

A woman is hiking on a rocky mountain trail. She is wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt, white pants, dark boots, and a blue helmet with a white fur trim. She has sunglasses and is carrying a large woven basket on her back. She is holding a wooden stick in her right hand. The background shows a steep, rocky mountain slope.

**FEATURING**

**Mountain biking Nepal**

**Sport in South Sudan**

**Hiking Sikkim**

# **ADVENTURE SHE**

**Also including:**

**New mums leading the way**

**Adventuring on your doorstep**

**Cycle touring in Bolivia and Java**

**Camel trekking Australia**

**Andes by horseback**



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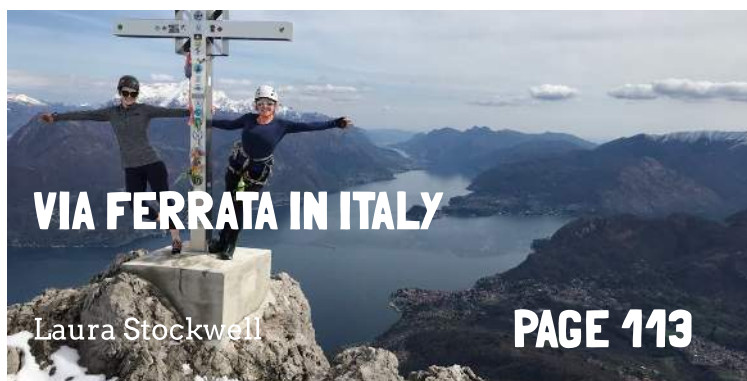
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# FROM THE EDITOR

## ***Welcome to the second edition of Adventure She.***

In this issue we hope there's something for all of you, whether experienced adventurers or new to the adventure game. We have some epic trips, but rather than covering expeditions taking many months, this time, we mostly focus on shorter adventures, adventures that might be perhaps more attainable in our often so time pressured world.

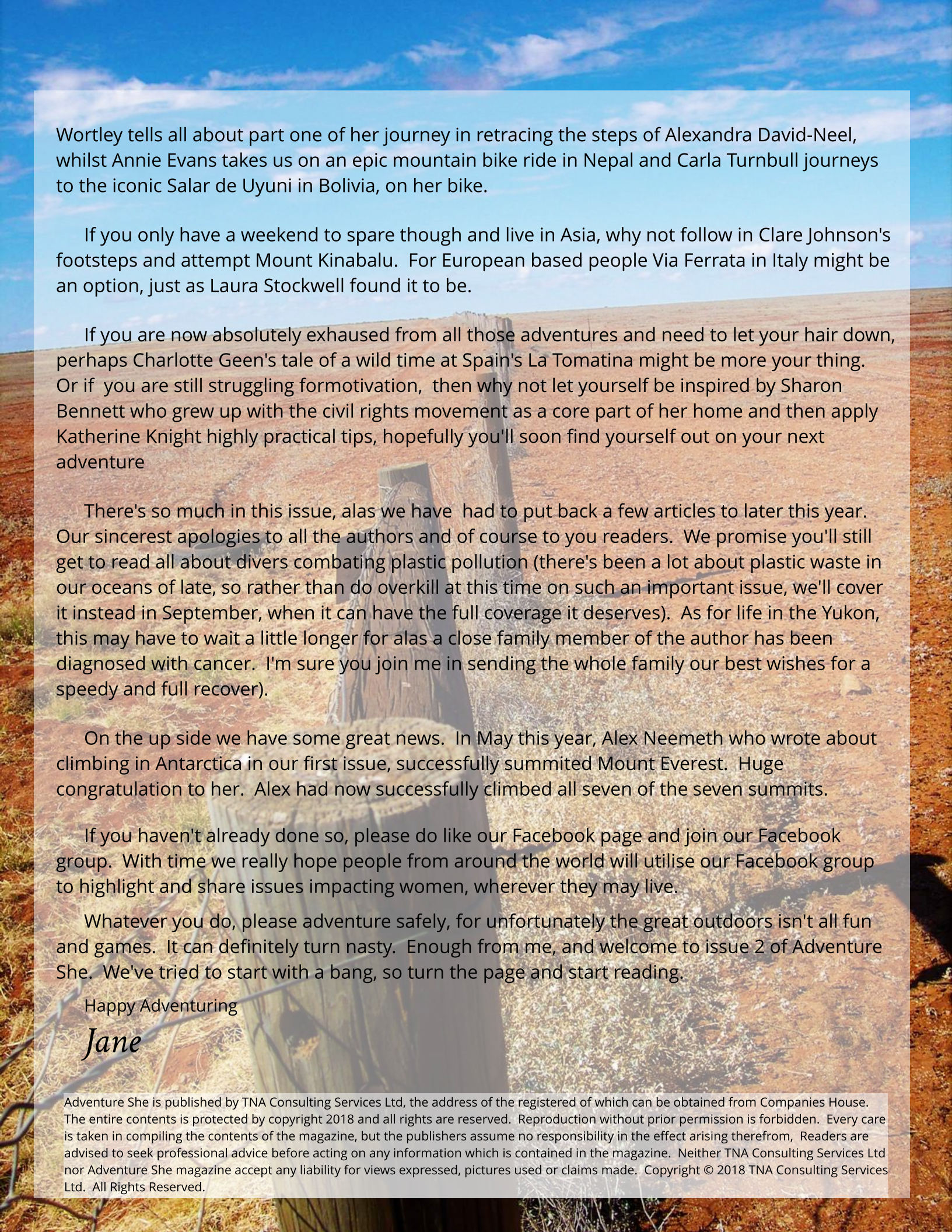
Josephine Anselin starts off this issue, with her tale of how she cycle toured across Java, Indonesia, in two weeks. It took Jo Bradshaw even less time to cross the Andes by horseback,

whilst Johanna Sutton took only 34 hours to complete an epic 100 mile race climbing over 5000 metres.

Adventure She goes beyond hard core exploration or adventure style feats. We also look at different types of adventures. This time Louise Rowen shares with us what it's like to live and work in a South Sudanese aid camp. Yours truly takes a glimpse at the life of Western explorers and pioneers in the Australian Outback and Rae Red, Kelly Lockhard and Catherine Edsell all share their experiences of adventuring as mums.

But what if you still want that epic, mammoth, stand out adventure? Elise





Wortley tells all about part one of her journey in retracing the steps of Alexandra David-Neel, whilst Annie Evans takes us on an epic mountain bike ride in Nepal and Carla Turnbull journeys to the iconic Salar de Uyuni in Bolivia, on her bike.

If you only have a weekend to spare though and live in Asia, why not follow in Clare Johnson's footsteps and attempt Mount Kinabalu. For European based people Via Ferrata in Italy might be an option, just as Laura Stockwell found it to be.

If you are now absolutely exhausted from all those adventures and need to let your hair down, perhaps Charlotte Geen's tale of a wild time at Spain's La Tomatina might be more your thing. Or if you are still struggling for motivation, then why not let yourself be inspired by Sharon Bennett who grew up with the civil rights movement as a core part of her home and then apply Katherine Knight highly practical tips, hopefully you'll soon find yourself out on your next adventure

There's so much in this issue, alas we have had to put back a few articles to later this year. Our sincerest apologies to all the authors and of course to you readers. We promise you'll still get to read all about divers combating plastic pollution (there's been a lot about plastic waste in our oceans of late, so rather than do overkill at this time on such an important issue, we'll cover it instead in September, when it can have the full coverage it deserves). As for life in the Yukon, this may have to wait a little longer for alas a close family member of the author has been diagnosed with cancer. I'm sure you join me in sending the whole family our best wishes for a speedy and full recovery).

On the up side we have some great news. In May this year, Alex Neemeth who wrote about climbing in Antarctica in our first issue, successfully summited Mount Everest. Huge congratulations to her. Alex had now successfully climbed all seven of the seven summits.

If you haven't already done so, please do like our Facebook page and join our Facebook group. With time we really hope people from around the world will utilise our Facebook group to highlight and share issues impacting women, wherever they may live.

Whatever you do, please adventure safely, for unfortunately the great outdoors isn't all fun and games. It can definitely turn nasty. Enough from me, and welcome to issue 2 of Adventure She. We've tried to start with a bang, so turn the page and start reading.

Happy Adventuring

*Jane*

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# JAVA BY BIKE

BY JOSEPHINE ANSELIN



*If you moved overseas, how would go about learning more about the country, its culture, and its people?*  
**Josephine Anselin took to her bike.**

## IMMERSION

Last November my husband Kenny and I moved to Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia. I admit before moving

here, I knew very little about this part of the world. For example, I hadn't realised Indonesia is made up of several thousand islands and has over 300 different ethnic groups.

I love exploring new places and connecting with people from different backgrounds. So moving to Jakarta gave me the perfect opportunity to

immerse myself in everything Indonesian, including learning more about the country's diverse culture and landscape.

I've done some cycling touring in the past and a few months after our South-East Asian move, we decided to explore the island of Java by bicycle.

Why cycling? Well,

cycling to me represents the perfect adventure mode of transport, for when you travel by bicycle, you are slow enough to take in your surroundings and fast enough to cover good distances. All this makes cycle touring is a great way to discover a country in an authentic way, because rather than hopping from tourist hot spot to tourist hot spot, you





get to experience a more complete, a more raw, a more real picture of a place. It's also a great way to meet and connect with locals because people tend to be intrigued by your journey. Plus (depending on where you're going and on you're level of fitness), a cycle trip may not require a huge amount of logistical or physical preparation. At its most basic, it can be as easy as getting a bike, a map and figuring it out on the road.

Our plan was to fly from Jakarta to Denpasar (on the neighbouring island of Bali), cycle from there to the port of Gilimanuk in Bali's west, catch a ferry from Gilimanuk to Ketapang Port on the easternmost tip of Java and then cycle across Java all the way back to Jakarta. Apart from knowing we had two weeks in which to cycle west all the way back to Jakarta, we didn't have too much of a plan in terms of the

actual route, thinking we'd figure the rest out on the road, for we wanted to take it a day at a time, be flexible and make up a route based on the recommendations of locals.

After a very early morning flight (we left our apartment at 2am) and an hour of bike building and gear rearranging in the lobby of Bali airport, it was time to cycle.

Denpasar's traffic

was crazy. Navigating it's streets took us a while. Then, despite just following the coast to Pekutatan (about 50 miles from the airport), we still managed to get lost a few times. Still the stunning bright green rice field views and ancient temples that seemed to pop out of nowhere made up for the extra kilometres.

Most tourists visiting Bali stay in the south and the centre of the island. As we cycled





west towards Gilimanuk Port and further away from the touristy areas, we felt a change all around us. It was more authentic.

Based on the reactions from locals who spotted us on our “sepedas” (bicycle in Indonesian), we realised bicycle tourism is not yet a very common trend in Indonesia. In fact most locals were surprised to see “bules” (an Indonesian word used to describe foreigners) on fully packed bicycles. I wish I'd taken videos of local people's reactions when we explained to them that we were cycling all the way to Jakarta. We actually came to realise that Indonesians do not usually cycle “for fun”. The people who cycle here do so because they can't afford to buy a moped.

Our being on bikes definitely helped to break the ice. Despite our rather basic Indonesian language skills we got to share a number of pretty special moments and conversations with locals. And this is exactly why we had decided to go on this cycle trip in the first place.

Over the next few days, as we cycled through small fishing towns and villages along the coast, we developed a routine. We woke early, had a rice, banana, coffee breakfast and hit the road around 6am to get most of the day's mileage in before the scorching midday heat. Lunch was either street food on the side of the road or in a small “warung” (restaurant). After lunch we cycled for a few more hours



before stopping for the day.

Whilst it was the monsoon season in Indonesia, we were mostly quite lucky with the weather. But on the fifth day just before Malang, our destination for the day, we were hit by a tropical storm. It thundered and it rained. For a while we sought shelter in a small coffee shop and chatted with the super friendly Balinese owner. But over an hour later and with the weather gods showing no intention of making the rain stop that day, we eventually got back on our bikes. I admit cycling through the puddles and dodging rain spray from cars was actually a lot of fun. The storm also made us really appreciate the hot shower when we finally got to Malang, it felt especially amazing, as did the Javanese massage we treated ourselves to, to loosen up our leg muscles.

After our daily cycle was over, it was time to explore our day's destination on foot and plan for tomorrow. If I had been by myself, my

competitive side would have probably taken over and I would have been tempted to push on further and cover more distance each day but it was nice to have Kenny to remind me that we were not here to race through Java as quickly as possible, but rather, to take the time to slow down and get to know this beautiful island.

The morning after the storm the sun shone again. This time instead of heading straight off on our bikes, it was time to explore the "Rainbow" village in the neighbourhood of Jodipan.

Just over a year ago a group of students from the University of Malang decided to revive this riverside slum area by turning it into a multi-coloured village. They partnered with local painters and artists to transform the neighbourhood into a rainbow-coloured masterpiece. Thanks to these students' intervention Jodipan has now become a popular tourist attraction.





We spent the next five days cycling inland through Central Java, famous for its many volcanoes, which our legs definitely got to feel. But the great thing about cycling through hilly terrain is, after a tiring uphill, you usually get rewarded with an amazing descent.

After visiting Yogyakarta - the cultural capital of Indonesia - it was back to the coast, though the south coast this time. I really enjoyed that 50km coastal road stretch between Yogyakarta and Kebumen on day 10. It was a real treat for we had the road pretty much to ourselves and all we had to worry about was to keep the sea

to our left and cycle ahead.

The locals had been raving on about "Durian", a big spiky and very smelly fruit also called "King of Fruit" by Indonesians. So I was quite excited to finally get to taste it in Kebumen. But after trying it, I have to admit I'm not a fan. I'll stick with pineapple and dragon fruit instead.

Three days later we arrived into West Java. The terrain became flatter and as we got closer and closer to Jakarta, the busier the roads became. By now, our bodies had acclimatised to cycling in the heat and what seemed like a long days distance-wise





at the beginning of trip, now felt like an easy day. We had also become quite skilled at dodging both potholes and mopeds plus posing for photographs (for some reason Indonesians seem to love to take pictures of smelly cyclists!!) and our Indonesian language skills were slowly starting to improve.

After fifteen wonderful days and 1350 kilometers we arrived back at our flat in Jakarta. It felt so amazing to look at the map of Java, our home island, knowing

we had cycled all the way across it.

Most importantly we both felt like we had a much better understanding and appreciation of the Indonesian culture. If I had to sum up our Java cycling experience in five words I would probably say: smiles, selfies, scooters, rice and heat. Here is why:

## SMILES

Indonesians are amongst the

friendliest, smiliest and most welcoming people I have ever met. As we cycled along busy roads we kept getting thumbs-ups and cheerful “Hello Misterrrr” shout-outs from moped and car drivers passing us.

There were so many times when Kenny and I were stopped on the side of the road taking a rest or looking at the map and within minutes, there would be locals coming up to us and asking if we needed help. They





would happily stop whatever they were doing to offer their help, have a chat and hear about what we were up to. From what we experienced, community, friendliness towards strangers and helping each other out are defining characteristics of Indonesian culture. Indonesians do not operate in the constant fast-paced “need-to-look-busy” mindset that tends to be common in Western cultures. It is something I very much admire in Indonesia and aspire to learn from.

## SCOOTERS

So many scooters. Mopeds are the most popular mode of transport in Java. It is so impressive how much people manage to stack and transport on a single scooter: cages full of chicken, transportable food stalls, balloons, bicycles, entire families. It put the two small rear panniers on the

back of our bikes to shame!

Having seen what traffic is like in Jakarta I was a bit worried about what it would be like to navigate some of the busier roads in Java. But we actually found that the traffic had an “organised chaos” to it. It all looks very chaotic from the outside but when you are in the midst of it, it just seems to flow. With so many scooters around, car drivers are very used to looking out for “two-wheelers”. So if you are tempted by an Indonesian cycling adventure, don’t let the traffic discourage you – it is very manageable.

## SELFIES

Indonesians love taking selfies especially with foreigners. Whenever we stopped for food or water, within a few minutes usually a dozen people would come up and ask us for a selfie together. There was also a time where a mini-van full of local

mountain bike cyclists stopped us and asked if they could get a group shot with us. I still don’t really know why Indonesians are so keen on taking pictures with complete strangers and initially I was a bit reluctant. But then I decided to just embrace it as part of the cultural experience.

## RICE

Rice is the base of most traditional Indonesian dishes. Another aspect of our cycling trip I loved was the local cuisine. We didn’t really know what to expect in terms of food before we started, but we quickly realised that it would be hard to go hungry in Java. Even in the smallest villages there were plenty of street food vendors, fruit and vegetable markets full of fresh produce and small “warungs” (restaurants). We had rice for breakfast, lunch and dinner and we tried “nasi goreng” (fried rice) and various other varieties of rice

dishes wrapped in coconut leaves. But my personal favourite was “bubur”: rice porridge topped with spring onions, peanuts and sweet soy sauce. I never thought savoury porridge could taste good, but it turns out to be delicious. It is also the perfect pre-cycle energy boosting breakfast.

## HEAT

We definitely got to experience Indonesia’s “hot and humid” climate during our cycle trip. I don’t think I have ever sweated as much as during those two weeks. There was one particular day in East Java where we cycled uphill for a solid two hours in the midday heat. My hands kept slipping off the handlebars because the sweat was making them slippery and my cycling top was so drenched in sweat that it looked like I’d just jumped into a swimming pool. Plus, I was almost out of water. But you know





what, I loved it. I loved the physical challenge aspect and the great feeling of achievement when arriving at the top of the hill. All that sweat made the views and the downhill that followed even more enjoyable. I do find it

so fascinating how adaptable the human body is. When we started our cycle trip we had to stop every couple of hours to rest in the shade and we went through about 6 litres of water a day. But after only a few

days our body had adjusted and what felt like a “hard day” at the start of the trip felt so much more manageable the closer we got to Jakarta.

Two weeks were certainly not sufficient

to fully get to know this colourful and diverse country. There is definitely much more for us to explore whilst we live in this part of the world. Time to plan the next trip!

You can follow Josephine Anselin on social media at:

**Blog:** <http://josephineanselin.com>

**Instagram:** @josephinanselin





# SPORT IN A SOUTH SUDANESE AID CAMP

BY LOUISE ROWEN

*What's it really like living in an aid camp, when one wrong step, could mean you're blown up by a land*

## FRISBEE AND ANTI TANK MINES

"Hang on, has no one told you?"

"Um, told me what?"

"Frisbee has been cancelled"

"What! You're kidding, no way, I love frisbee! Why?"

"They found an unexploded anti-tank mine on the frisbee pitch"

## WHY SOUTH SUDAN

7 years ago I decided to follow a path towards a career in humanitarian aid because I wanted to live a life which I thought would be meaningful, have a positive impact in the world and would be something practical. On a less altruistic level I also wanted to see unusual parts of the world, see how I coped with challenging contexts and to have a big old

adventure.

After getting my first taste of development work as a trainee in southern India, in 2012 I moved to London to work in the head office of an international non-governmental organization (NGO), where I learnt a bit about emergency humanitarian responses and a lot about paperwork and filing. Then by Halloween 2014 I found myself in the Ebola screening tent at Juba airport, having left my shared house in London to take a role in South Sudan, working for an NGO who were implementing education, child



protection, health and nutrition projects.

## **SOUTH SUDAN**

South Sudan officially became the world's newest country when it gained independence from Sudan in 2011. The River Nile flows through the middle of the country from south to north and in the centre, just above the

town of Bor, there lies one of the world's largest wetlands called The Sudd.

The name Sudd is derived from the Arabic word for barrier or obstruction, which is fitting because this huge swamp has formed an impenetrable barrier for centuries, impeding explorers' efforts to find the source of the

Nile. The multiple, twisting channels of the swamp were difficult to navigate and the risk of waterborne diseases and malaria were high. Explorers would have to trawl through thick black cotton soil which clings to shoes and legs and clothes in thick clumps and drags unwitting wellington boots down into the earth.

The same environmental factors which stumped explorers in the past continue to pose logistical challenges today as there is a very limited road network in the country which means many places are inaccessible by car. To reach these areas small airstrips have been cleared in the bush around the country and radio operators

Aerial view of the wetland known as the Sudd, and Nile river, South Sudan

Photocredit: John Wollworth / Shutterstock.com





speaking every morning to get the latest updates on the condition of soil and whether planes/helicopters could land that day. A landing at one of these airstrips can be quite tense as herds of completely unconcerned goats loiter in the landing path and the edges of the airstrips are littered with the wreckage of old planes which misjudged the landing and have been left in

the middle of the African savannah, abandoned to the wild.

The central / northern part of South Sudan is incredibly flat and the earth is a beautiful rusty, autumn, orange colour and stretches for miles in every direction. Not a single obstacle interrupts the horizon line other than grouping of tukuls and trees no higher than a man. In the field sites

these Tukuls were often the coolest places to be in the day as the doorways to enter are small and low down and the darkness inside keeps the mud-based walls emanating a coolness which is almost as refreshing as a mint and lemon iced smoothie.

To the south east the land becomes more fertile especially in rainy season and green

mountains with tall craggy peaks spring up along the border with Uganda. Around here villages lie nestled into the foothills surrounded by imposing walls made of dark gnarled branches 7ft high looking like something straight out of Game of Thrones.

I was based in the capital city, Juba, which is found in the south. The River Nile runs past the edge of the





city and if you go to the right place an old two storey tourist boat lies half-submerged among the reeds, a relic of more peaceful leisurely times, yet still beautiful in its state of disrepair. A couple of restaurants line the edge of the Nile and at sunset, when the temperature would drop from a humid 47 degrees in the day to a much cooler fresher atmosphere, these were amongst the favourite spots for locals and expats.

## VIOLENCE AND THE CIVIL WAR

Approximately 2 years after

gaining independence, civil war broke out in South Sudan in December 2013. Since then there have been periods of stability and periods of conflict, but as yet no permanent solution for peace has been found. The reasons behind the conflict are complex and built upon a history of rebellions, colonization, potential oil wealth, personal grudges and tribal rivalries.

As a result of decades of conflict with Sudan and the ongoing civil war 1.9million internally displaced people (IDPs) been forced flee their homes and become displaced in their own country. Hundreds of thousands of IDP's are living

in UN protection of civilian camps around the country in addition to those who have become refugees in neighbouring countries like Uganda, Ethiopia and Kenya. The country is littered with landmines and unexploded remnants of war and weapons are easily accessible so that even cattle raids are deadly.

