



Explorers of the Infinite: The Secret Spiritual Lives of Extreme Athletes--and What They Reveal About Near-Death Experiences, Psychic Communication, and Touching the Beyond

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Real-life psychic, near-death, and paranormal experiences are combined with cutting-edge science and vivid adventure stories in this energetic look at why extreme athletes and mountaineers take the risks that allow them to push the limits of consciousness, and what they encounter there.

In the life-or-death world of extreme adventure sports, there is one thing that athletes often keep quiet about: the “forbidden” territory of paranormal experiences. Ranging from fleeting moments of transcendence to full-blown encounters with ghosts and everything in between—visions, near-death experiences, psychic communication—many extreme athletes have experienced these moments of connection with the beyond, but have been reluctant to talk about them.

In Explorers of the Infinite, award-winning outdoors journalist and lifelong adventure sports devotee Maria Coffey probes the mystical and paranormal experiences of mountaineers, snowboarders, surfers, and more. She reviews cutting-edge science, and consults the history of philosophy and spirituality to answer the question: Could the state of intense “aliveness” that is the allure of extreme sports for so many actually be a route to a connection with the beyond?

Coffey investigates the scientific explanations for mystical phenomena, ranging from simple explanations to theories from consciousness studies and quantum physics, and leaves us wondering where science ends and spirituality begins.

An energetic, you-are-there look at the spiritual lives of extreme athletes, Explorers of the Infinite asks why extreme athletes take the risks that allow them to push the limits of consciousness, what they encounter there, and what we can learn from them.

Explorers of the Infinite: The Secret Spiritual Lives of Extreme Athletes--and What They Reveal About Near-Death Experiences, Psychic Communication, and Touching the Beyond Details

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From Reader Review Explorers of the Infinite: The Secret Spiritual Lives of Extreme Athletes--and What They Reveal About Near-Death Experiences, Psychic Communication, and Touching the Beyond for online ebook

Michael Schmicker says

The first and last time I jumped out of an airplane, I was 17 years old.

It was my mom who nearly died of fright. She had to sign a waiver that listed in gruesome detail all the ways her underage, unlucky son could die or sustain serious injury from skydiving. True to the odds, nothing went wrong. After four hours of “training,” the actual skydive, from Geronimo! to hard landing, lasted just a few minutes. My weekend parachute was an adrenaline rush, but hardly death-defying or life changing.

In contrast, the extreme adventurers in Mary Coffey's fascinating book "Explorers of the Infinite" push themselves physically and psychologically to the breaking point. Skydiver Cheryl Sterns jumped from an airplane 352 times in 24 hours, setting a Guinness World Record. Tanya Streeter free dove without oxygen to a depth of 525 feet below the ocean, holding her breath for almost three and a half minutes, her heart rate plummeting to five beats a minute, before resurfacing. Cyclist Jure Robic pedaled for 3,042 miles across the continental U.S. in 8 days, 19 hours and 33 minutes.

Such super-athletes suffer mind-numbing exhaustion, unbearable pain, intense solitude, sudden terror, and narrow escapes from death – conditions which parapsychologists know can generate paranormal experiences. And the heroes of this book have a journal's worth, experiencing time distortions, altered states of consciousness, telepathic communications, out-of body experiences, precognition, premonitions of death, and visions of the dead.

I've investigated and written about these baffling phenomena for some time. So the reading pleasure for me came less from the garden-variety paranormal experiences these crazies report than from the god-awful, insane exploits which trigger them.

Fifty-five year old ultra-marathoner Marshall Ulrich had a classic out-of-body experience running the Badwater, a 135-mile, non-stop foot race across Death Valley in July when daytime temperatures can hit 129 degrees Fahrenheit. He's done it 13 times, won it four times. Insanely, he once did it four times back and forth, non-stop, for over 77 hours, while pulling a modified baby jogger loaded with 200 pounds of water, ice and spare clothes. In 1993, while trying to break his own record, he suddenly stepped out of his body. From above, he watched himself running along, “like watching myself on a movie screen.” He remained out of body all night, until the next morning when he realized that “dawn was coming, the sun was about to rise. I knew it was time to go back into my body.” (Skydiver Sterns experienced a similar, extended OBE during her non-stop jumping.)

