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'Thrilled to be alive' after Everest climb

BY ED HILL

ADVENTURER Squash Falconer has successfully scaled Mount Everest – but was defeated in her bid to fly solo from the summit by bad weather.

The 29-year-old, of Thulston, spent seven weeks climbing the world's highest peak.

She was hoping to become the first woman to solo-pilot a paraglider down from the 8,848m-high mountain but her plans were blown off course by 60km winds.

After returning home to Derbyshire, Squash said the climb – where temperatures reached -50C – was the most challenging thing she had ever done.

She said: "I knew it was going to be difficult, the hardest thing I've done in my life, but it was even tougher than I expected."

"Over 100 people set out for the summit on the same day, but less than 10 made it because of the weather."

"I'm totally amazed that I made it."

"The conditions were hideous. I was thrilled to make it to the top – and thrilled to get back down alive."

Squash said she was disappointed not to have been able to paraglide down but was still "elated" about her feat, which she did with a group of four climbers, plus a guide.

During the trek, she burnt up to 12,000 calories a day – describing it as "the best diet".

More than once she feared she might not make it.

Even when at the top, she could not celebrate for long, as heavy cloud saw visibility drop to just 10m, meaning she had to start her descent almost immediately.



Squash Falconer pictured on her climb to the top of Mount Everest – she said it was the "toughest" thing she had ever done.

The trip also ended on a sombre note. While she was making her final ascent, Squash passed a Japanese climber who had got into trouble.

She had to carry on but could not stop thinking about him. She found out later that the man died within hours.

"His face was black and blue and he was in and out of consciousness," she said.

"In trying to help, all you would do is die instead. It's very difficult."

"People talk about leaving

others behind, but to be the one doing it was very traumatic.

"It makes you question yourself and also makes you think 'that could so easily be me'."

Squash, a former Ockbrook School pupil, said the exhausting experience had left her walking around "like a zombie".

"My body and mind were totally and utterly exhausted. I got frostbite on my face and everything hurt," she said.

"It kills a lot of brain cells.

For a few days, I felt dumbed down. I couldn't think of words, that kind of thing."

Squash was also hampered by a cut hand from her climbing gear, that would not heal because she was so high.

In 2009, Squash became the first British woman to climb Mount Blanc and then paraglide from the summit. She rode 900 miles on a motorbike to France, before climbing the highest mountain in the Alps and jumping off the top.

To cut down on weight, she

used a special lightweight paraglider which she could carry on her back during the journey.

Now she is hoping to cycle from John O'Groats to Land's End in September, as her next challenge.

The Mount Everest climb was to raise money for three charities – Treetops Hospice, cancer charity Soles and the Mount Everest Foundation for Sustainable Development in Nepal. To donate, visit www.squashfalconer.com.

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