## WORKING FOR AN NGO IN SOUTH SUDAN

From head office, which is where I worked, we ran programs aimed at helping children and their families who were affected by the civil war. I was excited about my first deployment to a humanitarian emergency and hadn't cared much about what the role was, only that it would get me into the middle of the action – so I came to Juba as an Awards and Reporting Coordinator. I worked in a small team with Kenyan and Pakistani colleagues to try to submit reports to 40 waiting donors who wanted to know what their money had achieved. We handled contract compliance and ensured all the projects were on track with their



Sunken ferry in the Nile at Juba, South Sudan  
Photocredit: Sebastian Noethlich / Shutterstock.com



financial spending.....I know what you're thinking, not exactly the "middle of the action" right!

One of the more enjoyable parts of the job was the field visits. Even getting to the field could be a challenge as the front line of the conflict was always moving, our projects were in remote locations and the few roads which existed had high risks of ambush and car-jacking. So the best way to get around the country was to fly with the UN Humanitarian Air Service. South Sudan has two seasons, the dry season and the rainy season and these seasons also impacted movement around the country, for when the rainy season came some places could only be reached by certain World Food Programme helicopters. That



meant each year all the NGO's would race to have their supplies pre-positioned before the rains came ... and I'm not talking just programmatic supplies, I mean supplies of hot chocolate powder and cheese!

For dry season field visits I would navigate the chaos of Juba airport to catch the UN

plane to different parts of the country and spend time with my colleagues who were implementing the projects. On these visits I got a taste of the difficulties of running projects in remote areas; the compounds where we lived and worked were run on generator power and after sunset the generators were turned off

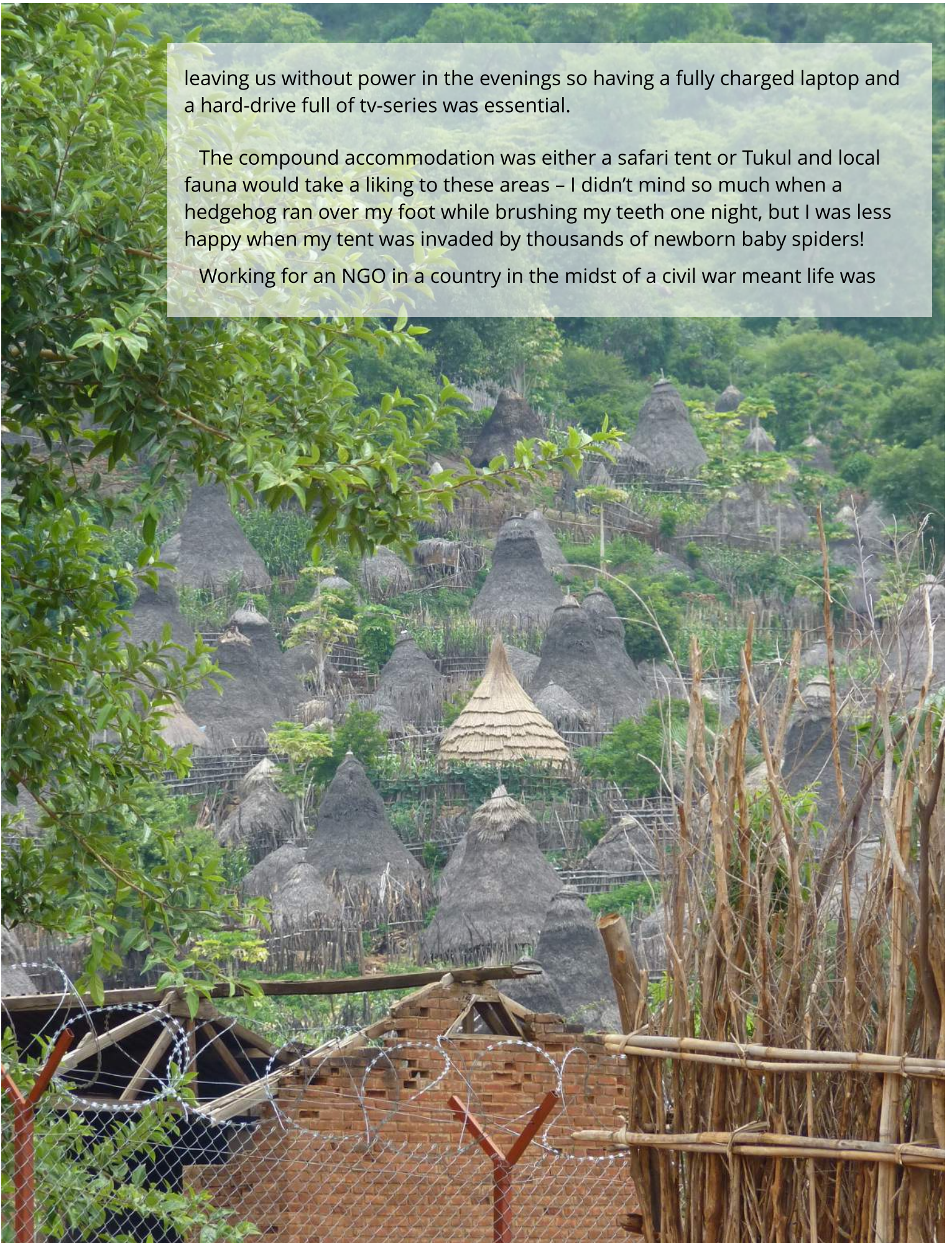




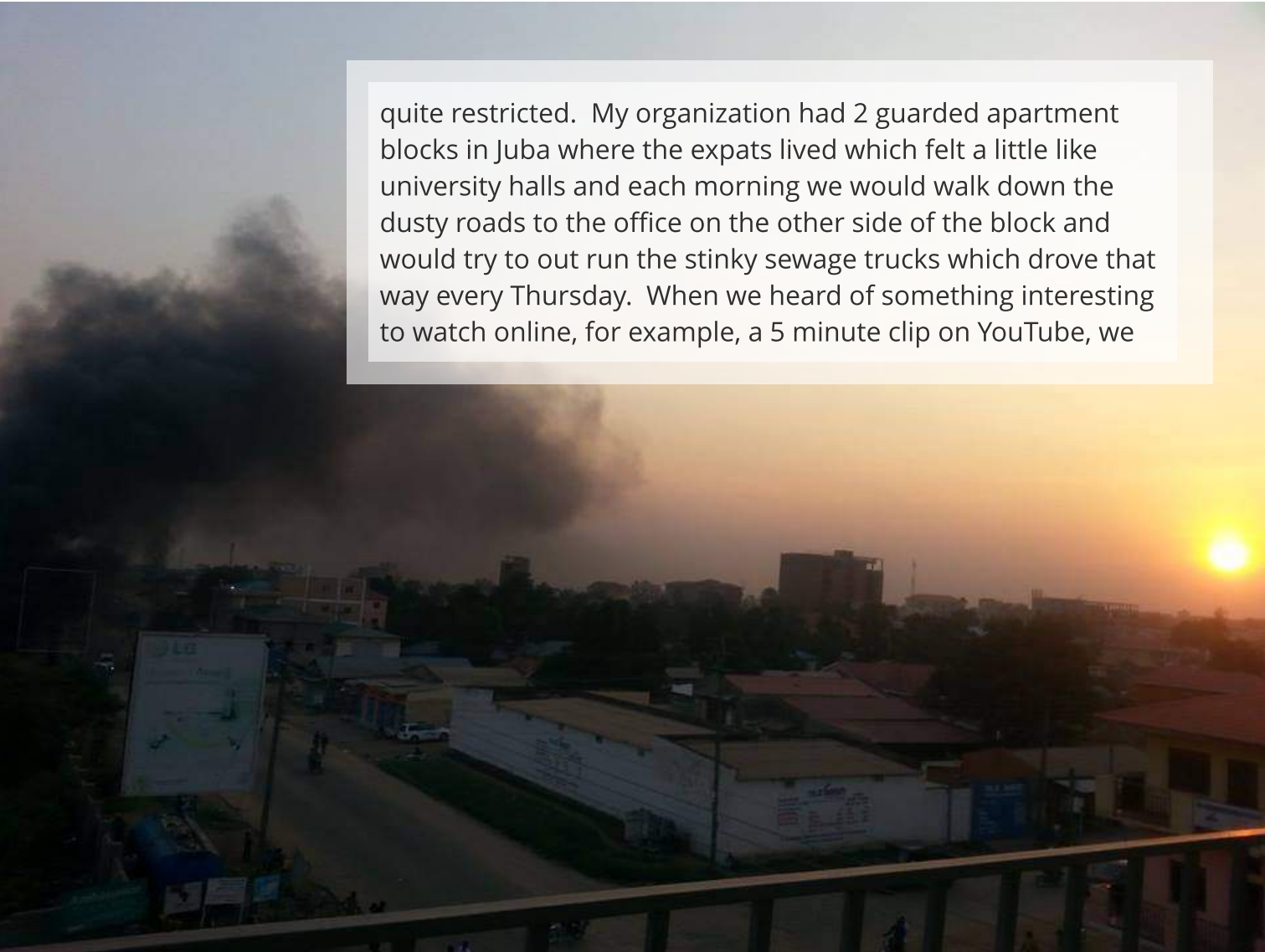
leaving us without power in the evenings so having a fully charged laptop and a hard-drive full of tv-series was essential.

The compound accommodation was either a safari tent or Tukul and local fauna would take a liking to these areas – I didn't mind so much when a hedgehog ran over my foot while brushing my teeth one night, but I was less happy when my tent was invaded by thousands of newborn baby spiders!

Working for an NGO in a country in the midst of a civil war meant life was







quite restricted. My organization had 2 guarded apartment blocks in Juba where the expats lived which felt a little like university halls and each morning we would walk down the dusty roads to the office on the other side of the block and would try to out run the stinky sewage trucks which drove that way every Thursday. When we heard of something interesting to watch online, for example, a 5 minute clip on YouTube, we

would take turns to sit next to the Wi-Fi router in the office and wait for anything up to an hour while it streamed.

We were allowed to walk around our block in the daytime but any further or after dark needed an organization car and local driver. Our curfew ranged from 7pm to 10pm depending on the security situation at the time and some areas remained totally off limits as there was increased risk of car-jackings and muggings.

Despite the insecurity, curfew, extreme heat and difficulties of working in this context there was a lot I loved about South Sudan. Konyokonyo market was always a delight, I would go there to buy fruits, vegetables, odds, ends and brightly coloured African fabric.

It was a baking burning hot (45 degree Celsius) 10 minute walk from my apartment to the market; it was so hot that only the thought of buying a congratulatory passion fruit for

myself when I arrived would get me there.

The market is a warren of muddy trails with holes covered by planks of wood and each side of the narrow paths are lined with stalls. Blue tarpaulins cover the interior of the market turning it into a maze of winding passages and treasures to buy. One step inside the warren of muddy trails and all sense of direction was instantly lost! The only way to navigate out was to find a spot to poke





your head above the tarpaulin coverings and try and spot a distinctive pink building which lay to the north of the market.

Tribal culture is very much part of South Sudanese life and learning about the different customs, languages and traditions of the tribes was very

interesting. I was particularly interested in their concepts of beauty as certain tribes valued protruding front teeth and facial scarification was seen as beautiful, a sign of courage and also a symbol of their tribe.



And lastly, I loved the names of locations around South Sudan, for example, there is a state named Bahr et Ghazal which translates beautifully to the Sea of Gazelles. The seriousness of any conversation at work would be completely undermined by the amusing names of the towns in which we worked including, the





delightfully named Waat (pronounced What), Wau (pronounced Wow), Yei (pronounced Yay) and the newly created State of Lol!

## DOWNTIME

I was in my apartment in Juba one hot and humid afternoon at the start of the rainy seasons when I had the phone call about the anti-tank mines on the frisbee pitch. A group of friends and I had been playing Ultimate Frisbee on Tuesday and Thursday evenings as the sun went down on a clear-ish patch

of ground near the River Nile. The rutted, cracked dirt field was used in the daytime as a show-space for farming equipment, but in the evenings the tractors and trailers were moved to the edges of the field making a space. Luckily the frisbee “pitch” was just a 10 minute walk from my apartment and the Security Manager had given the route the all-clear. When the anti-tank mine was discovered I would like to say that my frisbee friends and I, being a group of grown-up, sensible, humanitarian aid workers reacted very reasonably to this

surprise turn of events, however, the loss of one of the few extra-curricular activities available in a conflict zone hit us quite hard and there was a brief but fairly serious discussion about whether we could keep playing and “just run lightly?”!

Luckily I had one more extra-curricular activity trick up my sleeve; although Juba lies in the flat flat flat very very flat part of South Sudan there is a small mountain on the outskirts of the city called Jebel Kujur (which translates to the Wicked Mountain) and I had heard





rumors that there were a few sport climbing routes somewhere up there. I joined a group of climbers who had put up about 15 routes on the Jebel and since then every Sunday began with an alarm (set for earlier than on a weekday!), a hurried breakfast and a honk from my friend who would pick me up and drive to the Jebel.

Climbing in Juba is a little different to climbing in other parts of the world; firstly the temperature can reach 47 degrees so a ton of chalk was required to keep sweaty hands dry and two tons of water and Pepsi were required to keep hydrated. Secondly, the local fauna made the routes a little more intense than what I had been used to. Snakes would hide on ledges half way up the crag or in the tall grass around

the belayers, we found black spiders as big as my hand with golden webs on the trail one day and had to duck under them and eagles would nest near the top of the routes and dive-bomb us while we clipped into the anchor bolts. It wasn't just the fauna that created surprise obstacles to our climbs; at a certain time of year the local farmers would burn

the land to make the soil more fertile and halfway up a route one day we began to smell smoke, a second later we realized the flames had nearly reached our pile of gear! We dashed down to grab our stuff and run higher up the mountain to avoid the inferno. At one point we were chased off the mountain all together and accused of witch-craft when we accidentally stayed on the Jebel too close to twilight. Our days at the crag were one of the few opportunities to spend quality time with our South Sudanese colleagues outside of work. We were able to involve kids local to the Jebel and teach them climbing skills, watch their confidence grow, and as usual it wasn't long before I was being beaten up routes







by a grinning kid without proper climbing shoes!

Reaching the top of a route was sometimes the only tangible thing I could achieve in months as working in the South Sudanese context would take maximum effort, energy and

commitment to simply stay afloat at work. I couldn't even think about actually ticking anything off the many to-do lists I had stuck on the walls around my desk as the context was so unpredictable that anything I believed was completed would always come

back somehow! Achieving a task was near impossible. Up on the Jebel and on the frisbee pitch I found that I could zone out of my work responsibilities, forget about the stresses of living and working in a conflict zone – the uncertainty, always being slightly on-edge, never switching off from the constant workload – and just focus on the task of finding my next handhold or trying to master the frisbee forehand flick.

## LIFE CHOICES

When moving to a new country I love the process of learning how to function and the little tips and tricks for everyday activities such as,





where to buy loo roll, how to hang my mosquito net, how to get the best exchange rate for money, how to master the greeting style and where to get the best ice cream. But one thing I always find difficult to adjust to is the feeling of missing out. Living in places like South Sudan means I couldn't pursue my interests as much as I would like to because, as well as the security restrictions and curfew, the work is a 24/7 kind of gig, it's all consuming. In this line of work sometimes I feel torn between a life of meaning and a life full of the things that I love to do such as cycling, hiking, climbing, being spontaneous, ordering new clothes online, sending a letter, making a cup of tea with real milk and not the powdered, lumpy, underwhelming, happiness-destroying stuff!

Sports was not only important for me as a

way of challenging myself and getting a break from work, it was also a way for me to reconcile the two opposing desires inside me. The frustrations that come with a lack of freedom would melt away with the spin of a frisbee and my whole world would become the crack in the rock in front of me. After a little while in country I began to notice that I couldn't be the only one who felt this way as, despite the security restrictions, people in Juba had found novel ways of bringing their favourite sports to their work place – for example, if you knew where to look there were 2 jet-ski's moored on the Nile and I heard a rumour that someone had once paraglided off the Jebel! Maybe I could live a life of meaning and still get to do the things I love. Access to sports in Juba allowed me, for a short time, to have a little bit of both.

## RECENT PRESS COVERAGE

The aid sector has recently been in the news for reasons which are upsetting and disappointing. The #aidtoo movement is shedding light on a part of the sector which has too long gone unregulated and has been harmful to the same people the sector is supposed to be helping. A core principle in humanitarian aid work is Do No Harm but this standard has not been met by the people we are reading about in the newspapers. Excuses are often thrown around for inappropriate behavior

as the living and working conditions can be tough, but there is never an excuse for behavior which causes physical harm or poses a threat to any other human beings. I am angry and disappointed. But when I think of all the wonderful, dedicated, creative, compassionate colleagues I have had the pleasure to work with over the years I am also hopeful and proud and I know that many people are working hard to ensure the current focus and outrage can lead to tangible and meaningful change within the sector to protect both the people who NGO's aim to help and their staff.

Editors note: Louise Rowen mentions 1.9 million IDPs. 1.9 million is approximately the same number of people as the entire population of Latvia, or about half the population of Puerto Rico, or given it's the world cup, if you're a soccer fan, 21 times a capacity crowd at Wembley Stadium.





# ADVENTURES WHILST PREGNANT

**BY RAE RED**

***What does exercise during pregnancy look like? Rae Red was determined to keep as physically active as possible during her pregnancy. Here she share her experience. .***

For me it was flexible. By that I don't mean I was doing an hour or two of yoga a day, I mean I had to have a flexible attitude to exercise. Mentally I had

to accept my body was changing and physically I had to deal with the changes.

I'm a firm believer in self-education so I did a lot of research into exercise during pregnancy which included reading online articles, trying to find and read research papers and speaking with my medical team. There was very little out there in the way of actual academic

research done on pregnant women which is fair enough when you think about it, after all what ethics board would allow research where unborn babies and of course their mothers, were potentially pushed beyond their limit. I did come across lots of general information, alas not all of it was useful.

I found a lot of conflicting advice

about exercise during pregnancy. Some people said to carry on climbing, some said to stop. Some said to carry on running, some said to stop. My midwife (who didn't know I was a runner) said that starting a couch to 5k was a good idea. In the reading I did, yoga was often listed as the "perfect" pregnancy exercise, though twists should be avoided.



Ultimately I decided I knew my body and that I'd take a flexible approach to what I was doing as the pregnancy developed and I would also listen to my medical team.

## WHAT WAS MY BASE / WHERE WAS I STARTING FROM?

Pre-pregnancy I was running 15km to 30k a week. Some of these runs were 13k as I was building up my mileage towards my first ultra and some were as "little" as 5k.

I was also doing around 1.5 hours of yoga a week, mainly to counteract my various aches and pains and topped that up with daily 10 - 20 minutes of physiotherapist prescribed exercises, to deal with an ongoing hip issue.

I also tried to climb twice a week, but that

could vary between no sessions and three times a week. I was generally climbing in the region of 6a sport and bouldering 5a to 5c (Font), so basically standard mid range climbing and bouldering.

I'm 5 feet 3 and a ½ inches, have a strong muscular upper body and weighed in the region of 10 stone 12 lbs to 11 stone 3lbs. I think it's important to share these numbers, because that's what they are, numbers. Under some measurements I'd have

been classified as obese, but I wasn't fat and I wasn't a lean modellesque type either.

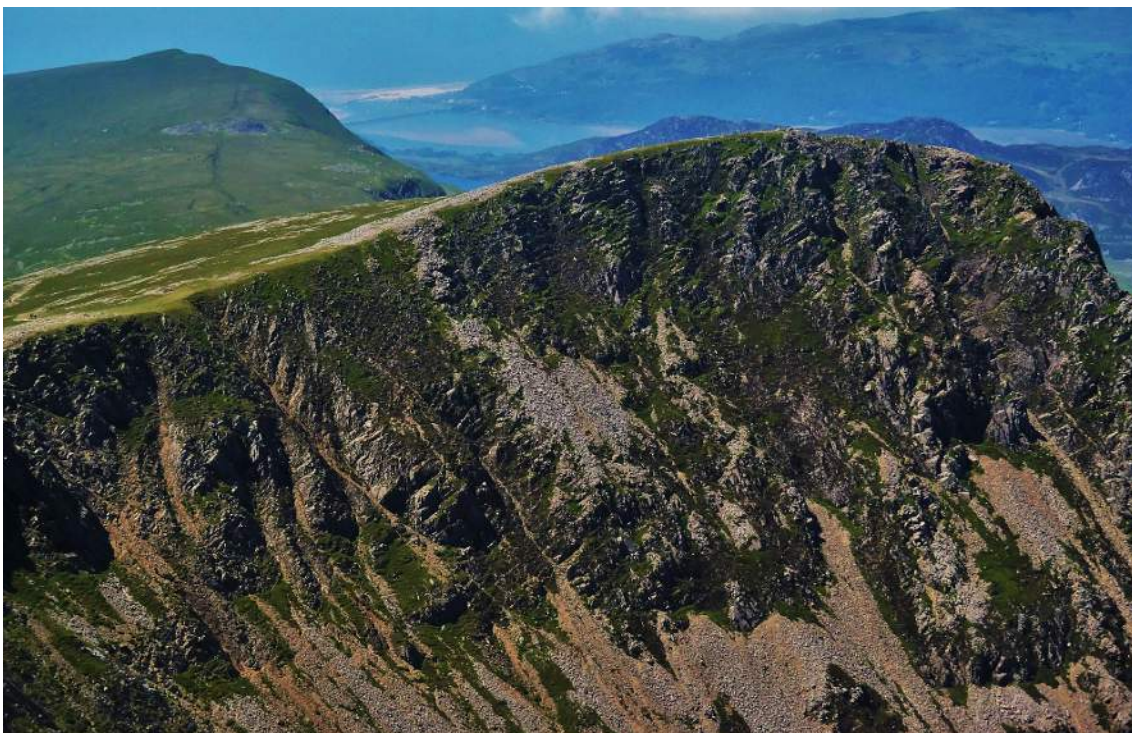
## TRIMESTER 1

I'll be honest, it wasn't great. It started well as I carried on running, but as morning (which certainly wasn't just in the morning) sickness got worse, my running got less. I was also battling a poor diet as all I could eat was toast, pasta, chicken, broccoli and lemons. Not the broadest of

diets.

Running - I stopped the long runs, but carried on with the 5k runs and if I was unable to run due to that horrible morning sickness, I would still go out for a walk every day, even on those days when I was exhausted and struggling to even walk down stairs.

