THE CAMPFIRE

British Exploring Society Members Magazine

Summer 2021

"...doing a BES expedition has never not been an option for my siblings and me; because the skills and experiences gained on expedition are invaluable..."

Flora Nicholls, Young Explorer 2021



CONNECTION CELEBRATION CONTRIBUTION

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SUMMER EDITION

Welcome to the Summer edition of The Campfire.

As we collate this edition, we have just completed our first face-to-face Young Explorer training in nearly two years. The training weekend was filled with the buzz of excitement from British Exploring Society staff, Leaders and young people alike – all delighted, finally, to be able to come together for outdoor adventures.

Do you remember your training weekend? The excitement or trepidation of meeting your Fire and maybe trying ration packs for the first time? Were you asked to pitch a tent while blindfolded or carry a 'casualty' down a steep slope? In a few weeks, the first of our five summer 2021 expeditions to the Scottish Highlands will be departing and we look forward to bringing you news of these, in the Autumn edition of *The Campfire*.

Meanwhile, in this edition, James Dyer reviews his 'desert island' book; we have the expedition experiences of the Nicholls family; the story of Member and photographer, Neil Langan and an exciting ennouncement from Belinda Kirk. There is also your invitation to our next Fireside Talk, Access All Areas, and you can learn about the changing needs of our Young Explorers. Finally, there is the opportunity to claim one of our branded enamel mugs, if you can reconnect us with lost members, and Chris Thorp and Chris Grace provide some handy tips to get you started.

We would like to thank all of our Members, who have generously shared their stories and photographs and made this edition possible.

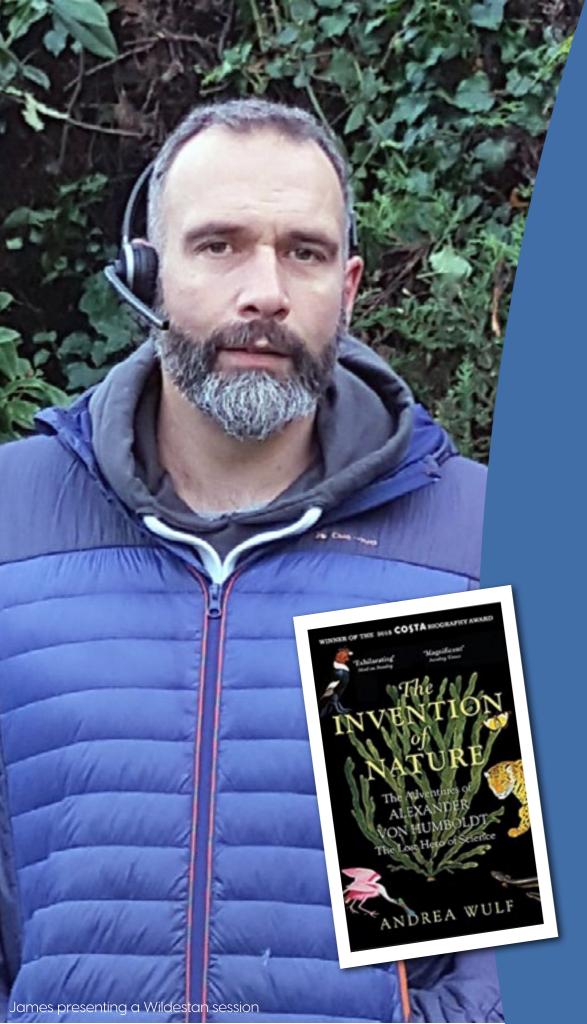
Finally, I should introduce myself. I am Abigail Huntington, the new Membership Officer at British Exploring Society. Like you, I am a Member – I was a Young Explorer on the expedition to Arctic Norway in 1989 (known as Abs Spencer, Geikie Fire, for anyone trying to place me).

It may have taken over 30 years (and a bit of social-distancing) but I have finally visited the attic offices at the RGS and can confirm that everyone is as friendly, welcoming and eager to hear your expedition memories as we have always been told. I am really looking forward to connecting with more of you in the coming months, celebrating your stories and working with you to contribute to membership and the mission of the charity.

So, please don't be shy; dig out those photos and expedition diaries and drop us an email or give us a call. We really would love to hear from you.







BOOK REVIEW: THE INVENTION OF NATURE

James Dyer, Chief Leader and Wildestan Expert, reviews his 'desert island' book, The Invention of Nature: The Adventures of Alexander Von Humboldt, The Lost Hero of Science.

