

INTERVIEW WITH HOLLY BUDGE BY MOLLY MOORE

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British adventurer, Holly Budge, has two world records under her belt so far. In 2008, she became the first woman to skydive Mount Everest. The following year, she was among the first to race semi-wild horses 1000 km across Mongolia, in the longest horse race in the world.

She works as a big mountain expedition leader and last year successfully led the 'Summit Climb 2016 Expedition' on the technical climb, Ama Dablam (6812m), in the Himalayas.

Other climbing achievements include summiting Cho-Oyu (8201m), Baruntse (7129m) and snowboarding from the summit of Mera Peak (6476m) in Nepal. More recently, she made a successful first ascent in the Mongolian Altai Mountains.

Please tell us about the best adventure you've had in the last 18 months...

I wouldn't say it was the outright best but it was definitely up there! Last summer I made a successful first ascent of an unnamed mountain (4000m) in the Altai Mountains, in Western Mongolia. It's a wonderful liberation to go where no one has gone before! It was not without its challenges though. We had to carry out a long medical evacuation for a crush wound to one of our team mates legs, we had to battle precarious boulder fields, extremely steep virgin snowy slopes, huge exposure and avalanche risk. It was a great achievement to reach the top and more importantly, return safely!

We have applied to name the peak 'Mount Zuchi', which was the name of Ghengis Khan's first born son and the word means 'guest'. Two thirds of the world's mountains remain unclimbed so this is an avenue I am keen to continue exploring.

Wow, sounds incredible! So, what's next?

As I write this, I am in Tibet acclimatising at 4300m, in preparation for my next big adventure – climbing to the summit of Mount Everest (8848m). Whilst this is not a new feat, it is still a true test of strength and endurance. The innovation for me lies in the latest cutting edge, lightweight, and portable technology that will allow me to broadcast video and photos, everyday of the expedition, to social media using my hashtag #EverestEveryday.

My coverage will be raw and spontaneous, allowing an intimate insight into the world of big mountain climbing. As yet, no one has stood on the summit of Mount Everest and streamed live to social media. A broad spectrum of emotions will be seen, from grueling hardship to total euphoria. Over the next 60 days, I will reveal the tenacity, grit, determination and self-belief needed to achieve my goal of reaching the summit of the world's highest mountain.

We will make sure we are watching every step of the way! What do you think is really exciting in the world of adventure at the moment?

In the words of @OutsideMagazine "The Future of Adventure is Female", this is the slogan of their current magazine to celebrate their 40th anniversary. I think this is hugely exciting that female adventurers are being independently recognised and acknowledged for their talents and achievements. Using the lens of mountaineering, women are fantastic endurance athletes because

we've kind of had that built into us. I think we're incredibly tough creatures and much tougher than some necessarily give themselves credit for.

You can say that again! What would you say to anyone who is settling for what they do, rather than doing what they believe in?

Act now. Get out there and give it a go! Put in the time beforehand to get physically prepared so you know you can give it your best shot. Having the mental ability to push yourself and being able to rationalise when your body is saying NO but your mind is screaming YES is half the battle! I describe myself as 'sort of pretty normal', with a down-to-earth approach to life. I do not consider myself to have a greater physical advantage than most but what I do have is a very strong self-belief and determination. Live with purpose and confidence, embrace fear to help overcome obstacles and encourage the role of leadership. My message is simple: **Think Big, Dream Bigger.**

Wise words from a wise woman. For you, what does adventure bring which enriches your soul and makes you happy?

Life in the mountains is without clutter, every piece of equipment has a role, every object has a place and thoughts have purpose. A lot of us want to simplify our lives. This is stripping it down to the absolute bare bones of what I need, and as I've got to carry that on my back, it's got to be essential. Everything you need to survive is on you, or in your backpack. It's just constantly thinking about surviving, and that's it. There's no room for thinking about anything else but the task at hand and that's the reason why I love mountaineering, it's a very simple life.

What are you doing for yourself right now, which is just to improve your adventure?

On the first few mountains I climbed in the Himalayas I didn't really do much training. I pretty much relied on my base fitness. On reflection, that was pretty arrogant and in fact, ignorant. The turning point came when I climbed Ama Dablam [6812m] in Nepal last October [2016] and it just totally kicked my arse. I hadn't trained enough for it. Ama Dablam is a technical mountain, with rock climbing to 6000 metres and then mixed climbing right up to the summit. It was a 24-hour summit push. It was technical and at times, hardcore. By the end of it, I was hallucinating and my body was pretty shot.

When I got back I vowed that wouldn't happen again. That's when I joined a dedicated training programme for Everest called, Uphill Athlete. I have been training six days a week and I've had a personal trainer twice a week in the run up to Everest. My nutrition is much better. Before I was just eating for the sake of eating, now I'm eating to fuel my body and I've just got so much more energy. There's this expression, 'train hard, fight easy,' but what I realise is, you've got to train hard, and regardless of who you are, on any big mountain, you've got to fight hard.

So determined, we love it! What is the top piece of advice you would pass on to a woman travelling independently?

Travelling alone is a fantastic, liberating, empowering and unique way of meeting new people and experiencing life in a way you may not whilst travelling with the comfort and security of friends or a tour company. The sense of freedom and independence is gold. However, it would be naïve to think it is without danger. I have found myself in several situations, as a blonde westerner, where I haven't always felt comfortable!

One occasion that springs to mind was during a 1000kms horse race across Mongolia, I was lost, alone and met some male locals on their horses as I was riding INTO the mountains. I thought that wasn't going to go so well for me given the remoteness and the enormity of the landscape but thankfully I never saw them again! So my advice would be – be strong, be brave, be calm, be sensible.

What are the most important questions you think a woman can ask herself in life?

If not now, when? If not you, who?

What are the three biggest lessons adventure has taught you?

- 1. Be prepared to step out of your comfort zone** – Life in the mountains is not for the faint hearted! Everyday is a personal challenge and a reward. Keeping warm and in good health are up there but it's the little things like feeling constantly grubby, putting grubby clothes back on after you do finally shower, seeing wetwipes as gold, ridiculously bad hair days, split & broken nails, trying to accurately pee in a bottle in the tent in darkness, eating hairy spam.... A positive mindset & an acceptance that nothing is luxurious or even comfortable at times is essential but the rewards are huge! The views, the fresh clean air, the midday sunshine are all spectacular BUT for me, the reward is knowing you can do it, knowing you can live for long periods of time very simply, without materialistic needs or big comforts and pushing yourself in ways you wouldn't have thought possible before! Learning, growing & experiencing a whole different you is the biggest reward.
- 2. Be grateful for the simple things** – It's a wonderful thing when wifi is absent and all that remains is people and place. I have a fond memory of myself, a group of climbers, sherpas, porters and local men, women & children in a remote village in the Himalayas, playing a game with a pile of rocks. The rules were simple. How far can you throw the rock. The game lasted for about 3 hours, it's transcended language and gender barriers and brought laughter, friendship and equality. By the end, half of the village were playing or watching! Embrace and cherish the simple things!
- 3. Get your priorities straight** – In this order, Safety, Friendship, Success. I try and live by these three rules of climbing, both on and off the mountain. You take good care of yourself and others, you cherish and nurture your friends and family, and then, you go to the top of that mountain! Friendship and safety come way higher on my list of priorities than success or failure.

Thank you so much Holly for taking the time to speak with us.

To discover more about Holly Budge visit www.hollybudge.com or follow her on Instagram www.instagram.com/hollybudge, and her journey at #EverestEveryday. Information on her 'How