Yoga - I carried on with the yoga, but adapted it to pregnancy yoga. Where I am most pregnancy yoga teachers will only allow you in classes





from 12 - 14 weeks, when risks of miscarriage start to reduce. Some might disagree with my decision, but I felt confident enough to make the decision about what my body could and could not do and I did pregnancy yoga at home from pregnancy videos that I found).

Climbing - I carried on climbing, but changed what I was doing. Lead climbing is not recommended due to the risk of falling so I did not lead climb. I did do top roping (when the most you can fall is about a foot due to rope slack), but as I was not getting the climbing session in each week my grade slipped slightly. I is recommended pregnant women wear a full body harness (which fastens at the chest not the waist) once the bump starts to show.

Bouldering is considered to be higher risk due to the

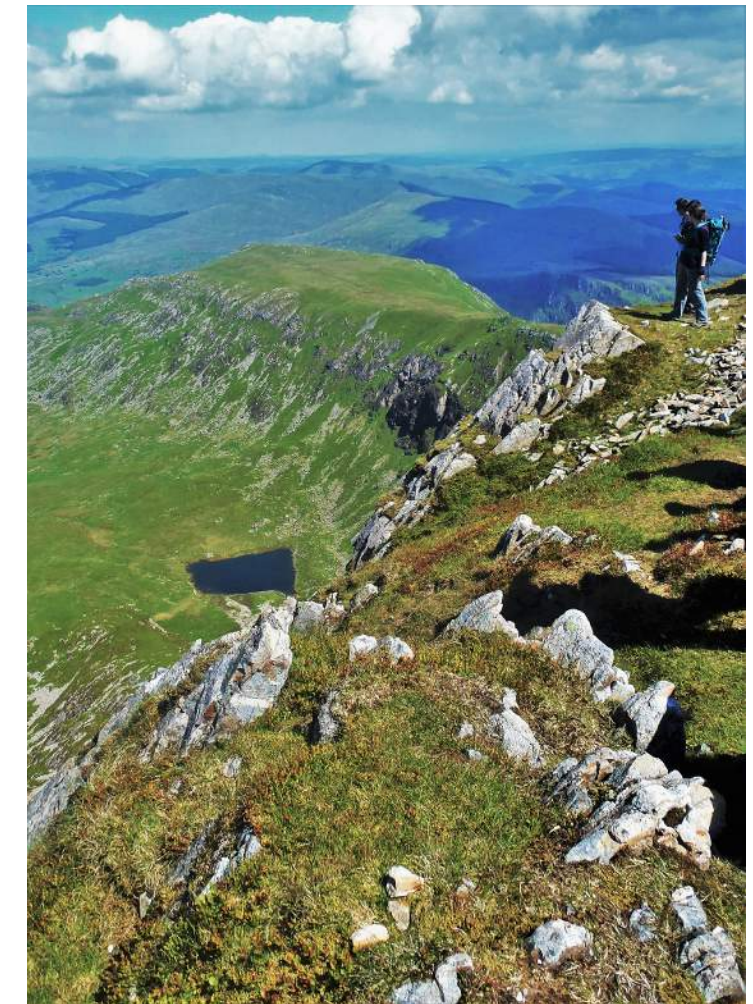
risk of falling, especially during the first trimester. I did boulder, but I mainly traversed. One problem linked to my morning sickness is I often had vertigo as well. Not good for climbing.

Physiotherapy - I carried on seeing my physiotherapist and doing the physiotherapy prescribed exercises at home.

## TRIMESTER 2

This trimester was initially much better as the sickness stopped and my diet expanded slightly, but I had hip issues from week 16..

Running - I was able to run 5k up to about week 23, but the pain in my hip got too bad for me to carry on. It was a bit of a moment for me when I decided to stop as I felt like I was losing more of my identity. My top tip for running in the 2nd trimester is to get a



shewee and a plastic bottle and take it out with you. Getting caught short is no fun. However, most of my runs were to Tesco to do the food shopping and back. Tesco has a toilet!

Yoga - the 2nd trimester is when the experts state you are allowed to start pregnancy yoga. There are tons of classes about, but as with most

things pregnancy or baby related they come at a premium. My normal yoga classes were between £6 and £8, pregnancy yoga classes started at £12 for 45 minutes. I kept doing those online videos instead.

Climbing - I now got myself a full body harness. I got the DMM 8003 and purchased it in V12 in Llanberis. It's not specifically



designed for pregnancy, but it does stop the pressure being on the bump. It's wasn't however very comfortable for me and had a habit of trying to insert itself into my vagina when I descended, but it meant I was still able to climb!

HIIT - I started doing pregnancy HIIT videos (yes, they are a real thing) from a lady on YouTube. They were normally around 10 minutes long so were easy to do day to day.

Walking - little did I know, but walking became my staple exercise for the rest of my pregnancy. I made the effort to walk a minimum of 3km a day, but was normally walking 6km a day.

## TRIMESTER 3

The 3rd trimester was the most boring exercise wise, but I got myself a puppy at the end of trimester 2 so I was out walking a lot

(yes, I know..... Puppy and baby..... I like a challenge).

No running, no climbing and no HIIT. I carried on with the pregnancy yoga and I walked everywhere!

During the whole pregnancy I gained around 12kg in weight and post pregnancy I lost all but 1kg in the first month. Breastfeeding certainly helps with weight loss. I got 3 tiny stretch marks and despite having a csection with complications, I have been able to get back

to exercise at 8 weeks postpartum.

## My Tips

- Listen to your medical team
- Listen to your body
- Be prepared to adapt as your body changes
- Adjust your expectations of what exercise is, but keep exercising if you can!
- Seek out pregnancy specific exercises - YouTube can be a wonderful resource, but use it with care.

- Walk as much as you can

I hope I have inspired any of you who might have been concerned that they couldn't do anything during pregnancy. All of us are different, what worked for me may not work for you or for other women. We are all after all individuals. Remember, if you have any concerns, talk to your medical team who know your situation and who can hopefully help you stay fit and healthy during your pregnancy.

## ABOUT RAE RED

Rae is a mother and runner who lives in North Wales with her husband, daughter and dog. Whilst training for an ultra marathon, she unexpectedly fell pregnant in 2017, after years of doctors stating a successful pregnancy was not possible.

After her daughter was born she restarted her training and in 2018 has two half marathons, a 10km and a full marathon all booked into her diary.

She hopes to get back into climbing when her daughter is a bit older.

Rae runs a Facebook group for mums and dads called Wales Outdoor Mums and Dads.



# GETTING OUTDOORS WITH TWINS



**BY KELLY LOCKHARD**

*In the second part of our special feature on adventurous mums, Kelly Lockhard shares her*

*experience of being a first time mum - with twins - or with that gorgeous fox red labrador, is it really triplets?*

In the summer of 2016, a glance at the tide times, or a nagging look from the dog was all it would take. We'd sling the kayak on the roof or bikes in the





boot, and off we'd go with the dog on an adventure.

Skip forward to me pregnant with twins, when literally, a walk from the kitchen to the lounge was an achievement, outdoor adventures were suddenly off the agenda. I was doing an important job growing two little humans, so that was okay, but it occurred to me how much I took for granted.

I have a vivid memory of my first outing post-giving-birth. It was a short walk around our local village green with my husband, dog and our three-week-old baby girls. I wasn't exactly galloping along but it felt so great breathing in the fresh air and moving without wincing or feeling as though something was going to snap (if you've endured SPD during pregnancy, you'll be able to relate). The physical *and* mental benefits were palpable. Cobwebs were blown away, along with a big huge pile of anxiety and I felt fortunate that my painful and debilitating pregnancy was at least temporary (with *the* best reward at the end).

Pre-babies, we were a family of three; me, my husband and our beloved fox red Labrador. A typical weekend for us would



usually involve some sort of outdoor adventure together. We're very lucky to have the New Forest National Park on our doorstep and are spoilt for choice when it comes to outdoorsy activities. Whether hiking, kayaking or mountain biking, we'd spend our free time exploring scenic areas of the forest or coast, and exercising ourselves and our boy.

In July, our lives were about to be turned spectacularly upside-down with our impending new arrivals, and while we were beyond excited about becoming parents, it was really important to us – eventually, anyway – to continue to be able to get out and do the

things we love. This played on our minds a bit. People do this all the time, right? But the fact that not only were we complete beginners, soon-to-be first time parents, we were also having two (gulp!). It was all pretty terrifying.

We needed to figure this out. Getting out of the house with *one* new baby can be challenging, so heading off on escapades with two in-tow and a big strong – let's say, enthusiastic, dog to control, wasn't going to be easy. What if the weather is bad? What if the terrain is rough? How will we feed them and change nappies mid-boggy-trail? Are we being unrealistic, selfish and

irresponsible? We had some things to consider, so fairly early on in my pregnancy, from the comfort of my bump-friendly cocoon chair, I got researching stuff like robust off-road buggies, baby carriers/slings, and how to fit everyone and everything in the car safely.

Almost eight months on and we've without doubt exceeded my expectations in terms of what we've been able to get out and do, and that's partly because of our gear, but also our attitudes, determination and team work.

We've managed to get out on some pretty great adventures, either using our Mountain Buggy Duet or carrying the babies in their ring slings. I've been chased around the car by New Forest ponies with the buggy, been stuck in a bog with a five-month-old baby attached to me (alas, my left wellie didn't make it), hauled our 40kg buggy (seats and babies) over a few inconveniently-placed stiles and gates, but all in all, our exploits have been fairly incident-free and we remain undeterred. The biggest baby-related faux pas we've made is forgetting to pack wipes and muslin cloths (oh, how our lives have changed) when we were out on a 6-hour







trek. We had to stop to feed the girls at a ford and needless to say, mud wasn't the only thing we ended up covered in. Got to love the smeared on sweet potato and carrot puree look to add a splash of colour on a grey day.

Our super buggy has definitely been put through its paces and pushed to its limits over the months, and yet we still haven't had a puncture (tempting fate, now). We carry a Northface rucksack as a nappy bag – it's what we always used pre-babies and is much more comfortable to carry, more

robust and practical than most standard nappy bags, and looks good covered in mud – our selection criteria when buying most things. The girls are no longer using their car seats on the buggy [Figure 7] so we are now using it as a side-by-side, as intended. It corners more confidently than the two-tiered, head-turning, conspicuous vehicle it was before.

We're not exactly hiking up mountains with the babies (yet) but we do have some exciting plans for summer 2018, particularly if we get our longed-for campervan.

Our next purchase is probably a TwinGo carrier to support our ever-growing girls. It's made up of two robust rucksack-type baby carriers – more supportive than our ring slings, and can be worn front and back, tandem or singly, making trekking more comfortable.

Our next big trip is, hopefully, hiking in the South of France with some friends this summer – the twins' first trip abroad.

We'll get to work on the kayaking logistics for summer 2019, as we haven't quite figured that one out...

You can follow Kelly Lockhard on social media:

Instagram: [www.instagram.com/kelbels\\_](https://www.instagram.com/kelbels_)

YouTube: My Winning at Twinning YouTube channel can be found at:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUYYVU4MkquxD1U7niV7ZpA>



# ADVENTURES WITH CHILDREN

BY CATHERINE EDELL

*In the third of our new mums special, Catherine Edsell shares her experience of adventuring once children reach kindergarten and school age.*

My name is Catherine Edsell, I am a female adventurer, expedition leader, PADI divemaster, Reef Check trainer, yoga teacher and a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. But the hardest challenge I have ever had to face is being a mother

of two girls, now aged 11 and 13.

Pre kids I lived a life of expeditions. I didn't just lead expeditions, I'd get sent on reconnaissance missions to find new locations for scientific research, trekking through the jungle with my machete in hand, hanging my hammock at the end of the day and waking up to the sound of howler monkeys. Small children do sound a bit like howler monkeys sometimes, but machetes certainly have

no place in a suburban kitchen. I was frustrated, trapped.

Of course I loved my children and my husband, but a part of me was unfulfilled, unmet, unobserved, not surprising really as my 'me time' was limited to the three hours during which my youngest was at kindergarten. So when someone said, "You know, if you become a Divemaster, then you can lead dive expeditions", I had a lightbulb moment. What a great idea! I had

always dived, and was at Rescue Diver level but I'd still need to do a lot of work to up both my practical skills and theoretical knowledge to pass the tests to become an actual Divemaster, but why shouldn't I do it?

I'd always thought taking kids on an expedition would be too difficult, and in the jungle that is possibly the case - too wet, too muddy, too humid plus way too many things to bite, scratch and burrow into your skin. But a beach? Don't all



kids love a beach? If I became a Divemaster, I could work and dive whilst my children played on a tropical beach, (supervised of course). Perhaps I could indeed have it all.

I contacted my local dive centre. There were 3 elements I'd need to pass, theory, confined water in a swimming pool and open water.

An instructor came to my house once a week to cover the theory and tests. Once my kids were in bed and the pool swimmers had gone home, I'd go to the pool for the practical confined water sessions. Then

later I went to Gozo in Malta for the final open water training. Yes it took some organising, yes it took some effort, yes I had to get used to having wet dive kit all over the house and miss catching up with my friends, but I did have the support of my husband who was at home with the children on those late night when I dived at the pool and during my two week long course in Gozo. Overall, it was very very simple.

I qualified as a Divemaster and then, with the kids safe, being looked after by a wonderful Indonesian family while I dived, I continued with my own

learning and development, immersing myself in the ocean, in coral reef ecology and in conservation monitoring techniques.

Now six years after taking that step I have completed three summer research seasons in Indonesia, led seven Reef Check expeditions in Musandam, Oman and the Maldives, and have just launched an all female dive conservation expedition to Madagascar. This is all part time, and I'm still mostly at home with the family, but these forays into the blue, into myself are priceless.

I always think it's fascinating to watch the twist and turns your life takes, how faced with a crossroads or an apparent dead end it can be just one sentence, one person you meet who reveals a new direction, a reflection of something that happened way back in your past - and so often the key is in your past. Some desire you once had that you squashed because it wasn't the right time, or something you hadn't considered you could even do, like me becoming a Divemaster. And it's not always about forcing things, fixing things, sometimes it's just about being open, reflecting, surrounding yourself with friends and family, waiting for that idea to pop into your head. And it will.

It may not always be a smooth journey, I know I had insecurities and butterfly stomach inducing nervousness, but I also reclaimed a part of me. I was back on the adventure trajectory and this time, it was with the kids in tow. I urge you, when that idea pops into your head, listen.





## DANGERS OF THE DEEP

Diving in tropical waters is not without its risks, however, the general rule of ,”if you don’t touch it, it won’t hurt you”, goes a long way to ensure your safety.

With the kids though I had to have strict rules - always wear a wetsuit or stinger suit, always wear water shoes, and always listen to an adult. My daughter did get stung by a dismembered tentacle of a bluebottle, but warm water and painkillers helped.

Coral atolls are full of jagged karst limestone coral holes, so care must be taken when walking around!

Bluebottles (Portuguese man of war jellyfish) are not strictly jellyfish, and float on the surface propelled by the wind. They are found throughout the indo pacific, and occasionally make their way to UK waters. Their sting is painful and can cause serious complications if you receive multiple stings.

Cone shells, look very much like other shells, but have a poisonous barb that they shoot out to kill their prey. Not fatal unless you stick it down your wetsuit and it enters your heart! Still, don’t pick them up to find out!

Lethal blue ringed octopus are very small and hide in crevices, found in Indo pacific waters.

Sea snakes are one of the most venomous of all snakes, however their mouths and fangs are small, and they are not aggressive, merely curious. Sea snakes come on land to lay their eggs, so always carry a torch at night.

Wolf spiders can deliver a bite, but will not attack.

## PROJECTS

Catherine also created and leads The Matriarch Adventure, an extraordinary expedition for ordinary women. A ten day full immersion into the Namibian wilderness, tracking the iconic matriarchal desert elephant and experiencing life, far from everything familiar. It was set up to give women a chance to take a step out of their everyday lives and participate in a journey of re-connection and self-discovery in one of the most beautiful and extreme natural environments in the world and in the company of other women. [www.cathadventure.com/the-matriarch-adventure](http://www.cathadventure.com/the-matriarch-adventure)

TEDxLondon talk about all of this! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfKB8GAqAGw>



# ABOUT CATHERINE EDSSELL

Catherine Edsell is an adventurer and expedition leader. An avid naturalist, she combines her passion for adventure and effective conservation through independent and collaborative work in the most remote areas of the world.

She is a trained PADI Divemaster, Reef Check Trainer, mountain leader, jungle trainer and yoga teacher, with 20 years experience working in all manner of terrains, often with her children in tow.

Inspired by her immersion in stunning natural habitats, Catherine is now leading a series of transformative adventures solely for women. Through travel to

extreme wilderness locations, in close proximity to wildlife, Catherine designs expeditions that open up her world of adventure to any woman who wishes to seize the opportunity to step out of their comfort zone, push their own mental and physical boundaries, and in doing so, rediscover themselves.

Catherine was a certified PADI rescue diver before embarking on her Divemaster training. She trained as a Divemaster with Aquanauts in Kingston Upon Thames. Her training cost £500 in 2012 and took her 9 months to complete.

You can follow Catherine on social media:

Instagram @cathadventure

Facebook @matriarchadventure

Twitter @cathadventure

[www.cathadventure.com/the-blumoon-adventure](http://www.cathadventure.com/the-blumoon-adventure)



# DHALBATT AND DUST

BY ANNIE EVANS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY HUV OLIVER AND ANNIE EVANS







***As Annie Evans puts it "anyone's who has set out to a new place, without a guide and armed only with scant information and highly inaccurate maps, will know, plan A does not always work. Sometimes neither do plan B, C or D." Here Annie Evans shares her story of plan Q.***

Of course we could have followed the same tourist tracks and probably had an amazing time. But all three of us wished to see a side of Nepal, less touched by western hands and ideals. We harboured no romantic ideas about rustic ways of life, but wanted to see

how communities existed away from the tourist dollars and far beyond the roads and pollution of Kathmandu. That's how after a mix of frustration and joy, we ended up on about plan Q. But I'm jumping ahead, so back to the start of the trip.

Loading the bicycles up into rice sacks and flying East, away from bustling Kathmandu to the small village of Tumlingtar, we dreamed of high mountain trails and big glacial valleys. Seduced by internet pictures of happy hikers, yaks and singletrack in the high

mountains, it was easy to picture ourselves in their place.

Our first few days riding were exciting, easier going and much warmer than we had expected, although we had never planned to be at such a low altitude. We raced tractors pulling big





trailers filled with kids along pebbled river beds and crossed tiny, bouncy, suspension bridges high above ravines to villages tucked into the hillside. We rode narrow single tracks through rice paddies, passing porters carrying inconceivable loads of rice or goods and big mule trains that kicked up dust and had us jumping out of their way as they jangled passed us, bags empty,

having delivered their goods to the higher settlements.

Starting from Tumlingtar's low altitude, those first long days were spent climbing steadily, the gradient kicking sharply up in places, and making the going hard. Around us the settlements gradually faded into the odd lone house. Eventually, having left the last remnants of the dust

road behind, we arrived at Gothe Bazaar, a porter's *bati*; an overnight rest stop where food and a place to sleep could be procured, hidden in a dark hollow next to a loud, gushing glacial river. Here, inhabited by three intricately decorated ladies, faces lined with age but filled with extravagant gold jewellery and wearing big toothy grins, we ate *dhal bhat* late into the night with a mix of

men, as they paused on their journeys to bring biscuits and shampoo to the remoter hamlets.

We were shaken awake that night by an earthquake rocking the wooden frame of the building. Thoughts of the huge devastation of the previous year's earthquake leapt to my mind. I couldn't help but think of how remote we were, the trail behind us not





much more than a trod carved out of the clay hillside by hundreds of feet and hooves, and how easily we could have been trapped in that valley. The snoring of the three intricately decorated ladies calmed my racing pulse and we were soon drifting off.

With sunshine dawning the next day we headed off in high spirits, the trail became increasingly broken; we had to pass bikes up and down steep slabs and were soon carrying more than riding. After a few hours making only a couple of kilometres, we had to sit down and accept the reality that this trail was not for bikes. We'd

known from the start we might have to bail, but still the disappointment sank deep into us.

We tried to be optimistic, yet we knew we had a long few days retracing our steps back down the mountain, back to Tumlingtar where we would have to reconsider and replan our trip. The disappointment of having to retreat dissolved all our excitement, and with it our energy. The look on our weary faces said it all and the steep carries which had even seemed fun and adventurous on the way up, were now fraught, as we tried not







to argue in our tiredness.

Thankfully our descent back to Tumlingtar was made more interesting by a celebratio, a giant pig slaughtered in the road and the hair being singed off whilst everyone looked on. We tiptoed around trying not to step in the blood.

On our outward journey we'd noticed that in these lower hills, which were inhabited by Hindus, not Buddhists (as in the higher ranges, where the identity of the people fades from Indian origin to Tibetan). The Hindu

women were seen as fleeting shadows, disappearing as we approached, either afraid or not allowed to talk to us, they would prepare food behind closed doors whilst the men chatted to us. Parmitra, a young lady in her early twenties was the first to change this. Seeing us sweating our way past on our uphill journey she'd come running into the street, intrigued by our bicycles, to greet us and try our bikes, a big infectious grin she managed to communicate better than we could with our dodgy Nepali and left us cycling away energised and giggling.

Now on our return we stopped to see if we could find her. Walking slowly past the string of houses, collecting a gaggle of small boys, she spotted us from her shop and called us over, hot tea was ordered as she commanded her little sisters around. The afternoon disappeared quickly as she entertained us with her bubbly personality, impromptu Nepali lessons and discussed her life as a single young woman. Once she discovered Rachael, nearly 10 years her senior was also single she sent the kids out on a whispered mission. Ten minutes later the


eligible bachelors of the hamlet started arriving. Laughing, we decided to leave, but not before Rachael was persuaded to have selfies with several of the men.

Later we met three sisters, each quite unique, the oldest, uninterested in boys, keen to be a savvy businesswoman, the middle sister was the poser, whilst the youngest, still at school wanted to study. We stayed up eating late with them, practising our Nepali, they their English, whilst trying to see what weird foods they could convince us naïve foreigners to eat.







A photograph of two cyclists riding on a rocky, uneven trail. The cyclist in the foreground is a man wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt, dark shorts, and an orange helmet. He is leaning forward, pedaling on a mountain bike with a large black pannier bag attached to the front. The cyclist behind him is a woman wearing a pink long-sleeved shirt, green shorts, and a green helmet. She is also on a mountain bike with a pannier bag. The trail is made of large, flat, light-colored stones or rocks, and the surrounding area is a steep, rocky hillside with some sparse vegetation. The lighting suggests it's daytime, with shadows cast on the ground.