A naturalist; explorer; adventurer; gentleman traveller; ecologist; conservationist; philosopher; politician; advisor and friend to Kings, revolutionaries and Presidents; geologist; writer; botanist; zoologist; anti-slavery advocate; the list goes on and on.

Von Humboldt was the ultimate polymath, someone who not only had an interest in many subjects, but also had a deep knowledge of them. A polymath is recognised as someone who has breadth of knowledge, depth of knowledge and, most importantly, is able to integrate this knowledge, finding links and connections from their broadness. Von Humboldt did this, probably more than anyone else in history!

Alexander Von Humboldt was an 18th century-born explorer and scientist, who travelled the world, developing his own theories on nature, evolution and the interaction and integration of the planet. His ideas have shaped future developments in these areas and inspired thousands of people, including a star-struck Charles Darwin (who he met in England on 29th January 1842) and John Muir who devoured Humboldt's books, using them to help develop his own thinking about the natural world and leading to the foundation of the National Parks movement.

Fundamentally, Von Humboldt changed the very way that we perceive and study nature. His ideas, his explorations, and his books (especially 'Cosmos') have laid the modern scientific foundations for our understanding of what nature is and how it works.

Andrea Wulf's The Invention of Nature is a thrilling ride through Von Humboldt's life, full of jaw dropping moments where you realise how influential his thinking was and how astounding

his travels were - through South America in the time of Simon Bolivar, across Russia in a horse and carriage, to the USA to talk with President Jefferson, climbing Chimborazo in Ecuador, to assisting Friedrich Wilhelm III as a peace envoy to Paris in 1807. This book, without exaggerating, is a true rollercoaster, you almost need to find time to breathe! Revisiting the book for this review has brought my original views and feelings flooding back.

Humboldt went out of fashion during the 20th century, but this book is an opportunity, a real call to arms, to rethink his influence and achievements and relate them to the future of the planet. It's also an opportunity to be inspired by him and to gaze in awe at what he managed to undertake within his lifetime, considering the limits he faced in terms of technology, transport, political understanding and religious thinking. Wulf challenges us to reclaim Humboldt for the 21st century and to remember that no other person has so many living things named after them; from the Humboldt penguin to the Humboldt lilv, he has over 100 animals and 300 plants named after him, along with minerals, rivers, national parks, towns, lakes, streets, glaciers, and a whole area of the Moon!

For me, if I were ever stranded on a desert island, I would want this book in my rucksack. You can re-read it thousands of times and it still grips you, inspires and educates.

Have you read a book that might inspire our Members? Why not write a short review and send it to us. We would love to include it in a future edition of *The Campfire*.



FIVE GO ON EXPEDITION

Young Explorer, Flora Nicholls, describes how British Exploring Society has become part of the family.

Somewhere in a dusty corner of the attic in the Nicholls' house, there sits one of our families' most well loved, and certainly well travelled, possessions. A large, British Exploring Society branded holdall, which has travelled over the world with members of our family, as they set off on BES adventures, for well over a decade. The name of my oldest brother, Duncan Nicholls, is written clearly, but now the 'Duncan' is crossed out and above is written 'Cameron', which again in turn is crossed out and replaced with 'Alasdair'. This summer, I hope to cross off my youngest brother's name and, like my brothers before, write down my name as I head off on my very own British Exploring

Society expedition, which will be the fifth time a Nicholls has been on a BES expedition.

My family's involvement with British Exploring Society actually began 40 years ago, when my great-uncle, Tony Duncan, became a BES Leader and travelled to Arctic Norway with the organisation.

Since then, BES expeditions have not been uncommon in my outdoor-loving family, with Tony's children all completing their own BES expeditions. Some 20 years later, my oldest brother, Duncan, rediscovered the organisation and only a few months later, found himself on a plane to Delhi to begin his own adventure.

Duncan joined the 2010 Indian Himalayas expedition, and spent 5 incredible weeks doing a variety of activities at altitude. One of the highlights for Duncan

was, perhaps, getting stuck in a valley due to huge

flooding washing away all the bridges. During this time, the expedition members spent time building flood defences for the local villagers. Upon returning to the UK, Duncan started studying for a degree in Environmental Sciences, where he found that his experiences of the floods in India gave context and purpose to his studies. Now, Duncan works



in flood management, and credits his BES expedition with igniting his interest in the effects of flooding.

