major ways in my life. The first is as a Mainer who has always enjoyed the outdoors, and the second is as a high school cross-country runner. This is mostly because as Bernd alluded to, running itself is very natural especially in the Maine woods. The middle chapters at first appeared to have just been thrown in, but once you have finished the book his reasons for putting in several chapters about animal biology as well as physiology and psychology become readily apparent. This intriguing and random section goes into scientific detail about several animals such as wolves, dogs, cats (canines, felines), camels and antelopes as well as many more, in relation to running and what we can learn from them. The final section of his book is filled with details of his preparation and racing in a 100 k (62.2 miles) ultra marathon, which he won and set a world record in. In this section you understand why he had the section on animal biology when he tries to improve his performance by using many different running techniques and fuels, such as Ocean Spray Cranberry juice, which he used and was sponsored by in the Chicago ultra marathon.

This book is truly a classic on the biology and anthropology of exercise. I first stumbled upon it in the bookstore when I was just looking for some more books on running. I wasn't looking for anything in particular and I picked up "Why We Run" off the shelf to give it a chance. It was just what I was looking for. The exploration of human anthropology and the scientific explanations of why we run

were in exact alignment with my beliefs. Heinrich's basic assertion is that we run because we're supposed to run. Our systems are made to use fatty acids and glycerol as fuels for long distance, nomadic type activities, not quick glucose intensive activity. This clearly sheds light on the heart rate formula for weight loss and what is particularly best for any specific person. If Heinrich's points are correct, then the conclusion would be a lower heart rate is most effective for weight loss and the preferred zone for any type of exercise. Any exercise in the higher heart rate zones could be classified as survival training--or expending energy that is meant for fight or flight type activities, like running away from tigers or the like. This is clearly not anything we have to do in our modern times. Heinrich goes to great lengths to explore his arguments. He takes the biology of the other animals and compares them to ours in a very "easy-to-read," unscientific way--something that is relieving for anyone who's spent hours with their nose buried in anatomy books. The book is anecdotal, because Heinrich bookends the story with his own 100K run. This makes the book entertaining as well and not just a dry scientific read.

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