Having replanned, we set off on a less ambitious route, more dirt road than trail. Initially we struggled with motivation, the disappointment in letting go of our original ambition sucking away the joy.

The next week or so passed in a blur of lumpy dirt roads, spectacular views, endless steep climbs and broken down trucks. We peddled past creaky houses, balconies dripping in orange pumpkins. We pushed through muddy ruts as men ploughed their fields with buffalo and woman sorted rice grain in big round trays. We ate instant noodles and drank sweet lemon tea in roadside shacks and met a hero in one, a guide just returning home after his first successful Everest summit with his stunning wife and child. Passing through





orange country we were implored to take more fruit than we could carry, by smiling faces and friendly words. Chicken and goats ran free between our wheels and children tailed us through every village. Buses passed, loaded to the roof with people and livestock, the suspension groaning over the bumps, their drivers stopping to throw water over the brakes in every streambed. A commander with the Nepali army wined and dined us to his stories of training with foreign princes at Sandhurt.

Finally the road took us to Phaplu, a string of houses on a dusty street with the first westerners we had seen since our arrival on the east. Boys played with a basic seesaw on a patch of dirt







with Mount Numbur looming behind. And here it was that we met the eccentric Mr and Mrs Lama, at their little guesthouse and who told us stories of bears and mountain lions. Knowing nothing of how mountain bikes worked, or what it was possible to ride, they were happy to point out trails they thought might work and laugh at how much we might have to push.

Several hours after leaving the village we were in the heart of a rhododendron forest, the only sounds my harsh breathing and heavy footsteps.

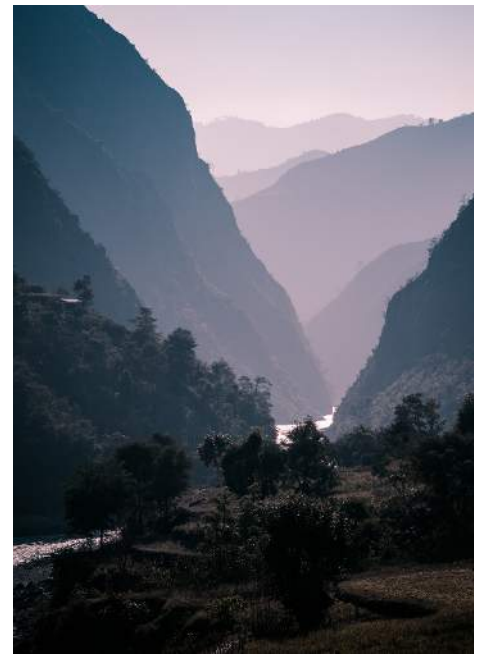
Around me stood beautiful, twisted, mossy trunks and ahead and behind, the steep rutted trail. The huge scaled map was only a rough guide to how far we travelled and it was soon confined to a bag.

Sweat dripped down my face and I had a serious case of sweaty boobs. Somewhere in front was Huw, further behind Rachael. We all suffered in our own little part of hell as we carried bikes, balanced on our rucksacks and loaded with bivi kit ever upward. In places the gully was too narrow for the bikes to fit, balanced as they were across our backs. In other spots, water had washed the trail clean

away forcing us to clamber over fallen trees and around big holes. Fortunately no one was quite close enough to hear my swearing.

I couldn't help but think, why were we doing this? There must be more fun to be had in these vast mountains that make up the Nepal Himalaya. Why hadn't we gone somewhere better trodden and with less





height gain.

And so we sweated up the flanks of Mount Numbur, carrying our bikes and kit which weighed about 25kg for over 1000 vertical meters to reach the place Mr Lama had suggested, The Duhd Kunda.

The Duhd Kunda, meaning milky lake, at 4560 m is a place of worship, tucked under the Nimbur mountain range.

Eventually as the steep climb levelled off, we regrouped on a stunning sinuous ridge. Laughing in the sunshine, hardships forgotten we peddled along; amazed such a wonderful trail existed here. Soon though, our bodies reminded us not just of what







we'd put our bodies through, but also that we were now at around 4000m the altitude really kicked in. Trying to ride undulating technical trail on steep hillside was painful, legs and lungs burned. I felt wobbly and awkward on my bike and Rachael soon passed me. As the afternoon approached dusk and the temperature dipped, we however had no choice but to push on,

forcing ourselves to ride faster, so we could reach a suitable bivi spot before dark, the hillside too steep and rocky to stop where we were.

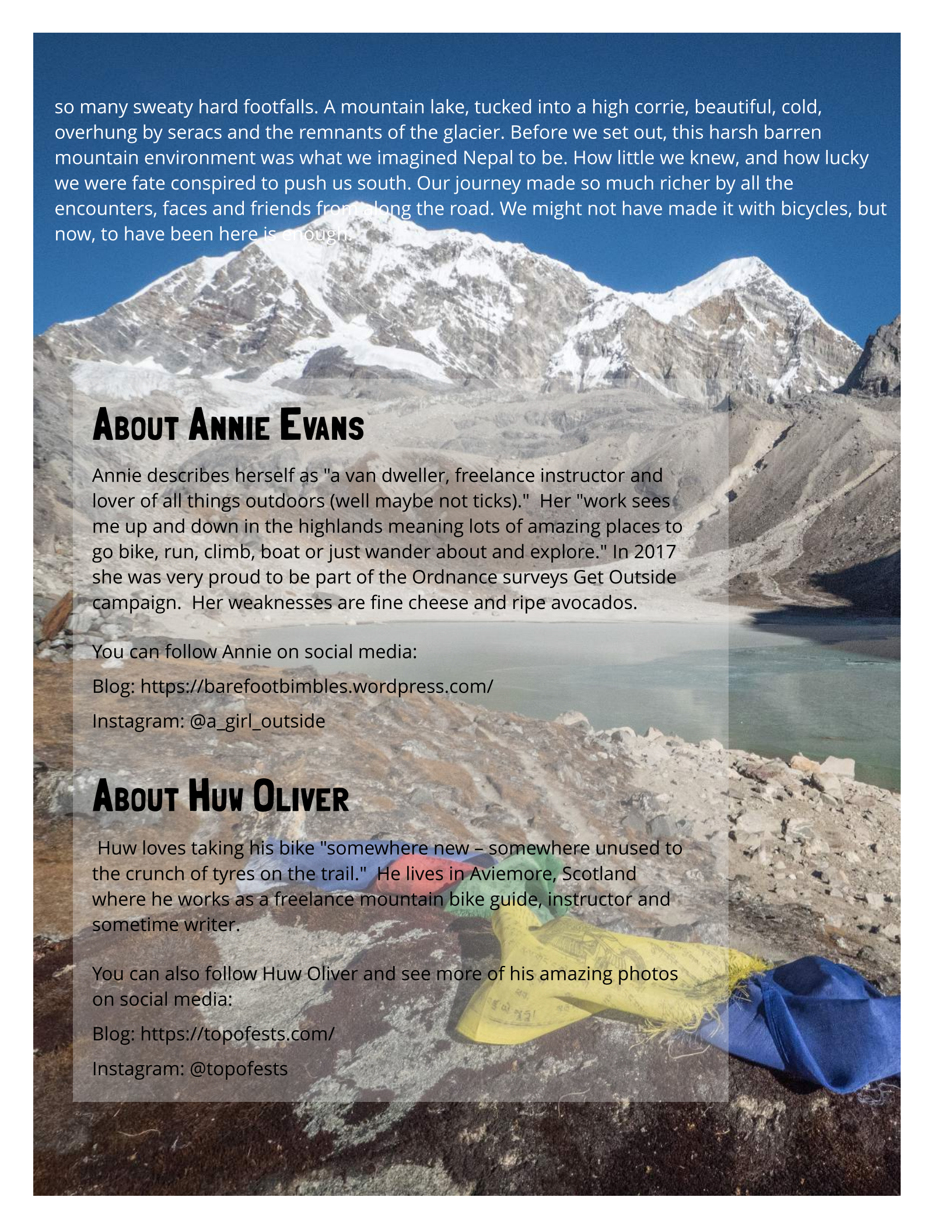
It was a cold night; dinner was a simple affair of boiled egg and yaks cheese. I lay in my under-powered bag and shivered, whilst the stars twirled slowly above my head. In this empty, silent valley it was hard to imagine

the thousands of pilgrims who gather here in summer, with their laughter and cattle and campfire smoke. They make this hard trek believing Lord Shiva resides in the milky water of the lake, and in bathing, sins are forgiven and fertility granted. The altitude made my head pound and I considered walking down to let it ease but stayed, stuck under the weight of the

enormous sky.

In the end it was Huw and Rachael who felt the altitude the next day, I scouted ahead and brought them the bad news that the trail disappeared into the glacial moraines. The bikes would yet again be abandoned. We walked slowly though the rock heaps and admired the sunrise over Numbur. Finally we reached the place that we had desired for



A high-altitude mountain landscape. In the background, a large, rugged mountain peak is covered in snow and partially obscured by a clear blue sky. Below the mountain, a turquoise lake is visible, surrounded by rocky, barren slopes. In the foreground, there are more rocky slopes and a yellow and blue prayer flag lying on the ground.

so many sweaty hard footfalls. A mountain lake, tucked into a high corrie, beautiful, cold, overhung by seracs and the remnants of the glacier. Before we set out, this harsh barren mountain environment was what we imagined Nepal to be. How little we knew, and how lucky we were fate conspired to push us south. Our journey made so much richer by all the encounters, faces and friends from along the road. We might not have made it with bicycles, but now, to have been here is enough.

## ABOUT ANNIE EVANS

Annie describes herself as "a van dweller, freelance instructor and lover of all things outdoors (well maybe not ticks)." Her "work sees me up and down in the highlands meaning lots of amazing places to go bike, run, climb, boat or just wander about and explore." In 2017 she was very proud to be part of the Ordnance surveys Get Outside campaign. Her weaknesses are fine cheese and ripe avocados.

You can follow Annie on social media:

Blog: <https://barefootbimbles.wordpress.com/>

Instagram: @a\_girl\_outside

## ABOUT HUW OLIVER

Huw loves taking his bike "somewhere new – somewhere unused to the crunch of tyres on the trail." He lives in Aviemore, Scotland where he works as a freelance mountain bike guide, instructor and sometime writer.

You can also follow Huw Oliver and see more of his amazing photos on social media:

Blog: <https://topofests.com/>

Instagram: @topofests





# ANDES BY HORSEBACK

BY JO BRADSHAW

*Charity fundraiser, horse rider and mountaineer Jo Bradshaw is one amazing woman. She's already summited Mount Everest and only has Mount Vinson in Antarctica (see the March edition of Adventure She for a Mount Vinson story by another of our contributors) and Carstensz Pyramid left to go, before she's scaled the seven summits – the highest*

*mountain on each of the seven continents. Not bad for a person who has recently as 2004 was scared of heights.*

*But, her joint favourite trip has nothing to do with mountaineering. Instead its horse riding, specifically riding crossing the Andes from east to west, from Argentina to Chile. Here she shares her story.*

## GETTING INTO ADVENTURE

I never thought that my former life with horses would transfer into my new world in the mountains but as we all know, never say never!

I first popped onto a donkey aged 6 at a village fete and my four-legged fate was sealed! Since that moment I was horse

(and donkey) mad spending every waking hour down at the local riding stables learning the ropes and earning my rides.

When I left school and went to train at a top establishment, life really couldn't get better and I thought / hoped this would be my life forever. However, as we all know, life generally doesn't turn out like that. But sometimes



the disappointments can turn into elation as something better comes along.

After leaving horses in 1994 many years in business followed, before in 2004 I took on my first challenge for charity. I hadn't been on a bike since school, yet had booked myself onto a cycling challenge, 600km at high altitude in Peru. With only six months before our departure date, it was time I got back on a bike. Physically this was certainly going to be a challenge. Environmentally too, for I certainly hadn't been to Peru and all that entailed! Mentally was also going to be a big one, for at the time, I was scared of heights and would have to deal with this along the way.

Two more bike rides followed before I was invited by adventure company Discover Adventure to become crew and later, to work in their office

near Salisbury, where I dealt with participants heading out on equally amazing challenges. Then in 2010 I took a big leap of faith and went freelance, saying goodbye to the office and embarking on a life I had never thought possible. To say thank you for a great two years and to wish me good luck on my journey, Discovery Adventure gave me the Andes Horse Trek to lead. Mountains, horses, wild camping, a great group and incredible gauchos – what a combination, I couldn't possibly say no and so the story begins....!

## **WHEN TWO WORLDS COLLIDE**

A tad frazzled, but all uber excited thirty Girl Guiding UK leaders, a doctor (yes female) and me (the expedition leader), arrived in Mendoza Argentina after almost 24 hours

of travelling.

My team were all used to being the ones in charge, to be super organisers, to being the life and soul of a group, so we were in for an exciting time! An all-female team heading into the all-male world of the South American gaucho.

Or could it all go wrong? For they might have been Girl Guide leaders used to camping, but my understanding is their camping was usually in a tent in a field with a toilet block. This wasn't camping by car or mini bus; this was camping by horseback and many hours in the saddle. This wasn't camping in a field with facilities; this was camping on high mountains and no facilities. This wasn't camping in a temperate climate; this was camping at altitude with sometimes frigid winds and snow showers. How would this group,

all accustomed to leading cope with being led and in an environment so far outside of their comfort zone? I was about to find out.

## **THE TREK**

After a couple of days to recover from jet lag, enjoy some local food and get acquainted with our gaucho guides, the feeling of excitement and nerves became palpable, for now it was time to meet our horses and set off on the trek.

On first sight, the line of Argentinian horses looked a little intimidating to a few of our team of Girl Guide leaders. Some, like me, had ridden all of their lives but others had learnt to ride specifically for this challenge. With just a year of riding school tuition and practice, they were about to head off over a major mountain range! I think the enormity of what they had signed up for



was kicking in, but we were behind them all the way.

Paired up with our steeds, we set off. A nice gentle hack through the incredible Argentinian countryside, pack horses passing us, naming our nags (mine was Kevin and the team doctor named her horse Perry), this first day's riding to the rough camp, setting up

our tents and getting acquainted with life on expedition, epitomises for me what dreams are made of.

Come camp, I don't think our gauchos really knew what to make of us all. A hugely capable team of clients, more so than normal due to their life in the outdoors with Girl Guides, a tent putting up demo was swiftly swept to the side as

the group just got on with the job. We all mucked in to get our mess area sorted, a simple barn with crates and bales of hay for seats. Then it was time to relax. We watched our gaucho cook get dinner ready and marvelled at the incredible sun setting fire to the skyline, as it slowly went down. What was revealed in its place was a light show bar none. With

no light pollution and a southern view of the stars, we were in for a few days of shooting stars and the brilliant Milky Way.

Day 2 and we were getting into the groove a little more. Our horses were brought over to us from their night time corral and we were taught how to saddle up South American style. We used more Western (as









in American not European) saddles with a few sheepskin pads underneath. Very comfy for your rear end but boy do your legs stick out! It was also a different style of riding; using hands and the reins for go and stop, left and right with a slight move of your lower leg to fine tune what you wanted your steed to do.

Life is very simple on expedition. You wake up early, eat, de-camp, find your horse, saddle up, get on, ride, stop for lunch, eat, ride again, set up camp, do a few yoga stretches, eat and sleep. The mountains were amazing, the views spectacular, we wild wee'd, ate out under the stars, rode in places people rarely go, saw mountains, volcanoes, eagles, and got bitterly freezing cold and way too hot. By now everyone had developed a bond with their four-legged friend. The horses puffed their way up the steep slopes whilst we held our breaths coming down scary steep slopes on the other side hoping we didn't fall off.

We rode on and on, through the sun, frigid howling winds and sometimes snow showers. Then after a few days -we rested, staying for 2 nights at an army camp. It was all fairly





basic, but there were facilities. No need to wild wee and there was even a place to wash properly too. The group set up their sleeping bags inside a mess hall, away from that wind, whilst the doctor and I chose to camp outside to be with those magnificent stars.

To be stationary for 2 whole nights was a gift. We hacked up the valley to see some sights and sites then spent the afternoon learning how to lasso plastic ducks. Afterwards it was a lesson in gaucho camp fire cookery

followed by a game of cards. I don't know who enjoyed this change of rhythm the most, us people or the horses which had a half day?

Back on the horses, it was time for some more of the Andes' seriously high passes. We rode up up up. For us, headaches at high altitude were the challenge. The horses were used to the altitude though, for they live and work at those heights, yet even they had to work hard as they puffed their way up more and more those mountain passes. Whilst the horses







were putting in the cardiovascular effort, our bodies and minds also worked hard with the effort of staying in the saddle rather than falling off on the treacherous terrain. Sitting still atop a horse in freezing winds is also tough; it isn't a pleasant experience as you get so very cold.

Our longest day in the saddle, probably about 8 to 9 hours led to our final rough camp in Argentina. The group was tired and with our adventure coming towards its end, it was with a touch of sadness we set up our camp that night in what was a truly spectacular setting. There

we watched the most incredible sunset developing right in front of us. It was so magnificent; it really was the most wonderful sunset I had ever seen to date.

The gauchos knew though how to put sadness to one side, bringing out the wine they had squirrelled away and cooking up a traditional gaucho style barbeque with fresh meat as a final night treat. Our initial sadness turned into a great night of singing, dancing and sharing great memories around the camp fire.

They say never work with children and animals, well, we

didn't have the children, but the horses were always a bit of a challenge! Each evening our super experienced gauchos gave them some nutritious horse feed and then (apart from on the first night when the horses were in a corral), set our steeds free, so that they could seek out the best pastures to replenish their energy. The horses were totally free, not hobbled, and had their favourite places to feed near each camp. So our gauchos generally knew where to find them. But on our last morning in Argentina, the gauchos couldn't find them, for the horses had gone off in a



different direction to normal. We waited and waited and waited! Where were they? It was a couple of hours before we first saw a cloud of dust quickly heading in our direction, out of which emerged some very naughty horses and very annoyed gauchos behind them.

As the leader, I hadn't however been worried, for I knew we still had enough time despite the long day ahead. We saddled up and headed off up another high pass, enjoying the magnificence all around us. These were the last moments with this crew of gauchos and wonderful horses, for we were heading for the border with

Chile. It's such a shame we couldn't finish the Andes crossing together, but they had taken us as far as they could. Saying farewell was a very poignant moment.

High atop the Andes with border formalities over, we were greeted with fresh Chilean horses and their gauchos.

Many people may say that sitting on a horse and letting it do all of the hard work is easy, but these half tonne beasts have a mind of their own and need persuading to go in the right direction at the right speed. For a beginner this is a daunting task and in this

terrain, even for an experienced rider, an exciting challenge.

Now with just a few hours remaining came the truly hair raising bit of the ride. I've ridden almost all my life, yet even I was apprehensive on that mammoth and at times treacherous descent from the top of the Andes, back towards what most of us call normality. I have such admiration for those in the group who had learned to ride specifically to cross this mountain range. Here they were, novice riders, coping with terrain that secretly sometimes scared me.

Looking back, my group of







fund raisers dealt with everything that the elements and the horses could throw at them. Each one of the 30 was used to being a leader. It's rare they found themselves in a state of learning and of being led. Being so outside their comfort zone, mentally, physically and environmentally, they could have found it difficult. But they all dealt with it superbly and in so doing, demonstrated to themselves they could handle situations unknown to them, they had more resolve and resilience than they'd thought and, they

could undergo life changing experiences by taking on challenges such as this one. They definitely showed life is indeed all about your attitude, not what you do or who you are.

Saddle sore but high on the feeling of achievement when after successfully crossing the Andes on horseback we eventually swapped our four-legged friends for a four wheeled form of transport, these ladies had said yes to a new experience well outside of their comfort zones and had

kicked the 'but' out of their lives.

For me, between them the scenery, the gauchos, the 30 girl guide leaders, the basic way of life and of course the horses, all combined to make this expedition across the Andes from Argentina into Chile one of the highlights of my life. It's certainly one I never thought I would get a chance to do once my life working with horses finished back in the mid-1990s. As for the memories, I hope they will be with me forever.



# MORE FROM JO BRADSHAW ON TAKING ON A CHALLENGE

Taking on any challenge for someone who has not been there and done that before, takes a huge leap of faith. I still remember what it was like when I did that bicycle charity challenge in Peru in 2004 and totally empathise with clients whose nerves are jangling and doubts creep into their thoughts. Signing on the dotted line can be the hardest bit. Everything else will work itself out with a willing mind and help from those around you. If you have pondered but dithered over signing up for your own challenge, I urge you, go on, give it a go.

## ABOUT JO BRADSHAW

Prior to Jo's 2004 charity cycle in Peru, she was a risk averse, sofa surfer, who was scared of heights. She maintains that moving from life as a business advisor into the outdoors industry, opened up a confidence and passion she never knew existed within her.

Jo now leads expeditions, be it on two wheels, two feet, or four hooves, in many far-flung corners of our amazing planet. She has led expeditions on Kilimanjaro 30 times, plus Aconcagua in South America and numerous 6000m peaks in Nepal. Jo has summited two of the 8000m peaks including Mount Everest and has to date climbed five of the seven summits.

Her aim is to inspire, motivate and educate her clients, whether they are Duke of Edinburgh expedition students or adults on a trip of a lifetime.

Jo is also a passionate fundraiser for a children's mental health charity Place2Be. If you would like to support Jo with her final two climbs in the seven summits, or if you would like to donate to Place2Be, you can contact Jo using the following social media tools. Any support would of course be gratefully received.

[uk.virginmoneygiving.com/jobradshaw7summits](http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/jobradshaw7summits)

Instagram: @\_jobradshaw

LinkedIn: Jo Bradshaw

FaceBook:- Jo Bradshaw

Twitter: @\_jobradshaw

Web: [www.jobradshaw.co.uk](http://www.jobradshaw.co.uk)





# AFRICA: VEILED HERITAGE

BY

SHARON BENNETT

*In this article Sharon Bennett takes a different look at adventure, journeying into the history of some of her ancestors. What would she find?*







I had no idea that I would be affected so deeply by this trip. It's not as though I haven't traveled before. I have traveled and enjoyed many destinations and cultures. However, a deep longing and awareness went through my body at the same time when I landed in Africa. Cairo, Egypt, to be exact. This was the start of a 14-day journey into the history of my ancestors.