Four years later, Cameron followed in his big brother's footsteps and joined the 2014 expedition to Namibia. He spent time exploring the incredible desert landscape, enduring extreme 50 degree temperatures and baking bread in the traditional Namibian style. But one expedition was not enough for Cam, who returned, this time as a young Leader, to the 2016 expedition to the Himalayas. This time around, the expedition proved to be more eventful, with the group crashing a wedding, getting their food stolen by a bear and spending long, cold nights auarding the camp. This inspired a lifelong love of the outdoors in Cam, who leaves his home in Glasgow to explore the highlands of Scotland, whenever he has the time.

The youngest of the boys, Alasdair, inspired by the stories of his brothers and eager for an opportunity to go completely off-grid himself, signed up for the 2017 expedition to the Peruvian Amazon. After three flights, an all-day









of expedition leaders

bus ride and a boat trip down the Madre De Dios river, he reached base camp and quickly got stuck into the ways of the jungle. While there, the expedition mapped a previously unmapped river, climbed above the moss line, worked on a banana farm (despite the bar across the street playing 'despacito' on loop!), and carefully dodged a tarantula which decided to nest on the path to the latrine pit!

Finally, it is my turn to go away on expedition. While my expedition may not be as exotic as those of my brothers, due to the current travel restrictions, I do anticipate my 2 weeks spent around Loch Tay in the Scottish Highlands

to be just as challenging and leave me with the same fond memories which I remember my brothers recounting upon their return home. After all, expeditions with British Exploring Society are not just about exploring untouched corners of the world. No, these expeditions gave my brothers a whole new outlook on life and built in them a quiet selfconfidence and resilience which is hard not to spot. This is why doing a BES expedition has never not been an option for my siblings and me; because the skills and experiences gained on expedition are invaluable, and no one else brings out the best in young people quite like British Exploring Society.





OVERWINTER ALASKA 1989

Neil Langan, photographer and Member, shares his memories of the Overwinter Alaska 1989 expedition and how his experiences shaped his future life.

At the time

At the age of 18, I was overconfident, ambitious with a growing sense of adventure, and at an age where I was looking to do something heroic - to make my mark amongst my peers and family. Seeing the letter pinned to the notice board in the sixth form common room was just what I was looking for; '3 Months Overwintering Expedition to Alaska', this was an opportunity to become an explorer! At the time, I was midway through A' levels, prior to heading off to study (a growing passion for photography) at a local college. Over the next few months and following my application and interview. I was offered a place on the final stage of the trip, which was the phase covering April through to June. I remember a pre-trip get together, with all members of the teams, where we were given insight to where we were heading, the risks and rewards we faced, but more importantly, the opportunity to meet our fellow team members.

The trip

As departure day grew closer, the sense of what was ahead was a real head rush - 'trying' to get fit and facing the dilemma of kit choices. We were limited with personal items due to the volume of necessary cold weather kit and climbing gear; what, today, would be considered enough clothes for a weekend away, was to last 3

months. For me, my camera, a couple of lenses and about 30 rolls of film were more important than personal items, such as shorts and t-shirts for the warmer days. Something I regretted at the time, as the majority of the group dressed appropriately compared with my choice of heavy fleeces and thermal tops.

Memories

The majority of experiences from the trip have been saved as memories but specifically, having a freedom to climb, ski (of sorts), pan for gold, mix with the locals, explore abandoned mines, camp outside under the Northern Lights and traverse glaciers. In addition, memories of the harder experiences, no shorts on a hot day, four pairs of underpants which after 3 months pretty much disintegrate, stretcher-ing colleagues through pathless wilderness and falling through frozen lakes. The list goes on, but ultimately the embedded memories are experiences from a place free of the influences of what some would call normal society, a place where the wrong decisions or lack of planning can have serious consequences. These experiences, which focus the mind while allowing it to think freely, can only offer a positive grounding and influence decisions for the future.

For me, personally, the opportunity to jump out of normal teen life, leave the trappings of a comfortable



Neil, ice-climbing in Alaska in 1989

family home and share the experiences with a like-minded team from different backgrounds had given me an insight into how experiences steer our decisions in life, taught me about taking risks and where to stop, and importantly how we place ourselves around others.

Spring forward 31 years to today and whilst my dream of being a staff photographer for the National Geographic has not 'yet' materialised (although some of my work has made it through to their Traveller magazine), I have been living the life of a photographer that I set out to achieve. For most of my photography career, I have followed a commercial path, alongside my other passion - for food. I'm in no doubt that my experiences gained, across the trip as a whole, have been the significant contributor to my life tool kit and humbly, to getting me to where I am today - content with both the good and not so good decisions made over COVID's timing, along with the pending the years.

