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Q&A with adventurer Squash Falconer



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I grew up on a farm and had a love for the outdoors and adventure from an early age. At school I did the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and then when I left school at 18 I went to live in the mountains and did a ski season. During that season I made friends who I started doing adventure endurance races with and it was those same friends who I joined on a trip to Aconcagua in 2004, which was the first big mountain I climbed.

A big challenge is the same as having a goal and I think having a goal is a wonderful thing. For me once a goal is decided it's no longer about 'if', but more 'when'. The journey I then go on to reach that goal, or try to reach that goal is always something special. Often it means highs and lows, meeting new people, sharing big experiences and learning about other people and learning about myself. A big challenge can take me to new and exciting places, into new cultures and also creates the opportunity to learn new things. It gives me a purpose and a motivation like nothing else and I love that.

I wanted to ride a motorbike to the South of France, I wanted to climb Mont Blanc and I wanted to fly from the top of a high mountain... So, I rode my BMW motorbike from my home in the UK to the South of France, to the foot of Mont Blanc: I then climbed the mountain and flew from the top on my paraglider becoming the first British woman to do so.

Earlier this year I was in South America in Cusco, Peru - it's a magical city and I fell in love with it. The French Alps have a special place in my heart: I have such happy memories of ski seasons there and each time I go back it feels like home. Nepal is somewhere that blew me away from the moment I landed into the crazy chaos of Kathmandu to the incredible peace and beauty of the Himalayas. In 2011 I cycled from Land's End to John O'Groats and realised that there was so much to enjoy right here on my own doorstep. Especially the coastline in Northern Scotland - I had no idea the beaches there were so stunning! Waking up high on a mountain anywhere in the world is always a favourite place to be, too.

I imagine that I will always love the mountains and want to be in them but I definitely love other challenges too! One of my favourite things is combine the different sports and activities that I do into one adventure. My Mont Blanc trip was a great example of that. I learnt to paraglide in Annecy, France. A wonderful way to spend a day there is to hike, fly and then jump in the lake for a swim!

I think the best way to train for something is to replicate as closely as possible the action you are going to be doing. When I'm going to climb a big mountain I try to get as much hiking in as possible, with a heavy pack on my back. If I can base myself in the mountains so that I can train at altitude that's even better - but that's not always possible! I do a lot of training on my ElliptiGo - it's like a cross-trainer with wheels, looks a bit like a bike but the action is running without impact. It's a great way to work out, so if I'm at home I might aim to do three rides a week of about 1.5hrs and when possible a much longer ride, maybe 3+hrs.

I love hot yoga so if I'm travelling and I see a class I'll try and go and of course when travelling I can always take my trainers and go out hiking or running. I think cross-training is great, in fact any type of training is good, something is always better than nothing. I try to focus on that fact when I feel like I haven't done enough or it's been tricky to fit in what I want to. A good friend of mine was a marine and he showed me a quick exercise that I can do anywhere to stay in shape - so if I'm in a hotel room and short on time I can always do reps of that. It's like a burpee with a few extras!

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