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Women in Sustainability: Holly Budge –  
Adventurer, Conservationist



Ahead of our **joint event** (<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/wins-bristol-womens-adventure-expo-tickets-46692875648>) with Women's Adventure Expo on 12th July in Bristol – Risk & Courage: Why adventures, little & large as essential for every women, we're delighted to interview Holly Budge for our 'Women in Sustainability' series.

We challenge you not to feel super inspired after reading her story below...

**1. As a change maker within your industry, tell us a bit more about your background?**

I started life as an adventurer at an early age and spent a lot of my childhood in the outdoors. When I 21, I did my first skydive whilst backpacking round New Zealand and was blown away by the experience and the fact that people were getting paid to jump out of aeroplanes for a living. My career's advisor at school definitely hadn't mentioned that as a possible career path! I decided there and then, that was the job I wanted. Six months later, with lots of training, dedication and hard work, I achieved my rather far fetched goal and became the third woman to work as a freefall camera woman in Lake Taupo. On reflection, I refer to this as the 'arrogance of youth' (arrogance meant in a positive way) as when I set myself this goal, I knew nobody in New Zealand,

I knew nothing about skydiving and I knew nothing about filming but none of that mattered. I knew I could learn all the skills I needed to get the job. This gave me immense confidence and self belief that I can try and achieve whatever I set my mind too.

Following on with this mindset, I have two world records under my belt so far, including being the first woman to skydive Everest and race semi-wild horses 1000 kms across Mongolia in just nine days. More recently my passion for adventure and conservation have started to align. Last year I summited Mount Everest to raise awareness and funds for wildlife conservation. To date, I have raised helped £300k for various projects.

Three years ago I graduated with a masters in Sustainable Design and this opened up a world of possibility, knowledge and creativity. I now use my adventures as a platform to talk about environmental and social issues. My award-winning charity '**How Many Elephants** (<http://www.howmanyelephants.com>)' was born.

Last month I immersed myself with the Black Mambas, the first all female front-line anti poaching team in South Africa and documented the work of these inspiring and courageous women on film. I aim to inspire women globally by showing real life case studies of ordinary women who achieve extraordinary things in traditional male roles. The Black Mambas are a great example of this and are one of the projects How Many Elephants is supporting right now. Next year, I am planning to hike the Great Wall of China in it's entirety of 3000 miles to humbly carry out research into how elephant ivory fits into their culture and their deep rooted traditions and beliefs. Why? I'm curious and I'm passionate. I believe passion has the power to make a change, personally, locally and globally.

## **2. What are the challenges you've had to overcome to get you where you are today and how did you address them?**

Listening to the naysayers who told me I lacked direction and purpose. Being an entrepreneur is tough, there is often no road map and sometimes this is hard to convey to others. It can be lonely too. I sometimes felt like I was hitting my head against a brick wall and not making any progress but a small voice inside kept whispering 'keep going'. I did keep going and then started picking up momentum. Now I receive public recognition for my work very regularly and I've learnt to be proud of the life I lead; being entrepreneurial, being an alpha female and living an 'unconventional' life, rich in purpose, experience and passion.

## **3. What would you do differently if you could?**

I do what I love and love what I do. I wouldn't change anything about my journey so far.

## **4. What keeps you motivated and positive when things get tough?**

I'm going to answer this questions looking through the lens of mountaineering.

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 wash, valuing wetwipes like gold, ridiculously bad hair days, split and broken nails, trying to accurately pee in a bottle in the tent in darkness, eating hairy spam and the list goes on.... A positive mindset and an acceptance that nothing is perfect, normal or even comfortable at times is essential, however, the rewards are huge! The views, the fresh clean air, the intense 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 familiar comforts and pushing yourself in ways you wouldn't have thought possible before. Learning, growing and experiencing new things is my biggest reward.

## **5. What advice would you give women who want to have more adventure in their lives?**

Think big, dream bigger and go climb your Everest, whatever that might be. Put in the time beforehand to get physically and mentally prepared so you know you can give it your best shot. I describe myself as 'sort of pretty normal', with a down-to-earth approach to life, and I do not consider myself to have a greater physical or mental advantage than most, so that begs the question – if not you, who? If not now, when? Act now.

## **6. How important is the ability to take risks and to have courage to living a full and flourishing life?**

Having the ability to push yourself and being able to rationalise when your body is screaming NO but your mind is whispering yes is a great skill to hone and nurture. Having the ability to listen to your body and you're gut feeling is also so important in living a full and flourishing life.

The mantra I try and live by everyday is to learn new things often, to push myself to be my best self and to know I feel most alive when I am making a difference and having a positive impact on people and the planet.

## **7. Who inspires you and why?**

I'm constantly inspired by people who are following their passions. This takes courage.

More information is available at [www.hollybudge.com](http://www.hollybudge.com) and [www.howmanyelephants.com](http://www.howmanyelephants.com)

To hear Holly speak, join us in Bristol on 12th July – Event information and tickets [here](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/wins-bristol-womens-adventure-expo-tickets-46692875648) (<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/wins-bristol-womens-adventure-expo-tickets-46692875648>).



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Posted on 6th July 2018, Categorised in: [Article](http://womeninsustainability.co.uk/category/article) (<http://womeninsustainability.co.uk/category/article>)

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