

## MY MOUNTAIN STORY

I grew up on the edge of the Lincolnshire Fens, so not a lot of mountains there. Being active with the scouts began my life-long enthusiasm for camping, and once a year we headed off to the Lake District where I would see my first proper hills. We even made it as far as Switzerland once. Although I remained fairly active in the outdoors after leaving school, mountains took a back-seat as I pursued my studies, and after moving to London, a long career as an art historian, librarian and curator.

My passion for the mountains began to take over my life in 2007 when I climbed Kilimanjaro, the highest mountain in Africa. This had been a lifelong dream for me, ever since seeing photos of the snow-capped mountain and its elephants as a child. Although the climb was for charity, the training I undertook brought me back to the Lake District.

Seeing Kilimanjaro's vulnerable glaciers, seemingly pristine under a fresh blanket of snow, inspired me to become a "proper mountaineer", whatever that means. The following summers I was in the Alps training to use ropes, ice-axes and crampons and climbed several 4000m peaks including Grand Paradiso and Mont Blanc. In order to keep fit for my overseas trips, I took to multi-day backpacks in the Lakes and Snowdonia every weekend that I could. Once familiar with the high hills of England I turned my attention to Scotland, despite the long journey times. I became an expert with train, bus and ferry timetables.

Two more childhood dreams were fulfilled in 2008 when I was part of an expedition to the remote Mongolian Altai mountain range, timed to coincide with a total eclipse of the sun. The same year I climbed the high volcanos in Mexico, Iztaccihuatl and Citlaltépetl. Most winters I visited the mountains of Morocco, and in 2010 I visited the Cordillera Real in Bolivia, although the team failed to reach the summit of Illimani.

Searching for something a little more off the beaten track, with no support I joined two expeditions to unclimbed peaks in Argentina. The first of these was successful, the team making four new ascents between us in what is now known as the Cordon de Los Pioneros in the Puna de Atacama. The expedition was reported in the [American Alpine Journal](#). My ascent of the rarely climbed Reclus at 6335m with its Inca ruins remains a high-point of my life, both literally and metaphorically. It is also one of the hardest things I have ever done. The second of these expeditions attempted a remote peak on the Argentinian/Bolivian border but was thwarted by poor weather.

Somewhere in amongst all this I managed to complete my Mountain Leader training and join the Rockhoppers Mountaineering Club in London. I even tried my hand at rock-climbing only to find I have a considerable fear of heights which I have never been able to overcome.

In 2014 I quit my career and returned to university to study ethnomusicology, which led me to the ukulele and field studies in Tahiti. Ultimately though I was now struggling (not for the first time) with my mental health. Apparently I can add agoraphobia to my fear of heights!

The Rockhoppers crowd-funded my Mountain Leader assessment, I left London, and in an attempt to manage my mental health I have moved to Scotland permanently so as to be close to the hills I love most. It is my goal to share my favourite places with you through my guided trips and my writing.





Kilimanjaro, Tanzania



Altai mountains, Mongolia



Citlaltépetl, Mexico



Illimani, Bolivia



Cordon de los Pioneros, Argentina



BenWyvis, Scotland