

EXTREME
TRAVELLERS

Squash Falconer, 29, is a mountaineer and adventurer. Last year she became the first woman to paraglide off the top of Mont Blanc. She has just returned from an expedition to climb Everest. She travelled with the Powermonkey eXtreme and Angelina Villa-Clarke meets her to find out how useful she found it



Powermonkey
eXtreme, £99,
page 86

In your recent climb up Everest what did you use the Powermonkey eXtreme for?
I used it for charging all my essential gadgets – video camera, Nokia mobile, iPod and my Sat Phone. I would put the solar panels on my back during the day and be ice climbing for hours. At the end of the day it would have enough power to charge everything.

How important is it for you to travel with a device like the Powermonkey eXtreme?
I found that it was really a very significant piece of kit to have. It meant that I didn't have to take heavy generators to base camp. It was also extremely tough yet lightweight so there wasn't any issue of it breaking. Powertraveller has an excellent reputation among climbers for making good quality products so I knew that I wouldn't have to take any back-up chargers; important when you need to travel light.

How important is communication with the outside world, in terms of morale?
Tackling Everest is mentally tough as well as physically demanding and can be very daunting when you are there. You are also away for about 10 weeks so it is crucial to check in with loved ones. There's actually a lot of time spent just waiting around. You are at base camp for weeks acclimatising, and it really does help you psychologically if you can talk to a friendly voice. It was a huge relief for me.

It sounds like your endurance was tested...
Yes! It takes 10 days to get to base camp which is 5,400m high. Then you have to wait for the right weather window to continue on to higher camps, so there's lots of time not climbing. It becomes a mental challenge. Although there were four of us doing it together, conversation dries up quickly when you are exhausted. I was very grateful for my iPod. Normally you can't listen to music when you get higher than base camp as there's no way of charging anything. Fortunately my trusty Powermonkey did the job.

PHOTOGRAPHY: WILSON HENNESSY



You must have to travel light when doing these trips, what are your top five essentials?
Powermonkey eXtreme; toothbrush/toothpaste; clean underwear; Elizabeth Arden's Eight Hour Cream, £22, page 41; luxury snacks.

You were planning to paraglide off Everest but the weather conditions were too bad. How disappointed were you, given that it is such an achievement to reach the summit?
If somebody had told me beforehand that I wouldn't have been able to fly, I would have been devastated. But I soon realised the magnitude of the task before us when I got to base camp. I knew early on that I wouldn't be able to fly off – it was totally out of my control. I was in fact really thrilled and delighted to get to the top. The conditions were so bad that it actually became all about survival and getting back down alive.

What was the hardest part of the trip?
Definitely the weather! You leave to reach the summit at night. So we set off at 8pm. It was a beautiful star-lit night – no clouds at all. Then at 4am, when the sun normally comes up, all you could see was dense white cloud and then the wind began to pick up. In no time at all there was no visibility, fierce snow blizzards and 60km winds. Some people have asked why didn't I turn back and try it again on another day. But we had gone too far, and I knew I just had to keep going.

What was arriving at the summit like?
It was freezing and it was clear that it was vital to get off and come down again – we were there for seconds. You think being on top of the world would be exhilarating but it was just very scary. The thrill comes when you look back and realise what you have achieved. I called home when I got to base camp and shared the news.

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How important is it for you that as a woman you are achieving these feats and setting records, like being the first woman to have flown from the summit of Mont Blanc?
I'd like to think that I inspire both men and women as I never really think in terms of gender. Although I can see that maybe other women may look at what I have done and be inspired to do something they hadn't thought of before. I do hope so.

Would you attempt this challenge again? And what are you setting your sights on next?
Immediately after coming down from Everest I said I'd never do it again, but now it is a maybe – so let's see! My next challenge is a Land's End to John O'Groats cycle ride in September. I'll be using the Powermonkey again as it's so light and portable and perfectly suited to something like this.

Who would you recommend the Powermonkey to?
Anyone who enjoys an active lifestyle, you don't have to be on an extreme expedition to use it. It's perfect for things like a family camping trip or for a student heading off to a music festival. I would also recommend it to anyone who is environmentally aware. It's a fantastic, money saving, solar solution.

Do you think you will continue with your adventures in years to come?
Being adventurous is part of who you are. I'll always have that spirit. Of course, I won't always do death-defying things, as there is a time and place for those. But I'll always enjoy a physical challenge – it keeps the spirit alive.
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Visit squashfalconer.com for information on her next challenges

Squash Falconer and powermonkey-extreme featured in Oct 2011 issue of British Airways high life magazine

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