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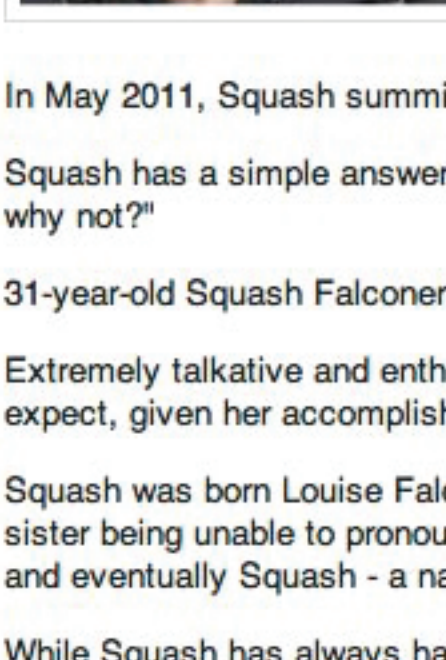




News Headlines | S...

## PlanetSKI reporters are an interesting bunch - Jac Smith

Saturday September 8, 2012 - [Email this article to a friend](#)



One of them, Squash Falconer, has paraglided from Mt Blanc, climbed Mt Everest and done a few other things in the mountains beside. She is quite a girl.

In September 2009, at the age of 28, she fulfilled three ambitions in one fell swoop.

She rode a motorbike from England to the foot of Mt Blanc in France; climbed the mountain, and became the first British woman to paraglide from the top.

In May 2011, Squash summited Mount Everest.

Squash has a simple answer to those of us questioning her audacious feats: "Well, why not?"

31-year-old Squash Falconer is somewhat of an anomaly.

Extremely talkative and enthusiastic, yet utterly unaffected, she's not what you'd expect, given her accomplishments.

Squash was born Louise Falconer and gained her unusual name as a result of her sister being unable to pronounce Louise. 'Ease' became peas, then squashy peas and eventually Squash - a name that stuck.

While Squash has always had an innate sense of enthusiasm and an indomitable spirit, surprisingly, she wanted to be a farmer - and then a vet.

She did neither.

At the age of 18, she set off from her Derbyshire home to fulfil her passion for sports and adventure, starting with a ski season in the French Alps.

In 2004, Squash and three friends (the 'Lipstick Blondes') were the first (and only) all women team, to compete in the 'Saab Salomon X-Adventure' - a gruelling 36 hour endurance race, combining running, biking, canoeing and climbing.

They then went on to climb Aconcagua, the highest mountain in South America. With no previous high mountain experience Squash completed the climb, armed with just a reasonable level of fitness, tough mental attitude and a sense of camaraderie.

"My parents have always taught me to believe in myself," she says. "There are times when I'm climbing that I've really had to dig deep mentally for those last reserves. These are the times when I hear my mum's voice telling me: 'Squash, you can do anything!'"

After Aconcagua, came Mount Mustagata, a 7546m peak in China.

At 7400m, they turned back, realising that overall conditions were not conducive to a successful summit. Making decisions such as these go some way to explaining Squash's continued achievements:

"People forget that it's not just about summiting - that's only a small part of the journey," she says. "In addition to the weather conditions, you have to be able to know your own body and recognise the warning signs. I always say that when it comes to climbing I'm a bit of a wimp. Yes, I take risks, but they're calculated ones. I don't want to be a dead hero."

In October 2008, Squash and Suzy Madge (another Lipstick Blonde) summited Cho Oyu in Nepal - the sixth highest mountain in the world.

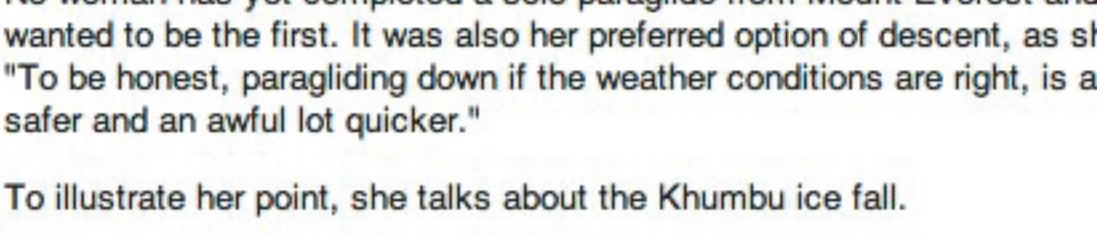
They both broke world records on their descent - as well as saving another climber's life.

