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FLYING BY THE SEAT OF HER PANTS

what it was and what we were doing and the next thing I knew he offered me a place to stay for the night – after ringing up his wife and two daughters to check it was okay to bring strangers into the house! Leaving the next morning I complained about not having a strap for my sunglasses. Joe disappeared into the house and came out with a shoelace — it did the job perfectly. That’s one of the many things that I love about travelling, it reaffirms my belief that people are good. I visited Joe as soon as the trip was over to return the shoelace, but he said I could keep it.”

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It’s no wonder Squash has come across a variety of people after travelling so extensively. “I met Ranulph Fiennes a while ago,” she says. “He has such a wonderful accent and certainly speaks the Queen’s English. The first thing he said to me was ‘call me Ran’. He was very down to earth. He’s an inspirational guy although I’m not sure I would be able to cut my fingers off. Apparently he chopped them off with a fretsaw in his garden shed after suffering severe frostbite while his wife was cooking dinner.”

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Squash has also met wildlife presenter Steve Backshall and Graham Bell, among others, adding: “Everyone’s so passionate about what they do. Their energy is very contagious.”

More recently, she has been filming an adventure travel television series in South America. Squash rode over 3,000 miles on her BMW 800 GS Adventure through Argentina, Chile and Peru before flying on to Colombia and Brazil to film the final episodes.

When Squash and I part ways later that afternoon, she leaves me with a lasting message. “There’s always a road to anywhere you want to go, or to something you want to do. You just need to find it and go for it.” If anyone’s inspired me — it’s her. *RB*

squashfalconer.com



Above
Made it!
Falconer on
the summit
of Mount
Everest

Far Left
ElliptiGO:
Powering on
for charity

Left
On the
road again

PHOTO: Kamil Tamiola

ROSIE BARCROFT TALKS
TO ADVENTURER AND
MOUNTAINEER SQUASH
FALCONER ABOUT SOME
OF HER MORE PECULIAR
ACHIEVEMENTS

QUITE SIMPLY, Squash Falconer brings out the best in people. We sit opposite each other in a bar in Shoreditch, East London. Outside, the rain is hammering down and the sky merges into the grey streets. And yet we are both laughing about her knickers philosophy.

"It's a load of pants... literally!" she says. "But basically, I believe if your knickers are right, everything goes right." I couldn't agree more. I looked at Squash's website before travelling to Iceland last year and consequently turned up with 10 pairs of pants (for the 10 days of camping), fluffy socks and my favourite shampoo and toothpaste. I'm sure some people would frown at such luxuries and say that's not what camping's about, but for me, Squash's tip made my time in Iceland even better.

Born in 1981, Squash grew up on a farm in Derbyshire. The name Squash came from her sister who was unable to pronounce her given name, Louise. 'Ease' became peas, then squashy peas and finally Squash — a name that stuck. "Louise just seems foreign to me now," she says.

From a young age, Squash could be found leaping from trees and swinging out of the barn. "I didn't know what fear was until I was attacked by a cockerel when I was three," she says. Squash has been scared of birds ever since.

"My plan was always going to be a simple one," she continues. "I was going to leave school and become a farmer. But this didn't happen. Instead a



PHOTO: FLO TOMLINSON

teacher encouraged me to apply myself — so I did. GCSEs, A-Levels and an 18th birthday later and I found myself in the French Alps with a view of Mont Blanc from my bedroom window. My passion for mountain climbing was sparked."

In 2004, Squash climbed her first peak, Aconcagua in Argentina. At 6,960 metres, it's the highest mountain in the western hemisphere. "It seemed perfectly reasonable that lack of experience could be made up for by the right team, good fitness and a massive dose of the right mental attitude," she says. Aconcagua led to Cho Oyu, in Nepal, in 2008. "I took my bum board up there, and became the world's highest boarder ever," she says.

Squash was on a roll. In 2009 she decided to combine a few more of her favourite hobbies into one trip. She says: "I hatched a plan to ride a motorbike to the south of France, climb Mont Blanc and paraglide from the

summit. However, I needed support. So I approached the BBC saying BMW were supporting me, and then I spoke to BMW and told them I had backing from the BBC. Amazingly it worked and I learnt creative blagging will get you everywhere. When I flew off the top I was planning to land in Italy and buy a pizza for lunch. As it happened I landed 22 minutes later in France, so I had fondue. The icing on the cake for the trip was discovering I was the first British woman to paraglide from the top of Mont Blanc."

Ever since her Mont Blanc trip, Squash has been in love with the region, particularly the Italian side of the mountain, Aosta. "Aosta offers everything — perfectly accessible mountains, really good climbing, huts and peaks for all abilities. It's beautiful and the food is great too," she says.

In 2011 Squash reached the top of Mount Everest with her paraglider by her side. The plan was to try and fly from 8,850m, but the conditions weren't right. "There were strong winds and zero visibility," says Squash. "There was no way I would be able to soar off, but it didn't matter. I was delighted to have made the summit." The same year, Squash cycled the 1024 miles from Land's End to John O'Groats in nine days. She climbed Mount Kilimanjaro in 2013 and, with a team, raised £400,000 for charities in Tanzania.

Most recently, she completed a world record 3,074 mile journey around Western Europe on an ElliptiGO, a cross trainer with wheels, supporting Coppafeel, a charity that encourages women to check their breasts for lumps that could be cancerous. "On the first day a cyclist called Joe rode alongside us and asked 'what is that?'. I explained

WHAT IS BUM BOARDING?

Bum boarding is a sport we Brits can claim to excel at, with Squash Falconer holding the record as the world's highest bum boarder. Bum boarding is where you slide down the snow on a plastic seat moulded to the shape of your bum with a handle at the front. You use your heels to steer and if you pick the right hill (smooth, quite steep) you can gain a lot of speed. Balance is also key for a steady and hopefully controlled descent.



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