Not all of my ancestors originated from this glorious land, but some did. As many Americans, my heritage is mixed. My family tree entails German, Creole, Asian, Spaniard, Blackfoot & Cherokee Indian. But, none have intrigued me as much as the heritage from Africa. The continent where all life originated and will be the continent that feeds the world during the end of times. At least, that's what I heard on a

program broadcast on the History channel. So, I am American, not African American. The majority of the world has that glorious melanin and it is not that simple anymore.

Why is it that other countries and cultures can see the value in what African Americans bring to the table; but, current day America is still resisting. That is strange to me seeing as how what we call

America was first inhabited by its original people, the American Indian. It amazed me that I received more respect, adoration, and care for my two weeks in Africa than I ever felt my whole life in America. Melanin is a wonderful thing and exists in high quantities in the majority of people on earth.

Day one was to get settled into the hotel in Cairo, have a meal and then run to the museum. It seemed that everyone greeted me as I passed them with a warming smile, a nod of the head or a simple hello. It reminded me of country southern hospitality when everyone knew each other. A time when people sat on the front porch for a bit of air and would wave as each car passed by.

The Cairo museum seemed endless with artifacts. It amazed me that's only a portion of what has been uncovered from this



vast and rich land. Numerous artifacts have been shared with noteworthy museums around the world. I would say that the pieces that stood out for me were the massive statues of Ramses II, the small all black bust of Moses, the antique braided wigs that were used and the Rosetta stone.

Our second through seventh days were spent traveling down to Aswan in the south of Egypt, while visiting the temples of Kom Ombo, Hatshepsut's temple, the land of the dead and Heliopolis. Days eight through twelve were spent sailing up the Nile to Luxor, Karnak, Philae temples. These tours were filled with a wealth of knowledge, both spoken and unspoken. You are depriving

yourself by not including Africa as a travel destination; especially, people of color.

There was a definite undercurrent of sorrow and discontentment felt, even though a smile graced the faces. Groups of people seen talking vigorously, some writing in notebooks. My trip was October of 2010, and the civil unrest broke out January of 2011. This type of rebellion would happen again in 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016.

The civil unrest in Egypt, the year of 2011, was a protesting of the corruption of the three-decade reign of president Hosni Mubarak. The impoverished citizens were living in squalor and demanding

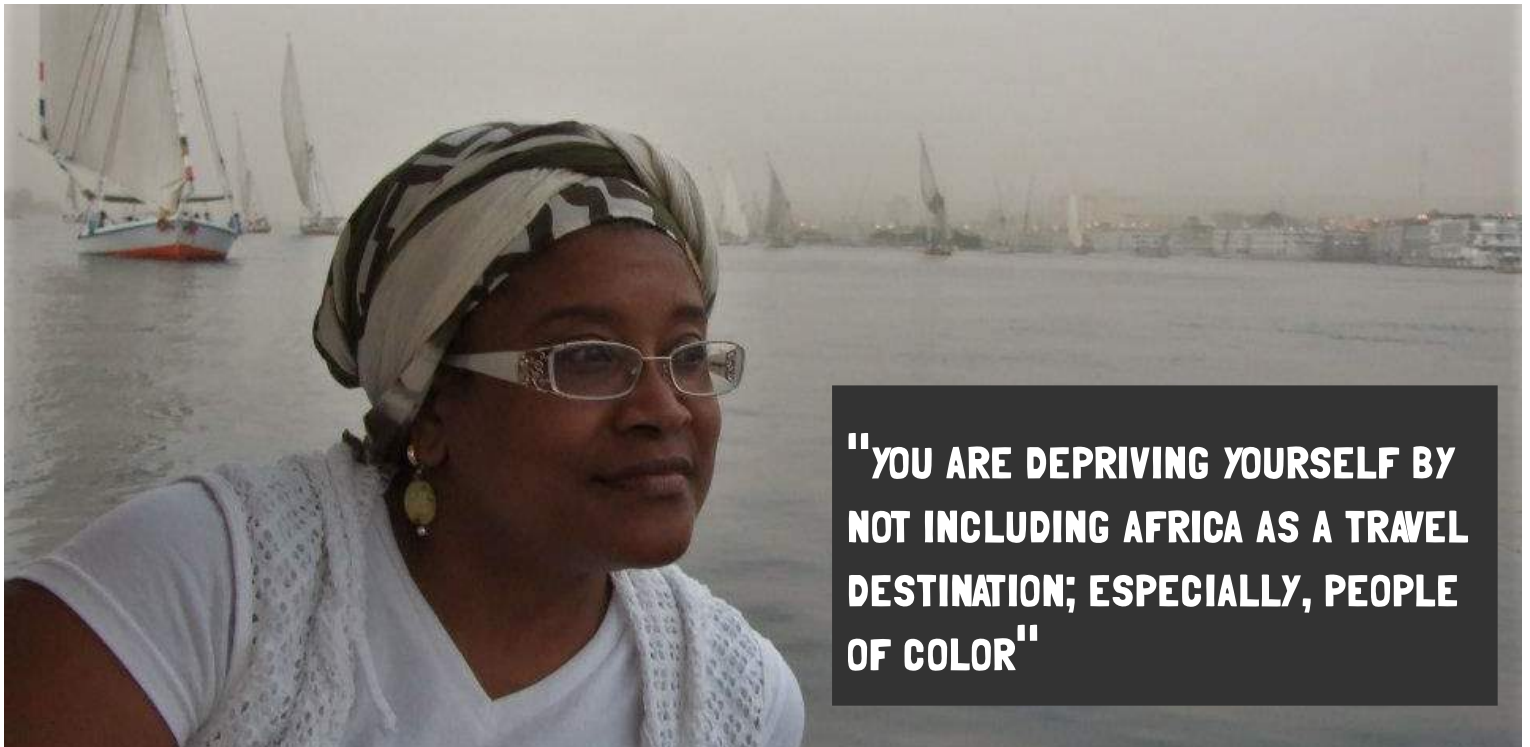
higher wages and better jobs. January 25, 2011 is called the Day of Rage.

Our government called for the return of all U. S. citizens to avoid possible injury or death. During this particular uprising several protestors and a police officer were killed, and numerous were injured before it would end. Violent clashes raged mostly around Cairo's Tahrir Square with tear gas gunfire and fights. Alexandria, Suez and Cairo experienced injuries and deaths with their own protests. This bout ended February 2011 after Mubarak stepped down.

Our tour groups private guard, along with his tech 9 rapid fire gun, were by my side







**"YOU ARE DEPRIVING YOURSELF BY NOT INCLUDING AFRICA AS A TRAVEL DESTINATION; ESPECIALLY, PEOPLE OF COLOR"**

whenever we went out. He said, "My place is with you, my Queen." I never felt unsafe though tensions were notable. The tour companies obviously knew of the impending unrest and chose to require the additional security for traveling guest. I was always greeted as

my Queen, Goddess or cousin. From the chef in the restaurants to the people in the square, they bent over backwards to be kind and attend to my needs.

I loved my experience and can't wait to return to the continent of Africa. This time I

want to do the southern regions. I long to see Victoria Falls, Cape Town, Johannesburg, and more. It beckons to my soul, like a long-lost lover to return.

## **ABOUT SHARON BENNETT**

Sharon Bennett is a women's empowerment speaker and author based in the USA.

You can follow Sharon on social media:

Blog: [ShoeFetishMovement.com](http://ShoeFetishMovement.com)

Instagram: [shoe\\_fetish\\_2](https://www.instagram.com/shoe_fetish_2)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/TheShoeFetishMovement>



# CYCLING BOLIVIA'S SALAR DE UYUNI

**BY CARLA TURNBULL**

***When Carla Turnbull married, did she and her new husband head off for a tropical island paradise style honeymoon? No, they set off on a mammoth trip. They've managed to set aside from their honeymoon just long enough to share one of their favourite times with us.***

When my husband said 'I do' on 18th September, 2017, he vowed to always support me through my latest fitness craze and offer me a lifetime of adventures. He had even said yes to our first affair of cycle touring. When we looked for our destination, being newbies to the sport, we picked our destination based on beautiful backdrops and exotic pictures that

we had once seen.

Choosing our route of cycling from Peru to Bolivia, then onwards to Chile and Argentina, we had 5 to 6 months of excitement ahead.

Upon arriving in Peru, we soon realised we had mountains to climb and deserts to cross.

Our first few days consisted of unpacking our bikes from their boxes and assembling

them for adventure. We ran around Lima, Peru looking for many bits and pieces that we had no idea about. Reading various different cyclist blogs, you realise that everyone is different when going on a long term cycle tour. Some are over cautious and pack every spare part under the sun and others have a more 'laissez faire' attitude and will take each break-down as it



comes. There is no right or wrong when packing for your big cycle, it's all about how comfortable you feel and if packing an extra spare tyre will give you an extra hours sleep, then pack away.

Day one on the bikes was a nightmare, as we rode over dodgy backroads out of Lima and and I fell off my bike. Our bags broke twice and we had to do a quick fix on the side of the road and in our minds, we were thinking 'What the hell have we gotten into'. We had a very serious debrief after day one, but thankfully decided to stick it out. We quickly decided to try out the Pan-Am Highway and after two weeks it of it being our training ground and we soon found our rhythm and were loving life. Our first two weeks consisted of sore muscles, sore bums and growing appetites. (cycling makes you very hungry!)

My favourite leg of the trip has by far been cycling over the famous Salar De Uyuni in Bolivia (The Salt Flats), being the largest salt flats in the world, we knew we had to experience it. Cycling over the flats from Bolivia through to Chile was like cycling on the moon. With each push you heard the crackle of

the salt underneath your tyres, and wow, it was something special.

We cycled about 20km from the town of Uyuni to Colchani, which borders the salt flats, in order to reach the beginning of the Salt Flats, and as soon as we arrived, I got a flat tyre. After repairing our first blip, we continued through, entranced by how magical the place was we found ourselves laughing and shouting out to each other in amazement. It was a few days before Christmas and it looked like we would be having a 'White Christmas' after all. As far as the eye can see, it was glistening white and flat, which is a huge relief for any cyclist, a break from the gruelling hills.

After a good day's cycle we pitched up camp early as we heard the winds get quite crazy.

We decided to christen our first day with a little cyclist tradition of cycling the Salt Flats naked, looking around there was no one to be seen for miles. So we popped our kit off and took our bikes for a spin, totally liberating, and also a bit uncomfortable to be on your bikes in the nude! We giggled our way through our photo shoot, luckily we brought a small tripod with us, otherwise we would have needed a third person to take the photos! Waking up the next day was surreal, upon opening the tent there was not a soul to be seen and the panorama was gorgeous.

A good day's cycle was ahead of us, again we didn't see many people on route, and we had to use our compass to navigate ourselves. Having no signal meant our phone maps weren't





too reliable and having no road signs in the Salar made for a challenging few days. Most days we knew the direction we wanted to head in and then just asked any tours that crossed our paths for water. At the end of day one the winds were extremely strong and disheartening, it was a really tough cycle but one we had to make as we were running out of water and knew there was a restaurant at the half way point at Isla Incahuasi. It was getting very hot, and we were dying to see someone, anyone! We finally made it to the island, and met some lovely people from Germany, they gave us some water and we stayed in the restaurant's side room for the night (A regular spot for cyclists passing through, an old classroom, no beds but warm and out of the wind).

Our third day, Christmas eve, we thought we were about to make it across to Chile, but our plans backfired as we got slightly lost. We hit the toughest part of the expedition, as the salt was too soft to cycle across and on parts where it was crusty, we found it was damaging to our bikes. We ended up pushing the bikes and our 30kg+ loads through the

flats, in the hope that we were 'almost there.' It was 3 o'clock and the winds were picking up, we had no more energy so decided to pitch our tent. That night we experienced winds like never before and it was the first time that I was genuinely scared on the trip. The winds were so strong that we couldn't cook ourselves dinner and I thought the outer tent was going to blow off and we would end up sitting out the storm on the side of the Salt Flats. We couldn't turn back as pushing the bikes through the salt took us a good 2 to 3 hours, so there was no way we would have made it in these conditions. That night we put on our Christmas hats, ate leftover cheese and crackers and tried to keep each other in good spirits.

Christmas day was spent, pushing a further half an hour

through the salt before deciding that it was best to turn back to the half way restaurant and start again. We were running out of water, which could get dangerous and had not seen a person for a full twenty four hours. Best decision we made, even though we had to push our bikes another 3 hours back but we were able to arrive back at the island by 3pm, in time for a beer and a chat with people passing through. We got some new directions and made it over to Chile the next day.

We learnt so much when we crossed the Salt Flats:

-If you are lost or unsure, turn back and start afresh. Having turned back on Christmas day we were gifted an extra day on the Salt Flats and took some wonderful photos that we will now have forever .







Bolivia's Salar de Uyuni at sunrise

Photocredit: David Krijgsman / Shutterstock.com

-Don't be afraid to ask for help. Even when you are on your big adventure, this is when you need it the most. The extra water and advice we got from tour guides and tourists was amazing.

-Even if you are afraid, take the plunge, you won't regret it. We almost didn't cross the Salt Flats as we initially thought that navigating and conditions would be too dangerous but we made sure to plan well, add

extra bottles of water and face into it. Best decision we have made so far!

Our adventure through South America has been full of highs and lows, there have been moments when I have cried at the top of a mountain from exhaustion; both mental and physical - but now every time we think back to that day, we laugh hysterically. The highs have been nothing I could've experienced without this

adventure and they couldn't have been so good unless we experienced those tough moments.

If I had to choose again, I would pick bike touring through South America over any glamorous beach honeymoon any day as sweating over the tough hills and pushing through the desert to be rewarded with beautiful views and a sense of accomplishment has engraved memories in my heart that I will carry forever.

If you'd like to find out more about our journey, you can follow us on social media:

Instagram @thislittleworldblog

You Tube as Team Tarla



A person wearing a blue jacket, white pants, a white fur-lined hat, and sunglasses is hiking on a rocky mountain trail. They are carrying a large, light-colored wicker basket on their back and holding a wooden walking stick. The background shows a vast, hazy mountain landscape under a cloudy sky.

# IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ALEXANDRA DAVID-NEEL

**BY ELISE WORTLEY**





*In 1924, dressed heavily disguised as some say a beggar, others say a peasant, Alexandra David-Neel and her companion Yongden, who was dressed as a monk, walked into the the closed city of Lhasa. Her journey to Lhasa is the most famous of her adventures, but Alexangra David-Neel travelled widely. Her book *My Journey to Lhasa* (published in 1927) became an instant travel classic.*

Whilst French-born and half Belgian Alexandra, is most famous for her daring trans-Himalayan journey to Lhasa in 1924, she travelled extensively throughout Asia for a staggering 14 years, before reaching the fabled city of Lhasa.

In November 2017, with an all-female team in tow, Elise Wortley set out into the Indian Himalaya, to follow in the footsteps of legendary explorer, starting where Alexandra David-Néel herself had started her wonderings, namely Sikkim, the small state in northern India sandwiched between Chinese Tibet, Bhutan and Nepal. Here is what Elise had to say in a recent Q&A.

***Q: What was it like to walk in David-Neel's footsteps / why was it important to you to complete this challenge?***

I first read Alexandra's famous book *My Journey to Lhasa* when I was 16, and I could never get her story, and what she managed to achieve out of my head. She

must have had so much strength, physically and mentally to journey through Asia for 14 years, but more so to walk away from her life in Europe. Women just didn't do that sort of thing in the early 1900s, they stayed at home and had children, which makes her story even more unusual and

inspiring to me. I always look up to women who achieve amazing things through their own sheer determination and will power, it makes me think if she can do it, then so can I, and so can anyone!

There were moments on the trip, especially when we





reached the cave that she meditated alone in for a year and half, where I would think, wow, I can't believe she was standing in this exact spot looking at exactly the same mountains which. I imagine that the mountains looked similar to when she was there, but I couldn't help but wonder how much the countries she travelled through had changed since 1920. It's quite astounding when you think about it like that.

**Q: You went with an all female team! What was that like?**

One of my main motivations to do this expedition was to highlight roles of women in adventure travel. I also wanted a focus on female guides

around the world as well as trying to inspire as many other women as I can to put themselves out of their comfort zones and take on a challenge,







whatever that may be to them. This is why it was really important for me to keep the team female where I could.

The interesting thing is that I was told by numerous people that I would never find a female guide in northern India. After a huge search I managed to find a local leader called Jangu, who couldn't have been more amazing, and was an absolute inspiration to be around.

I was also joined by an

incredible cinematographer, Emily Almond-Barr, who documented the journey. Emily runs her own production company with the main aim of getting more women onto film sets, and her attitude and approach to her work was inspirational.

I don't think I would have coped anywhere near as well if I didn't have these two remarkable women there to support me. There are just some things that you can't

really discuss with men, I won't go into detail but there is a lot of personal stuff to discuss when you're up in the mountains with no proper bathroom! Women have an instinct about what each other's needs, so when I needed a helping hand, a laugh, or advice, Emily and Jangu were there for me. We formed such a strong bond that you could only get from adventuring with other women, and it made me realise how important it is for us women to stick together and





**"SHE PROMISED HER HUSBAND SHE WOULD  
COME BACK IN 18 MONTHS TIME, BUT HER  
JOURNEY LASTED NEARLY 14 YEARS."**

support each other rather than compete.

I have to mention that we weren't an entirely female team! It proved impossible to find female porters in India. Unfortunately it's just not a job that's socially acceptable for women to do, so we were also joined by 7 local boys from Lachen, who helped us carry food, camera equipment and my spare emergency clothes. After their initial shyness at these three mad looking women, they became the life and sole of the trip and I wouldn't replace them for the world.

***Q: What was the most challenging aspect of the expedition?***

I had never organised an expedition on









this scale before, in fact I'd never properly organised my own holiday before. Not only did I find it challenging, but also very daunting. This trip was not a normal route or itinerary, and I quickly learned that to do something out of the norm, that wasn't the traditional way of doing things, was quite a challenge.

Oh and did I mention the cold?!

***Q: What will be your lasting memory of the adventure?***

Without a doubt reaching the basecamp of Mt Kangchenjunga, the third highest mountain on the planet. We all had such a phenomenal sense of achievement running through us, from having conquered all the long days of walking and all the mental and physical obstacles that we met on our way.

It was a special moment for me, reaching the highest and most beautiful part of our trek, but I had no idea just how important this place was for our

leader Jangu. We were as close to Mt. Kangchenjunga as you can get from the Sikkim side, and it's very rare that local people get to come here due to the permits, costs and the amount of time it takes to get there.

Mt. Kangchenjunga is a sacred mountain for the people of Sikkim, it's seen as the mother deity, and is so revered that climbing the mountain from the Sikkim side has been banned since the 70s. As I stood there, staring at the towering peak



that had the bright sun beating down on it, I felt totally in awe, finally understanding its huge spiritual importance. We stopped as close as we could before the mighty Zemu Glacier blocked the way, and Jangu changed into her traditional clothes to recite a prayer for her late father.

It was incredibly moving for all of us because we knew Jangu well by this point, and understood how much she missed her father, and what an important role he had played in her life. Leaving a prayer for

him here was one of the greatest respects she could pay to him and something she never thought she would be able to do, so you can understand just how significant this moment was.

***Q: Why did you choose to support Freedom Kit Bags instead of another charity?***

Freedom Kit Bags is an amazing charity that empowers women and girls in rural and low-income areas of Nepal by providing them with a reusable

kit containing everything they will need during their period.

Due to cultural practises that go back centuries, women and girls are seen as an "unclean" during menstruation. One of the main reasons for this is the inability to deal with a periods physical effects. This results in them not being able to continue life as they normally would, which in many cases for young girls means not being able to go to school for a whole week every month.

A lack of hygienic protection







also means that many village women suffer from infections which then lead to other health issues such as infertility, kidney complications and pelvic infections.

Exodus have been supporting Freedom Kit Bags for a while, and I've wanted to help in some way since I first heard about the work they do. I personally couldn't believe that some women and girls don't even have a pair of knickers as a starting point, and it's just not possible to live normally during your period if you don't even have pants. I think any woman can imagine how impossible life would be without access to sanitary items. The other great thing about these kits is that unlike disposable sanitary items, they are environmentally friendly, so the natural

environment is safe too.

Periods are still such a taboo subject even here even in the UK which is pretty unbelievable and it really needs to change. It's important that we all, women and men, talk more openly about these topics and make it part of everyday conversation.

***Q: Do you have any top tips for women wanting to undertake their own adventure of a lifetime?***

I had the beginnings of this idea when I was a teenager but never did anything about it. I've always been an anxious person, so it was probably a combination of not having the confidence to take it on and the devil on my shoulder telling me it was a ridiculous idea. I couldn't picture it all physically coming together and actually going to India wearing clothes from the 1920s!

This experience has taught me that no matter how silly you *think* an idea is, or how unreasonable it may seem, just go with it. My whole life I've worried about what other people think, which has been a







huge barrier for me in many aspects of my life. Even though I often still think this way, this project has made me realise that the opinions of others should never discourage you from following an adventure or dream.

When we are teenagers we have dreams and ideas that all feel possible, but as you get older and go through the motions of growing up and having more responsibilities we lose this free way of thinking. It's important that we try and revert back to our 16 year old minds and maintain that way of thinking.

So, grab some friends and go on an adventure – it really will change your life.

## ABOUT ELISE WORTLEY

Elise is tempting to follow in her heroines footsteps with no modern equipment, using and wearing only what would have been available in the early 1900s. Through her travels Elise aims to raise awareness of women's rights in travel, encourage others not to be afraid to take on a challenge, highlight female leaders and prove how hard Alexandra's journey really was. She wants to show that women were, and still are, at the forefront of adventure and shaping the way in which we travel.

You can follow Elise on social media:

Blog: <https://www.womanwithaltitude.com/>

Instagram: @woman\_with\_altitude

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/womanwithaltitude/](http://www.facebook.com/womanwithaltitude/)



A photograph of a camel caravan in a desert landscape. The camels are loaded with gear and are being led by a person. The title 'CAMELS AND THE AUSTRALIAN OUTBACK' is overlaid in large, white, outlined letters.

# CAMELS AND THE AUSTRALIAN OUTBACK

**BY JANE HARRIES**

*When you think of a camel, what comes to mind? Perhaps the Sahara, or the Middle East, or three wise men? Or, was it Australia, home of the world's largest feral herd of camels?*

*Our editor had heard about the Outback of Australia, she'd even visited some of the legendary places, like Uluru and Alice Springs. But, what was it like further away from the roads? What was it like in the 19th century? In 2003 she decided to find out as much as she could, by taking a journey into the Outback by camel.*





## CAMELS IN 19TH CENTURY AUSTRALIA

Imagine the scene. Towns and cities sprouting up along the coast, pastoralists seeking out land, gold miners chasing the dream of making it rich quick. Australia was indeed a land of opportunity for many, but it was also a harsh country, a place where

one wrong step could easily lead to death, for in places it appears to be a severe country, where a person could die before reaching the nearest water source.