Squash became the world's highest ever burn boarder and Suzy, the first British woman to ski from that height.

Squash also faced her own mortality on Cho Oyu. Catching her crampon whilst abseiling a vertical ice wall, she flipped upside down, losing her oxygen mask. Prompt reaction by summit leader Dan Mazur saved her life. Typically understating the incident, Squash recalls: "That was a scary moment."

Yet Squash was to face another life-threatening situation when she fell off Mt Blanc (twice) whilst roped to her climbing partner.

"People had often asked me how I would react if I fell whilst climbing, and I honestly couldn't answer until it happened," she says. "I thought that I'd freeze or panic, but instinct just kicks in. I realised that I'd fallen off the mountain pulling my partner with me and told myself to get my axe and stab it into the ice wall. The first time I stopped myself, but then my partner fell past and pulled me off again. The second time, we both managed to stop ourselves."



Flying high

March 31st 2011 marked the beginning of Squash's Everest journey - not just to summit - but also to fly off the top.

No woman has yet completed a solo paraglide from Mount Everest and Squash wanted to be the first. It was also her preferred option of descent, as she explains: "To be honest, paragliding down if the weather conditions are right, is arguably safer and an awful lot quicker."

To illustrate her point, she talks about the Khumbu ice fall.

Situated just above base camp on Mt Everest, it is one of the most treacherous places on the mountain:

"The Khumbu ice fall is a huge moving glacier, on the South side of Mt Everest," Squash says. "Because it is constantly moving, deep crevasses can open up and enormous seracs (ice blocks) can crack and fall at any time. This is one of the most scariest and dangerous parts of the climb; you try to minimise the risk by climbing through before the sun hits it, but it is ultimately out of your control and through no fault of your own you can end up getting killed in there."

Due to the acclimatisation process that enables climbers to adjust to the low oxygen levels, Squash had to negotiate this terrifying climb 6 times.

Yet she had specifically chosen the South side of the mountain, explaining: "There are pros and cons to both sides and, in my opinion, equal dangers. The North is typically colder - the South side is warmer, but unfortunately, you have to go through the ice fall. I really feel the cold though, so felt that this was the better option."

Clearly, she knew what she was doing.

On May 11<sup>th</sup> in 2011, over 100 people attempted to summit Everest. Squash was one of less than 10 that succeeded, at 8.30am on May 12<sup>th</sup>.

Adverse weather conditions had forced most of the mountaineers back; they had also cost one of them their life. Unfortunately, the weather conditions prevented Squash's paraglide attempt - not something she's too disappointed about.

"My aim was to reach the summit and fly from the top, obviously I didn't quite make it, but I don't care. I tried. There was no way I could have flown in the conditions we summited in and when I tried to fly from the South Col it just frightened me and wasn't going to happen. I am however completely delighted, and a little bit surprised, that I made it to the top of the world."

Safely back at base camp Squash was finally able to appreciate what she'd achieved. Prior to that, her thoughts were a little more sobering.

"Standing on top of Everest, I didn't get the feeling I expected. The weather conditions were deteriorating and I was seriously scared that I wasn't going to be able to get back down. It may sound cheesy but nothing else mattered to me at that point, except love. Love for my family and friends and knowing the love they had for me. That was all that was important and I just wanted to get back down alive."



Squash Falconer

Far from sounding cheesy, Squash sums up the brutal reality of the situation.

Self-deprecating and notably modest about her accomplishments, it's easy to forget the sheer magnitude of what she's done.

Though in a happy relationship, Squash admits that her unusual lifestyle does present challenges. "Going away on long and potentially life threatening expeditions puts a strain on any relationship."

She also has to work hard, in order to fund herself and pay for her expeditions. Event work, motivational speaking and leading mountaineering treks, are just some of the means by which Squash supports herself.

Squash is now preparing for her next challenge, the 'Wings of Kilimanjaro' - an event that will take place in January 2013.

This is a charity led project and will bring together 200 adventurers from all over the world, to climb Mt Kilimanjaro and paraglide from the summit.