When COVID-19 brought an untimely change to our lives, for me it shared many of the attributes the expedition did, over 30 years ago. Having my head down and pushing on, while being bump-steered down a certain path. I realised that, while

facing the somewhat daunting times ahead with British Exploring Society and see if my with COVID restrictions within hospitality and the food sector, I had time to reflect and shift direction to where my heart was telling me to head. One of my shelved objectives for many years was to digitise the 800 odd slides and photographs I took on the expedition, thus I embarked on a rather large task of scanning slides and negatives. This exercise re-ignited the memories whilst triggering the urge to just get on with fulfilling the dream, still driven by the love of exploring with my camera.

50th birthday later this year, some might suggest has triggered, not so much a 'rather delayed' midlife crisis, but something of an epiphany. Learning to ride a motorcycle and getting away with my camera to re-live the creative freedom experienced 30 years ago - with several trips still on the to-do list. I wanted to re-kindle contact

collection of images from Alaska could be utilised to help in one way or another. I'm looking to provide access to the image collection either through the society or put them online for fellow trip Members to remember what an awesome experience the expedition was, at such an important time of our young naive lives!

Such experiences are what each and every teenager should experience before they jump into the big world around them. For me, the experiences that British Exploring Society offer are invaluable.

If you were part of the Overwinter Alaska 1989 expedition and would like to get in touch with Neil, please contact him via us.



ADVENTURE REVOLUTION

The life-changing power of choosing challenge.

Belinda Kirk, British Exploring Society Member and Leader, has walked through Nicaragua, sailed across the Atlantic, searched for camels in China's Desert of Death, discovered ancient rock paintings in Lesotho and gained a Guinness World Record for rowing unsupported around Britain. She has led numerous youth development challenges, pioneered inclusive expeditions for people with disabilities and managed scientific research missions in the Amazon, Sinai and Alaska.

Over the past 25 years, Belinda has seen first-hand how adventure turns the timid into the confident, the addicted into the recovering, and the lost into the intentionally wandering. As a force for change, adventure can be powerful like few others. In 2009, Belinda established Explorers Connect, a nonprofit organisation connecting people to adventure and has encouraged 30,000 ordinary people to engage in outdoor challenges. In 2020, she launched the first conference to explore the Adventure Effect, the positive impact that adventurous activity has on wellbeing and now, we at British Exploring Society are excited to announce, she has written a book!

Adventure Revolution: the life-changing power of

choosing challenge is about the transformational power of exploration, something that any Member of British Exploring Society will identify with. The book examines why adventure (not just nature or travel) is essential to our wellbeing and presents the evidence, theories and ideas that explain its magic.

"An inspirational read. A testament to the spirit of exploration that resides in all of us. Reading this will make you want to go on an adventure" - Levison Wood

Illuminated with Belinda's personal narrative, her own research with modern huntergatherers, and the latest findings in neuroscience and behaviour, Adventure Revolution presents a compelling case for ditching the living room in favour of a longer, happier, and more adventurous life. With inspiring adventure stories about normal people changing their lives for the better via adventure (including some of our own Young Explorers), through to insights on the harm our prescriptive parenting is doing to an entire generation, Belinda's sage words will be of vital importance to all readers:

Adventure Revolution is published in paperback by Piatkus on 5 August 2021 (RRP £14.99).





Facing the extraordinary every day - in some of the most remote wilderness areas on the planet - provides young people with a unique opportunity to move beyond the limits of what they, and society, believed they were capable of.

You know this, perhaps better than we do. Our Members regularly share stories which demonstrate just how life-defining an expedition experience can be. Particularly at such a pivotal time in a person's life.

Society is failing to ensure fair and sufficient access to the skills, behaviours and confidence young people need to tackle challenges and seize opportunities. This is particularly true for young people who are vulnerable, or from disadvantaged communities, and this is becoming even more pronounced in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This brings greater urgency to our vision: to provide more, and a more diverse community of, young people with access to the truly transformative impact of challenging learning and adventure in the wilderness.

We have significantly shifted how we work as an organisation to achieve this.

Firstly, our approach to recruitment had to be transformed. While any young person can join us, we are now particularly focused on reaching and supporting some of the most marginalised and vulnerable young people in the country.