Of course, the Aborigines knew their land, they knew where and how to find water. But not so the new people who had come here from all over the world, not just Europe, but China and what is now Pakistan (then part of British India)

and Afghanistan.

Afghanistan - the third to sixth letters of that country's name, give a clue as to what's about to come - "ghan". For The Ghan, is the train that now runs north south through the centre of Australia. Why The Ghan? Could it be because of the role the Afghans played in opening up Central Australia to the newcomers? Yes, though it should be noted that in time

cameleers from then British India were also referred to as Afghans.

The first camel arrived in Australia in 1840. It was the lone survivor of a few camels which had been shipped Tenerife to Adelaide in South Australia. Named Harry, during an expedition in 1846 a sudden movement by Harry accidentally caused the explorer and leader of the expedition John Ainsworth Horrocks to shoot himself. He subsequently died of his wounds. However before dying, he asked that Harry be shot.

Despite the initial setback with shipping camels to Australia and the unfortunate incident with Harry, shipments continued and in time camels became the ships of the Australian deserts. Numerous explorers used them as they surveyed the land, whether to look for inland pastures, mining sites, or a suitable route for a telegraph





line, for the race was on to speed up Australia's communication with the outside world.

With time, Australians realised the need for cameleers to accompany their camels to Australia. Two of Australia's most famous explorers were Burke & Wills. In 1860 the government of Victoria imported camels to assist in their forthcoming expedition. These camels were accompanied by three Afghan cameleers.

Scouting a route for the proposed telegraph line was a key objective of the Victorian government in backing

this expedition, which if successful, would also be the first crossing of Australia from south to north by white people.

Burke & Wills set off from Melbourne leading a large expedition including over 20 camels. Almost six months later, together with six of the camels and one horse, Burke, Wills and two others, King and Gray, managed to reach the Gulf of Carpentaria in the north. Of the four, only King survived the return journey.

Meanwhile the South Australian government wanted the telegraph line to go through its domain. On the sixth







of his major expeditions John McDouall Stuart led a party across the centre of Australia from North Adelaide to Chambers Bay, a beach situated to the east of what is now Darwin. Stuart was mindful of the proposed telegraph line and during this expedition, he recorded sources of water, suitable crossings, even trees which could be used as telegraph poles.

Stuart's route eventually became the one used for the Overland Telegraph Line. Whilst Stuart did not use camels on his expedition, camels were widely used in building the line, as camels were better able to cope with the environmental challenges of the Outback, including heat and lack of water, than other animals potential pack animals such as horses.

## **CAMELS AND THE OVERLAND TELEGRAPH LINE IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

The Overland Telegraph Line is no longer needed. As is often the case, unwanted items are left to rot. But in 2003 I was fortunate enough to travel with





Philip would meet me.  
But how to get there?

The answer was the mail bus from Coober Pedy, that legendary town in South Australia where it's so hot the most expensive homes are built underground and inside caves, so they can take advantage of nature's own cooling properties. It was also so hot the locals built a statue of a tree, so they could at least have one tree in town tough enough to

Philip Gee who has trained camels for decades and has trekked over 30,000 kms in the Australian deserts.

Philip was more than a camel man, a trekker, a guide. He was also passionate about the area's history and was then seeking out the remains of posts used in the Old Telegraph Line. Wanting to share his knowledge of the desert and its history, he also worried that if he published the location of his discoveries, vandals might desecrate the posts. He once quietly lamented to me "you're

the only one in this group who wants to know anything about the history", for the others in our small group were there for 'the experience'. A perfectly valid reason to be there, for a camel safari in the Australian Outback is certainly an experience. To me though, part of 'the experience' was learning more about this place, the people who had travelled through it, who had made it their home. Encountering the complete skeleton of an animal, was a stark reminder of how hard life could really be in this country.

The trip itself started in the middle of nowhere. Literally. A junction of tracks in the middle of nowhere is where







survive the conditions.

Drop off in the middle of nowhere completed and now safely in Philip's hands, it was time to head off to the camp, again in the middle of nowhere.

Of that evening's briefing there's only two things I can remember.

Most importantly,

whenever we went to the loo, we were firmly instructed that we had to take a box of matches with us. This wasn't just for the loo paper. It was to help keep us alive. For, if we found we had strayed too far and couldn't find the others, then lighting a fire might just save our life.

Secondly, whilst the camels would carry





plenty of water for us for the full five days we'd be out there, there was no water for washing ourselves. Thank goodness I had brought some wet wipes. Not perfect, but enough to wipe away the desert's grime from my face at the end of each day.

The trek itself was an easy affair, perhaps because of the nature of our group. It was up to us. We could ride a camel, or we could walk. Or, we could do a bit of both each day. The food was absolutely fine too, with after dinner cask red wine and / or chocolate for desert. A few people may baulk at the idea of cask wine, but trust me, in those conditions, I suspect few would be disappointed with the

vintage that came out of the box.

It wasn't on that first night, but later on, Philip came out with a great point regarding the flies. The local flies really knew how to annoy a person. I don't just mean by landing on freshly made sandwiches either. In fact, they couldn't land on the lunchtime sandwiches, as a fly cover would be whipped out quicker than those pesky insects could dive bomb our longed for lunch. No, those flies simply hung around. They hung around so much that a few times, I lifted my plate and my hand inside the fly net I wore on my head, in an attempt to have an insect free lunch. But as

Philip put it, at least the flies were clean in the Outback - there wasn't exactly much for them to get ill on. The flies were also the reason for wearing that net even when riding a camel.

Then the day came when we rode into Peake Station. This is one of three old telegraph stations still in existence, though this one (as least when I visited), was in a state of disrepair.

Display boards with copies of old photographs brought names and faces of real people into thought. What would it have been like to have lived there? What would it have been like to be a woman, perhaps the only woman on some of the





# The Peake Station



properties, (though a photograph showed two here). What would it have been like to perhaps be the only woman for hundreds of miles? A woman who strilled dressed in the rigid fashion of the time, complete with a full skirted dress and, was that a bodice I could see in the photographs?

How did these people survive in such a barren country whilst trying to live the Western way of life? Some of course didn't survive and the small graveyard at Peake Station is testimony to the tragedy of life cut short.

This wasn't a grand

expedition, my trip was merely a tiny eye opener into the stark, harsh, sometimes cruel nature of the Outback. But it was also an eye opener into vistas, big skies and an occasional oasis tucked away beyond that next hill and it was also an eye opener into sleeping in swags under those magnificent stars.

As I rode my camel back towards the drop off point in time to meet the mail man on his twice weekly visit, I relished my time out there and I looked forward to being reunited with my friends. For those pioneers, such a reunion could have been years in the







waiting. For me, I'd been away perhaps two weeks and only five days on this camel trek.

## POSTSCRIPT

The reunion when it came was a particularly memorable one. Why? Well I might have camel treked to an old telegraph station, but we had no internet and no mobile phone coverage. Misreading the last email I'd sent her from Coober Pedy,

a friend thought me missing. She'd expected me to arrive at her place on Thursday. I promise for I have checked my email clearly stated a week Thursday. But by the Saturday she was sufficiently concerned to contact mutual friends. They tried to allay her fears, but by the following Tuesday thinking me now five days overdue, she had enough and phoned the police station at Coober Pedy, being my last known

whereabouts, to report me missing.

Fortunately the station had closed for the day, the call got rerouted and she was told to report at her local station in the morning. That she did, giving a description that described me as "long legs and big boobs". Being British (though then living in Australia and not yet an Australian citizen), can you imagine the fun the British press

would have had with "long legs and big boobs missing in Aussie Outback". Talk of the embarrassment, let alone the worry for my family back in the UK.

Fortunately our mutual friends had taken matters into their own hands. Remembering I'd talked about taking a camel safari, they contacted every single camel safari company in South Australia, until they found the one with which I was





travelling. As my friend walked out of the police station having filed an affidavit stating I was missing, she received a phone call "we've located Jane". Relieved but intensely embarrassed, she retraced her steps into the police station and withdraw her affidavit, thankfully before either my family or the British press had got wind of the story.

Of course, I had no idea any of this was happening, for I had no phone and no internet. So when I logged back on to modern life, I had quite a shock. The friend who tracked me down just laughed. Another friend said, "I'm so sorry Jane it took us five days before we started searching for you." Yet

another (non Australian) friend said, "you're lucky, I've always wondered if I went missing, how long it would take for someone to report me as missing".

Writing this makes me think. Those friends of mine were either pioneers themselves, having migrated to Australia from three different continents, or the descendants or pioneers. Perhaps that's how those early pioneers and their explorer predecessors coped as well as they did. Perhaps they had friends who cared about them, who knew the importance of when to take action and when to sit back. In my case, it was of course a false alarm. But, it taught us all a good lesson in communication

and how to manage and co-ordinate a situation should things go wrong.

As for the Burke & Wills expedition, had their pre expedition planning, contingency planning and communication strategy been better, it's possible more of them would have survived. In the end King, the only survivor, of the party of four from the Burke & Wills expedition lived due to the kindness of Aborigines and later in 1861, a rescue party led by Howitt. His health never however fully recovered and he died a few years later at the age of 33 in 1872.



# ABOUT JANE HARRIES AND ADVENTURE SHE

Jane set up Adventure She partially because she struggled to keep up to date with all the adventure blogs she wanted to read. She figured, surely she wasn't the only one who'd like to see everything in one place, rather than going from blog to blog. Long term Jane hopes Adventure She will be able to promote the writings of numerous adventure bloggers and other people too.

In fact, Jane is keen to encourage women writers, photographers, and adventurers - whether full on hard core expeditionists, or middle of the road adventurers, or new to the adventure scene - to share their stories. She claims it doesn't matter if you can't write, it's all about what happened, what you thought, what you felt and if the story is good enough, then an editor can help fix any writing issues.

Whilst not busy editing Adventure She or training for her latest adventure, Jane runs a training business which specialises in developing people's presentation and pitching skills, plus fixing any existing training problems which organisations may have through a training needs analysis. She has a post graduate in professional development and education and in between adventures during her younger years, was a tax lawyer / consultant and tax trainer, before she "saw the light."

You can follow Jane on social media:

Instagram: [adventure\\_she](#)

Facebook page: [adventureshe](#)

Facebook group:

Website: [www.adventureshe.com](http://www.adventureshe.com)

To view her TedX talk on how it takes a million small steps to achieve big dreams, go to:

Jane will be giving a talk on hiking the Camino Frances to Santiago de Compostella at the London meeting of Globetrotters on 1 September 2018.

To book Jane as a speaker, please go to the contact us page on the website [www.adventureshe.com](http://www.adventureshe.com)





# GETTING INTO ADVENTURE

**BY KATHERINE KNIGHT**

**PHOTOGRAPHS BY KATHERINE KNIGHT AND JANE HARRIES**

*Yachts woman and all around adventurer is passionate about getting people out there adventuring. Rather than share with us some of her own epic adventures, Katherine Knight has once again chosen to share some of her tips for the less experienced, or the budding, or even the more experienced but time poor adventurer.*

## GETTING INTO ADVENTURE

How to find adventure on your doorstep

Reading about grand adventures; skiing to the south pole, climbing Mount Everest or rowing an ocean can be inspiring.

They can also be a bit intimidating. I don't

mean the scale of the undeniably amazing undertaking achieved by those taking part. More the fact that they feel so far out of my reach that it can make me feel intimidated to even think of taking on an adventure of my own. If I don't travel to a faraway location, suffer for months on end or achieve a world first then maybe my adventure isn't worthy, maybe it isn't even worth trying it?

Fortunately these thoughts are banished by calling up the adventures that I have undertaken, some of them big ones, but it is the small ones that come most prominently to mind in this instance.

The day I headed out into the Scottish hills in winter by myself and experienced how it feels to be in a blizzard whiteout, alone.





The first time that I spent a night out in a tent with my friends,

The first time I spent a night out in a tent by myself.

The time I headed out for a short evening paddle in my kayak and found myself surrounded by hundreds of inquisitive seals.

The time I completed that first 15 mile training run.

It is these mini adventures, the ones that often take place only a few miles from our front doors that can be the most rewarding and teach us the most about

ourselves.

It is easy to overlook them, but I call on each and everyone of you to celebrate the small adventures in your life. Set aside a weekend and dedicate it to adventure. It can be big or small, on your own or with a group, close to home or far away. Find something that is a little bit different or new to you, something that challenges your comfort zone. Most importantly it should be something that you have the skills to be safe doing.







## FINDING INSPIRATION FOR ADVENTURE

When I found myself with two days free on the west coast of Scotland I decided to see what adventure I could have on my doorstep in a weekend. My mind wandered to my childhood adventure inspiration, the book *Swallows and Amazons* by Arthur

Ransome. Where the main characters, a group of children, set off in a small boat to camp on the uninhabited, 'Wild Cat Island'.

I looked at my map and located my very own uninhabited island, one that was within reach in my sailing dinghy, on further inspection it looked as though it had a good spot to land and a flat area for camping. So a *Swallows*

and *Amazons* adventure to sail to an uninhabited island and spend the night it was to be.

I have been on bigger expeditions to more remote places but this weekend was something special. It was a challenge I conceived and saw through by myself. I started out unsure if I could do it, and came back knowing that I could. I had spent a weekend with nature

and the ocean for company and had been given immense joy by the experiences that they have to offer.

## FINDING YOUR ADVENTURE

What day or weekend adventure could you take? Why not let your imagination run free, grab a pen and write down five ideas now.

Just in case you need a little bit more inspiration, here are ten adventures ideas that fit into a weekend:

- Sleep in a tree house
- Swim in a hot spring
- Go on a day or even a weekend long hike
- Go milky-way spotting while sleeping out under the stars
- Take on a charity challenge
- Sleep on an uninhabited island
- Enter a fun run
- Take an intensive learn to kayak course





- Go snorkel
- Take a bush craft skills course

## MAKING YOUR ADVENTURE HAPPEN

What did you come up with? Some amazing ideas, I'm sure. Now it's time for a quick reality test. Look at each of your ideas and ask yourself the following questions.

## WEEKEND ADVENTURE CHECKLIST:

- What will it cost?
- Can I afford it?
- Do I have the skills to be safe doing this?

- How will I get there?
- Who will I go with?
- What kit do I need?
- Where will I stay?
- What extra information do I need to find out?

Your answers will guide you whether your idea is realistic for you and show you the steps that you need to take to make it happen. Enjoy your adventure!

## A LITTLE NOTE ON SAFETY

Adventures inherently involve some degree of risk and these vary depending on the challenge being undertaken. With any adventure or challenge it is necessary to ensure that you are aware of, fully understand and accept the risks that are involved. Ensuring the safety of yourself and your group should always been your primary concern when taking on any adventure. The challenge will always be there to come back to. Make sure that you come back to take it on again. If you have any doubts about your skills or experience to take on an adventure, you should seek guidance from a qualified guide, instructor or professional in the relevant field.







To learn more about Katherine Knight's tips on adventuring and how to make your adventure a reality, you may like:

- To watch a film she made about her Swallows and Amazons adventure:  
<https://www.narwhalexpeditions.com/news-1/2017/8/24/a-foiling-boat-adventure>
- To have a read of her book 'How to Have and Adventure' available at  
<https://www.narwhalexpeditions.com/new-products/>

You can follow Katherine on social media:

Email: [katherineknight360@icloud.com](mailto:katherineknight360@icloud.com)

Web: [www.narwhalexpeditions.com](http://www.narwhalexpeditions.com)

Socials: @YachtNarwhal



A woman and a man are standing in a grassy field, likely a coastal path. The woman on the left is wearing a purple long-sleeved shirt, a white cap, and sunglasses. The man on the right is wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt, a black cap, and sunglasses. Both are wearing running vests and shorts. The background shows a grassy hill under a clear sky.

# PEMBROKESHIRE 100 MILE ULTRA

**BY JOHANNA SUTTON**

**PHOTOGRAPHS JANE HARRIES**

*"A 100 mile run, but why would you do that?"*

*Former doctor and now personal trainer Johanna Sutton freely admits that "was a common response when my Pembrokeshire Coastal Path run came up in conversation. And I have to admit I struggled to convince many! It's hard to explain, especially to a non-runner, why you might choose to undergo extreme physical discomfort for well over 24 hours when no one is actually forcing you to. 'I've entered now and it's on the calendar' was the easiest reply."*





## **PRE— RACE PREPARATION AND SOME RAMBLINGS**

A race of this distance is a big commitment. You need to set yourself a good training schedule and prioritise it. The key to success, and not destroying yourself for ever, is to build up your distance; the weekly mileage has to creep up and the individual long-slow runs (LSDs) have to become just silly! All this must be set upon a good solid background of running i.e. not recommended as a first goal.

My longest runs reached the 48 km mark, a point where no amount of mindfulness could do much to help. "Grit your teeth and just get





it done" was my approach at this stage (a technique that turned out to be invaluable). A supporting long run, of perhaps a mere 32km, flanked this one, either the day before or the day after and crazily managed to take on a "only a 32 km today " status. Yes I had indeed entered "crazy world".

I have focused on core strength training for a number of years, and as all long distance runners will know a strong core is essential for an event such as this one. Basically a strong core means one can maintain a good running position for longer and so transfer as much energy as possible into forward motion. It has the added benefit of

protecting against backache and knee problems.

The great thing about core training is that it can be easily fitted into a busy life. Also when a fit of panic suddenly occurs, a few core exercises can really calm your nerves.

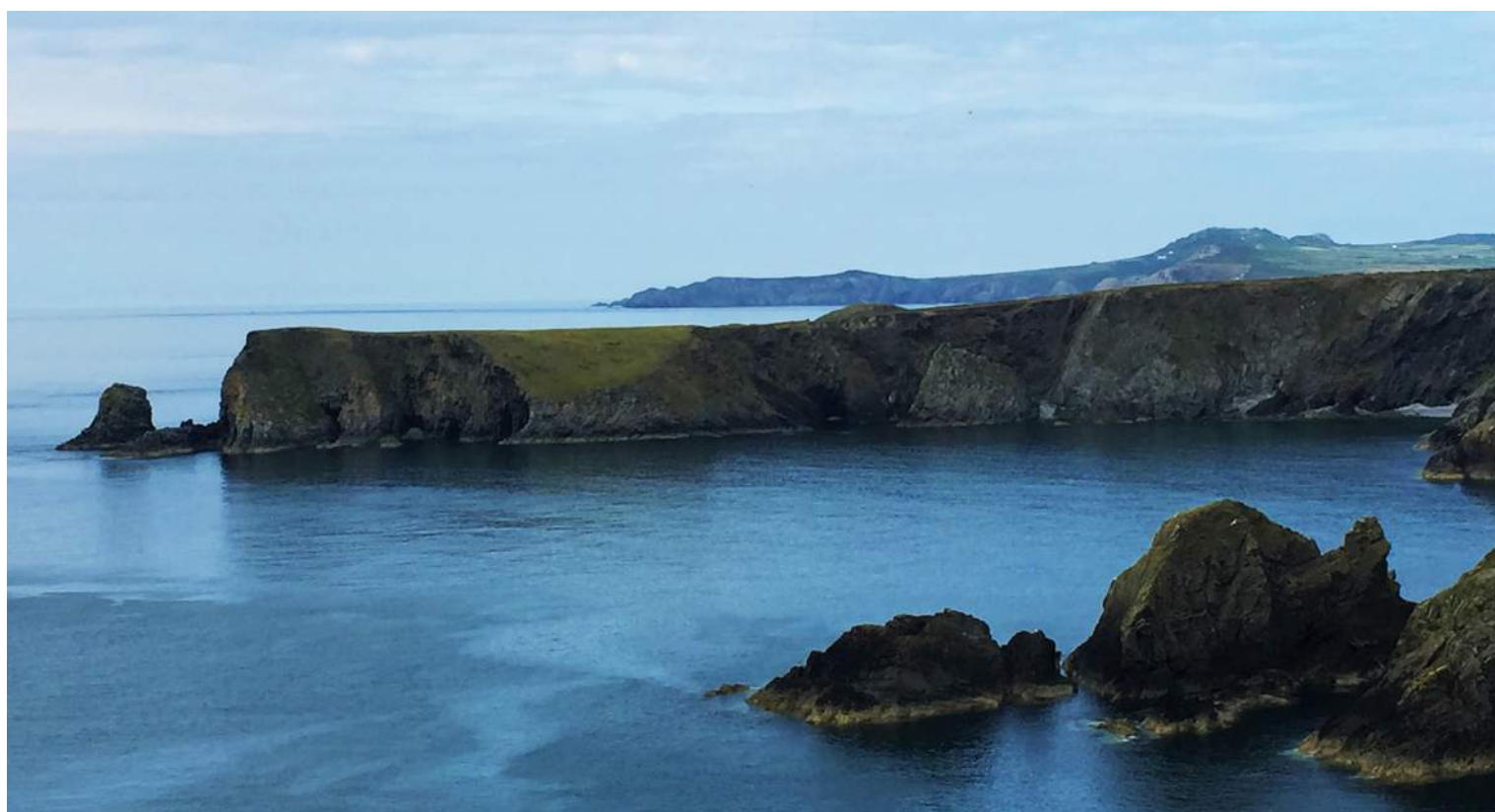
I managed to stick to my training plan pretty well, completing most of my long runs and a lot of my medium length ones. But it turned out that the "bitty" nature of my job as a personal trainer and my family commitments didn't allow for such long periods of



time out of the house. So instead I adopted a pick and mix approach, breaking my long runs up throughout the day, e.g. run, see a client, run, see kids, run, go to bed, run etc. Because my husband's training had to fit alongside his full time job as G.P. I felt it only fair to give him first pick of the weekend training slots. I know he appreciated this!

The mental strain is also not insignificant. The race is always lurking somewhere in the back





of your mind. When social plans occur you find yourself making calculations and trying re-jig to fit everything in. The temptation to skip a run sometimes becomes highly appealing. At times like this I found it useful to imagine the run and scare myself into training!

But throughout my training I remained struck by how awesome the human body is to be able to adapt to run these distances. Very cool!

A quick note on feet as this is something I did do well!