As for the future, while Squash is not ready to give up two of her greatest passions yet, she doesn't intend to be climbing mountains and paragliding forever.

"Mountaineering and paragliding is a numbers game," she says. "It all comes down to probability, and the more times I do it the more likely that something's going to happen. I don't think I want to keep putting my family and the people that I love, through it. When I left for Everest, it felt like everyone was saying goodbye to me for the last time and that really hit home. What I would like to do is more motivational speaking and also progress into TV presenting."

Extraordinarily determined, it would be easy to assume that she never doubts herself - something Squash is very keen to put straight.

While she's obviously, and justifiably, proud of her achievements, she remains very grounded and determined to point out that she's no different to anyone else.

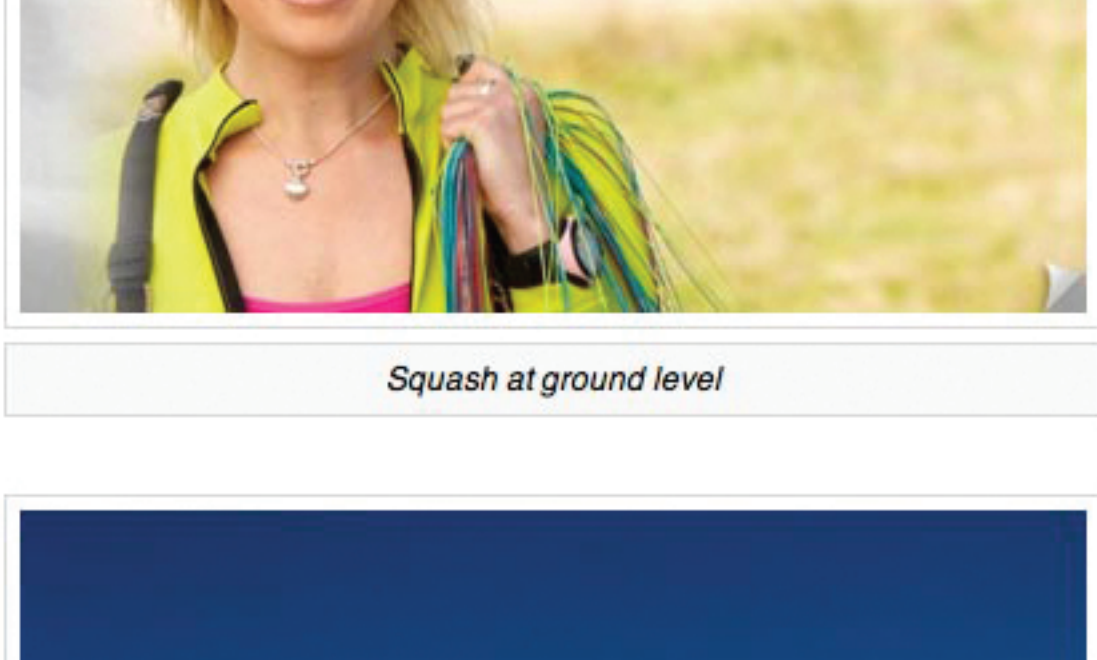
"You have to put things into perspective," Squash says. "I watched my friend battle cancer for 10 years before sadly losing her fight last year; I used to look at her and think if she can do that, then I can definitely do this. Of course, I occasionally doubt myself, just like anyone else. And that's when I have to sit myself down and tell myself that I can do it. This is why it's so important to me that I speak about my experiences. I really want others to realise that if I can do this, anyone can - not particularly to climb mountains, but to follow their own dreams, as you never know where they may take you."

It's this genuine desire to actively encourage and motivate others, which sets Squash apart.

Squash Falconer's achievements are phenomenal.

This is an inspirational woman who steadfastly refuses to accept 'the impossible'.