We work with partner organisations who have developed positive, trusting relationships with young people facing significant challenges. We also target our recruitment in areas of economic deprivation, which lack access to learning opportunities outside the classroom, or with poor educational and employment prospects.

Some of our partners include **The Change Foundation**, **Catch22**, **Onside Youth Zones** and **Break Charity**. Thanks to the strength of these partnerships, we now predominantly work with young people who require additional support throughout their journey - from completing their application form to attending our *Next Steps* event post-programme. To deliver this requires more team capacity than we have required



before. Our newly appointed, full-time Skills Development Officer, Joanna, has therefore been invaluable to both her team and the young people she supports. Introducing this role was necessary in ensuring we provide young people with meaningful support through their journey.

Secondly, we **no longer run a pay-to-participate model.** We know that the cost to go on expedition... to travel to an expedition... to purchase kit, can be an immense barrier to joining us.

To ensure that no young person is left behind, we fully fund our programmes with the support of a remarkable community of donors.

This change in our funding model helps us to provide fairer access to our programmes than at any other time in our history. **And in such a generationally defining period, this is more important than ever before.**

To show their commitment, and to help them develop invaluable life and work skills, we ask all young people who join us to commit to fundraise an amount for the charity. Their contribution is based on a simple means test. Each Young Explorer is supported with their fundraising by our fantastic team.

Major setbacks when you are young can be very hard to overcome. It takes time. We know that our model provides genuinely transformative, long-term impact.

"For the first time in my life, I felt bigger and stronger than anything that could stand in my way."

Quote from Young Explorer.

You might now better understand our need for donations from our community, and why these articles have been appearing more regularly in The Campfire.

To continue to reach significantly more young people, we need the support and funding from people, like you, who share our belief in the transformative power of challenge and adventure.

We hope you will consider making a donation or perhaps find out about becoming a patron.

Together, we can build stronger futures for young people.

Boost your donation by 25% (25p per £1 you donate) by adding gift aid when you donate.

If you would like to donate in another way, you can also get in touch with Amy-Leigh personally at amy-leigh@britishexploring.org.



RECONNECT AND CELEBRATE

Win a cuppa on us!

Are you still in touch with any of your fellow Explorers? How many of them? Or, do you keep thinking it would be nice to track a few down and maybe organise a reunion?

With our 90th anniversary year in 2022 fast approaching, we would love to see more of our Members reconnecting with each other and with British Exploring Society.

To encourage you, we would like to offer a 'cuppa on us'. If you can reconnect us with two Members who have lost touch with British Exploring Society over the years, we will send you one of our branded enamel mugs - perfect for that outdoor brew.

To qualify, please ask your reconnecting friend to email membership@britishexploring.org and make sure they mention your name as their 'reconnecting Member'.

Don't forget to let us know about any celebrations that you organise, be they large or small, virtual or in-person. We would love to feature them here in *The Campfire*.

And, if you need a little inspiration to get you started, Chris Thorp and Chris Grace (Newfoundland 1969) revisit their story and have a few tips for you.

A chance conversation with Chris Grace, the only person I fully stayed in touch with after our expedition to the Great Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland in 1969, resulted in us staging, what turned out to be (though I say it myself), a wonderful, memorable reunion some 50 years later. I will try to give you an idea of the enormity of the task we faced, and how we went about the little germ of an idea, that eventually grew to become a mammoth event.

Our expedition was 80 strong, including 11 Leaders, and our only database was a typed list of names, addresses, ages at the time of





the expedition, schools/work places, and where the Leaders came from – nothing more. I only had contact details for Chris, and he had contact details for only two others, so the prospect of finding enough people to make it worthwhile was somewhat daunting, to say the least.

We soon realised that it would not be good enough to ask people to turn up to a pub for a few drinks and a bit of bar food, especially when some would be coming from across the globe. The issue that arose was to decide on an appropriate location, where there would be suitable hotels with enough bedrooms, conference facilities, settings for photographs, and diversions during downtime, for an event that became spread over three nights/two days. After

much research, we found the perfect hotel - the Lakeside on Windermere which provided a good group discount in June.

It is worth bearing in mind, for those who wish to organise something similar, that considerable restrictions have been imposed on accessing information, by the Data Protection Act. Our first port of call was the offices of British Exploring Society and a meeting with the Chief Executive and Membership Officer. They agreed to send out letters on our behalf, but our first set-back was finding that only 15 expeditioners had remained Full Members, and secondly, several letters were returned unopened. Only a few people actually replied. It was not a good start.