Toe-ga has been a fabulous discovery for me. I know there are many runners who shove their feet into running shoes and forget about them; but the foot is a very important part of your running apparatus and should not be neglected! It has twenty intrinsic muscles (if I remember correctly) all able to be conditioned and strong feet are such a bonus for running. I have been practicing all sorts of weird foot scrunching exercises for a while now, designed to improve the function of my feet. And I can confirm they really do work! Gone are the days of aching feet at the end of a hard run; I now have powerful, shock

absorbing levers on the end of my legs!

I have my own theory of running to share (it might not be mine). Ultra running is not a new phenomenon, it is in fact a very old one that has been rediscovered. Early man would have had reason to run a very long way from time to time. He would have needed to track and chase his dinner for instance, or move on in search of a new water source. The most effective way to travel a long distance is to set a pace you can keep going at and do just that.

My theory is that while



running your mind gets to shut down for long enough to mentally recharge. The mind needs time out and long distance running, especially when there is a mind consuming focus like following a trail, is the perfect situation in which to achieve this.

So I do many things while running. Sometimes I rehearse things in my mind such as French verbs, Welsh phrases (my latest hobby), song lyrics I am trying to learn for choir or I might practice Morse code (I have been told not to admit that one). At other times I try to do "mindfulness" and focus on my body, how it feels right now and

the sounds and sensations around me, and then of course I just let my thoughts wonder and daydream along. But 6+ hr runs are after a while, not surprisingly a little dull. I have developed a technique I call "mindlessness" which is completely switching off! It's better than sleeping! I am still aware on a basic reactions level so don't get run over but otherwise I'm totally out of it!

I think this is what is missing from modern day life!

We need to run like Early man!

## AND FINALLY – THE RUN ITSELF

This race is basically the entire Pembrokeshire coastal path situated north of the Milford Haven Estuary. The map helpfully instructs one to follow the Coast path signs keeping the coast to the left and the land to the right - simple! "Stay away from cliff edges!" is written in red, bold type at the bottom. Which seems rather good advice.

The route starts from Dale and takes you south initially to round the peninsula at St Ann's head before turning north. Eight check points, roughly 10 - 14 miles apart mark the way to the finish at St Dogmaels 101 miles away.







We slept in a car park near St Dogmaels in our estate car the night before, better than it sounds with our super comfy memory foam mattress. Chips and veggie sausages our pre-race meal were eaten on a damp bench over-looking the soon to be very familiar sea view. At this point my feelings were a mixture of excitement, relief it had finally arrived together and a fair amount of foreboding.

Despite my inner turmoil I managed to get a good night's sleep, and woke refreshed for race day.

The organisers had provided a coach to transport us from St Dogmaels to the start at Dale. We assembled with our fellow runners outside the village hall; this was it, the moment I had been training for/dreading for

months. It all felt somewhat surreal.

Registration then followed,

GPS tracker devices were given out to be placed inside our rucksacks. The organisers would be able to see if anyone







strayed too far off the course, or fell into the sea!

And then G and I were two of twenty nine runners standing casually on the coastal path

listening to the race brief, a moment that remains firmly etched in my mind. I was suddenly very aware that there were only a few of us doing this crazy thing. A fact that terrified

me. It was all bizarrely casual and informal despite the seriousness of the advice being handed out, "stay together through the night if possible" and "be careful of the path when close to the edge." At this point I recall feeling totally awed and full of self-doubt. Everyone seemed so experienced and looked so confident and ready to run 100 miles.

Before I could think much more it had started and we were running and I recall thinking that at least each step I took was one off the total.







My taper had given me fresh legs and I started running along way too fast with the pack, a combination of nerves and giddiness. G though was sensibly holding back and I finally cottoned on; thank goodness for my sensible husband! The group quickly started to spread out as runners settled into their own paces and as is often the way we saw the same few runners again and again as we took turns to overtake and be overtaken.





The scenery along the Pembrokeshire coastline is stunningly beautiful, one of the main reasons for picking this particular 100 miler. The colours were vibrant and sharpened by the glorious May sunshine. Mile upon mile upon mile of unspoilt coastline stretched out before us. The coastal path goes perilously close to the edge and at times is less than a metre away from a sheer drop of hundreds of metres into the ocean below. As we rounded each headland the roaring and crashing become louder as waves broke over the jagged, grey rocks. The path was frequently deep and narrow, forcing you to place one foot in front of the other; all too easy to catch an edge and stumble. Here I really concentrated hard; forcing myself to study the ground ahead and absolutely not admire the scenery. I have a poor track record of falls. I did once fall off a cliff

while on my mountain bike, luckily for me there was a conveniently growing tree just below and so it all ended well but I didn't want to tempt fate twice. My worried children had drilled it into me to not get distracted!!

I entertained myself by studying and trying to identify the coastal flora growing beside the path. Bright yellow gorse wafted its delicious coconutty scent, sea campion, tufty pink thrift, tiny violets, buttercups, wild geraniums and many many more I couldn't identify. Simply beautiful. So far I was

thoroughly enjoying myself. My face at this point I am sure would have had a wide grin, this was running at its best and I felt strong and contented.

The first day was fabulous, we chatted and ran, daydreamed and ran, G taught me Spanish while we ran, admired the view and ran, ate and ran! I made my first mistake on day one and didn't eat enough. A fellow runner described the event as an eating competition and I now realise just how true that was. We ate snacks fairly regularly and when the chance arose we stopped at a

local store and bought sandwiches and coke, but it wasn't enough. I should have been forcing far more calories down my throat at this stage.

Checkpoint 3 and our first drop bag was just up from the old St Justinians lifeboat station, 44 miles in. Together with the crisps and biscuits provided by the organisers, this was an opportunity to do some faffing and sorting. At two places along the route you can leave bags with whatever you think you may need. I changed my socks and re-filled my rucksack with







snacks and one of our Marathon des Sables tent mates, Jane (Harries) appeared and provided savoury sandwiches and encouragement!

I was still revelling in the whole experience as dusk approached and we stopped to don warm clothes and retrieve head torches from our bags. We had arranged to meet Jane again at the next stop and she has promised to try and get us coffee and chips. The thought was very exciting and spurred us on. She was true to her word and waiting for us at the Porthgain check-point, producing steaming hot lattes and a mountain of chips

from the restaurant which G and I were unbelievably welcome for. After a day of flap jacks this was perfect!!

We waved goodbye and headed off into the night. The day's running had had an almost carnival feel about it, setting off into the pitch black was an altogether more serious affair. The route by day had been easy to follow, but in the dark it was much, much harder and the thought of that cliff edge was very sobering.

Despite having on all my four layers I was soon uncomfortably cold and remained that way throughout the







him. We have run a lot of events together over the years and luckily so far have not had concurrent crashes.

We arrived in Fishguard for the dawn. I was still completely freezing so not up to much admiring. We watched the sun rise longingly while we ran, desperate for a little warmth. A pit stop was just ahead, where our second and final drop bags were. There was also a van to shelter inside and some hot soup. Unfortunately though, no loos so impossible to linger as long as I wanted, in retrospect a big error of judgement. I should have been warming up, resting and EATING!

Leaving Fishguard a mere marathon distance lay ahead. Easy...?!

The race by now was taking its toll on my body. I had been aware of but ignoring a niggly pain in my right calf from about ten

night; we had six hours of darkness and cold ahead of us to endure. We started the night stage alone and at slow, steady plod. Night-running when all you have is a halo of light from a head torch always feels very closed in and is most discombobulating. I felt like I was running in a bubble and the uneven ground made it hard to find a rhythm.

It was a relief to meet up with another group

after we had been running for a while, as the more head torches and eyes the better! The night stage had some of the trickiest terrain to negotiate; there was rock scrambling, some pretty close encounters with the edge and a couple of times when we ran for a while in completely the wrong direction! In the darkness the warning roar of the ocean was thankfully very loud.

I experienced another giddy period during the night. Night running does sometimes do this to me and I find my speed hard to judge. I think I felt by running fast I could speed the advent of dawn. G does not have my "flighty" side and was able to rein me back in and I quickly resumed my steady plod. Gareth had a slump during the night stage, completely out of energy and "bonking" so I force fed





hours in; (I think related to my arthritic knee from a snowboarding crash!). Stopping for any length of time had been causing it to stiffen up and then it took a while to get going again but by this stage it was simply staying stiff and sore. A race of this distance will always find your body's weaknesses!

This run is not just a long way, it is incredibly hilly too. It has 5000m of ascent, which believe me is a lot! The path hugs the

coast, leading you along the cliff tops but every now and a rocky staircase drops down to the beach. To begin with it is enjoyable trekking down the unevenly hewn steps to the pretty beaches below and running across the pebbles, but as the event wears on this becomes a little less appealing! Each time I glimpsed an upcoming inlet and the possibility of a beach visit I groaned internally.

The camaraderie one finds on events such as this is fantastic. The

intensity and the knowledge that you are "in it together" quickly builds close bonds between essentially strangers. Running along, conversation flows naturally; snippets of your lives are shared; their race becomes important too, and you wait for, and encourage each other. Also chatting really distracts from the pain!

The second day for me was admittedly not that fun (understatement!) Temperatures soared

and I felt sapped of all energy. The views were still stunning but at this stage in the event I wasn't really appreciating them much.

I just needed to get it done. It was now a slog and all conversation had dried up. The thought of not completing having endured so much was unbearable. I have never felt so completely and utterly spent and out of fuel. I felt I was moving forward on will power alone. My lovely husband had come through his low period and found some energy (not a huge amount) but he kindly shoved the occasional piece of banana into my mouth, this was true team work and I will be eternally grateful to him.

The last miles were a real test of resilience, about gritting my teeth and not giving in. In a way I am more proud of myself for my determination at this









point than my running ability. I had not imagined this ending. The race was in fact 101 miles not 100 and the last mile was definitely the longest.

Normally, faced with a down-hill tarmac road I would have eaten up the distance effortlessly, but that road was sheer, frustrating, never ending hell!

My race was an eighty five mile run and a fifteen mile "limp" but 34 hours after setting out from Dale we did make it back to St Dogmaels and to finally stop moving was bliss!

As we entered the hall we were presented with our well earned medals. My first words were "it was worse than childbirth, don't let me do it again!" But, I have always found a cup of tea improves

most situations and two cups later I did feel a lot better!

## SOME FINAL REFLECTIONS

It is now a few weeks since the event and I have just returned from a sensible 10 km run in my own beautiful Peak District. I am beginning to suspect that 100 mile races might have a lot in common with childbirth. It is hard to hold on to the memory of pain for very long, "surely it can't have been that bad" and I clearly have memory problems as I have 3 children.

I also have that nagging feeling of unfinished business. Although I did finish and only 13 out of 29 did, I don't feel

completely satisfied by this race. I had intended to do it with more style and less pain. This might sound harsh, and I really am delighted to have ticked this one off my list, but that part of me that needs to succeed and has done with failure can't help wondering how this race would go if I ran it slightly differently, more sensibly.

I am proud though of how G and I worked as a team. I don't think I would have made it round on my own. I am pleased to discover how deep I could dig when I needed to. It has taught me a lot about myself and goes to show what you can achieve if you really want to. I am relieved that after a week of rest I felt physically none the worse which means the training was effective after all.

It was a massive life experience, but as always the memory has faded too quickly and life has moved on. But I haven't forgotten the awe-inspiring people I met enroute; there are some incredible athletes out there quietly doing their own thing.

Of course a huge thank you goes to Jane for feeding us along the way. Those chips I think probably swung it!



# ABOUT JOHANNA SUTTON

Jo Sutton is a personal trainer who loves her job. She lives with her husband and three kids in the glorious Peak District on the edge of Sheffield.

She's a qualified doctor and practised mainly psychiatry until 2007, when she realised she really didn't want to do it anymore., though she's glad she did it.

Her main passions are fell running, walking up mountains, travelling, good food and wine, which she finds fit together very well.

You can follow Jo on social media:

Blog: <https://trainwithjo.wordpress.com/>

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/TrainWithJo](http://www.facebook.com/TrainWithJo)

Instagram: @trainwithjo1





A woman with long brown hair is lying on her back on a ground covered in a thick layer of red tomato pulp. She is wearing a green t-shirt and dark shorts, both of which are splattered with tomato. Her arms are outstretched to the sides, and her legs are also spread apart. She has a joyful expression on her face. The background is a vast field of similar red tomato pulp, with some whole tomatoes scattered around. The overall scene is vibrant and festive.

# LA TOMATINA

**BY CHARLOTTE GEEN**

*Even those of us with the most serious disposition, the most serious job and facing the most serious situations, sometimes need to let our hair down, even if it's for just a couple of days. Multi day ultra runner and MDS veteran Charlotte Geen, knows precisely the place to go for exactly such an experience.*



## PARTY TIME

La Tomatina is a huge tomato festival held on the last Wednesday of August every year, in the town of Bunol, near Valencia, Spain. It's been a tradition for over 70 years!

I can't remember where I had read about it La Tomatina initially but it coincided with a friend's birthday so three of us decided to head to Valencia for some tomato throwing fun.

There's very limited accommodation in Bunol itself, like most people we stayed in Valencia, home of the after parties!

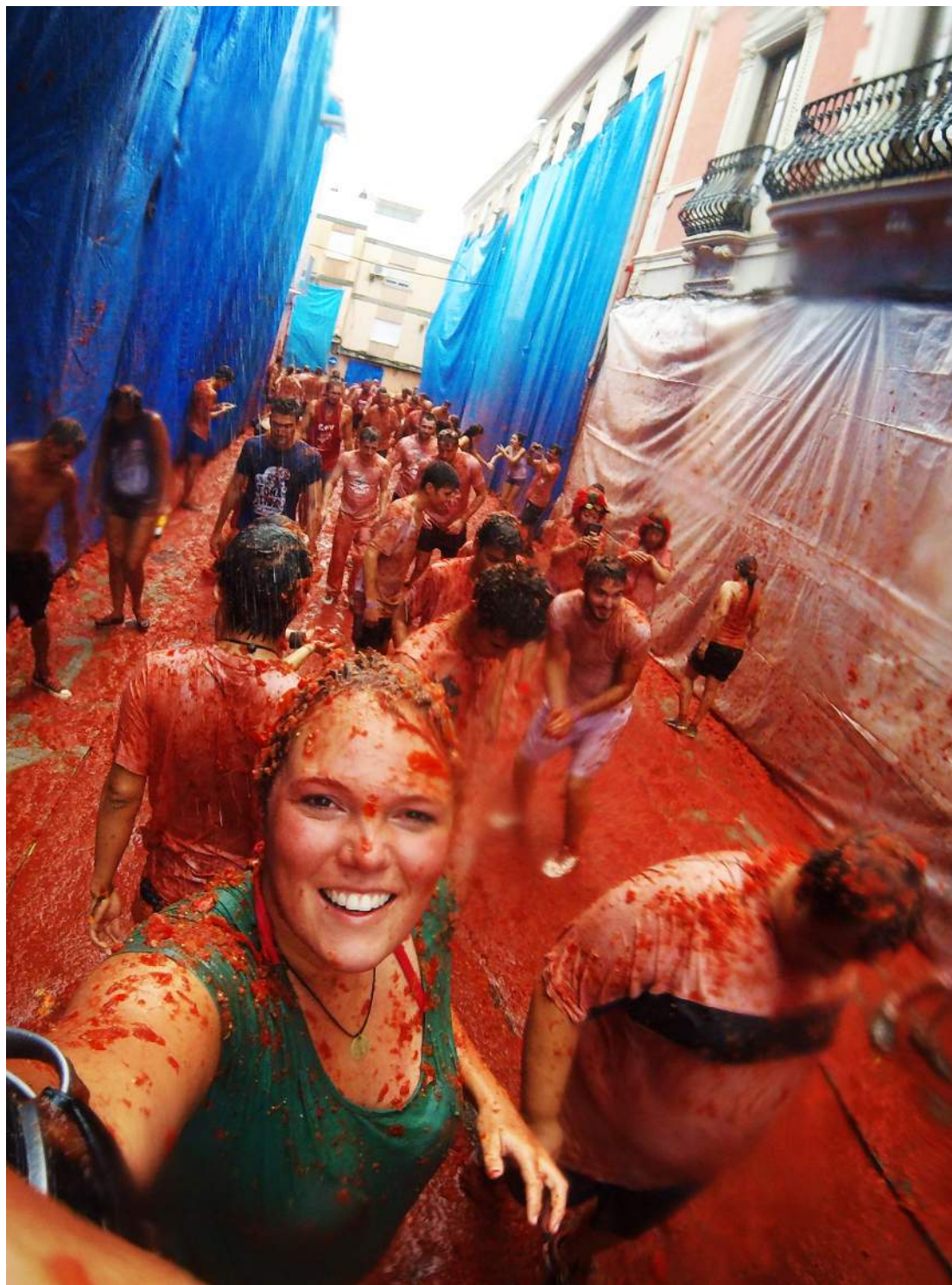
Early morning we joined the excited crowd boarding one of the frequent trains for the 40 minute journey to Bunol. Some of the crowd had even brought drinks for the train, to help them get into the festive spirit. By the time we arrived in Bunol around 06:30am people were partying, sangria was

flowing and music was pumping.

The town is zoned for the day. At 10am in Zone A/1, a ham is

placed atop a pole. People try to outdo each other, in the overcrowded mayhem, as they attempt to climb up the pole to

retrieve that ham. Once retrieved, the trucks roll in and the tomato fight can commence.







We headed to Zone B/2 where there were more side streets. Those side streets were great, for the crushing was insane and the side streets meant we could dodge down them rather than be crushed against a wall, when the trucks went past.

The tomato trucks

launched their tomatoes for an hour. One of my friends left within five minutes of the first tomato being thrown, for those tomatoes actually hurt a lot more than you expect them to. By the end of the hour long tomato fight, you are surely sick of tomatoes! What's more, after drinking litres of

sangria, everyone has a very full bladder and with huge queues for the toilets people got imaginative and initially went behind bins. But once the tomatoes started to get thrown, people ill just went where they were! So it isn't just tomatoes you are throwing!!!

The locals though

love it, protecting the buildings by lining the streets and buildings with tarpaulin and soaking tourists with hoses and buckets of water. I loved it too, returning three years later with my sister for her birthday. In case you're wondering, I loved it then too and would definitely return for round three.



## TOP TIPS

Old clothing is a must!!!! I wore a bikini under some clothes I planned to throw away. I would recommend goggles, as the tomato stings when it gets in your eyes, they also sell these when you get there so don't worry if you haven't packed

them! Also shoes- I have worn the same pair of Teva sandals both years and they are great, they have loads of grip so I wasn't sliding around in the tomatoes and have not stained at all.

If taking the train back to Valencia, they have train inspectors, assessing your level of

cleanliness to get on the train. With a queue for the showers being around an hour or so, it's far easier to buy a T-shirt and chuck the one you wore.

In 2017 we went by coach from Barcelona. This involved a 2.00am start! The coach didn't assess our level of cleanliness. They didn't

really mind what state you got back on the coach which was a relief, but we had managed to find some sneaky staff/ VIP bathrooms, that no one knew about, so completely stripped down and had a sink shower. It was amazing. We felt so clean!

## FACTS ABOUT LA TOMATINA

La Tomatina is a ticketed event. So if you plan on heading to this legendary fun event, do jump online and buy your tickets well in advance. There are some rules, including squishing the over ripe tomatoes in your hands before you throw them (apparently squished tomatoes hurt less).

According to <http://www.latomatina.org> Tens of thousands of participants come from all over the world to fight in a harmless battle where more than one hundred metric tons of over-ripe tomatoes are thrown in the streets.

The weeklong festival features music, parades, dancing, and fireworks. On the night before the tomato fight, participants of the festival compete in a paella cooking contest'. So why not plan ahead to enjoy all of the festivities, not just the tomato throwing.

## ABOUT CHARLOTTE GEEN

You can follow Charlotte and her adventurers on social media.

Blog <https://thegeenmachine.wordpress.com/>

Instagram: charlottesg123





*Laura Stockwell could be a professional time management coach. For she doesn't just know how to make the most of her weekends, she also know how to make the most of a business trip. Here she reveals all.*

## WEEKEND MAGIC

I unclipped my carabiners for the last

time, and rounded the corner to the summit, to meet Laura's grin, matching mine - "We did it! We bloody did it!"

5 minutes for photos, but we couldn't linger much longer - the last bus left in 2 hours, and it had taken us a lot longer than that to summit Mont Grona. It was a race to the bottom!

I'd met Laura two

months prior on a meet-up style walk; in a sort of girly fashion, I'd noticed her shoes, which were a kind of hybrid walking/ climbing shoe - not so typically girly. We immediately bonded over climbing, cycling, travelling and different adventures that we had done and wanted to do. (Having the same name meant also that we immediately thought the other awesome.) A recent

London import, friendly Mancunian Laura immediately slotted right in, so when I posed the idea of joining me for an adventure in Italy, she didn't think twice.

I was spending the week in Milan for work, and I wanted to take advantage of a 'free' flight to the continent, so I extended the trip to include the weekend. I didn't really know what





work, and I wanted to take advantage of a 'free' flight to the continent, so I extended the trip to include the weekend. I didn't really know what I'd do, but there were lakes and mountains nearby, so the potential to find some fun seemed pretty high. Laura booked her flights to join me on the Friday, and we started plotting.

This was done fairly

last minute, as I had just got back from a holiday in Australia, so our plotting mainly consisted of various WhatsApp messages back and forth. I was looking at Lake Maggiore to do some day hikes, possibly a bit of kayaking; Laura wasn't satisfied with this level of exertion, wanting to do some climbing. She did a bit more research, found someone's blog post describing it, and so we

settled on doing a via ferrata route up at Lake Como.

For those who haven't come across this before, via ferrata are protected climbing routes usually found in the Alps. They consist of a steel cable that is periodically secured to the rock, and is often accompanied with chains or iron rungs fixed into the rock to assist your climb. Climbers attach

themselves to the cable using a via ferrata kit that is attached to their harness. If you've done a Go-Ape course (or similar), you've done something like a via ferrata.

Laura was a confident trad\* climber, ice climber\*\* and dry tooler\*\*\* -, I had done a fair bit of climbing back in the day, and we'd also done via ferrata in various



guises, so we were feeling fairly confident we could do this, after doing some reading up of the route.

After I'd endured a week of rain in grey Milan, I was relieved to get out of the city on the Friday night and met Laura in Menaggio, a cute little town on Lake Como. We were pleased to see the clouds clearing

we bussed up to Breglia the next day, and the start of our hike.

We couldn't get over what a gorgeous day it was, and had constant grins on our faces. As we hiked up the steep mountain for two hours to the refuge, the Refugio Menaggio.