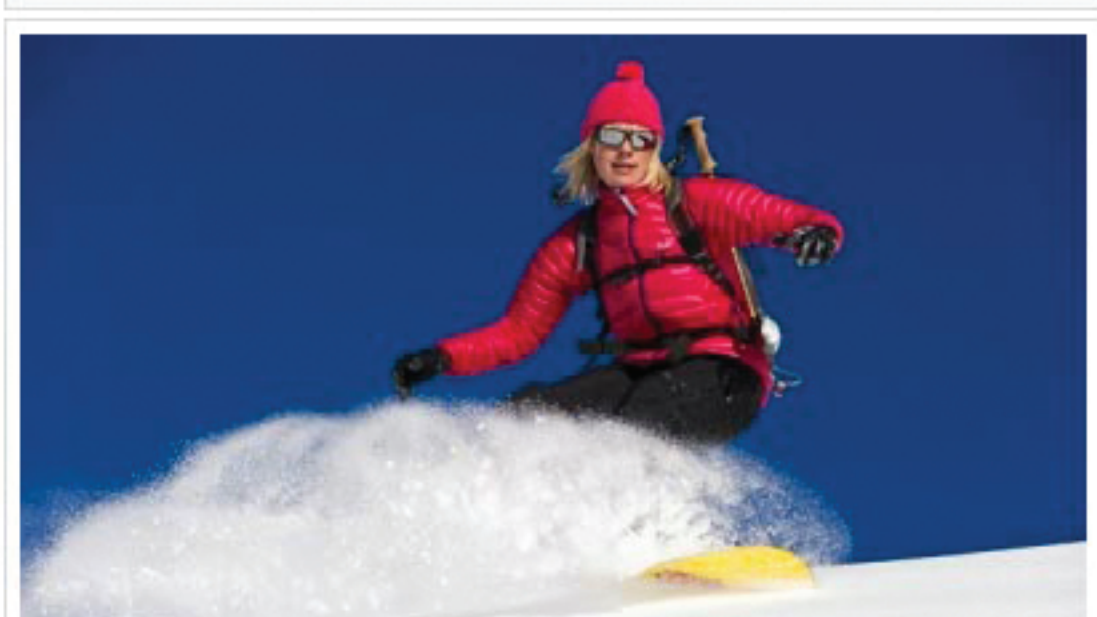
And why should she?



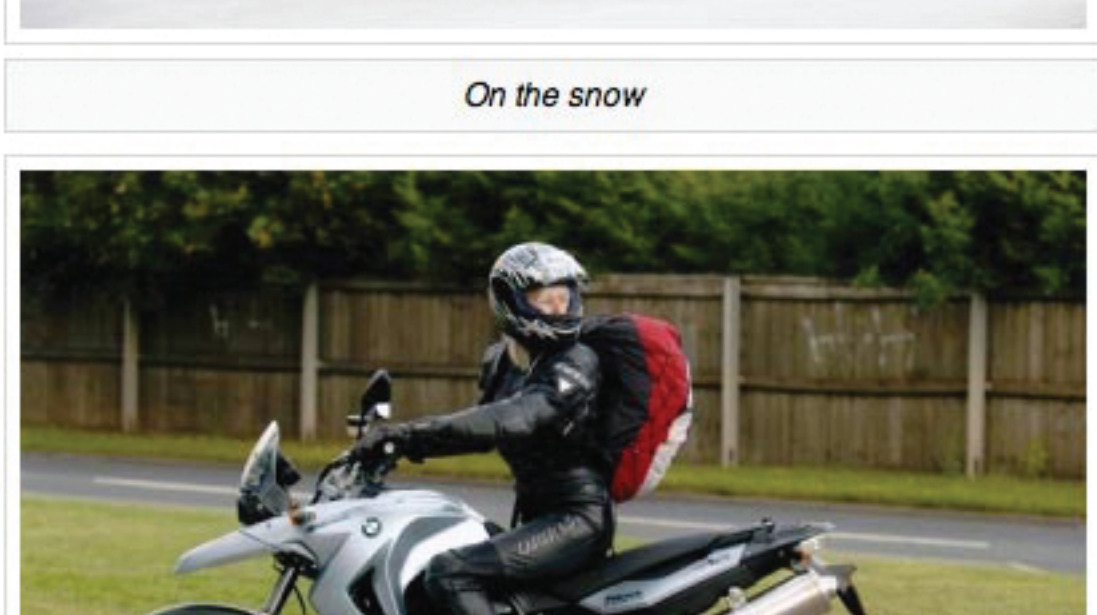
Squash at ground level



Go for it



On the snow




On yer bike

Squash has written several articles for PlanetSKI including her account of [what it is really like to summit Everest](#).