“Many mountaineers have sensed unexplainable presences in the high mountains,” notes Coffey. American climber Lou Whittaker in 1989 was guiding the first American assault on 28,169-foot high Kanchenjunga in the Himalayas, the third tallest mountain in the world. At his base camp, he kept sensing the presence of a middle-aged, friendly Tibetan woman spirit who communicated with him mentally, telling him everything would go OK. His wife Ingrid arrived at the base camp shortly after Lou had departed for the summit, but

her ascent to 16,000 feet was so fast she suffered severe altitude sickness. She spent three days in agony in Lou's tent, ministered to by the same Tibetan spirit. "She was wearing a headscarf and a long dress. She was shadowy and two-dimensional, like a silhouette." The spirit would put her hand on Ingrid's forehead, very comforting, and help her to roll over. She didn't speak; the two women communicated telepathically. Two months later, after they had returned to the States, Ingrid finally told Lou about her strange helper. Stunned, he admitted seeing her too. They're convinced it wasn't a hallucination, since both sensed the same apparition.

Coffee notes similar "spirit friends" assisted and comforted many well-known adventurers in their perils, including Antarctic explorer Ernest Shackleton during his desperate 36-hour trek across frigid South Georgia Island; aviator Charles "Lucky" Lindbergh on his record-breaking, non-stop transatlantic flight to Europe in 1927; and mariner Joshua Slocum, the first man to sail solo around the globe.

In 1997, Tony Bullimore was attempting to duplicate Slocum's feat, competing in the around-the-world Vendee Globe single-handed yacht race. Two months into the race, a fierce storm in the Southern Ocean rolled his boat, trapping him upside down in his watertight cabin for almost five days. Race officials informed his wife Lalel his upturned boat had been spotted in huge seas; he was presumed dead. That night, kneeling by her bed, she received a telepathic message from him. He was alive, he had food and water, but he was exhausted and had to sleep. The following day, he mentally spoke to her again. "Oh Lal, I'm in a mess. It's wet. The boat won't stop rolling. I'm cold." She told him to keep fighting. Back in his watery tomb, shivering and staring into darkness, he suddenly had a vision. He saw an Australian warship steaming for him, a boat was lowered, sailors started banging on the hull, and he watched himself swim to the surface where he was rescued. Twenty-four hours later, everything happened exactly as his vision had foretold.

Coffey presents dozens of such puzzling experiences while pondering their reality and meaning. For an outdoor adventure writer, she demonstrates a surprising familiarity with parapsychological literature, referencing among others Rupert Sheldrake's ESP research; Montague Ullman's dream lab investigations; NDE studies by Raymond Moody and Sam Parnia; plus conventional counter-explanations from popular skeptics like Susan Blackmore and Robert Persinger.

Her references are understandably brief and occasionally incorrect – for example, her assertion that scientists know very little about the out-of-body phenomenon. Psychologists, physicians and investigators such as Charles Tart, Stuart Twemlow and D. Scott Rogo mapped the phenomenon several decades ago, and recent NDE research has advanced our understanding. We know a lot about them; it's just that, like so many other paranormal phenomena, we can't agree on where they fit in our current model of reality.

But Coffey can be forgiven for not penning a dry parapsychology book few would read. She offers enough science to ground her stories, but wisely focuses on the sense of surprise and wonder her eclectic community of daredevils find in their unexpected brushes with the infinite. As British BASE jumper Shaun Ellison puts it, "There's so much out there that we don't understand."

Cheryl says

I wanted to like this book more than I did. I am fascinated by extreme sports and the people that choose to participate in them, but the way this was written was too helter skelter for me. It seemed to "jump around" too often and, although the sports interest me, I am not up on all the "lingo" that was used. I'll continue to

read about these crazy people that do things I would/could ever even imagine, but I'm hoping to find a clearer, more in depth, organized book.

Derek says

If you are looking for a lot of examples of near death psychic experiences, this is it. It was nice to read a book that examined so many of these while also introducing some of the scientific analysis as well. Having read a number of true life "adventure" books it was interesting to have familiar names and places turn up providing a different perspective or a more thorough examination of the individuals and events themselves. A little choppy, but a good read overall.

Emlyn Lewis says

Starts of fascinating, then starts to repeat identical stories continuously. Lost interest half way through, though finished anyway.

Visual cover and lay outs beautiful, but misleads the reader of it being a gem to add to your self

Brian says

I really liked this one, but it was too heavy to finish before the library wanted it back. Basically, the book is about the spiritual side of outdoor adventure. It explained a lot of the things I feel when I hike/climb/kayak/ski which was very enjoyable, but it also provokes a lot of thought which requires time and commitment. I'm probably just gonna buy this book so I can give it the time it deserves.

Heidi The Hippie Reader says

Coffey covers so many different sports and phenomenas in Explorers of the Infinite that I felt rushed through the chapters. I wish that she had written a separate book for each topic!