Walking into the refuge at ten thirty we

were greeted by the most delicious smells - a red-wine infused stew was being prepared for hikers wanting sustenance after their climb. It was so tempting to linger there, looking over the incredible views of Lake Como and the surrounding snow-capped mountains, but for us, the refuge was really just the start, for we

had a mountain to climb! A quick espresso and a chat with the staff about the route, and off we went!

Another 15 minutes of hiking and we were at the start of the via ferrata.

I have to say standing at the base of the via ferrata climb and looking up at it, I was super nervous. For





despite us being competent climbers, I don't think either of us had just pitched up at an unknown crag before and just climbed. This would be a first.

Why were we unsure? Was it because we were two women? We both knew that this was a silly thought - guys do this sort of thing all the time! We were fairly intelligent and sensible women. We had the experience and we had good weather. Laura's confidence won me over (the many years she'd spent as a school teacher probably had something to with it) and with her leading, off we went.

Well, we couldn't get the inane grins off our faces. We got into a rhythm of clipping and unclipping the two carabiners that were attached to our harnesses, to the cable that was bolted into the rock. There were also chains bolted in that we could pull ourselves up with, but the climbing was easy enough that these weren't really needed. (Except at one point with an overhang - Laura's pack proved to be a bit too heavy, so we created a quick pulley system with a spare carabiner and some rope I'd spontaneously bought when I'd bought my helmet.)

But the grins were not just for the climbing - the incredible views around us, where we could now see two lakes, as well as the widening vista of mountains as we increased our altitude. And the fact that we were really doing this - a random idea for









an adventure that actually became a reality.

And then we hit a snag.

We had just finished another pitch and were reveling on how brilliant it was all going, when these two men across the valley yelled at us for our attention. I recognised them as the only other people who were on the via ferrata, and had been well ahead of us earlier - one guy had some very recognisable orange trousers on. They had clearly finished and were walking down the path on the other side of the valley. "Do you have a rope?", one of them asked in a strongly accented shout. What then followed was a bit of confused shouting, but the gist was that they were saying that we needed to leave the route as we didn't have a rope (and were silly little English girls who didn't know better). It was very dangerous! (Apparently.)

Laura and I were a little stumped; Orange Trousers also looked like he was about to walk across the valley to personally escort us down the mountain. To buy ourselves some time to think, we indicated that we were stopping for lunch. We took out our sandwiches and eventually, they headed over the ridge and out of sight.

Munching on our cheese & tomato rolls,

we debated what to do. Do we take an exit route, one of which was right by us, or do we continue up? Now, we had chatted to the staff in the refuge, and all they'd said was to be a bit careful in the shadowy parts as there may still be snow, and there would be snowmelt on the rock. So these guys saying we should leave the climb seemed a bit odd, particularly when they had clearly just summited.

Eventually, logic but mainly FOMO (fear of missing out), won - we would regret it if these guys' words put us off for no good reason, and if we hadn't run into them, we would have carried on regardless and would have had to deal with whatever was waiting for us up there.

We carried on, but now with a bit of fear marring the enjoyment of it all. I could feel the tiredness in my arms,







not being as fit or young as the other Laura, and it all started messing with my mind. After another couple of pitches and the snow appearing thicker on the ground, I stopped again when I saw another exit route. "Maybe we should take the exit here?" I said, eyeing up the next vertical pitch with snow melt streaming down it, the Italian climbers' words echoing in my head. Laura said she'd

support whatever I wanted to do but I could tell she was keen to go all the way to the summit. Once again the thought of not completing something I'd set out to do egged me on, so I quieted the petulant child in my head and put my climbing shoes back on.

By this stage, we'd spent so much time faffing around, we were running out of

time to get back in time for the last bus. We'd found getting around these parts a bit tricky without our own car, and it being the off-season, transport options were few and far between for us to get back the hostel we'd booked into for the Saturday night in Menaggio. So the last few pitches were a bit of a blur as we hauled ourselves up the chains without thinking too hard about the

climbing.

When we got to the top, it was a mixture of relief, joy and a bit of regret that I'd allowed irrational worry to spoil what was an otherwise incredible day. It turned out that those men were trying to tell us to take a particular route down the mountain, which was actually the only obvious route down with the current snowfall. Why they had



to turn it into such a drama, I don't know.

But it was a good lesson for us in listening to our guts, and to trust in our experience and skills. We still had a brilliant day, enjoying the sunshine and being outdoors, celebrating ourselves and cementing a friendship, topped off with a crazy run down the mountain.

And yes, we did manage to get that last bus home.

## SOME CLIMBING TERMINOLOGY

\*trad or traditional climbing: this type of climbing is done by placing gear into the rock to which you attach your rope. The gear is later pulled out of the rock either by the second person up the route, or on descent of the route


\*\* ice climbing: climbing walls of ice, where instead of gripping the surface with your hands, you use pickaxes to secure yourself

## CLIMBING EXPERIENCE:

**Laura Stockwell (age 37) - the author:** My university boyfriend taught me to rock climb (it was that or never see him), and so I spent many a weekend away at the crags. Studying in Stellenbosch in South Africa meant that we had hundreds of climbing routes just a few hours' drive away, in glorious settings. I've taken newbies out to try their first rocking climbing experiences, been mugged whilst at the crag, and climbed outdoors in Australia.

**Laura Illingworth (age 31)** - always had a love of the outdoors and started her climbing career at university in Leeds. When living in Australia, she climbed in the Blue Mountains, and spent two years supervising students at a climbing wall, where she gained a level 3 Australian qualification in abseiling. Not minding the cold, that much, she has also completed a 9 day course in New Zealand learning the basics of mountaineering. Since coming back to the UK 2 years ago, she has found herself gripping on to lots of grit and clocked up a 100 trad routes in the UK. This has been put to use by ice climbing in Norway and rocking up to dry tool in various locations in the UK.



A hiker with a large pink backpack and blue jacket is climbing a rocky trail in a misty forest. The hiker is wearing a red beanie and grey sneakers. In the background, another hiker is visible on the trail.

# FINDING ONESELF ON MOUNT KINABALU

**BY CLARE  
JOHNSON**

## **THE MOTIVATION**

I wish my decision to move to Malaysia had started with a much more exciting spark, like I'd won the lottery, or I'd had to escape, or I was whisked away by a Malaysian millionaire on horseback along a beautiful tropical beach. Nope. I was dumped by my fiancé. Like thousands perhaps millions of other people around the world, now my life had been turned upside down due to a traumatic experience, I just wanted to run away. I craved that ability to wipe the slate clean and erase all that pain I'd been through. For me without a doubt, I had shelved my hunger to travel and see the world for someone I loved, because I'd thought it was the right thing to do.



Now it was time to be bloody petrified and brave in making my own decisions for the first time in a while. Hence I used my mortgage and wedding fund to travel India and Israel, before embarking on my new life in Kuala Lumpur working as a teacher.

I landed. Unpacked my bags. Made a cup of tea (you can take the girl out of Britain). Opened my laptop and researched 'Top things to do in Malaysia.' I have a tendency never to be content unless I have some goal or challenge to work towards, and now being in a new country was the perfect opportunity to continue this tradition. Having already been to South East Asia some years before, I'd visited enough temples and been threatened by too many monkeys and aggressive market sellers to want more of that. Instead I wanted something completely new. I wanted a physical challenge to

prove I could really do it. And here was the answer, number 3 on my results list; climb Mount Kinabalu. Surely climbing a little mountain wouldn't be that hard, right?

## THE CLIMB

A few months later I was finally in Kota Kinabalu. I could not

sleep a wink that night for all the overthinking and asking myself what will it be like? Would it be weird just being me with the guide? What if he didn't like my jokes? It could be one long awkward two-day hike.

I still felt anxious as I waited outside my hotel for my ride to the park headquarters. There an excited and enthusiastic man with

the clipboard looked allocated the guides. When it was my turn he looked down his list to see who I'd been paired up with. "Ah you have Safrey! Very good guide." Now this felt awesome, a real cracking start. Then a tiny skinny rake of a man popped up munching on a whole packet of chocolate Oreos. Hmmm, maybe I should have booked that trip to the Elephant Sanctuary in Thailand instead.

After another transfer to Timpohon Gate (1,800m 5,986 feet), Safrey and I started our ascent. The plan was to reach Panalban (3,273m or 10,738 feet) where we would spend the night before going to the summit 4095m 13,435 feet point in time for sunrise. At Timpohon Gate I noticed the bustling, exciting atmosphere. With a clear crystal view of Mount Kinabalu on the horizon people's faces had brightened up and now glowed. Mine certainly did.





We showed our passes and details then walked along the pathway leading up to the first incline.

As Safrey and I walked side by side, I noticed more and more guides and climbers kept smiling and acknowledging his presence. Most kept saying to me 'Good guide! Good guide!' What on earth were they talking about? Curiosity prevailed and I asked him why everyone kept talking about him. As I asked we reached a painted wooden sign, with names of the Mountain Running Champions of 2016; Safrey was number one with a winning time of 2 hours and 21 minutes. He simply pointed and smiled. At that point, I definitely

wished I climbed a few more stairs in training.

Some rain had been forecast and came, so the rocks and steps underfoot were fairly slippery, but in my hiking boots I was fine. In fact with every step I took forward and up, my anxiety vanished. I felt exhilarated as I basked in the wonderful scenery and beauty that surrounded me. Watching water trickling from the overhanging vines and falling on my cheeks as I stepped up was pure magic. Having lived in Kuala Lumpur, I was used to hearing the noise of a city. But here the only sounds I heard were peaceful and tranquil, the singing of birds.

We walked and lunged up steps, boulders and tree roots. My thighs burned and my forehead sweated. As hard as it got, my wonderful guide, the exquisite scenery, and the fascinating people I met along the way kept me going.

I loved talking to my guide about how he started his career. He'd been working on Mount Kinabalu for twelve years. Initially he delivered items to accommodation and stop off points along the way, next he worked as a porter carrying climbers' personal bags to the top, and then finally, he became a guide. As we trekked up I saw men carrying iron girders and buckets of bricks,





some even barefoot, to various locations along the way. Those men had feet of steel. It made me think of the journey my guide had taken over those twelve years.

As we neared the accommodation at Panalaban where we would spend the night, I could almost taste the ice cold can of beer that sat in the fridge in the café. "Last 500 metres to go" said Safrey. Excellent. Piece of cake. I took a few steps forward on the horizontal ground to see that it quickly changed to a 55° degree angle walk up. Every step felt like a hot poker jabbing me in

my buttocks. I focused really hard on my breathing and keeping to a slow pace to minimize any risk of altitude sickness or dizziness. Despite that 55° degree angle of those last metres, I loved every single step I took as I walked slowly alongside the 2016 Mountain Running Champion.

Safrey told me to sleep plenty that night and to meet him at 2.15am the next morning. I quickly dumped my stuff, put on a pair of flip flops, bought two cans of beer and sat on the balcony without moving for hours. Watching clouds encase the cliffs and trees was

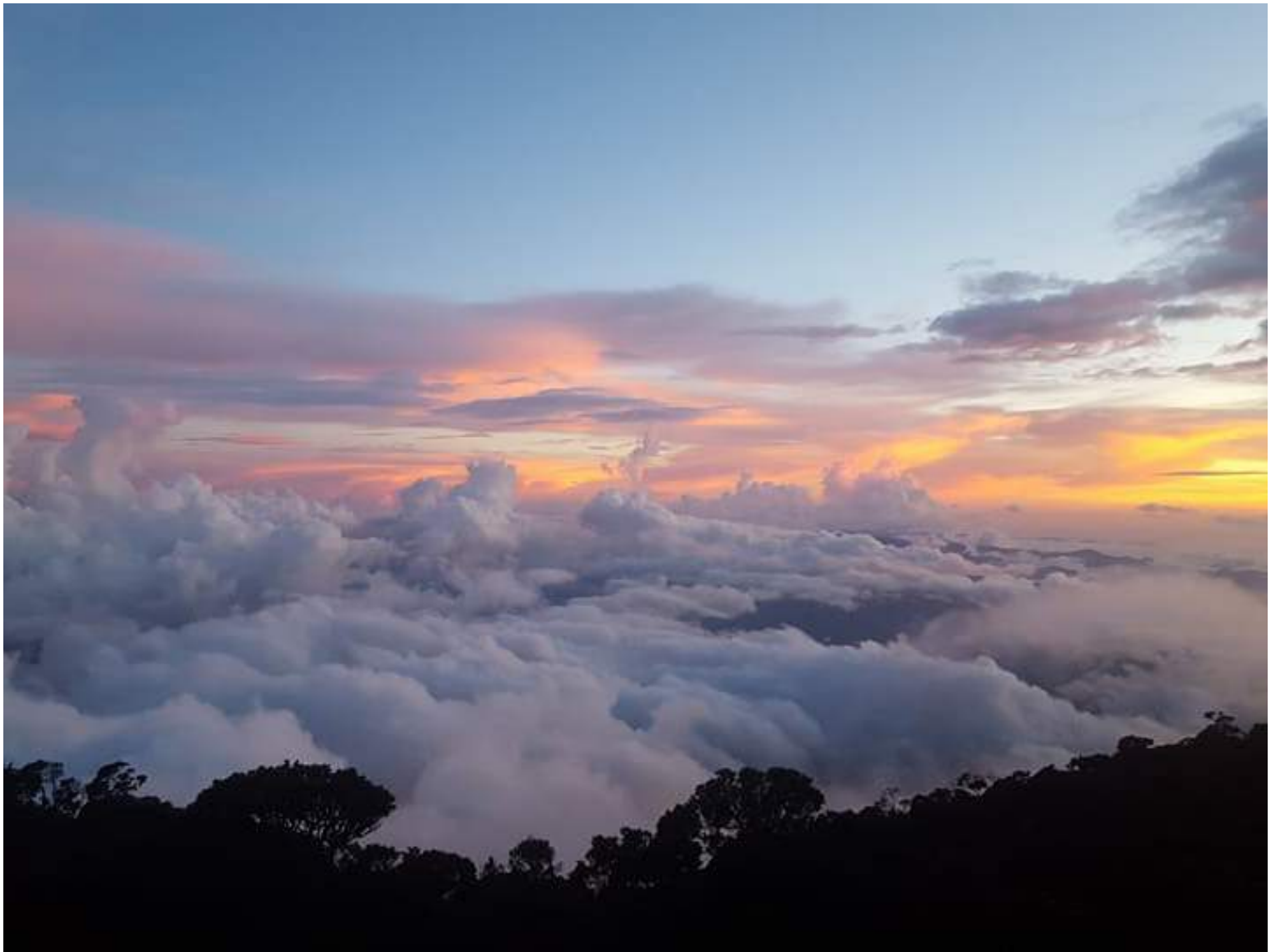
breath-taking, feeling the damp air moisten my skin, and seeing the sky transform colours before my eyes was pure heaven. It felt so right to be there at that point taking it all in. After two cans of beer and a stomach filling buffet dinner, I prepped all of my gear and tucked into bed to try and have at least 5 hours' sleep. Alas the incessant snoring of a Japanese climber sharing my dorm room meant 5 hours sleep became wishful thinking.

## SUMMIT DAY

1.30am. The alarm rang. I couldn't even open my eyes, but







the snoring Japanese climber was already dressed and raring to go. Good for you, mate! Realized where I was and what I was about to do, I quickly brightened up, washed and changed into my climbing gear. Trying to stomach breakfast was incredibly difficult, but I knew that I would need all of my energy to climb the final leg of Mount Kinabalu.

I met Safrey at the scheduled 2.15am. We had 3 hours to reach the summit in time for the sunrise. It was pitch black outside, and with only a head torch to help us see, I knew that this would be my biggest challenge on the trip.

Each climber had met their guide and would climb the same wooden stairway that took us to the first set of rocks.

Itching to get past the cautious climbers, Safrey quickly over-and under-took many climbers with me following behind so that we could get past.

As we climbed I really could not see a thing except for the twinkling of lights that came from individual head torches within the blackness. Every now and then there would be a



piece of rope to use and for support on the steep ascent. Whenever anyone wandered off where they weren't supposed to, every guide within a 100 metre radius would bombard them shouting "No! Follow the rope!" There was no escape.

At times Safrey checked if I wanted to stop for a break.

"Nope, let's keep going!" I did not want to stop. The adrenaline rush felt so empowering that I didn't want to take a break for one moment until I reached the top. I can remember the rhythm of my breathing with the pounding of my feet. Safrey stayed back as I think he sensed I wanted to do this by myself. With other

climbers looking like fireflies climbing the mountain, I kept following their trail as we raced to be there in time for sunrise.

We arrived. I was sweaty, achy and exhausted. I still couldn't see anything except the lights of the city and town thousands of metres below. My numerous layers of clothes were

not quite enough for the damp shivering I felt. Safrey told me to find somewhere to wait and watch the sunrise. I huddled by myself on a boulder and tried to think of every possible way I could warm up my body; if only they had cups of tea up there.

All of a sudden, that glaring red light shone across the rocks and







sky. The deep black sky morphed into colours of pink, yellow, orange and blue. I witnessed the clouds and mountain transform into a completely different place that I didn't realize I had

hiked up. I felt burning in my stomach and the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. Everyone just sat and watched in awe and was completely transfixed by the sheer beauty they were

witnessing. Those climbers who hadn't quite made it in time quickened their pace so they could catch what was left of the sunrise.

I sat there in silence,

thinking about who I was and who I had become. It only hit me that at that point, on the 30th August 2017 at 6.02am, that it was exactly a year to the day since my relationship had





# You are Successful Climbers

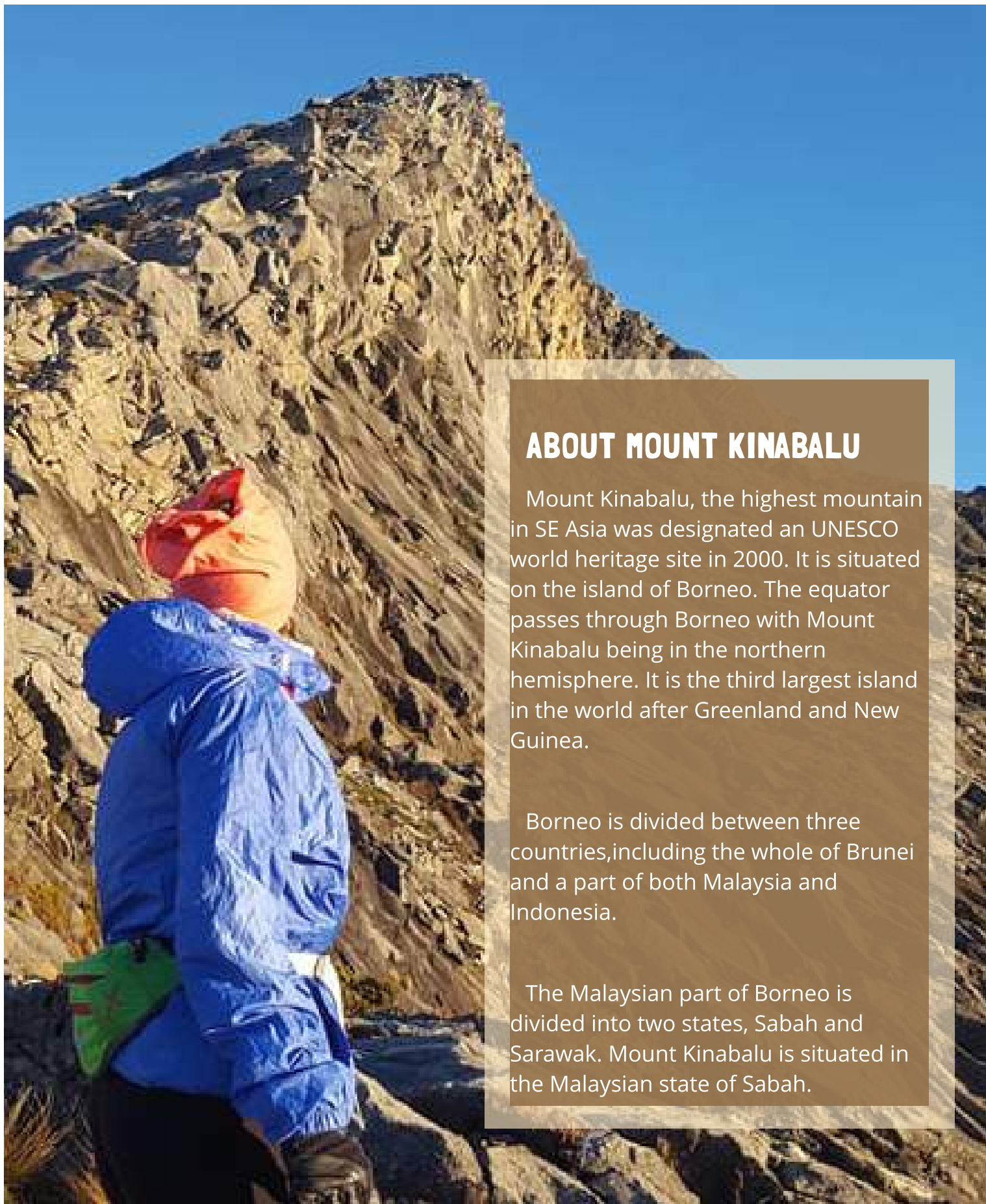
ended. I hadn't even realized before. Funny how life works in that way. To tell the truth, I didn't realize how truly happy and content I was with my life until now.

With the sun blazing and feeling the it's warmth on my face, we made our way back to the very bottom where I had first met Safrey. After getting a quick selfie with his name on the Mountain Running Championship board, I showed my utmost gratitude by giving him the one present I thought he would really cherish and appreciate; a packet of Oreos.

In a way, I went back down that mountain a different person. I no longer wanted to doubt myself but to grasp every opportunity I was offered. I just needed to climb a mountain to realize that fact.







## ABOUT MOUNT KINABALU

Mount Kinabalu, the highest mountain in SE Asia was designated an UNESCO world heritage site in 2000. It is situated on the island of Borneo. The equator passes through Borneo with Mount Kinabalu being in the northern hemisphere. It is the third largest island in the world after Greenland and New Guinea.

Borneo is divided between three countries, including the whole of Brunei and a part of both Malaysia and Indonesia.

The Malaysian part of Borneo is divided into two states, Sabah and Sarawak. Mount Kinabalu is situated in the Malaysian state of Sabah.





Next time we hope to bring you the features outlined below and much much more. Remember, please do send us your comments, questions and suggestions, for the team at *Adventure She* really hope this magazine adds value to your life.

WE LOOK FROWARD TO SEEING YOU ON 21 SEPTEMBER







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