She is currently in the Aosta Valley in Italy and will be writing for us again at PlanetSKI this winter.

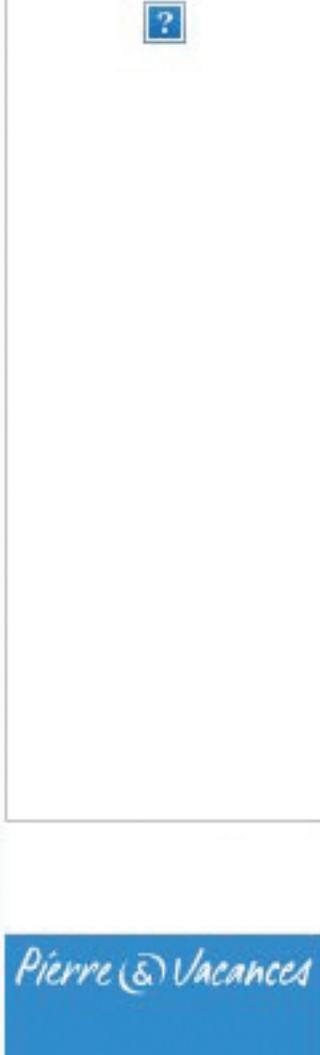
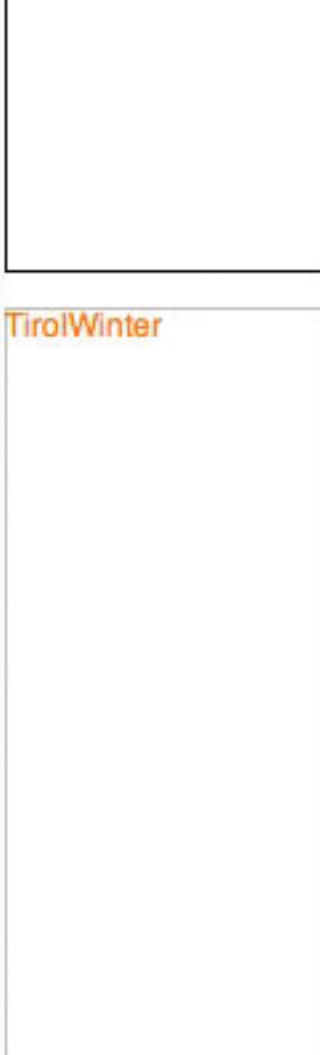
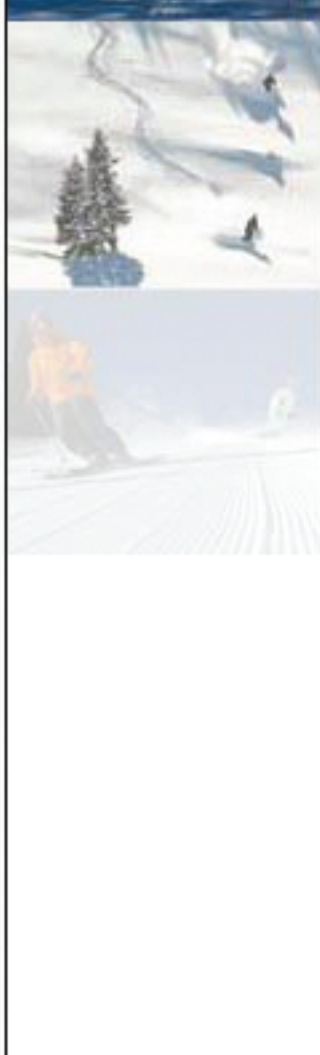
For Squash's web site [see here](#).

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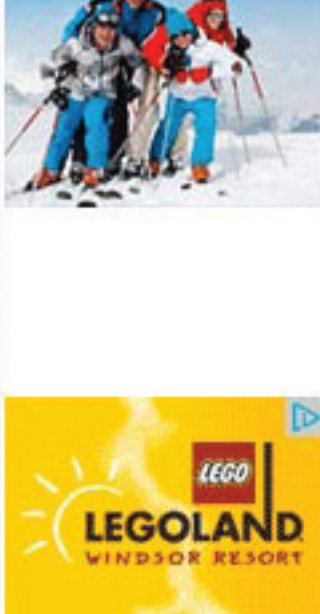


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