

WE'RE SHAKING UP THE ENERGY INDUSTRY



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My travel: adventurer Squash Falconer

The first woman to paraglide off Mont Blanc and the world's highest bum boarder talks to us before jumping off Mount Kilimanjaro.

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You're about to jump off Kilimanjaro with 100 other paragliders - what's that about?
It's called Wings of Kilimanjaro and it's a world first that we've got so many people paragliding off a mountain at the same time. The other adventurers include mountaineers and paraglider pilots. There have been illegal jumps before off the mountain but this is the first legal paraglide. The reason is because Kilimanjaro is a national park and the government don't allow paragliding. But Adrian McRae, who founded the initiative said: "Look, if I raise \$1 million for Tanzanian charities, will give you us a one-off permit", and so they said yes.

You were the first British woman to paraglide off Mont Blanc...
Yes - although I didn't know that I was until after I'd done it. I regularly get people saying "you're mad". I started mountain-climbing when I was 23 and in my mind, there were three things I wanted to do. I wanted to ride a motorbike to the South of France - I've ridden since I was little. And when I did a ski season when I was 18, I used to have a great view of Mont Blanc - I'd look at it and think 'climbing that would be a cool thing to do' but I didn't yet know how to mountain climb, and then when I learned to paraglide in 2006, I thought I'd love to paraglide off a high mountain.

So in my mind, I wanted to ride a motorbike from my home in the south of England to France with the paraglider on my back, when I got there I wanted to climb the mountain and if I made it to the top, I wanted to fly from the summit. A lot of people said you won't do it, you're mad. I also didn't have money or the equipment. But I didn't listen to the naysayers and I just thought, I have to try.

Although I'd climbed higher mountains and had tougher trips, that really was my shining example of "just do it and don't listen to the negativity".



Squash Falconer

How did you fund all these adventures?
At first I funded it through work, then I did special events work. At first I started talking to companies and then slowly signed on sponsors. It's slow progress. You buy some kit at trade rates and then go out there and do an adventure. Then you show the sponsors what you can do and they help you a little bit, and then if you're successful you can do it full-time. It's taken me years.

And what of you being the world's highest bum boarder?
When I went to Cho Oyu in 2008 my snowboard was too heavy - but my mate gave me a small, plastic, pink kids bum board. I got some strange looks - this was the world's sixth highest mountain after all. I didn't bum board down the whole mountain - that would've been near impossible - but it was at the highest altitude.

What was the most difficult trip?
Each trip has its own element of difficulty but it was probably Everest. Everest conjures up images of death and there's a huge mental weight before you go. The trip itself is long and tough. I've always found with mountains, you have to push yourself physically and then you have to push yourself mentally to get there. On Everest I found a third level and it was emotion.

As we summited, the weather deteriorated and a man actually died on the way down. We were nearby and you have to come to terms with the fact that somebody is dying but there is nothing you can do to help - you're struggling to get yourself down. And then there are all these questions such as - why am I doing this, how am I going to get myself down? And in that moment I had the most amazing clarity of what was important. It was just love. I could hear Mum's voice in my head and I knew I wanted to get back to the people I cared about.



Ben Winston

What about Everest becoming popular among normal travellers - do you approve?
I would never say "only this many people should do it" or anything, but as kit improves, more of us can do it. People who have never climbed before can climb Everest and that's because of the porters and all the other support that you're paying for. The only thing I'd say is that when you do that, if something goes wrong, the person with the experience is likely to live, and the person without is likely to die.

What was your first challenge like?
It was a 36-hour adventure race and there were four people in the team, and there had to be a minimum of one girl. The furthest I'd ever run at that point was 12 miles and when you're doing this race, the rules are that at any one time, three people had to be racing. That could involve racing, cycling or abseiling.

You ended up having eight hours off each. I had my eight hours off earlier on, and so I was on for the last 14 hours of the race. The last eight hours was a 30-mile pole run - I was exhausted but I did it. I remember thinking I want to throw up and I can't do it, but I just kept going. I always go back to that and I think just when you think you're going to give up, you can push through it. That was the moment I thought you can do it anything if you put your mind to it.



Flo Tomlinson

How do you train?
I will regularly walk somewhere with a heavy pack on. It's hard to have a workout structure because I'm not always in one place and I don't like gyms. But some weeks I work out a lot and others not so much. Before a trip, I factor in where I am and what I'm doing. I'm not fussy about diet because I try eating as much before a trip to fuel up.

So, we hear you can climb Everest but you're afraid of birds?
Yes! I grew up on a farm and went strawberry picking when I was three, and this cockerel just went at me. It jumped on my back and dug its claws in, trying to peck me. My mum had to pull it off. Yes, it's irrational but that's where it comes from.

Next challenge?
I'm doing a world record trip. It's a 3,000-mile ride across Europe on an ElliptiGO - it's like a cross-trainer meets bicycle.

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