It was clear that we would have to draw on more resources. These included alumni associations, medical directories, Linkedln, 192.com, Ancestry.com, Companies House, Forces Reunited, Facebook (we are all old!), Google search engine, knocking on doors and long-distance telephone calls. Despite using all those tools, it still took us over 3 years and countless man-hours from start to finish, so the further you have to go back in time, the more time it will take.

Our top tips are:

- · don't leave it for 50 years
- · start early
- · stay in touch with one another
- be determined!

Then decide, early on, exactly what you want to provide. We included a celebration meal, presentation with a slide and film show, chartered lake cruise with buffet, name badges, a banner, memorabilia (artefacts and diaries), a photographer, flowers, two raffles, and an amazing cake. That all took a great deal of planning and organising, especially drawing up a budget, meal planning, and managing payments. And do allow for late drop-outs and additions to upset your carefully laid plans and budget.

We hope that this provides a useful, mini guide to anyone who is thinking of organising a gathering. What surprised us was the very high level of interest and attendance, which made it so worthwhile and rewarding.





FIRESIDE REPORT

Where do we go from here: can exploration help us tackle climate change?

Ben Saunders FBES FRGS and Robert Swan FRGS OBE are two record-breaking polar explorers who have seen first-hand the impact of climate change.

In our most recent Fireside Talk in June, Robert and Ben shared with us how their challenging experiences have continued to shape their own lives, and how the courage, skills, resilience and determination that British Exploring Society continues to foster in young people could be essential to conserving the last great wilderness on earth – Antarctica.

Robert and Ben shared thought-provoking anecdotes and insight from their remarkable adventures in the poles. Holding onto our dreams, the transformative impact of exploration, and the parallels between the survival of Antarctica and wider space were just some of the themes covered in this fascinating conversation.

We learnt so much. And we were delighted by the thoughtful questions posed by some of our Young Explorers, who will be heading off on their own adventures this summer.

For information about our next Fireside Talk, which will take place on 14 September 2021, and how to obtain tickets, please see the next page.

Lost-and-found tickets

Do you know someone from your expedition who has lost touch with us? Would you like to invite them back to join us? We would love to reconnect with them.

Please ask them to email us at membership@ britishexploring.org, including your name so we know who found them. You will each receive a code for a 50% discount on your ticket to our next Fireside talk.



FIRESIDE TALK: ACCESS ALL AREAS

Join us at our next Fireside Talk with Cathy O'Dowd and Aaron Phipps.

14 September 2021

Does genuine accessibility to the outdoors really mean no restrictions?

For British Exploring Society, this question feels more crucial than ever.

We have invited Aaron Phipps and Cathy O'Dowd to explore what it might mean to 'Access All Areas', to consider the impact that access can have on an individual and to ponder our moral responsibilities in championing the outdoors. We look forward to hearing their thought-provoking perspectives and conversation around our virtual campfire.

Aaron Phipps and Cathy O'Dowd are remarkable, uniquely different individuals. What unites them are the records they've set by conquering specific challenges - which have traditionally excluded 'people like them'- and the career paths those achievements have set them on.

Meet our Speakers

Aaron Phipps

Aaron Phipps is a British Wheelchair Rugby player, Paralympian, motivational speaker and father of two. In 2016, he scaled Mt Kilimanjaro on his hands and knees, becoming the first disabled Briton to reach the peak, and the first disabled person to reach it without assistance.

Cathy O'Dowd

Cathy O'Dowd is a South African rock climber, mountaineer, author and motivational speaker. She was the first woman in the world to climb Everest from both its north and south sides, and continues to be an active adventurer.





RECONNECT

Please help us to keep up to date with the information we hold for you and let us know of any changes to your details. You can also pass this link on to any other Members you are still in contact with.

We will use the information to keep you informed of activities and events which may be of interest to you, provide opportunities for you to get involved in the work of the charity, contact you on behalf of other Members that might like to get back in touch, and to send future editions of *The Campfire*,

SEARCHING

We currently have a Member that is looking to connect with former Explorers that attended Portsmouth Grammar School and went on expedition with us from 2010 onwards. Please contact us to find out more.

MEMBER DISCOUNTS

This is a reminder that as a Member of British Exploring Society, you are entitled to discounts with our select partners. There are eight brands that offer varying discounts, so make sure to click below to find out more.