I had no idea that so many athletes experienced similar paranormal visions, dreams, and out-of-body experiences but I suppose I should have because their extreme sports are so similar to shamanistic journeys- where they push their bodies and minds to the limits to see beyond the world.

I haven't felt the call to push myself that far, but anyone who has should read this book. At the very least, you'll know that you're not alone in the search for transcendence through sport.

Jennifer Myers says

Didn't finish all the chapters before the book had to be back to the library, but I liked the variety of stories that Ms. Coffey introduced us to. Being an athlete myself, I've had some of these experiences but definitely

not to the extent of these extreme athletes!

Brian White says

This was a great exploration into the ways in which adventure athletes can be affected psychologically and spiritually by extreme situations. I enjoyed reading the accounts of these athletes and the circumstances that brought them in touch with a state of consciousness that they couldn't fully understand. Having had "white-light" experiences, I have learned that attempting to explain or verbalize them can be frustrating and seem pointless. That enabled me to identify with these athletes. They knew they had experiences something "other" but didn't want to share those experiences, either because of fear they would not be believed, or because they couldn't find the words to express it.

This book does an excellent job of not trying to over-explain and lets the reader draw his/her own conclusions about the nature of the experience being described. This was a fresh, almost factual way of examining these types of experiences.

Coffey also did an excellent job of blending athlete stories with scientific and statistical information to show how prevalent these experiences are in the world of extreme sports. The shift in consciousness that can be brought about by life-threatening situations was explored through real-life accounts and then scientific concepts were added to offer additional information on how these experiences could affect the athlete's physiological and neurological systems. Coffey then explores how this altered perception can result in the manifestation of various forms of psychic abilities and experiences from precognition, to psychic communication, to conversing with the recently dead.

When I first picked this book up I thought these topics would be almost impossible to explore without sounding trite or "new age" but I was pleasantly surprised at Coffey's storytelling ability. My favorite thing about this book was living through the lives of these athletes and hearing their stories. Being able to identify with them and sharing in their spiritual experiences made this a truly great read.

Paul Savage says

A beautiful book exploring the psychological and spiritual impacts of extreme athletes and adventurers, written by someone who isn't simply an armchair academic but who has lived the life of a mountaineer and adventurer. The beauty of the book is that it details both scientific and spiritual aspects, both in detail, but without pushing either as an agenda, giving a well-rounded and extremely thought-provoking work that I could not recommend highly enough. Brilliant.

Balthasaradell says

pretty dope. almost a 4 star. didn't like the beginning and then it picked up nice....pretty trippy...then got weird again...basically she interviews ten million people about their vibes during extreme hiking in Tibet and stuff...so it seems totally basic but when you keep going the stories start to intensify until you are in the vortex...then it gets average again and ill be finishing soon

Jessie says

This book explores the spiritual aspects of extreme sports, mostly through stories from the extrem athletes. The book also tries to explain what these experiences might be or mean through science and various religious traditions. I liked the stories a lot the explanations weren't that interesting since they are things that by definition cannot be explained. Although I did like knowing how the individuals who had the experiences interpreted them.

Terri Schneider says

She nails something I've pondered often and have been interviewed about—that perhaps physical duress really is a foothold to much higher places in our mind and beyond. A compelling writer who always redirects the light onto the world of extreme sports and mountaineering. Also recommend: *Where the Mountain Casts its Shadow*.

Anthony Pelosi says

Enjoyed the taboo topics explored in the book as well as blend of science and perception of reality, but the author jumps around a lot making it tough to keep all the characters straight. As long as you can bear through the less than perfect flow between stories, I recommend reading for the perspectives offered.

Jessie says

This is a great intro book into the minds of people with extreme lifestyles that compel them to pursue great adventures in nature. You get enough of the science/spiritual information to validate the stories of real-life experiences that are explored on the pages. Actually I would have enjoyed even more of the climbers' stories since their lives are so far removed from my office cubicle lifestyle.

I only dinged this book one star because one of the first stories is about two women, one that perished on a ice climb and the other that felt that she knew exactly where she could find her friend's body because she felt her friend reach out to her telepathically. I waited the entire book and never found out if she was actually able to find her friend's body. I assume so but it would have been nice if we have more of their stories to know what happened.

Chris says

This book makes a great connection between extreme sports and meditation, but I would also be interested to know experiments & experiences during other activities that raise the spirit. Perhaps more connections can be made? In my experience music and sex also have similar effects, minus the fear and pain. Special thanks

to Art Belle's Coast to Coast program for interviewing the author - it was mindblowing. Very interesting book.
